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Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Department for Corporate Services

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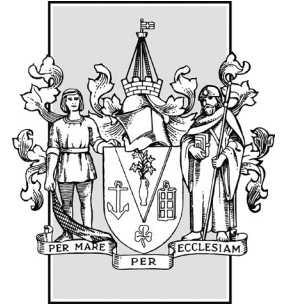
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Dear Councillor

THE COUNCIL - THURSDAY, 25TH FEBRUARY, 2016

Please find enclosed, for consideration at the next meeting of the The Council taking place on Thursday, 25th February, 2016, the following report(s) that were unavailable when the agenda was printed.

Agenda No	Item
5	<u>Questions from Members of the Public (Pages 1 - 10)</u>

Yours faithfully

Robert Harris

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Council Meeting – 25th February 2016

Question 1 from Mr Garne to the Executive Councillor for Children & Learning

5

Question

Will the necessity for additional provision of Secondary age school places by 2020, as outlined in Councillor Jones' Echo article of 25th January, be sufficiently met by the two new sites she mentions – the former Cecil Jones building and the Procat premises in Southchurch Boulevard – bearing in mind the desirability of an even geographical spread across the borough and a proper match between the parental preferences and school catchment areas?

Answer

The two sites mentioned are only part of the plans for secondary expansion. Discussions are taking place with a number of other schools that have shown a willingness to expand in order to achieve the required additional places.

In the first instance, the priority is to ensure that there are sufficient places in good schools for September 2018. Proposed expansion will provide for the whole of Southend and should provide greater parental satisfaction. Mr Garne will be aware that the process of secondary expansion is overseen by the all-party School Places Working Party set up in 2012.

Question 2 from Mr Garne to the Executive Councillor for Health and Adult Social Care

Question

Is it intended that the proposed 2% precept on Council Tax for adult services be used for any particular area of acute need, or will it be spread across the entirety of social care provision?

Answer

The proposed budget assumes a new Adult Social Care precept at a level of 2%. The ability to apply this precept has been introduced by the Government as part of this year's Local Government financial settlement. It has been introduced to assist with the increasing demand and demographic expenditure pressures from Adult Social Care that Local Government has been experiencing and are continuing to face. It is proposed that the Adult Social Care precept be used to support the service in two ways;

(a) The savings proposals include two proposals totalling £3m that will require significant service redesign. As such it will take some time until the full savings are realised. It is proposed that £0.691 million of the new precept is used to enable the transition and delivery of the savings over a two year period.

(b) To support the delivery of the service redesign, there is a need for some initial investment to enable old and new style services to be run side by side to enable a safe transition. These total £0.6 million and are as follows;

- £150,000 - Overnight support for older people reducing the long term use of care;
- £250,000 – Additional services to reduce admissions for residential care and high cost packages;
- £200,000 – Mental Health Intensive Enablement;

Question 3 from Mr Gittus to the Executive Councillor for Public Protection, Waste & Transport

Question

Over the past two months, there has been a set of traffic lights put in place while significant construction work has been carried out on Southchurch Avenue directly affecting Porters Grange Primary School. As well as a significant diversion to those who use the school, there have been numerous reports of speeding by those who try to make the lights. Due to the characteristics of the road, this action has directly put children at risk of serious injury.

Will the portfolio holder assure me, parents, teachers and governors of all of Southend's education facilities that roadworks and construction work around schools that will cause significant disruption and risk to life will in future only take place during the summer holidays?

Answer

The works at this site were associated with a private building development and required occupation of one lane of the public highway on Southchurch Avenue to place machinery to safely undertake piling works.

It is always our intention to avoid any major disruptions around schools and where we have to, we work with utilities and developers to ensure we undertake these works without endangering public safety. As such at times, the works involve closures or part closure of roads and/or traffic management including the use of temporary traffic light controls. The majority of works were undertaken during the Christmas holidays. However, the works took longer than anticipated because the developer had to undertake additional piling works to support the side of the highway.

