

Public Document Pack

Southend-on-Sea City Council

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THE COUNCIL - THURSDAY, 14TH DECEMBER, 2023 SUPPLEMENTARY PACK – PUBLIC AND COUNCILLOR QUESTIONS

Please find enclosed, for consideration at the next meeting of the The Council taking place on Thursday, 14th December, 2023, the following reports that were unavailable when the agenda was printed.

Agenda Item No

- 4 **Questions from Members of the Public** (Pages 3 - 20)
Questions and answers sheet attached
- 5 **Questions from Members of the Council** (Pages 21 - 38)
Questions and answers sheet attached

Rob Harris
Principal Democratic Services Officer
Legal & Democratic Services

1. Mr Howe asks a question of the Leader of the Council (Cllr Cox)

Question

An “Older People’s Champion” represents older people’s issues right across the Council. Their job is to be a link between the Council and older people. To amplify the voices of older people within the Council chamber. The Champion would identify issues impacting older people such as the Digital Divide, how the City consults its resident’s, as well as Health and Social Care concerns.

Basically, a simple line of communication between the City and its older resident’s.

Would the Leader of the Council please reinstate the role of “Older People’s Champion” previously held by Mr. David Norman MBE?

Answer

Within Southend City Council we are proud of the work we do to ensure that we reflect upon the experience of citizens across the city. Over recent months we have developed our new Co-Production strategy that sets out how we will ensure that we proactively engage with communities, particularly when we are developing strategies, plans and policies. Ensuring that we understand and identify issues impacting older people.

A good example of this is our Ageing well and caring well strategies which were developed collaboratively with older people across the city, ensuring that we got as many diverse experiences and suggestions as possible to inform the work and the actions we have taken as part of them.

Our teams also take every opportunity to engage with older people via the many public facing events and activities we run. For example, our highly successful slipper swap campaign that has been running across the city was also a great opportunity for staff and partners to explore

issues and get feedback on subjects such as health care, local services and community issues.

The fire service also supported us which allowed for us to arrange home visits to provide safety information, fit sensors but also spend time with people to get their views on many things.

We also ensure that we work through our libraries, galleries and the multiple events that we run to provide information and connect groups so that issues of digital accessibility and learning, loneliness, isolation are known and responded to.

In terms of listening to and championing the voice of residents and particularly older residents the portfolio holder for health and care Cllr Moyies ensures that he pro-actively engages with older peoples groups across the city and not only meets regularly with organisations that work closely with older people such as the NHS and social care but also those organisations whose role is intended to champion and advocate for and on behalf of this group. This includes Healthwatch, the community and voluntary sector, and faith groups.

Cllr Moyies is also ensuring that our approach to social care is truly focussed on supporting people to live better and healthier lives. Supporting people to not just live longer but to be able to continue to support our City's economy, voluntary sector and families. Very often as carers to loved ones, grandchildren and neighbours.

I don't feel that a dedicated champion as outlined is required but would hope that all Members could champion and share their constituents' experiences and ideas across the council and with the relevant Executive Directors so that we continue to build on our knowledge and apply these to the services we provide.

2. Mr Atkinson asks a question of the Cabinet Member for Arts, Culture, Heritage and Leisure (Cllr Jarvis)

Question

Following the very vocal and welcome support from the Conservative Group at Full Council over two years ago in September 2021, for conservation area designation to the so-called 'wider area' at and

around the lower part of Hamlet Court Road, and also following Milton Society's representations to you since last May with new evidence and, most notably, following your Spring 2023 manifesto commitment to grant conservation area designation to this area, please can the portfolio holder advise when this designation will come before Council?

Answer

The current boundary for the Conservation Area at Hamlet Court Road was determined based on a very thorough consideration of the evidence available at the time, in accordance with the advice from officers and the specialist heritage consultancy Purcell and with the support of Historic England.

Having recently completed a full review of the City's heritage assets as part of the evidence base for the new Local Plan, including the designation of two new conservation areas and the introduction of new and amended article 4 directions to remove permitted development rights where it is appropriate to do so, it is considered that Southend-on-Sea has a very up to date and robust position to appropriately protect its heritage assets.

In the Council's current, extremely challenging, financial climate, a further review of a relatively recently designated conservation area which had been so thoroughly examined could not be justified. However, it is recognised that it is possible to review whether the boundaries of conservation areas remain correct, and this will no doubt be looked at for the Hamlet Court Road Conservation Area in future years, as it would be for others.

3. Mr Atkinson asks a second question of the Cabinet Member for Arts, Culture, Heritage and Leisure (Cllr Jarvis)

Question

At the Environment, Culture and Tourism Working Party in November 2022 and in representations since last May, Milton Society proposed a redefinition of the boundary to Crowstone Conservation area, to include The Crow Stone monument itself, to help to protect the area and to save it from de-designation. Milton Society also proposed the conservation area designation to the Cliff Gardens and extensions to our seafront conservation areas to include the promenade and beaches, as happens

in Brighton. This would allow the recognition, protection and improved management to our seafront, from Chalkwell Shelter to Adventure Island.

Why have these progressive suggestions that are central to who we are as a seaside resort and that can enhance both our heritage and our city profile, not come forwards?

Answer

On the 20th November 2023 Cabinet approved the adoption of a new Conservation Area Appraisal for the Crowstone Conservation Area, alongside the designation of an entirely new conservation area for Chelmsford Avenue Almshouses, and agreed that consultation take place on the use of an Article 4 Direction, to restrict permitted development rights within this area, where they may harm its heritage value. This work updates and enhances the heritage protections for the Crowstone Conservation Area and there is no prospect of it being de-designated.

The Crow Stone (London Boundary Stone) itself has been made a statutory listed building. This is a higher degree of heritage protection than a conservation area designation and including it within a conservation area would offer it no additional heritage safeguards.

