

## **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

**Council Meeting – 25<sup>th</sup> February 2016**

### **Question 1 from Councillor Assenheim to the Executive Councillor for Public Protection, Waste and Transport**

#### **Question:**

“Would the Portfolio please update the Chamber and public on what is happening in respect of the flood defences on Shoebury Common and beyond?”

#### **Answer:**

Since the Cabinet decision in January 2015 not to progress the previous preferred scheme, work has continued to develop a new set of options and Project Appraisal Report (PAR). The Council’s Contractor, Mott MacDonald, are required to re-test all the assumptions made in the previous PAR including all data analysed by the Council’s previous advisers, Black & Veatch. As part of this due diligence work and in order to develop a new scheme through the PAR process, Mott MacDonald have had to assess whether there has been any underlying changes to any of the data or information since the former scheme and previous PAR were prepared.

This is a substantial and technically complex piece of work and has required a specialist coastal modeller to undertake this assessment. It is though, absolutely essential given the public concern raised by the previous scheme and the questions that were raised about the basic data upon which the project was based and because the method of predicting future sea level rise has been changed by the Environment Agency for projects which require their funding. This is likely to mean that it will be possible to develop a less intrusive coastal protection scheme.

To establish this, a detailed investigation into the condition and stability of the existing sea wall is also underway, which will require careful examination of the soils under the wall and samples from the structure removed for examination and assessment.

It is anticipated that the work to produce the PAR will be completed by August 2016 which is in line with the timeframe set out in the Cabinet report of January 2015.

The PAR is an essential requirement of project development and necessary to secure the Environment Agency Funding identified in their Capital Programme.

**Question 2 from Councillor Assenheim to the Executive Councillor for Community & Organisational Development**

**Question:**

Given your statement in respect of the Domestic Violence “Together We Can Campaign” in Southend. Can you please state why the Authority abolished the Councils Domestic Violence Team and Domestic Violence Officer some four years ago?”

**Answer:**

The role of the Domestic Abuse Partnership Manager was deleted as part of the Budget saving process 3 years ago. I was not personally in favour of the move at that time, but since then the Council has faced several more years of heavy budget cuts imposed by Central Government.

The Council’s work on domestic abuse is now co-ordinated by a committed and successful Domestic Abuse Strategy Group, chaired by the Deputy Director of Public Health. The Group continue to deliver and drive the Domestic Abuse Agenda forward locally, as a number of the critical partner agencies are already represented on this Group. Accountability and governance of the Domestic Abuse Strategy Group will be to the Southend Community Safety Partnership Board.

Additional posts have been recruited to deliver services to vulnerable people and the Council has a Child Sexual Exploitation lead within Children Services, Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference Team and wider partnership working, that makes our domestic abuse work more sustained and embedded within the system.

The Council also funds various projects to support victims and families experiencing domestic abuse. A good example of this is the Southend

on Sea Domestic Abuse Project (SOSDAP) which is funded by our Community Commissioning Programme fund. This encourages and enable families suffering violent situations to become independent and safe from further harm, and also importantly provides a male only service which offers support for young male victims.

The project also raises awareness of the effects of domestic abuse in the community and where residents can get help and support. Along with awareness raising at community events, work is also being undertaken in our local schools to help educate children on healthy and safe relationships.

### **Question 1 from Councillor Ware-Lane to the Executive Councillor for Public Protection, Waste and Transport**

#### **Question:**

Southend West Conservatives plans are for a reinstatement of a five day a week rubbish collection. Can the Portfolio Holder tell me how much this would cost the Council (and therefore council tax payers) each year?

#### **Answer:**

The proposal to move to a 4 day collection week was an intrinsic part of the recent procurement for the new Waste Collection Contract and has contributed to the significant savings that have been negotiated and which are set out in the Council's proposed Budget.

Veolia, as the successful contractor will have made significant financial assumptions on bidding for the contract and formally entering into it with the Council.

To reinstate a 5 day waste collection would require a significant variation to the existing contract with Veolia and would negatively impact on the 'value for money' achieved from the recent procurement and contract award. There would be significant cost implications as a result which would take considerable time to analyse and quantify. This process in itself would represent further costs in terms of spend and resource.

It is important to understand that a 4 day or a 5 day collection service will still consist of a weekly collection for all waste streams and from a customer perspective, there will be no difference.