In this instance, our officers worked closely with the school, Ward Councillors and the developers to ensure that we did not compromise children's safety and did all we could to minimise disruptions to traffic flows. The developer also kept the school informed at all times and attended the school assembly to talk to children about the works. We also agreed with the developers to undertake a number of additional actions to ensure we sustained the safety of road users and particularly children at this location. These being:-

- Closing the crossing and directing pedestrians to a safe crossing point at the permanent lights at the junction of Southchurch Avenue and Southchurch Road
- Ensuring that the developer employed marshals to point people to the direction of the safe crossing points
- Maintained regular contact and meetings with the developer and school to alleviate any issues.
- Manually controlling the temporary lights to ensure minimum disruption to the network

I take Mr Gittus' point about delaying works around the school until the summer holidays. As the highway authority with responsibility for co-ordinating all street works, the Council uses its best endeavours to encourage and sometime force utilities and developers to reduce if not avoid disruptions around schools by undertaking works during school holidays, where practical and feasible. However, this request was from a private developer and due to the nature and duration of the works, there was no ideal time to undertake these. However, the Council ensured that adequate traffic management and pedestrian arrangements were in place to ensure public safety and safe traffic movements.

Question 4 from Ms McDonald to the Executive Councillor for Health & Adult Social Care

Question

As a result of the huge cuts imposed by Central Government, it has been necessary to make savings in many areas of the Council, including Public Health. In a statement regarding the forthcoming budget for 2016/2017 published on the Southend Borough Council website on Monday 11th January 2016, it was stated that part of the savings in Public Health would be made by "not commissioning a number of projects including the domestic abuse schools prevention project".

At a time when the police are having to put more funds into dealing with instances of domestic abuse and the Police and Crime Commissioner is allocating funds to sexual violence services, it seems that working with young people to make them aware of what an abusive relationships looks like would be of paramount importance.

In addition, the lack of support for compulsory sex and relationship education from MPs, including those in Southend, means that our school children are potentially receiving no information about these issues at all.

What assurances can the portfolio holder give me that this crucial work will be done with our young people after April 2016?

Answer

As Ms McDonald points out, there have been some significant reductions to the public health budget imposed by central government. This has included a reduction of £584,000 in year and an additional reduction of £230,000 from our allocation for 2016/17.

Public health is about prevention and we deeply regret having to cut any public health services. We have attempted to minimise the impact of these cuts by looking at how we can make efficiencies and deliver services differently.

The domestic abuse schools prevention project referred to is a commissioned Theatre in Education programme, which provides awareness training on healthy relationships and domestic abuse for secondary school children.

We will be replacing this programme with the Risk Avert programme. This is a new nationally accredited risk awareness programme for schools, and is currently being offered to Secondary Schools in Southend. This new programme is fully resourced from external partnership funding.

The Council will still commission the theatre in education programme in 2016 pending the transition to the Risk Avert programme.

I would also like to reassure Ms McDonald that public health are currently working closely with primary and secondary Schools in Southend to provide both extensive training and curriculum resources to support the delivery of a relationships and sex education programme.

Question 5 from Mr Thomas to the Executive Councillor for Public Protection, Waste & Transport

Question

How much a year does green waste in black bags cost us? (it would be useful to see the last two years figures please)?

Answer

Garden waste is a chargeable service and therefore should not be placed within black bags for residual waste collection. It is estimated that putting green waste in black sacks costs the Council approximately £80,000 per annum to its residual waste disposal budget.

Question 6 from Mr Thomas to the Executive Councillor for Housing, Planning & Regulatory Services

Question

In the Council's homeless prevention strategy 2014 - 2017 it states ' the code of conduct requires SEAL members to notify the council of tenancy related issues and the serving of section 21 notices in order that the council has more time to work with tenants to prevent homelessness occurring.' How effective has it been?