The area between the Crowstone Conservation Area and the statutory listed Crowstone has been carefully assessed and, while extremely pleasant, it does not have the heritage value which would warrant designating it a conservation area. National planning policy is clear that when considering the designation of conservation areas, local planning authorities should ensure that an area justifies such status because of its special architectural or historic interest, and that the concept of conservation is not devalued through the designation of areas that lack special interest.

The Cliff Gardens, promenade, beaches and areas surrounding our existing seafront conservation areas have been assessed for their heritage value by both officers and staff at the specialist heritage consultancy Purcell. It is considered that the various existing heritage designations already in place provide the appropriate level of protection. Brighton has its own character and heritage and direct comparisons with

Southend are not possible or appropriate in this case.

4. Mr O'Connor asks a question of the Cabinet Member for Community Safety (Cllr Courtenay)

Question

In light of the concerning high number of incidences of identity-based violence in Southend, and recent tragic events more globally that highlight the devastating consequences of intolerance and conflict, the level of engagement and scope of activities held during the City's Hate Crime Awareness Week in October felt limited.

How seriously is the Administration taking this critical issue, what learning is being taken forward from Awareness Week and other initiatives to address identity-based violence, and what support does the Council need to energise the next Awareness Week?

Answer

Hate Crime is a Southend Community Safety Partnership Crime Priority. A multi-agency Hate Crime Action Group is in place chaired by Southend Council, it has a range of representatives bringing together knowledge and expertise in this subject area. The group work in close collaboration leading on hate crime initiatives, monitoring hate crime, and addressing incidents of hate crime, including identity-based violence.

A specific task and finish group chaired by Southend Council was set up to arrange activities for Hate Crime Awareness week, these included;

- Specific Mosque Engagement;
- Specific Synagogue Engagement;
- Pop Up supermarket events, engaging with visitors and handing out specific hate crime literature;
- A restorative justice event was held with voluntary agencies to understand what hate crime is, how to support victims of hate crime and how to refer into the restorative justice programme;
- Alfie protocol was launched, featuring a specific programme focusing on improving relationships within the neurodiverse community, their friends and families;

- Essex Fire and Rescue attended 9 schools across Southend (the most in Essex) delivering specific Hate Crime and Respect assemblies.

Hate Crime is taken with the upmost seriousness across Southend, not just for our residents, but number of hate incidents against our visitors are also monitored. A 12.7% year -on-year reduction of hate crime reports across the city is noted, and an increase of 7.6% in solved hate crime incidents has been recorded by Essex Police.

Southend works across departments and partnerships sharing relevant information and ensuring community leaders and members of public are aware of the support that is available to them.

5. Mr O'Connor asks a second question of the Cabinet Member for the Environment (Cllr Davidson)

Question

Given the alarmingly low ranking of Southend City Council in the recent Climate Emergency UK climate action assessment, where the City was rated as 164th out of 181 Councils for its progress, what immediate and tangible measures will the Administration implement to address the gaps identified by the assessment and accelerate progress to safeguard the City and its residents from the escalating climate breakdown?

Answer

Thank you for your question.

We are aware of the Climate Emergency UK climate action assessment score for SCC and whilst it is disappointing, we know that the methodology that they use does not fully reflect the ongoing hard work that is taking place across the organisation. The council will continue to deliver projects like the award-winning Retrofit Show Home and work in partnership with organisations such as the Environment Agency, as we are currently doing in the Catchment to Coast project. We will also continue our work to deliver strategies such as the Heat Stress Strategy in order to support climate positive action across the city.

6. Mr Norton asks a question of the Cabinet Member for Public Health, Adult Social Care and Constitutional Matters (Cllr Moyies)

Question

In the 2023/2024 budget the Council committed to providing an Emergency Fund for Carers of £125,000 a year, that would be up and running by August 2023. Can you confirm if unpaid carers are eligible to apply for support and where applications can be made / such support can be accessed?

Answer

Thank you, Mr Norton. I can confirm that unpaid carers supporting residents of Southend on sea are able to apply for support. Details of the support available and how to access this can be obtained via carers first directly 0300 303 1555.

In addition, whilst co-producing this work unpaid carers advised us that local organisations should also be able to access the support to enable them to deliver local initiatives that will also provide direct support to unpaid carers. We have therefore engaged with SAVS to administer this option as well. Again, organisations wishing to discuss this opportunity can make contact via carers first in the same way.

7. Mr Webb asks a question of the Cabinet Member for Arts, Culture, Heritage and Leisure (Cllr Jarvis)

Question

During this year's summer read how many children took part in the age groups 0 – 4 and 4 - 12 for each library and how many volunteers took part listening to children?

Answer

The Summer Reading Challenge is a programme that encourages children to read books during the summer holiday. It is run by the charity, The Reading Agency and is delivered by public libraries throughout the UK. Children can choose any book they like and earn stickers for each book. When they complete 6 books, they are given a medal and certificate based on the theme of the challenge.

In Southend, children who complete the challenge are given a swimming pass, and entry to a prize draw to win tickets to Adventure Island, Sealife Adventure and the Panto at the Cliffs Pavilion (all supplied by sponsorship). Volunteers dedicate their time to talking to children about the books they have read and encouraging them to develop their reading.

The Summer Reading Challenge for 2023 was called Ready, Steady Read! and was a celebration of reading, sport, games and play. Southend Libraries also held 13 free events attended by 316 children, from Beatboxing, playground games and Magna drawing.

Statistics:

Number of children who completed the Summer Reading Challenge by reading 6 books throughout the summer holiday.

In 2023 the numbers are as follows:

- The Forum 19 under 4s and 291 over 4;
- Leigh 18 under 4 and 226 over 4;
- Kent Elms 20 under 4 and 209 over;
- Shoeburyness 16 under 4 and 160 over;
- Southchurch 23 under 4 and 182 over;
- Westcliff 13 under 4 and 201 over.

