

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

Council Meeting – 20th October 2016

Question from Councillor Robinson to the Executive Councillor for Housing, Planning and Public Protection Services

Question

If residents fail to take remedial action to clear Japanese knotweed from premises what scope does the council have to take action under the anti-social behaviour legislation or species control orders?

Answer

Whilst it is not illegal to have Japanese Knotweed in your garden, owners have a legal responsibility to take control of the weed so as to restrict its spread into other residents' gardens. Any resident finding the weed in their garden will need to take action to ensure they are suitably controlling the weed.

Under the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014, local authorities can issue land owners with a Community Protection Notice to formally require them to control the spread of Japanese Knotweed on their land. However, we would only consider this action where residents are taking no action, and as a result of this, is causing knotweed to significantly spread onto neighbouring land.

Question from Councillor Kenyon to the Executive Councillor for Culture, Tourism and the Economy

Can the Portfolio Holder give the Members assurance that action will be taken to prevent the appalling mess left by visitors to our seaside as demonstrated over the weekend of 6th & 7th August?

Answer

There were several images posted on social media and in the Southend Echo showing the aftermath of litter left following a very busy day on Jubilee Beach. The inference was that this was entirely caused by a particular group. In fact the fantastic weather encouraged many thousands of visitors to the seafront. When numbers are this high it is not possible for cleansing staff to pick litter between people on the beach and so the clear up is undertaken at the end of the day. The pictures shown depicted the mess but not the great look of the beach after both

our cleansing contractor and the event organiser had cleared the beach of rubbish.

Our officers will continue to provide waste guidance to organisers bringing groups in this way and in some circumstances seek a financial bond. However the organiser on this occasion was picking litter until late into the evening, after the photograph was taken.

Question from Councillor McDonald to the Executive Councillor for Culture, Tourism and the Economy

Kieren Reed has contacted local people regarding a sculpture he has been commissioned to create by Focal Point and Southend Borough Council at Shoebury Park. Could the portfolio holder explain the process that was used to select this artist for this project, including the allocation of funding?

Answer

Two artists were selected using a standard commissioning model of creating a long list of ten artists, of which four were selected for interview by a panel of Council Members from Shoebury Wards, the portfolio holder, curatorial staff and Southend Council officers. The allocation of funding is part of the value for money assessment in such processes.

Two artists were selected to take the commission forward and a timeline, which puts the launch of the project as Spring/Summer 2017 is being worked towards.

The artists presented their plans for the work to Cllrs Holland, Assenheim, Hadley, Moyies and Jarvis earlier today.

Question from Councillor Ayles to the Leader of the Council

Following what was thought to be a spoof item in Southend news network about an atomic style bomb being on the Montgomery that is sitting in the Thames not far off Southend. There has been concern that there could be some plausible truth in the story.

Could the cabinet holder responsible for public health and safety basically tell me not to ask such a stupid question and put people's minds at rest?

Answer

I can confirm that the cargo manifest for the SS Richard Montgomery specifies the types of munitions that were loaded on board and where they were loaded, and the daily reports of the stevedores who salvaged the vessel report what was unloaded. There is absolutely no suggestion of anything like atomic weapons on board.

Added to this, my understanding of the history of the development of atomic (nuclear) weapons suggests that no such weapon even existed at the time that the SS Richard Montgomery sank – the first testing of a nuclear weapon not taking place until nearly a year after the Montgomery sank.

Question from Councillor Ayles to the Executive Councillor for Culture, Tourism & the Economy

Question

On Sunday 2nd October from 7.30 pm the press reported 600 extra cars came to Southend.

Assuming an average of 3 people per car which is around 1800 visitors. To bring this into some sort of context, the London to Southend classic car run that was the second biggest event in Southend year to the air show attracted 327 cars and a bus.

Using the classic car run as a reference and allowing for the Sunday to be off season, could a cabinet holder make a guess of how much it would cost in advertising etc. to attract 1800 visitors on that evening?

Answer

Advertising costs vary considerably, however increasingly social media is used to promote free events which carry very little additional costs over existing staff resources.

Question from Councillor Terry to the Leader of the Council

It has come to my attention that the grant usually given to the Southend Ethnic Minority Forum has been cancelled completely this year. It is generally accepted and understood that this group does a lot of very good work within our diverse and ethnic communities that would

otherwise need to be undertaken by Southend Borough Council itself, thereby saving the Council money it would otherwise have to spend.

