

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Council Meeting – 21st April 2016

Question 1 from Mr Webb to the Executive Councillor for Housing, Planning & Regulatory Services

Question

I have been informed by a senior planning officer that there is no set way to put yellow planning notices. In Westborough in the past 6 months we have had them wrapped round a pole with string, not near the application and bottom of the pole.

Do you think the council can have a policy that yellow planning notices are put flat with cable ties and written with a permanent marker pens so residents can clearly see the information and dates?

Answer

Site notices are placed around the borough in line with the regulations that govern public notification of planning applications. Unfortunately, from time to time, these notices may be removed and/or become loose around the object to which they are attached. For the vast majority of these notices they are in place and clearly legible for the period of time they are required to be displayed. The resources made available to officers to carry out this function are therefore, considered sufficient to meet this statutory requirement.

Question 2 from Mr Webb to the Leader of the Council

In December 2014 I pointed out that the Conservative run Council was wasting council tax money on mobile phones to officers, sculptures and the millennium clock which did not work. The joint administration leader of the council, Ron Woodley stated that in 2013 - 2014 spent £136,000 and he was going to carry out a review into appropriate allocation and cost of mobile phones to officers.

What was the outcome of the report and how much has been spent on mobile phones in 2014 - 2015, 2015 - 2016?

Answer

The use of mobile phones by staff employed by the Borough Council was subjected to review and cost challenge with providers in 2015/16.

The use of mobile technology was and remains a key plank in the Council's flexible working strategy as it enables staff to be more productive on terms of receiving up to date information in real time without the necessity of returning to the office and releases office space which can generate rental income for the Council.

I am able to report that spend on mobile phones in the financial years 2014/15 and 2015/16 was as follows:

2013/14 - £136,000 - 934 units

2014/15 - £113,000 - 976 units

2015/16 - £ 108,000 estimated for full year (accounts currently being finalised) - 1050 units

The figure provided include cost of both mobile phones and SIMS (3G data SIMS for portable devices)

Question 3 from Mr Garne to the Executive Councillor for Community Development and Organisational Development.

Question

Cllr Gilbert appeared on the front page of the Echo on 9th March in an article about the redevelopment of the four Queensway tower blocks - Chiltern, Malvern, Pennine and Quantock. Can we have an update of any progress in the six weeks since that dramatic announcement, for example which tower might be demolished first?

Answer

The communication which resulted in the Echo article in question should not be seen as a dramatic announcement, but rather the latest stage in a very thorough and deliberate process to decide the best method to regenerate the Queensway area. The recommendation to consider options, including refurbishment or redevelopment, for the town centre tower blocks was put forward by a cross-party in-depth scrutiny working party chaired by my colleague David Norman and accepted by the then-Conservative cabinet on September 17th 2013.

Under the current administration, a project team has been appointed, a series of consultation events with local residents has taken place and much thought has been given to how we could regenerate the area in the interests of both residents and the wider community. This could easily be the biggest regeneration programme ever undertaken by the council and we make no apology for not rushing decisions.

By March it was clear that the work being done by officers strongly indicates that the refurbishment of the blocks to the standard we would expect of today's housing would be financially unviable, and therefore a complete redevelopment of the site was likely to be their recommendation. Given this clear direction of travel, we thought it best to be open with residents, councillors and other stakeholders. It was clearly communicated to all concerned that this was not a final decision, but instead an update on work in progress.

Since March and until June, when a report will be going to Cabinet, we are testing and validating the work done so far with the market. We believe that we have a viable scheme and it is now prudent to have all elements of this looked at more closely by external experts. This is known as 'soft market testing' and is where much of the teams work has been focused in the last six weeks. When we are in a position to make further announcements, we will ensure that these are communicated in the proper way.

Question 4 from Mr Garne to the Executive Councillor for Housing, Planning and Regulatory Services.

Question

In the Echo article on the Queensway redevelopment on 9th March Councillor Norman anticipated that it would constitute "a wonderful new community with new and better housing."