A total of 80 Volunteers took part and contributed 1606 hours of their time for which we are extremely grateful.

8. Mr Webb asks a second question of the Cabinet Member for Arts, Culture, Heritage and Leisure (Cllr Jarvis)

Question

In the proposed consultation to the changes to closing 2 libraries, the last 4 closing a day.

Will there be paper copies of the consultation provided in libraries and Council buildings as not many people are able to interact with a

computer and how long will the consultation be and when will happen and the libraries based on what criteria?

Answer

We will ensure that the public consultation document will be available in different formats including paper copies at all libraries across the City for people to access. The consultation will last 6 weeks in keeping with guidelines for Public Consultation. We have not confirmed a date for the start of the consultation but we will ensure this is advertised widely once agreed.

The consultation will set out the criteria and rationale that has been used for the proposal that will be outlined within the document.

9. Mr Gittus asks a question of the Cabinet Member for the Environment (Cllr Davidson)

Question

On the 9th September, one of the hottest days of the year, we saw temperatures above 27°C. Southend High Street was packed, but sadly for visitors there is little shade cover with not a single tree down the main street itself. I witnessed people having to sit on the ground behind the non-functioning bollard control units just to get some shade.

While the idea of pop-up parks should be welcomed as a basic idea of improving Southend's streetscene, a permanent solution would be far beneficial to our biodiversity and tree canopy coverage.

Now that Cllr Longstaff's motion to set up a biodiversity and tree retention working party was agreed at September's Full Council, will the portfolio holder ensure that they will look to prioritise the installation of mature tree saplings along Southend High Street for the well-being of residents and visitors and reduce the heat island effect we are seeing?

Answer

Thank you for your question. Increasing tree canopy across the city is a priority but Southend High Street presents some specific legislative and practical challenges. The council is required to ensure that there is an appropriate fire path for emergency vehicles. As trees start to mature

this becomes increasingly challenging to do without damaging either the emergency vehicle or the trees.

The density of retail development in the high street means that there is a significant number of utilities under the paving on the high street that need to be accessed regularly. Planting trees in close proximity to utilities increases the possibility of damage to tree root structure and is therefore something that the council seeks to avoid where possible.

The tree planting at Victoria Gateway has provided helpful insights as to the best ways to support and maintain trees. The trees at this location have a significant number of drainage crates beneath them and this is not something that can be successfully replicated along the length of the high street.

Officers are aware of the impact of heat stress challenges in the high street and are exploring options to address this including looking at pop up parks in this area.

10. Mr Gittus asks a second question of the Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Parking (Cllr Buck)

Question

I am becoming concerned about the popularity of SUVs in our city. They are oversized, heavy and dangerous.

They produce more emissions than standard-sized cars, polluting our streets and causing health issues. According to recent reports, emissions could have fallen by 30% from 2010 if the SUV trend hadn't taken off.

- They are bigger and heavier, causing more damage to infrastructure and reducing the amount of available space for other vehicles.
- Their perceived safety and high-riding position often gives drivers a feeling of invincibility that is of detriment to animals, children and cyclists.
- The high centre of gravity can mean they are more susceptible to roll-over causing injury.

Paris is looking at ways to reduce movements of SUVs, such as increasing parking fees. Does the Portfolio Holder share my concerns about the increases in popularity of SUVs and would they be keen to look at ways to discourage their use?

Answer

In the UK, the sale of any type of domestic motor vehicle, is neither controlled nor restricted by central or local government and it is up to the individual buyer to decide what they will purchase and drive. Central government already applies to the most expensive and/or heavier polluting vehicles, a number of escalating taxes, fees and charges and/or environmental levies, such as the Road Fund Licence, Fuel Duty, VAT, BIK (Benefit In Kind) etc.

Many larger domestic vehicles such as Estates (Station Wagons), MPV's, SUV's, Mini Vans/Buses etc, have the capability to carry more than the 5 passengers than that of a standard Saloon (Sedan) vehicle, with some being able to carry up to 8 or 9. When considering environmental impacts and emissions from passenger carrying vehicles, such as that used commercially in aviation, road and rail passenger transport, the metric used to determine the environmental emissions and impact, is the emissions 'per passenger'.

Using the aforementioned recognised industry metric, a 7-seat large domestic passenger vehicle, emitting 250g/km CO₂, would have a lower environmental emissions impact 'per passenger' (35.7g/km PP), than a 2-seat sports car emitting 190g/km CO₂ (85g/km PP). It would therefore follow, that the small 2 seat sports car has a greater environmental impact 'per passenger', than the larger multi occupant vehicle. This is the environmental principle and metric by which public passenger, air and rail transport is measured.

The move to 'zero emissions at the point of use' vehicles, capable of being powered by 100% renewable energy, also means that localised impacts of pollution and air quality issues from road transport and domestic passenger vehicles, will soon be significantly reduced to almost nothing within the coming years, as the zero emissions transition continues at a significant pace.

A transport network needs to be very eclectic in its application and cater for the needs of the various modes of transport and demand within it. It is a local authority's responsibility to try to achieve a balance of those modes of transport that works for the demand placed upon it, the local community and the local economy it relies on.

We therefore have no intention to apply punitive charges to public service or other passenger carrying vehicles. It is not the policy of this administration to unduly contradict standard industry emissions metrics or cognitively penalise those who choose to drive potentially more environmentally efficient 'per person' multi occupancy vehicles, especially when they may already, or soon will be, zero emissions at the point of use.

11. Mr Allen asks a question of the Cabinet Member for the Environment (Cllr Davidson)

Question

Once again, we have seen a mature tree being brutally cut down by the Council's contractor, Tree Fella. The tree, which was around 100 years old outside St. Bernard's High School was hacked down in November.

4,064 saplings can never replace the 2,369 mature trees that have been cut down in the last 9 years by this council. The reliance on replacing mature trees with young saplings will in fact increase the city's carbon emissions due to the growth process and transportation of the trees. They will take many decades before they even start to offset the damage done.