Can the Leader of the Council explain the following: why was this Grant cancelled, does he agree with the cancellation of this grant and finally can he give Members an assurance that this matter will be looked at again?

Answer

The funding that you refer to is the Council's In-Year Grants programme, an annual pot of money which provides small amounts of funding to local voluntary or community organisations. These grants are used to pump-prime new groups, help existing groups manage emergencies and support special events that encourage community well-being and cohesion. Groups can bid for sums up to £2,000 from a total annual pot of £25,000.

I agree that the Southend Ethnic Minority Forum does indeed do good work for our community, and we have recognised this by supporting them with a number of small grants since 2011. However it's important to remember that the programme is a competitive one, with bidders proposing projects each year and the Council deciding which of these will have the best impact for the borough. Because this is a competitive, and annual, process groups do not have an automatic right to continuous funding and should not plan on this basis.

Indeed, this year the level of competition was particularly high, with 26 bids totaling over £50,000, all vying for a total pot, as I have said, of just £25,000. Grant decisions are made by the Chair of the Grants Strategy Working Party, Cllr Moring, who takes into account officer recommendations and local need. The application made by Southend Ethnic Minority Forum earlier this year was unsuccessful for two reasons:

1. the group accounts showed that they already hold sufficient funding reserves to pay for the activity that they were proposing, and;
2. the fund's main purpose is to support new start-ups and fresh projects rather than continuing to pay for ongoing activity.

Having looked into this I believe that our reasoning is sound and fully agree with the decision that was made. I would like to stress that this decision in no way reflects on the work done by Southend Ethnic

Minority Forum. Rather, it highlights the high quality and quantity of bids received from many other local, deserving groups. It is worth noting that support is available from Southend's Council for Voluntary Service, SAVS, who we commission to help organisations such as the Ethnic Minority Forum find alternative funding streams.

Finally, I'd like to reassure Cllr Terry that the In-Year Grants Programme continues to support our diverse and ethnic community groups.

Question from Councillor Ayling to the Executive Councillor for Housing, Planning and Public Protection Services

The Council received a planning application proposing to demolish the historic Britannia public house on the seafront, a building possibly dating back to 1790. However, it would appear from a recent article in the Southend Echo that the application has now been withdrawn. Does the Council have the capacity and a specialist officer to be able to provide advice on planning applications with conservation implications and, if not, what plans does this Administration have to deal with the matter?

Answer

The Council employs a Design & Conservation Officer, who has a planning qualification with a specialism in conservation. This officer provides specialist conservation and heritage advice to the Council. Where necessary, officers also liaise with specialists at Historic England (formerly English Heritage) and have a close working relationship with relevant staff there.

With respect to the planning application for the Britannia Public House the application has received extensive advice and comments from the Councils Design & Conservation Officer. I can confirm that the applicant has now withdrawn the application.

Question from Councillor Terry to the Leader of the Council

Question

In the forthcoming weeks and months the Holocaust Memorial Day Working Party will be meeting and organising the next memorial event to ensure we are all reminded of various atrocities committed by humanity, ensuring we do all we can to stop these evil ideas and thoughts ever being allowed to exist in our midst.

Does the Leader of the Council support the aims, objectives and ethos of the Holocaust Memorial Day Working Party at Southend Borough Council?

Answer

I fully support the aims, objectives and ethos of the Holocaust Memorial Day Working Party and agree entirely that we must do all we can to prevent any recurrence.

Councillor Moring has already chaired a meeting of this working party on 5 September and officers are working up the agreed arrangements for the 2017 Holocaust Day to ensure that the commemorations reflect our need to show respect and educate future generations.

Question from Councillor Woodley to the Leader of the Council

Question

Is the leader still intent on severing its membership of the LGA?

Answer

We made it very clear that we will give notice to the LGA that we will withdraw our membership and this will all be part of the budget process.

Question from Cllr Butler to the Executive Councillor for Housing, Planning and Public Protection Services

In view of the amount of new flats along Victoria Avenue, together with the large building project at Priory Park, and many other small building works throughout Southend. Would the Portfolio Holder kindly advise the council what precautions will be taken to improve the poor air quality which will prevail along the A127 which is the main corridor in and out of the town?

Answer

The Council undertakes air quality monitoring across the whole of the town, including Victoria Avenue. There are currently no reported exceedances, except around The Bell junction where the Air Quality Management Area is being declared. Where there are proposed road improvements, the Council undertakes modelling of the schemes to ensure that the air quality is not adversely affected by the new road schemes. Where there are large developments air quality assessments are usually required as part of the planning process.