

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Council Meeting – 24th October 2019

Question 1 from Mr Webb to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning

Question

What amount of tonnes have been recycled in garden, black, food, pink bags in the following years of 2016 – 2017, 2017 – 2018, 2018 – 2019?

Answer

Local Authorities are compelled to report waste data to Government via the 'Wastedataflow' portal. The public can register and gain access to data, which can be downloaded. The website address for Wastedataflow is:

<https://www.wastedataflow.org/>

Garden

2016/17	Collected & composted 8677.30 tonnes
2017/18	Collected & composted 9213.96 tonnes
2018/19	Collected & composted 10037.63 tonnes

Black *

2016/17	Recycling from black sacks =3157.73 tonnes
2017/18	Recycling from black sacks =2364.93 tonnes
2018/19	Recycling from black sacks =2545.16 tonnes

*recycling is carried out at the Mechanical Biological Treatment Plan in Basildon, operated by Essex County Council

Food **

2016/17	Collected & sent for Anaerobic Digestion 4013.90 tonnes
2017/18	Collected & sent for Anaerobic Digestion 4430.62 tonnes
2018/19	Collected & sent for Anaerobic Digestion 4169.03 tonnes

**Food waste is treated at an Anaerobic Digestion plant and classed as recycled

Pink ***

2016/17	Recycled 12789.05 tonnes
2017/18	Recycled 11904.99 tonnes
2018/19	Recycled 12804.64 tonnes

***Material from the pink sacks is sent for sorting at a Materials Recycling Facility.

Question 2 from Mr Webb to the Leader of the Council

Question

How many people are on the housing list and what practical steps will the Council put in place to provide housing, but what is the criteria for being first?

Answer

As of 21st October the number of live households on the housing waiting list is 1379.

The criteria for being 'first' is as follows;

- *All applicants have their housing need assessed, and then placed into the appropriate band that matches the level of priority as set out in the Allocations Policy (which is currently being reviewed and is in the second stage of consultation).*
- *Applicants are able to place up to 3 bids for suitable properties in every bidding cycle. Bids are shortlisted at the end of the cycle which is 23:59 on Sunday night. Applicants are shortlisted firstly by their band, then by the amount of time they have been in that band. So someone in band A will be shortlisted ahead of someone in band B, and someone who has been in band A for a year will be shortlisted ahead of someone who has only been in that band for 6 months (for example).*
- *Additional shortlisting criteria may apply such as restrictions on the number of children, or additional priority for people with a ground floor or lifted need because of medical conditions.*
- *Applicants on the shortlist are then checked to ensure they meet any property requirements, are contacted to confirm their details, and are then offered a viewing of the property in order of their position on the shortlist.*

In terms of practical steps, the Council's Southend 2050 Safe and Well outcome of "We are well on our way to ensuring that everyone has a home that meets their needs" shows that housing is a key priority for the Council. The development of new council housing is ongoing with both the HRA Land Review and Modern Methods of Construction Projects and the Council's Acquisitions Programme is also buying property from the open market for use as Council housing.

Question 3 from Mr Wood to the Cabinet Member for Transport, Capital and Inward Investment

Question

Please can I ask the portfolio holder for transport why the residents parking scheme in St Vincent's Road was refused? (This decision follows many hours of hard work from residents and the agreed council criteria was met).

Answer

The Cabinet Committee on 12th September 2019 received a report of the Deputy Chief Executive (Place) that presented the representations that had been received in response to the statutory consultation for a traffic regulation order amending the (Cliffs Pavilion Area) (Prohibition of Waiting and Permit Parking Places) (Zone CP) Order 2016. The effect of the Order, if approved, would introduce permit parking places to facilitate the improvement of parking for residents in St. Vincent's Road, between the hours of 11.00 am to 9.00 pm daily.

The report sought the Cabinet Committee's approval on the way forward in respect of these proposals, after having considered the views of the Traffic Regulations Working Party following consideration of all the representations that had been received in writing and at the meeting. Large scale plans of the proposals were displayed at the meeting.

The Cabinet Committee noted the Working Party's concerns that the introduction of permit parking in this road in isolation would be likely to result in further displaced parking into the surrounding roads. It therefore:

'Resolved:-

1. That the Southend-on-Sea Borough Council (Cliffs Pavilion Area) (Prohibition of Waiting & Permit Parking Places) (Zone CP) Order 2016 (Amendment No. 1) Order 2019 not be confirmed.