Can the portfolio holder provide:

The report that recommended the tree outside St. Bernard's be cut down, how many trees the Council plans to cut down in the next 6 months and how many of the 4,064 trees planted over the last 9 years have actually survived?

Answer

Thank you for your question.

All street trees are part of the council's inspection and maintenance programme. During checks in August 2021, decay and fungi were noted on both sides of the stem of the tree in question. Further checks on the tree in December 2022 noted areas of bark loss on the south side of the tree from the stem and into the crown.

Following the observations made in December 2022, the following tests were undertaken by both the council's Arboricultural officers and a specialist company:

- Percussion,
- Tomographic Survey, and
- Resistograph.

These tests verified that there was significant internal decay in the stem of the tree and that the tree was no longer safe and should be removed. The council is legally required to manage the risk of falling branches and trees which was high due to the tree's proximity to the school and a busy road.

The council does not have a forward plan to remove trees. The council's street trees inspection and maintenance programme determines both the health of the trees, and whether pruning is required.

A tree may be removed when it is:

- in very poor health,
- dead, or
- decayed to an extent that it is unsafe.

The Council continues to extend the tree canopy across the city, in a constant process of renewal. Street trees are much more susceptible to disease and early death compared to trees in woodland and or parkland settings. This is because the growing conditions include many challenges including e.g. utility pipes, compacted soils and paving. The decision to fell a tree is always an evidence-based decision and the council will continue to navigate its climate emergency commitment and tree canopy target and resident safety requirements carefully.

We do not currently specifically monitor and record the survival rates for newly planted trees; however, this will be incorporated into the future inspection regime. Generally, the survival rate is high; however, extreme summer weather conditions, as experienced in 2022, will have a

negative impact on successful establishment.

12. Ms Denham asks a question of the Cabinet Member for Public Health, Adult Social Care and Constitutional Matters (Cllr Moyies)

Question

There are 904 transgender and non-binary people in the City of Southend according to the 2021 census. The biggest such community in Essex. Significant studies suggest trans people are three times as likely to live with dementia than cisgender people. In June two questions were asked of the Health and Wellbeing Board to determine what support would be given.

These questions were never recorded in the meetings minutes. The chair of the board Cllr Moyies was not aware they had been asked.

Despite repeated requests of the Chair to establish why they were not asked, to determine if unprofessional practice or gatekeeping was taking place, to date, they have not answered. The lack of a response does little to allay the concern that some form of collusion or unconscious bias is occurring.

Could the Cabinet Member explain why he has not responded?

Answer

Thank you for your question. I can advise that your questions were reported to the Health and Wellbeing Board on 15th June by the Committee Officer who explained that as the questions related to matters associated with an external partner, namely SEE Alliance / ICB, that it had not been possible to provide the answers to the Board on 15th June.

This should have been recorded in the Minutes of the Board held on 6th September 2023, I have apologised to you for this omission. This has now been corrected and reported to the Health and Wellbeing Board held on 12th December 2023 as an amendment to the Minutes.

I understand that the answers had initially been sent to you by email and I understand that you are in continued discussions with the ICB/SEE Alliance.

I decided to read out both of your questions and answers to the committee and told the committee that I thought this is a subject that is serious and should be considered by all parts of the health service. This meeting was available to watch online and is recorded. I also offered to take two further questions from you at this meeting.

Please be assured that there has been no collusion or unconscious bias and that it was an administrative oversight that has now been addressed.

I found my face to face meeting with you and Cllr Mulroney very interesting and have spoken with officers and colleagues throughout the health system about it. I also asked that Southend City Officers attended a training course that you offered.

13. Ms Denham asks a second question of the Cabinet Member for Public Health, Adult Social Care and Constitutional Matters (Cllr Moyies)

Question

Trans people face heightened risks of dementia. A 2021 study determined 1 in 6 transpeople were likely to live with it, compared with 1 in 10 cisgender people. Three times as likely according to Cambridge University. Some trans people require intimate care - a trans woman may need prostate checks to reduce the risk of cancer. Needs may include douching and dilation support. If care needs are not met, risks; UTI's, Diphtheria, and Sepsis may arise. The Health and Wellbeing Board, and the county's ISB were made aware of the risks and hidden harm. We are led to believe 'other priorities' are taking precedence, but do not how they risked assessed this.

Considering heightened risks and hidden harms, could the Cabinet Member provide an outline of all the City Councils activities under their Public Sector Equality Duty to foster good relations with the city's older trans community?

Answer

Thank you for your question.

We are working hard to develop our approach to not only engaging with groups but also how we can provide the best care and support within our remit as a social care service.

We have engaged directly and via groups which has included the supporting of training via SAVS. We have worked with Transpire previously to support learning within the council we have worked with Southend Pride to invite them to our professional practice event which will help engage and share the experience of citizens to inform the practice of our social workers and how better to develop care and support plans when required.

We are rolling out as part of our new learning plan, training, which will be mandatory for our staff to ensure a better understanding of the experience of citizens from LGBTQ+ communities and domestic abuse and how we can improve our professional understanding and response in this area.

Our new co-production protocol sets out how we will ensure that co-production and engagement with groups is clear and focused and allows for us to seek not just the views but also solutions as we develop new services and approaches going forward. We will ensure that this applies to our city's older trans community especially as we seek to embed our ageing well and caring well strategies across the city.

We have also started to work on our approaches to developing the care market to ensure we are able to meet the needs of Trans older adults and have run session on how we can develop and quality monitor this with our commissioning teams and at the recent care provider forum there was a focus on this to ensure it informs future commissioning.

However, we do not want to be complacent and are aware that we need to improve our engagement with many groups as well as our older trans community and will do this through our neighbourhood and localities work as well as reaching out to engage and co-produce the development of care provision locally.