Can he state categorically that no existing tenants and leasehold owners will suffer any detrimental change in the quality of their accommodation or higher costs in any form?

Answer

The Echo article followed on from one of our regular resident briefing meetings, held on Monday 7th March in which we confirmed a clear commitment consistently made to all residents that if they wish to remain in the Queensway Estate once the regeneration work has been completed then they will have the opportunity to do so. This guarantee applies to both tenants and leaseholders.

Leaseholders have been consulted with and we will be initiating further tenant consultation following the upcoming June Cabinet. Conversations with individuals regarding staying on the estate and what their options are will be included as part of this consultation. We have officers based within the Hub in the Victoria Shopping centre for residents to voice any concerns about the project, and ask more about what it means for them.

Rents and service charges will continue to be the subject of the same setting process as now, and I cannot speak for the decisions of future councils or, of course for the actions of Central Government. I can, however, give an absolute assurance that the quality of the accommodation on the Queensway site will improve as a consequence of this major and exciting redevelopment and both tenants and leaseholders will benefit from the scheme.

Question 5 from Mr Ali to the Executive Councillor for Health & Adult Social Care

Is Southend Borough Council satisfied that Healthwatch Southend has helped all NHS health services and council social services to improve the health and wellbeing outcomes of all Southend residents during the 3 years of its operation? It would be helpful if the council could list the health and wellbeing improved outcomes that it has helped to achieve to date.

Answer

Southend council is satisfied that Healthwatch Southend have helped NHS health services over its 3 year period. The annual reports aim to answer this question and once complete are signed off by the Healthwatch Board. The 2013/14 and 2014/15 reports can be accessed via the local website <http://www.healthwatchsouthend.co.uk/> . The last report for 2015/16 is currently being completed and will be available in the coming weeks. The website also provides a comprehensive breakdown of other activity over their three year period, including but not exclusive to:

- a series of reports on local issues e.g. Cancer Café, St Luke's Health Centre;
- Healthwatch Southend events calendar - local awareness events held.

Question 6 from Mr Ali to the Executive Councillor for Health & Adult Social Care

Further, is the council satisfied that Healthwatch Southend has provided value for this period of time and is satisfied that Healthwatch Southend will be effective in the future?

Answer

Southend council are satisfied that Healthwatch has provided value for money over their three year period. As referenced above the annual reports include a full breakdown of financial activity and this information

aligned with activity and outcomes, indicate that value has been provided. Leading up to the annual report we monitor the service on a regular basis to ensure that the service is delivering in line with the agreed service specification and meeting their statutory requirements.

The service will continue with a long term contract from October 2016 and we will continue to ensure that the service will continue to be effective in the future.

Question 7 from Mr Thomas to the Executive Councillor for Adult Social Care and Health

Does the portfolio holder agree that given all the recent reviews about the need to have a clear strategy and the fact that we have slightly less than 20% of residents with mental health issues compared to 15% nationally it is now time to set up a working party/board to look specifically how we can help improve the service?

Answer

Over the last 12 months the Southend Health and Wellbeing Board has maintained a focus on mental health. This has included the oversight of the development of a detailed mental health needs assessment and full consideration of its findings at one of its development sessions.

The refresh of the Southend health and wellbeing strategy will capture the recommended strategic actions to improve mental health in the borough, and their delivery will be overseen by the Health and Wellbeing Board, which includes key partners. For this reason we do not feel that the establishment of a partnership board for mental health is required at this time.

Question 8 from Mr Thomas to the Executive Councillor for Public Protection, Waste & Transport

Question

A lot of St Lukes residents are concerned about speeding in Bournemouth park Road and eastern avenue. Will the portfolio holders meet with me and the residents to hear their concerns?

Answer

We are a listening administration and would be only too pleased to meet with the Residents in Bournemouth Park Road, including the Ward Councillors. I will arrange to meet with the residents as soon as possible after the local elections in May.