2. That consultation be undertaken to introduce permit parking in the roads in the wider area, the extent of which to be determined by officers in consultation with the Ward Councillors.

Reason for Decision

To improve parking for residents while reducing displacement of parking'

Question 4 from Mr Wood to the Cabinet Member for Transport, Capital and Inward Investment

Question

Could you also expand on why the minutes of the Traffic and parking meeting in January, that stated St Vincent's Road will go ahead even if the surrounding roads did not meet the criteria, has been ignored?

Answer

In January 2019 the scheme was considered at the Traffic Regulations Working Party and Cabinet Committee. The decision was to publish the relevant statutory notice and undertake the necessary consultation for a traffic regulation order for the inclusion of St Vincent's Road.

Objections were received as part of this consultation and therefore this scheme was reviewed at Cabinet Committee in September 2019; whereby the outcome was to look at introducing permit parking in the roads in the wider area, the extent of which to be determined by officers in consultation with the Ward Councillors.

It was agreed that a wider area consultation would be undertaken and taken back to Cabinet Committee in March 2020.

Question 5 from Mr A Grubb to the Cabinet Member for Environment & Planning

Question:

I saw an item on the BBC News last week about Grants from Government in order to plant more trees, however the scheme called Government Cash For Trees Scheme was possible to focused on a few selected areas.

I understand the government having realised the problem are in the process of expanding the scheme and are now calling the scheme New Grants For Urban Area, with a view to encourage more local authorities to apply for the money to plant trees.

Will Southend Council apply for the additional funding to plant additional new trees and if the council is lucky in securing the additional funding, will the new trees be planted in the Wards where there is a need to improve the vegetation and Wild Life?

Answer:

We believe you're referring to the 'Urban Tree Challenge Fund'.

The Urban Tree Challenge Fund is a competitive fund offering 50% contribution to the costs of tree planting. It is over a two year period and this is the first year. In that first year only block bids are required to a minimum value of £500,000. As this has to be match funded, the Council would also have to contribute the same amount, which has not been added to the current budget.

A planting scheme of this value and consequent magnitude would constitute a massive planting in Southend which does not have the land capacity, even if it were broken down into several areas.

However, year two is aimed at individual applications and would allow for smaller individual schemes working with community groups. The Council has also recently announced its commitment to plan 1000 new standard trees over the next three years. This along with any externally funded tree planting will ensure the tree cover in the Borough is maintained and enhanced aligning with a number of the 2050 objectives and giving a chance for all areas of the Borough to participate.

Officers will be looking at this as a positive opportunity in the coming months and engaging with community groups.

Question 6 from Mr A Grubb to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning

Question

I put in an objection to the Aldi planning application and these were ignored.

Please could the Cabinet Member explain Why the Council failed to impose a Section 106 Agreement as part of the planning permission for the Aldi Store development in London Road for the costs in providing a Pedestrian Crossing at this location, and will one now be provided?

Answer

The original planning permission for an Aldi Store at 666 - 686 London Road granted in December 2008 required a financial contribution under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) for highway improvement works, including a pedestrian refuge. These works have now been delivered.

The two most recent applications at the site in 2018 and 2019 have been for either minor works related to the installation of plant (application reference 19/00742/FUL) or changes to the hours for servicing, deliveries and loading (application reference 18/00168/FULM).

It is not appropriate, proportionate or in accordance with national planning policy and legislation to request a Section 106 Agreement for a pedestrian crossing in relation to applications of this minor nature.

It is also considered that a further pedestrian crossing point is not necessary in this location due the close proximity to the signal controlled crossing at the junction of the A13 and Chalkwell Avenue.

Question 7 from Mrs Walker to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning

Question

Given the council's recent statements and commitments regarding reversing the devastating deforestation of our borough that has increased in recent years, we would ask the council if they will now commit in principle to replanting the area of the cliff slip with trees in order to stabilise the ground, improving the aesthetic look of the cliff repair and give a clear indication to the public that no development will be permitted or considered on the cliff slip site?

Answer

Firstly I would like to confirm that no de-forestation has taken place within the Borough. The Council has remained committed to managing the town's highways and parkland trees including maintaining and enhancing the town's canopy cover. The Council has recently confirmed it's commitment to trees as part of the town's green infrastructure with the announcement of a new tree policy and the planting of 1000 additional standard trees.

Decisions on suitable methods for slope stabilisation first require an evaluation of the hazard. Deep mass movements (deep landslides) are difficult to control and require engineering solutions. Shallower mass movement (shallow landslides) and erosion processes are more suitable for control using bioengineering or ecoengineering methods that will have the added benefit of enhancing the urban greenspace.