14. Ms Walker asks a question of the Cabinet Member for Arts, Culture, Heritage and Leisure (Cllr Jarvis)

Question

Over the past year IronWorks have become an integral and celebrated part of Southend's cultural regeneration:

- Welcoming over 108,514 individuals since our doors opened.
- Providing space for 44 charities and local service providers.
- Hosting 80 weekly additional needs clubs, welcoming over 1,000 visits from members.
- Offering free arts and crafts for children, with over 150 kids participating each week.
- Hosting numerous private and music events, involving over 1,000 musicians.
- Showcasing numerous artists and supporting local traders.
- Employing 20 individuals and engaging 10 regular weekly volunteers, many with additional needs.

Contrast this to the art group Metal which continues to offer very little to the community from behind its closed doors. How can this be justified? Why can't the money wasted on Metal be used to secure the future of The Ironworks Community Venue and maintain its status as a thriving, creative, and inclusive space for all?

Answer

You will be aware of the challenging financial difficulties the Council is currently seeking to address. A number of organisations across the City, including Metal, have benefited from Council grants and support over several years. However, the opportunities and their size are reducing against the backdrop of these financial difficulties.

There are, however, a number of long-standing support commitments to various organisations, made previously under a stronger financial

position. Budgets and decisions for the 2024/25 financial year have yet to be fully determined.

1. Councillor Ayles asks a question of the Leader of the Council (Cllr Cox)

Question

At the last meeting of the Southend City full Council I asked a simple question of how Southend City Council could spend £100,000 on two small events when the Council struggles to fix broken fences, replace broken safety signs and refuse to invest in Belfairs Park, not even clean signs.

The response was that substantial investment had been put into Belfairs ward, e.g. the tennis courts have been upgraded. As far as I can tell the tennis courts of Belfairs Park have not even been swept.

So would the cabinet holder explain how much of a substantial amount was spent in Belfairs Park, as asked in the original question?

Answer

The Council was successful in attracting funding from the Lawn Tennis Association for the refurbishment of tennis courts across the city. This project included an investment of £57,700 for the courts in Bonchurch Park which sit within Belfairs ward. The courts in Belfairs Park fell outside of the financial scope of the LTA project with an estimated refurbishment cost of more than £90,000.

Additionally, the council has allocated a capital budget of £1 million to refurbish playgrounds across the city. The project includes the refurbishment of one of the playgrounds in Belfairs Park. The detailed plans are currently being finalised but are likely to see an investment of £100,000 in this playground.

2. Councillor Aylen asks a second question of the Cabinet Member for Arts, Culture, Heritage and Leisure (Cllr Jarvis)

Question

The Carvair airplane was designed and constructed at Southend Airport, featured in many films including gold finger. A carvair returned the winning Monte Carlo BMC minis. Carvair to Southend is the same as the pier is to Southend. An important part for the city's history. A group of volunteers have recovered the last known to exist Carvair cockpit and it's under restoration. However, it needs a home to finish the restoration and to put this important part of Southend city's proud history on show, where the public can view and learn all about Southend's involvement in Aviation.

The Cabinet have been asked for help. The response was why not ask the Vulcan trust if you can put the cockpit there. As I understand this has been refused and the Vulcan is completely separate to the Carviar.

So, the question to the Cabinet Member is will they support and assist this important project to find a fitting home?

Answer

The Carvair is indeed an important part of the city's history and a great example of the rich aviation heritage locally. I am delighted that a group of volunteers are currently restoring the last known existing cockpit and are keen to see how it can be displayed locally.

Due to the size of indoor environment required, and the need for security, there are clearly challenges in finding a site in Southend which would enable members of the public to access this historic piece.

Unfortunately, the Council does not have a suitable site in which we could host such an exhibit. We are however committed where possible to supporting the group and its ambitions and are happy to try and connect any potential partners who may be able to support the group with a venue or find a position in an aviation museum, where the cockpit could be displayed to full advantage, and be appreciated by the public.

3. Councillor Cowan asks a question of the Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Parking (Cllr Buck)

Question

According to the latest financial report, the Council is overspent in parking enforcement and highways by £967k. Are there plans to reduce this overspend in-year and how much will it be reduced by?

Answer

The nature of parking and highways is such that spend and income fluctuates throughout the year. However, as a matter of course the Council works to manage its budgets in a proactive, forward-thinking manner. Work being done to reduce this overspend includes tendering of the new parking enforcement contract, continued work to deliver value for money through all parking infrastructure (for example reviewing which machines we continue to service), a review of all card payments into the Council to drive economies of scale and the increase in the number of car parking spaces in high volume areas.

4. Councillor Cowan asks a second question of the Leader of the Council (Cllr Cox)

Question

Which departments and services does the Leader believe the council should be looking at first for service redesign and restructuring as part of the transformation programme and which does he believe we should be looking at last?

Answer

Thank you for your question. The Transformation Programme is in the early stages of development. The priority for change is on the operational structures of the largest and most pressurised services.

I will take service redesign and restructuring separately as there are different approaches.

The initial phase of service redesign has been identified through the budget challenge. The longlist of efficiencies and savings identified

services that need redesign to either reduce costs or improve demand management.

In the case of restructuring, some services are restructuring in response to the recruitment freeze that has been in place for some time or the Voluntary Redundancy process; as vacant posts are deleted, structures need to change to accommodate. Other restructures will follow the outcome of service design. There is also a focus on support services where efficiencies can be made to protect the further reduction in frontline services. There are a set of organisational design principles in place for all restructures which ensures a consistent approach is taken.

5. Councillor George asks a question of the Leader of the Council (Cllr Cox)

Question

What impact will the Government's decision announced in the Autumn Statement to increase the National Living Wage have on the Council's budgetary position particularly in light of increased demand for adult social care and children's services?

Answer

Councillor George thank you for your question.

The National Living Wage (NLW) has been increased from £10.42 to £11.44 per hour, a rise of 9.79% from 1st April 2024.

