

**Council 15 February 2017 - Questions submitted by Members**

Question No.	Question from:	Question:	Question to:	Service area:
1	Cllr John Wright	<p>Having been out and about in south Sittingbourne, many people amongst other issues, have raised the issue of the inability of first time buyers being able to afford to get onto the property ladder, as well as the shortage of affordable housing. I know I and others have raised this question and now, through that lobbying in part, Gavin Barwell MP Minister for State for Housing and Planning has announced for this financial year 2016/17 a sum for Swale of £341,232.00 to help those to find a first time property in Swale.</p> <p>Can the Cabinet Member For Housing or the Leader detail how this excellent initiative will be rolled out and spent within this financial year as next year's allocation is dependent on the success of this year's. It is also important to publicise this so that people who qualify may be able to access these affordable homes?</p>	Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing	Housing Services
<p><b>Response:</b> Swale BC has been awarded this funding from the Community Led Funding Programme to deliver community led housing projects within Swale. The fund has been allocated between local authorities proportionate to the number of holiday homes in the local area, and also taking account of the affordability of housing to local people. The fund is intended to enable local community groups to deliver affordable housing units aimed at first-time buyers. The fund also aims to build skills at a local level to promote the sustainability of this community-led approach to house building, and to enable additional capital investment and revenue to make more schemes viable and significantly increase community groups' current delivery pipelines.</p>				

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<p>The funding is intended to be distributed by the Council to local groups within the community-led housing sector.</p> <p>The first year of funding is to be used to build capacity within local groups, such as improving technical skills, setting up support hubs to offer advice, business planning, and providing staff to review local housing needs. Funding the following year must then be used to deliver housing on the ground for local people.</p> <p>We are currently working with DCLG to develop proposals for the funding that meet the set criteria and that can be developed with Community Housing groups.</p>				
2.	Cllr Roger Truelove	<p>Apart from a period in the 2000s when Derek Wyatt was MP and the funding gap was closed, primary care health services in Swale have always been severely under-resourced. We now read that the Swale NHS Clinical Commissioning Group is facing a £6 million deficit and we do not have adequate GP coverage. The explanation that we have had "a particularly deep and cold winter" is not credible.</p> <p>The CCG talks about "transformation of services" and a cold shiver goes down my spine. Maybe there are savings to be made on pharmaceuticals but isn't it a fact that we need more money, we have always needed more money, and in an area of exceptional need this should be the top of all locally elected politicians' agendas?</p>	Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing	Housing Services
<p><b>Response:</b> I agree that this is one of our top priorities, and we are working with Swale CCG to bring about the transformation as speedily as possible. However, I categorically refute your misinformation about a £6 million deficit, as I was at the Board meeting where it is reported that up to month 10 of the year, the CCG was showing a £2.4 million deficit, but still forecasting a breakeven position by year-end.</p>				

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<p>As regards the need for GPs, I am sure you are aware that it takes at least ten years to fully train a new GP. We are now faced with a workforce gap in health professionals as more GPs are retiring. You knew about the impending gap when Labour were in power and you did nothing about it.</p> <p>In July 2014 the Conservative MP lobbied ministers for debate in Parliament on numerous health matters in Swale, especially to address the per capita anomaly, and as you are aware he was successful in securing an above average increase in year-on-year funding. Both NHS England and government accepted that inequalities and deprivation should be taken into account when calculating the growth increase.</p> <p>I can also report that in addition to this Swale CCG has secured from NHS England a substantial uplift in money to fund the restructuring of primary care, and in particular, GP practices within the Swale area.</p>				
3.	Cllr Ghlin Whelan	<p>I am sure that most members will have heard of the death earlier this week of Chris Ewell of Milton Regis, who for the last 25 years has spent much of his time cycling around Sittingbourne collecting discarded cans and recycling them for the benefit of Neuroblastoma UK which supports Children with Cancer.</p> <p>Could the Finance Portfolio-holder agree to this Council funding a bench in memory of Chris Ewell, to be placed somewhere prominent in Sittingbourne or Milton Regis, such as perhaps Milton Recreation Ground or the Countryside Park or similar? I would allocate funds from my own localism grant but they are exhausted for this year.</p> <p>This would I suggest be an appropriate gesture from this Council on behalf of the residents in memory of someone who</p>	Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance	Leisure and Technical Services

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		will be sorely missed.		
<p><b>Response:</b> The Council considers all applications for memorial benches in our parks and seafront areas. Applicants are normally asked to pay the purchase cost and installation of the bench by the Council's contractors. Locations consider the wishes of the applicant alongside the practical and health &amp; safety requirements of the Council.</p> <p>In this particular situation, we have considered the options from the Parks Team, and believe it would be appropriate to offer something slightly different. Emergency tree works at the Grove in Sittingbourne are required in the next month and will produce large trunks that are to be utilised at Milton Creek Country Park. We propose to 'recycle' one of the trunks to make a bench for Mr Ewell, and to locate it on one of the walkways in the Country Park. This will recognise the charity/community work that Mr Ewell undertook.</p> <p>We would like to know if there are any family that would like to be involved, or who could suggest some wording for a dedication plaque.</p>				