Any project to remediate cliff movement will be undertaken based on the results of appropriate survey works and using solutions that are appropriate for the location. Any remedial works could include bioengineering or ecoengineering solutions.

Tree planting can form part of a ground stabilisation solution. However, trees are not suitable in all situations. Trees can sometimes be a benefit as part of the scheme to remediating shallow slips and erosion. However, for deep landslides, trees will not provide stabilisation as the roots will not grow to the several metres down that the movement occurs, and in some instances can increase the risk of ground movement by adding weight to the area.

To help identify areas of the town that would benefit from tree planting, the Council has commissioned a canopy assessment, this will form part of the new tree policy and influence future tree planting.

Any future tree planting on Southend Cliffs will take into account survey results and the findings of the canopy assessment. Therefore, it would not be appropriate to make a commitment to any form of new green infrastructure, including trees, on the Cliffs at this time.

QUESTION 8 from Miss Newman to the Leader of the Council

Following on from the comments made at the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 10th October 2019, several councillors made me aware that there are over 1400 people on the waiting list for Southend Borough Council that require homes. The proposed cost for HRA phase 4 is just over £6.1 million, this is the cost for 31 units! There are plenty of empty properties in the borough, above shops in the high street, boarded up buildings, and these are commented on a lot by the public, especially on social media. These empty buildings have increased Anti-social behaviour, crime and squatting rates with some increasing by over 7% between 2016-2019.

Can the council please explain why this money cannot be used to purchase property in the area that is boarded up or empty and be turned into housing for the people on the waiting list?

This will no doubt, reduce squatters and anti-social behaviour as well as visually improving what was one a bubbly, thriving town.

Answer

The Council's Homeseeker's Register currently stands at 1379 households and highlights the need for affordable housing in the borough. One of the priorities of the Council's Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is the supply of safe, locally affordable homes. In order to meet this priority, the strategy outlines a number of commitments which includes:

- Property Acquisitions which the Council has already spent £3.6m to purchase property so far this year.
- Buying land for affordable housing and there is a £1.4m budget for this.
- Bringing Empty Homes back into use and this work is now underway
- And bringing forward new Council housing on council owned land through the Housing Revenue Account such as the Lundy Close Proposals which have a budget of £6.1m but which include contingency and other associated 'on costs'.

There are therefore a number of methods to increase safe, locally affordable homes and the Council building homes and buying properties are both commitments that the Council are pursuing and are not mutually exclusive.

The recent cross-party scrutiny working party considered the issue of High Street regeneration and Councillors do appreciate that converting a certain amount of retail to other uses may be appropriate as part of a general transformation. However, attempting to rush the acquisition and conversion of empty shops would be unlikely to yield good quality family dwellings, would be counter-productive to the long-term regeneration of the High Street and would probably be poor value for taxpayers' money. The Council is currently forming an investment partnership to take forward High Street regeneration in a planned and financially sustainable way.

It should also be noted that the town centre area has already seen a greater intensification of residential property than any other part of the borough, largely in the private sector largely outside of council control, for example the many hundreds of new dwellings on Victoria Avenue.

QUESTION 9 from Miss Newman to the Leader of the Council

Question

In the meeting, Councillors referred to the plot of land at Lundy Close as a strip of land yet others rejected these comments. For any councillors that are not familiar with this ward, I urge you to come down and take a look at the site. The surrounding infrastructure cannot cope with the amount of houses that HRA Phase 4 is proposing, parking is already a major issue, not just on Lundy but all the surrounding roads. The roads are already overstretched with the traffic especially during rush hour and school times - I am sure Cllrs Mark Flewitt, David McGlone, Daniel Cowan and Paul Collins can all agree with this statement, as well as doctors surgeries and the schools in the catchment area. My dad, suffers with Cancer and COPD yet struggles with appointments and he is a priority case.

How does the Council propose to deal with congestion, unemployment and the over stretched facilities that we, existing residents already face in St Laurence Ward?

Answer

The final proposals for Lundy Close have yet to be agreed however any proposal will respect local surroundings and the Council's Housing teams work closely with the Planning department and School's teams to assess the impacts of any housing development. As part of any development proposals, the Council will also be looking at a range of works that will look to regenerate the area locally, including improvements to car parking and highways.

Once an architect has been appointed, a further local consultation will be scheduled that will give Lundy Close residents another opportunity to discuss their views for the site and discuss opportunities for local regeneration.