The estimated financial impact from the increase in NLW for 2024/25 based on the current costs of local delivery of our range of adults and children's social care services is around £5.5M. Other third-party contractors' costs will also be impacted by the increased NLW, it is currently estimated that this additional cost would be around £1m in 2024/25.

These increased costs will form part of the budget setting process for 2024/25 and one of the reasons why we are seeing a significant increase in the Council's medium term financial plan position.

6. Councillor Richardson asks a question of the Leader of the Council (Cllr Cox)

Question

Does the Leader believe that this council still has reputational issues that are preventing us from recruiting and retaining the staff we need, leading to an overuse of agency staff?

Answer

Work has been undertaken across the Council to improve our reputation as a good employer. We work closely with our resourcing provider to ensure external applicants are aware of the benefits of working for Southend. There is evidence of effective cross party working such as the Chief Executive appointment and the budget challenge sessions which demonstrated improved working relationships. There is also stability within the Corporate Leadership Team and this has helped to promote effective working and clear and consistent management. Communications have improved and all of these factors will support the retention of our staff.

The number of agency staff has reduced. A majority of agency workers are in the nationally hard to fill areas of statutory provision. The management team are continuing to drive down the use of agency workers across the Council.

7. Councillor O'Connor asks a question of the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Learning (Cllr Boyd)

Question

Predicted overspend in Children's Services is going up. What preventative action is this administration taking to reduce costs in the long-run?

Answer

Thank you for your question. There was in fact a slight reduction in the projected overspend in Children's Services from period 4 to period 6 reported through the Period 6 Council position report.

Much of the current overspend is due to the cost of the placements for children we care for. We currently place children in residential placements, Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements and in Council's House Fostering services. The current cost of external residential care placements for the children we care for is placing considerable financial strain on the Children's social care budget.

This is a national and regional issue as well as a local one. At the end of the 2019/2020 financial year, we had just under approximately 330 Children in our care, an avg. of 33 in residential care and a spend on residential placements was just over £6m. As of the end of September 2023 we also have 33 children of the 315 in our care in residential placements but at a projected cost of now £9m for the year. Since January 2022, the average costs of the external residential care market have risen significantly, and that trend continues. The average cost of those placements is now £5,238 per week (to social care directly).

The significant increase in residential placement costs is due to a combination of; demand outstripping supply which increase prices in a very competitive market for bed spaces; as well as inflation and wage increases, leading to further increase costs for placement providers. There is also the need and complexity of some of the children and young people, requiring additional support and interventions from the placement. The average cost of a residential placement itself has risen by 36% from 2021/22 to 2023/24 including an 18% increase from 2022/23 to 2023/24. Increased financial pressure has also been due to a reliance on IFAs with 98 children placed with an IFA as of September 2023 at a cost of £5.2M for the year.

We are continually seeking to address and challenge the cost of Residential placements with a monthly High-Cost residential panel chaired by the Executive Director which reviews all the current residential placements. As a result of this panel and the work of the Children's Commissioner and their brokerage team we have avoided circa £950k's worth of costs in this financial year.

An investment in the Council's Fostering Service, agreed by Council in the budget setting for 2023/24 to increase the number of in house Foster carers with an improved inhouse foster care remuneration offer so that we can place more children locally to maintain their links with their family

and friends and avoid changing schools (at an average cost of £26k p.a. per child placed) in order to reduce our reliance on IFAs (average cost of £52k pa per child placed).

In addition, a focus on practice within Children's Services to improve permanence for children and young people we care for, including plans to reunify children home with their parents where it has been deemed safe and appropriate to do so with support packages, are some of the ways we seeking to address cost pressures in the longer term.

Further targeted saving details will also be shared through the Cabinet and Council budget setting papers for 2024/25, early in January 2024.

8. Councillor O'Connor asks a second question of the Leader of the Council (Cllr Cox)

Question

This administration is collectively underspending on SEND provision but is massively overspent on Educational Psychology. What is being done to attract permanent staff to the Educational Psychology roles?

Answer

- The situation regarding the shortage and recruitment of permanent Educational Psychology (EP) staff is a national issue. This, therefore, means that overspending on locum services is also an issue faced by other local authorities.
- What is Southend doing to alleviate this challenge?
- All London courses are making a point of ensuring that trainees who have accessed bursaries funded by local authorities go into LA practice rather than private practice. This was a previous condition but was not enforced.
- Southend are developing links with London and East Anglia EP training courses to raise Southend's profile as a trainee placement. Once trainees are on placement, it is easier to keep them following training.

- The New Principal EP already has firm links with one of the London courses having been a previous Academic Tutor on the course, and supervised a previous trainee in Southend, who then stayed on.
- We are offering a recruitment and retention incentive that is very competitive, and available in two lump sums, after six months and two years to encourage stability. I would suggest that this would be even more attractive if it followed the model of other LAs, such as Hertfordshire, and offered an incentive after this initial two years for every further two years of service. This recruitment and retention package is ahead of other LAs, particularly most of London, and offers competition to the Outer and London Fringe payments due to the Southend's location near London.
- We are offering EP Specialisms, such as emotional wellbeing, and therapeutic work, as part of our developing traded service to encourage those who might not want to go into management to be able to expand their knowledge, skills, and expertise.
- We are looking to become active again on social media, such as Twitter/X, so that the EP world become familiar with Southend as a unique and rewarding place to work. This will require possibly some investment initially to attract the right person to be able to do this and keep on top of it regarding quality and relevant weekly posting.
- The inclusion of early intervention work (trading with schools) as well as EHCP work offers more variety and is attractive to main grade EPs.
- The current division of the traded and legal (EHCP) services is attractive to main grade EPs who have previously worked in LAs where all they do is complete EHCP advice and no preventative work.
- We are expanding our agency connections so that we can reach other EPs wanting to find permanent work in a place like Southend.
- We are ensuring our pay offer is competitive and our staff are looked after in terms of a work allocation model. This will ensure that EPs do

not feel over-worked and continue to enjoy a balance of work that is manageable.