Answer

This is an important part of the Homelessness Prevention Strategy and is a regular issue discussed at liaison meetings with SEAL landlords and Letting Agents. Generally this has been effective but there are some cases which do fall through the cracks and in many instances there are occasions where the Council cannot do anything to prevent the household from becoming homeless. Overall it has been a useful requirement which can help to prevent homelessness if we can intervene as early as possible in the Section 21 Notice period.

Question 7 from Mr Dent to the Leader of the Council

Question

In a letter to his constituents, the MP for Southend West, Sir David Amess, has attacked the administration currently running the council as giving "factional leadership" and "poor direction of policy". Given that Southend has suffered millions of pounds of cuts at the hands of Sir David's government, and surprisingly has not benefited from the extra money doled out from the treasury, united leadership for the town is undeniably vital.

In light of this, could the Leader of the Council tell me what invitations he has made to Sir David and James Duddridge since he became the Leader of the Council, and what the response of Southend's Conservative MPs has been to these open offers of co-operation?

Answer

Our Joint Administration has always made decisions based on what we feel is best for our residents in the town. We constantly have to deal with negative comments from Conservative councillors as well as our 2 Conservative MPs.

These comments do not offer us advice or alternative solutions but openly criticise to whoever wants to listen and more often than not are not based on actual fact.

However, the Joint Administration has run the Council effectively and efficiently since it took over in June 2014. It has continued to provide the best possible services to the residents of the town, notwithstanding significant cuts in the resources coming to us from Central Government.

The Joint Administration has listened to the people of Southend, has been united in its objectives and given clear direction.

It is very disappointing that our 2 local MP's have not supported the Council in its endeavours. I have made repeated efforts to work with our 2 local MPs for the good of the town, but they continue to refuse to speak to me.

Question 8 from Ms Richardson to the Executive Councillor for Children & Learning

Question

Back in 2013, a proposal was given to merge Hamstel Childrens centre with Temple Sutton as part of the measures to save money, given the strength of feeling regarding the previous proposed closure, can the portfolio-holder confirm that both will be staying open as a result of the budget to be presented tonight?

Keeping in mind the importance of these children's centres, these are a lifeline to many, especially to those who do not have the support of family nearby. They provide vital services to the area, which are extremely popular.

Answer

A report to Cabinet was approved on 10th November 2015 aimed at seeking a view on a proposed redesign of the management structure of Southend's children's centres **to ensure that all 9 children's centres remain open. This is still our intention.**

The recommendation was to revise the management structure into a single delivery model, and was the result of working with the local organisations for all 9 children's centres to ensure no closures but to use this as an opportunity to improve the way the centres provide services through a more sustainable model within the budget allocation. In accordance with the Childcare Act 2006, consultation on the proposed model will begin in the Spring.

Question 9 from Mr Fieldhouse to the Executive Councillor for Public Protection, Waste and Transport

Question

I live on Station Road in Westcliff and on numerous occasions have witnessed vehicles travelling at what I would estimate to be in excess of 50mph in a 30mph zone. Other residents, for example in Scratton Rd and Mayfield Avenue have also reported similar events to me.

In view of the success of other Councils where average speeds have been cut and serious injuries and deaths drastically reduced by the introduction of 20mph speed limits in residential areas, can the portfolio holder tell me:

1. Does the Council intend to implement a 20 mph speed limit in residential areas borough-wide, and if so when?
2. If the Council has a cost figure for the implementation of such a scheme in Southend?

Answer

The Council is keen to ensure we do all we can to reduce the numbers and severity of accidents on our roads. The speed of some vehicles is often a factor in how accidents are caused.

The Council's Place Scrutiny Committee is currently undertaking an in-depth study entitled "20mph Speed Limits in Residential Streets". A project team of Members appointed from the Scrutiny Committee is collating information and evidence and will publish its findings in a report in the next few months. It is too early to pre-empt what the outcome of the study is likely to be.

I do not have any cost figures at this stage for implementation of this scheme as this will depend upon the future Policy and the extent to which it is implemented.

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