

Council – 14th December 2023

Public Questions

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.