- We are seeking to ensure that policies and procedures are in place for Continued Professional Development (CPD) and supervision so that EPs feel supported in terms of wellbeing.
- We are looking to invest in trainees through contributing to training bursaries for Years 2 and 3 (approx. 19,900 per trainee), as well as inviting Year 1 trainees to complete their short summer placement with us. This is at no cost, other than supervision time.
- We are looking to strengthen our links with other LA services, such as the Southend Virtual School, and Southend Youth Justice Service, to attract main grade EPs to the team with a variety of opportunities.
- We will be developing a specialist wellbeing service which will be attractive to all levels of EP.
- We will be expanding our involvement in training Assistant EPs and participating in the recruitment of trainees for the London and eastern region courses so that we can share what Southend has to offer at a very early stage in someone's EP career.

9. Councillor Sadza asks a question of the Leader of the Council (Cllr Cox)

Question

In a recent financial paper, a discrepancy has been noted between the predicted and actual cost of agency staff in the legal department. What is the cash value of this discrepancy?

Answer

Thank you for your question.

Legal Services has a staffing budget for 2023/24 financial year of £1.14m.

At period 4 (July 2023) the forecast spend on permanent staff was £0.86m and the forecast spend on agency was £0.4m, giving a combined forecast overspend on staffing of £0.12m.

At period 6 (September 2023) the forecast spend on permanent staff was £0.86m and the forecast spend on agency was £0.5m (an increase of £0.1m), giving a combined forecast overspend on staffing of £0.22m.

These predicted costs are forecasts based on the information available at the time, the actual cost of agency staff in Legal Services for the year will not be known until the 2023/24 outturn, which will be reported in June 2024.

10. Councillor Sadza asks a second question of the Cabinet Member for Regulatory Services (Cllr Lamb)

Question

What are the detailed plans for the outsourcing of maintenance and cleaning of the Travel Centre, and in the Forward Plan does the Portfolio Holder envisage changing the Travel Centre in any way?

Answer

The Travel Centre is maintained by the Council's Property and Estate Management team through its various term contractors whilst cleaning is undertaken by South Essex Property Services. There are no plans to change these arrangements. There are no proposals at this time to alter the Travel Centre.

11. Councillor Berry asks a question of the Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Parking (Cllr Buck)

Question

Fewer people are using buses than predicted, leading to a £550,000 underspend in concessionary fares. Does the portfolio holder see this as a positive?

Answer

Nationally, the number of concessionary fare journeys have yet to reach pre-pandemic levels. However, we recognise that bus services are essential for many Southend residents.

Through the Bus Service Improvement Plan and the Enhanced Partnership, we are working with the bus operators to improve existing bus services and cross-city connectivity, and we are discussing with them how we can jointly promote local bus routes and also make the information on them more accessible. We are also evaluating where we can use the limited BSIP+ money, allocated to us by the Department for Transport, to enhance bus provision on certain individual corridors within Southend.

12. Councillor Gilbert asks a question of the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth and Investment (Cllr Nelson)

Question

Can the portfolio-holder say how many people or businesses have taken part in the growth strategy consultation?

Answer

The recent consultation on the Growth Strategy was available on 'Your Say Southend' and hard copies were available for completion at the last Southend Business Partnership Briefing session. 19 people or businesses took part in the consultation through these forums.

The survey link was also shared with Essex Chambers of Commerce for distribution among their members and specifically to the new Strategic Southend Business Partnership Board which they co-ordinate and members were invited to feedback at the inaugural board meeting.

Feedback has also been received from direct engagement with the Southend Business Partnership Executive, which is attended by 22 business, and the Economic Crisis and Recovery Group. In addition to this there have been workshops with a wide range of Council services.

13. Councillor Gilbert asks a second question of the Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Parking (Cllr Buck)

Question

Can the portfolio-holder provide council with an impartial estimate (eg agreed by finance officers) of how much revenue has been forgone by the decision not to charge for parking in seafront car parks between 6pm and 9pm?

Answer

The introduction of the 18:00 to 21:00 parking charges in Zone 1a had been budgeted to increase parking income by £250k PA. Initial income achieved by their introduction from April to July was £170k. However, during the month of July, when the 18:00 to 21:00 parking charges were still in place, parking income dropped significantly over the previous year, when these extra charges were not in place, by £70k. This negative impact is due to visitors becoming accustomed to and realising the financial impact it was having on their individual budgets when visiting Southend. The impact of a reduction of parking revenue in July of £70k in Zone 1a, meant that we needed to act swiftly to stop the downward trajectory of further parking income losses due to this damaging new policy.

When the 18:00 to 21:00 charges were removed, August quickly recovered to about the same income as 2022 and September saw an increase in parking income, without the 18:00 to 21:00 charges in place, of £140k over the previous in year month. The evidence of the negative impact the 18:00 to 21:00 parking charges were having on parking income and the local economy was very evident and the positive impact their removal had, is equally evident. It would have been extremely remiss and foolhardy for this administration to no act swiftly upon the very clear and unambiguous evidence, to stop the harmful effects these charges were having on Southend.

14. Councillor Dent asks a question of the Cabinet Member for Public Health, Adult Social Care and Constitutional affairs (Cllr Moyies)

Question

Can the cabinet member for Health & Adult Social Care confirm whether it is still the intention of the administration to cut the NetPark Wellbeing project?

Answer

I can confirm that there is a proposal to remove the post of the Mental Wellbeing Co-Ordinator from our establishment as part of a wider restructuring of our adults and communities department. The post is linked to the NetPark Wellbeing project but is not the project in itself. We are aware that the role the Co-ordinator has in supporting the delivery of the project and of the impact that our decision to propose the removal of this post could have on NetPark Wellbeing.