In addition, the 4 day service offers significant benefits such as:

- No catch up days following most Bank Holiday's
- Removing the need to communicate rescheduled collections, which causes customer confusion and complaints
- Improve the street scene as waste will be on the streets one day less per week, which will certainly have an impact on the aesthetics of the Borough
- It has also enabled an increased focus on street cleansing.

With this contract, the Council is getting more for less and a return to a 5 day collection would serve no purpose, or improvement and only result in unnecessarily increasing costs to the taxpayer.

### **Question 2 from Councillor Ware-Lane to the Executive Councillor for Community & Organisational Development**

#### **Question:**

With the recent sad news of a fourth murder in a little over two years in a small part of Milton ward, public concerns are naturally focussed on community safety. Will the Portfolio Holder confirm that the Council is working with the Police to ensure that Milton ward residents can feel and be safe?

#### **Answer:**

I would like to reassure Members that the Council is working with the Police to ensure that Milton Ward residents can feel and be safe.

All 3 murders over the last 2 years in Milton Ward had connections to drug and gang activity. All resulted in successful convictions and life imprisonment. In relation to the recent murder in Napier Avenue, 2 perpetrators are currently remanded in custody awaiting trial so we cannot comment further on the circumstances of the offence at this time. The Police have, however, stated that this was not a random attack.

Southend's Community Safety Partnership (CSP) consists of key partners including the Police, Fire, local authority including Health, Probation and the Police & Crime Commissioner all playing a significant role in keeping the town safe. Crime performance is discussed at every CSP Board with the Police held accountable for monthly performance, with a continued focus on tackling violent crime and the rise in crimes associated with organised crime groups and gangs operating in Southend. The Councils CCTV network continues to play a vital role in both preventing and detecting crime, operating 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

A key recommendation from this year's Strategic Intelligence Assessment (which is an annual audit of crime and disorder in the Borough), is to ensure, that emerging crime trends, hotspots of activity, and our worst offenders are targeted through a robust partnership approach, led by the Police and supported by the Council and other partners.

### **Question 1 from Councillor Buckley to the Executive Councillor for Health & Adult Social Care**

#### **Question:**

It is understood that the town currently has a PET-CT Scanner based at Southend hospital that is not being used (which is a terrible waste) Meanwhile NHS England are carrying out consultations with patient groups and conducting surveys of the public to ultimately decide whether Southend or Basildon Hospital should provide the PET CT services for South Essex. Can the cabinet member for Health assure me that he is monitoring the events closely to ensure that Southend stands every chance of procuring these services together with the retaining of the CT scanner.?

#### **Answer:**

I would like to reassure Cllr Buckley that in my capacity as the Cabinet member for Health and Adult Social Care I have been taking a keen interest in where the permanent PET CT services for South Essex will be based.

As you are aware the People Scrutiny Committee is monitoring this issue very closely and has been in correspondence with NHS England to

indicate our support to their initial proposal to move the PET-CT service to the Southend Hospital site.

I would urge members to attend the NHS England public engagement event on the future of the PET CT service which is being held in The Forum on 9<sup>th</sup> March to voice their views and offer support for Southend to be the chosen location.

### **Question 1 from Councillor Nevin to the Executive Councillor for Children and Learning**

#### **Question:**

Could the Executive Councillor and Portfolio holder for Children and Learning please advise members of the Council on the outcomes, so far, of the School Places Working Party and her opinion as to whether children from Milton Ward will benefit from any extra capacity?

#### **Answer**

The School Places Working Party has considered the provision of secondary places across the Borough, including Milton Ward. The current discussions with secondary schools will provide additional capacity that will be of benefit to children in that Ward.

Permanent expansions at primary schools over recent years at Milton Hall, Barons Court, St. Helen's and St Mary's primary schools have provided more primary places and pupils living in Milton ward will also benefit from these places."

### **Question from Councillor Davies to the Executive Councillor Housing, Planning & Regulatory Services**

#### **Question**

What can be done about estate agents in Southend who are charging exorbitant fees and profiting from the most vulnerable in our society who can't find homes?

#### **Answer**

There are no restrictions in place in terms of how much Letting Agents charge for the various services they offer to landlords and tenants. However the Government last year brought in some regulations, in sections 83 to 88 of the Consumer Rights Act 2015, to ensure that there is more transparency and to ensure that Letting Agents have to publish their fees. In addition all Letting Agents have to be a member of a redress scheme to deal with any complaints and if the Council finds that a Letting Agent isn't a member of the redress schemes then we can prosecute them for breaching the regulations.