Question 10 from Miss McMahon to the Leader of the Council

Question

The now Executive Councillor, after years of being the Councillors Private Rented Sector Representative, failed to tackle the sub letting of affordable rented accommodation by Southend Estate Agents, to national organisations such as The Housing Network. This filled Southend's rented accommodation with tenants from Councils from all over the Country, this being a central cause of homelessness in our Town.

Now that the administration has private rented sector landlord in their Councillor number, will they use this expertise to resolve this matter that the council's former representative failed to reconcile?

Answer

I'm unsure on the reference to "Councillors Private Rented Sector Representative". If this is a reference to SEAL, I have never been the Council representative on SEAL.

Every member of the council should be aware however that we have no powers to regulate whether private sector landlords let to people inside or outside the borough or indeed to any other local authority, and it is disingenuous to suggest otherwise.

At this stage we have little hard evidence to suggest that our private rented sector is filled with tenants from other councils, nor that this is the cause of homelessness. While the main immediate cause of homelessness is termination of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy there is nothing to suggest all these tenants are replaced by placements from other councils and indeed Southend Council itself continues to work with local landlords and to place a high number of people into the private sector in Southend as part of the discharge of our homelessness duties. The main barriers to accessing the private rented sector continue to be unaffordable rent levels and not the lack of availability.

Question 11 from Miss McMahon to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning

Question

Essex Wildlife Trust agree with my suggestion that protective fencing should, with immediate effect, be erected.

This would be in locations where the public feed wildfowl, especially Swans and Cygnets. This has made them exceptionally vulnerable to natural and unnatural predators. In 2019 we have lost Swans and Cygnets in double figures, in just three Southend parks. One at least with appalling carnage and suffering.

Will the administration now act?

Answer

The wildfowl in the Borough's parks and open spaces are truly wild and free to come and go as they please. In the normal run of life wild animals are either predator or prey and upsetting as it is on occasion, we should not interfere in that process.

However, I am aware of an incident earlier this year when a dog that was not properly under control, attacked a young swan. This was a very unfortunate and rare incident and one arose not because the swan was free living but because the dog owner could not control their dog.

As a result information was made available to remind people that they must keep their dogs under control when out in public.

I am not sure what fencing is being proposed, nor whether it would have the desired effect of protecting rather than encaging our wildlife. It could potentially have a negative impact on how the public and wildlife use and interact in our parks and open spaces. I acknowledge Ms McMahon's concern for wildfowl, however I would ask that she share any information she has from the Wildlife Trust with me as we have been unable to find any of their local representatives who are aware of this matter.

Question 12 from Mrs Cowdrey to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning

Question

Will the Cabinet Member please update me as to the status of the development of the Shoeburyness Garrison Heritage Centre?

Answer

Capital funding has been allocated for the works to the Carriage and Wagon Shed building for use as a heritage and community facility. Officers are currently finalising the tender documents to enable a contractor to be appointed, and construction works are anticipated to commence on the building early 2020.

Question 13 from Mrs Cowdrey to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning

Question

Will the Cabinet Member agree to meet with myself and representatives of the community, to find the best way to take the development of a Shoeburyness Garrison Heritage Centre forward?

Answer

The council is already working with the Shoebury Coastal Community Company, a not for profit organisation, on the operation and management of the building. This group has access to and manages archives relating to Shoeburyness and Shoebury Garrison and are currently working on its plans for how they will operate the centre when it opens. I would recommend that anyone wanting to get involved with the operation of the building to contact the Shoebury Coastal Community Company directly.

Question 14 from Mr Ali to the Cabinet Member for Health & Adult Social Care

Question

Dementia Diagnosis Rates (DDR) - all CCGs are required to meet the constitutional target of 66.7% diagnosis rate against the estimated prevalence of those calculated to be living with dementia.

Southend continues to reach and exceed the target. How reliable are the methods used to estimate the number of people living with dementia in Southend?

Answer

Firstly, I would like to thank Mr Ali for his recognition that Southend continues to exceed the constitutional target. Whilst we do continue to perform above and beyond our peers I also recognise that there is so much more to do in terms of identifying those with dementia and providing support in a community setting.

The methods used to calculate the dementia diagnosis rate are set and agreed by NHS England. Not only do they support local GP practices and community support services to monitor their own performance but the dementia diagnosis rate provides a helpful tool in setting a trajectory, reviewing the impact of initiatives and benchmarking both within Southend and against similar areas. The Dementia Diagnosis rate refers specifically to diagnosis for those over 65 years old and is calculated by the number diagnosed with dementia divided by the number estimated to have dementia.