We will continue to offer support to the project going forward and we are working with the organisation to seek a solution.

15. Councillor Dent asks a second question of the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning (Cllr Garston)

Question

Can the cabinet member for Housing please tell me how many individuals Southend Council has housed in temporary accommodation in each of the last five years, and the cost to the council in each of the last five years?

Answer

Please note this response excludes spend for the provision of temporary accommodation in the self-contained city centre tower block units.

The costs of guest house provided TA is as follows:

2017/18 - £21,794

2018/19 - £149,881

2019/20 - £432,412

2020/21 - £1,293,708

2021/22 - £352,580

2022/23 - £1,143,585

2023/24 - £557,511 (up to 15/11/23)

Total spend from 2017-15/11/23 is £3,942,439

The spend for hostels is as follows:

2017/18 - £490,451

2018/19 - £411,046

2019/20 - £401,135

2020/21 - £400,050

2021/22 - £474,096

2022/23 - £465,892

Total for period 2017-2023 is £2,642,670

This covers both Rough Sleeping Initiative spend as well as our statutory duty to provide temporary accommodation to homeless households.

In terms of numbers to match the spend, for the Rough Sleeping Initiative the numbers in guest house per financial year were:

2017 / 2018 - 0 – The first year of the Rough Sleeper Grant was 2018/19.

2018 / 2019 - 19

2019 / 2020 - 104

2020 / 2021 - 234

2021 / 2022 - 105

2022 / 2023 - 125

2023 / 2024 - 56 – this is up until 15/11/23

It will need to be noted that these numbers represent the number of individuals who are counted once per financial year. This doesn't consider the length of time each individual was in B&B nor how many times they were placed in accommodation in the same year. The individuals may be the same as those in previous or subsequent financial years or their stay may span across into another year.

It is much more difficult to give a total number in temporary accommodation for our wider homeless households (placed in guest house, hostel and city centre tower blocks) per year as our software does not run specific reports for that and month to month the figure alone would likely contain duplicates. However, looking back at the monthly numbers over the last 7 financial years we can provide average number of households in temporary accommodation per month for that year:

2017 / 2018	-	111
2018 / 2019	-	153
2019 / 2020	-	202
2020 / 2021	-	266
2021 / 2022	-	201
2022 / 2023	-	242
2023 / 2024	-	254 (so far)

16. Councillor Hyde asks a question of the Cabinet Member for Regulatory Services (Cllr Lamb)

Question

The Council has lost £795k in predicted income due to the crematorium refurbishment. How much will this position have recovered by the end of the financial year?

Answer

Thank you for your question. We are currently projecting that the crematorium will have generated approximately £150,000 by the end of the financial year (23/24).

17. Councillor Hyde asks a second question of the Leader of the Council (Cllr Cox)

Question

What risks do we foresee from climate change with regards to flooding and extreme weather, and do we have sufficient protections against these in Southend?

Answer

The data shows that Southend is increasingly likely to experience the impacts of climate change in the years to come, including:

- frequent and more extreme flooding
- faster and more extreme coastal erosion
- more frequent and more extreme droughts leading to water shortages,
- permanent damage to habitats, plants and wildlife

The city's coastal defences provide the appropriate level of protection for current climate impacts, but officers are working hard through a variety of projects and partnerships including Catchment to Coast and Marine Parade Sustainable Water Management Scheme to ensure that the coastal defences will provide sufficient protection for future climate impacts

18. Councillor Line asks a question of the Cabinet Member for Public Health, Adult Social Care and Constitutional Affairs (Cllr Moyies)

Question

Last month, Southend-on-Sea City Council's own public health team made phone calls to every dental practice in Southend. Every single one of them said that they were not open for registration taking on new NHS patients.

There is a devastating shortage of NHS dental provision in our city and this is having a detrimental impact on many residents, especially our vulnerable and Looked After Children, and those subject to child protection plans.

Whilst the Dentaaid bus is doing what it can in order to accommodate some of those children who have had dental emergencies, it is unable to provide regular check-ups. This is resulting in many struggling families being forced to seek costly private care, in the midst of a Cost-of-Living Crisis.

Can I ask what are the immediate and long-term plans to improve access to dental care for the whole population, especially for the most vulnerable in our city?

Answer

For clarity, the dental practice information that was previously shared was from Southend Healthwatch, who reviewed local websites to gather information about NHS dentists, and I can confirm that no phone calls were made to them.

19. Councillor Line asks a question of the Cabinet Member for Arts, Culture, Heritage and Leisure (Cllr Jarvis)

Question

Councillors will be aware of the considerable community campaign to save *The IronWorks*.

In its existence, *The IronWorks* has had a significant impact in the City, welcoming over 100,000 guests and tourists through their doors. It is an exhibition space for live music, theatre, comedy, spoken word poetry, and art and provided opportunities for independent traders to start-up new businesses at relatively low cost, and hosted over 80 weekly clubs, kids' clubs, and community groups.

The IronWorks is an inclusive employer, providing jobs and volunteering opportunities to dozens of individuals, some of whom have additional needs. It's a jewel in the crown of Southend's arts and culture offer.

The Cabinet Member and I have been handed a petition with over 1500 signatures. Considering the Council's plans around regeneration, does the Administration have any intention to provide further support to *The IronWorks* whilst they navigate this particularly precarious next few months?

Answer

You will be aware of the challenging financial difficulties the Council is currently seeking to address. A number of organisations across the City, including Metal, have benefited from Council grants and support over several years. However, the opportunities and their size are reducing against the backdrop of these financial difficulties.

There are, however, a number of long-standing support commitments to various organisations, made previously under a stronger financial position. Budgets and decisions for the 2024/25 financial year have yet to be fully determined.

Officers will be working with Ironworks to provide advice and suggestions about any wider opportunities that Iron works could consider or we could connect them with.