The figures for the Dementia Diagnosis rate is calculated via GP data and is therefore based on GP list databases. East locality which covers the GPs in Shoebury and Thorpe Bay currently has 276 people with a dementia diagnosis.

Question 15 from Mr Ali to the Cabinet Member for Health & Adult Social Care

Question

Can we, please, have the figures broken down for Southend, Shoebury and West Shoebury Ward?

Answer

As you may know the national dementia diagnosis rate ambition is 66.7%. The rate for Southend for September has just been released and we are again above the national average at 79.6%. Southend's dementia diagnosis rates are among the highest in England and we will continue to improve our opportunities to diagnose people in a timely manner in a place that is most suited to their situation and needs through the new Dementia Community Support model.

Of the 1932 with a diagnosis 1358, or 70.3% are receiving a bespoke service with their Dementia Navigator. Obviously not everyone with a diagnosis will need or want support but the service is there to offer emotional and practical support and advice and information as and when it is needed.

Future developments include the implementation of an enhanced community dementia support model, which includes innovative ways of diagnosing and offering person centred care and support to the person with dementia and their family, ensuring everyone living in Southend can access the support they need when they need it. This builds on the dementia friendly community status that Southend is proud of and our aspiration to include more businesses and services as new opportunities come to the town.

We are also striving to create a holistic and compassionate hospital inpatient experience, where older people's physical and mental health along with social and community wishes are looked at as a whole and not separately, ensuring we are truly understanding needs and the support required to empower, promote confidence, health, happiness and wellbeing throughout the dementia experience.

If anyone would like further details they can contact Nancy Smith, Commissioning Manager for Dementia and Older Adults Mental Health, 01702 534434 or nancysmith@southend.gov.uk

Question 16 from Mr Harp to the Cabinet Member for Health & Adult Social Care

Question

The SOS Bus voluntary first aid first responder service has provided cover for Friday and Saturday nights in Southend Town Centre for 13 of the last 15 years. During that time £millions have been saved for both Police and Hospital through our efforts.

The SOS Bus has been instrumental in grant of Purple Flag Safe Town status.

After a period during which another organisation attempted to provide similar cover, and notably failed to do so, the SOS Bus was granted a trial period during September this year.

This trial resulted in 49 casualties being attended, many of which would likely have resulted in Police or Hospital response without our intervention. The Bus directly kept Southend clean and safe.

Southend needs such a service and support for such is widespread, as evidenced by responses from those whose valued support has been received to date. It is acknowledged that a review of the decision to withdraw funding for a NTE service may be taking place.

Following the trial it was decided that the service was not needed and funding was withdrawn. Such a decision flies in the face of the results from the trial and my question respectfully asks for a response, with evidence, on the decision taken by the Interim Director of Public Health?

Answer

Thank you for all your comments and queries which have added to the richness of the information we are gathering about the SOS Bus. The Council is immensely proud of the dedication of our volunteers in manning the SOS Bus for years and the great service this has provided to our Town Centre to-date. Without the volunteers, the service will never have existed in the first place and the many stories and reports are a poignant testimony to the valuable contribution that this service has had for Southend-on-Sea.

In 2017, the contract for the SOS Bus came to an end. A new provider was successful in the bid for a new service, but this was discontinued in August 2018, due to poor performance. Since December 2018, whilst a wider partner engagement was being undertaken, the Council allocated a defined grant to support some limited activity in the town centre during Friday and Saturday nights including first aid and a limited number of sessions for the SOS Bus to operate when demand for this service would be the most cost-effective means of support in the night-time economy.

Following wider engagement with partners throughout the summer of 2019, including the BID, and having received numerous feedback about the positive contribution that the volunteers of the SOS Bus have made and this being held in high regard by all parties, the Council will work with the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Board to undertake an intensive discovery design phase, to explore what options can be developed for due consideration by the CSP Board.

There is good evidence that the SOS Bus type arrangement can have a vital part to play in our Night Time Economy and a plethora of local support in perception around community safety. There is also an opportunity to re-think the local provision in the context of support to other events/ high footfall days/ Bank Holidays as part of the Summer & Winter preparedness planning.

The Council with the Community Safety Partnership Board, will consider what type of provision can be more sustainably put in place to support the night-time economy and ensuring that people feel Safe and Well, in early 2020.