

AGENDA ITEM NO.**Council - 20 September 2017 - Questions submitted by Members**

Question No.	Question from:	Question:	Question to:	Service area:
1.	Cllr Roger Truelove	Along with other elected members I am becoming increasingly frustrated when trying to help people in desperate straits seeking temporary housing accommodation. The current position in Swale is profoundly unacceptable. We have two properties and uncertain access to a number of Housing Association homes. The result is that supply is about one third of demand. Is there a serious strategy to deal with this crisis?	Cllr Ken Pugh	Amber Christou
<p>Response:</p> <p>We all know that homelessness is increasing nationally and Swale is no exception to this. It is also universally accepted that it is becoming increasingly difficult for people to secure housing that they can afford, which is why this week Government made a further Statement on the latest stage of the government's work to fix this country's broken housing market.</p> <p>The access we currently have to temporary homes through our strong partnerships with housing associations and other landlords are valued and nurtured and we will continue to seek opportunities to expand these. The three homes owned and managed by the Council are an excellent and well used resource.</p> <p>In funding terms the acquisition of further residential properties can be funded from two sources; either capital or borrowing. The overall financial position of the Council does not allow for further capital funds to be allocated, as the capital and ongoing revenue required to manage the houses makes this is a very expensive solution to housing families. If we borrow we have the debt costs and minimum revenue provision to fund and that can only come from reducing revenue spend somewhere else in the Council.</p> <p>Notwithstanding the difficulties, the Council still manages to deliver a successful homelessness prevention service and works hard to secure cost effect, quality accommodation within the Borough wherever possible. We do understand the impact that living in temporary accommodation for any period, particularly when out of the area and away from support networks can have on a family, which is why working with households to prevent homelessness and, where this is not possible, working to reduce the amount of times spent in temporary accommodation and help to secure sustainable, affordable housing for the longer term is our priority and will remain so as the demand fluctuates over time.</p>				

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2.	Cllr Roger Truelove	Does the Swale Community Safety Unit have the resources to monitor any increase in hate crime in the Borough over the last year? If it does, what is that resource and is there any evidence of an increase in hate crime during that period?	Cllr Alan Horton	Charlotte Hudson
<p>Response:</p> <p>The Community Safety Partnership (CSP) identified Hate Crime as being one its priorities for 2017/18. The number of hate crime incidents is monitored on a monthly basis by the Community Safety Unit and is reported to the CSP Executive Group, where action to be taken is discussed. The Police have a Community Liaison Officer, based within the CSU whose dedicated role is to monitor hate crime incidents and support victims. Between July 2016 and June 2017 there had been 167 incidents in Swale, which has on a month by month basis been relatively stable. There had previously been an increase in the build up to and post the EU Referendum, however this has now stabilised, and is regularly monitored to ensure any changes are identified, understood and actioned when appropriate.</p>				
3	Cllr Mike Baldock	Last year saw the introduction of the well-received Christmas Shopping busses and the Park and Ride scheme. Can we have an update on what plans are being considered for this year's Yuletide shopping season?	Cllr Alan Horton	Martyn Cassell
<p>Response:</p> <p>Following a review of detailed survey data and customer satisfaction surveys from last year's Park & Ride offer, I have been able to refine the Christmas concession to be closer aligned to the needs of each town centre location.</p> <p>In Faversham we are once again providing a Park & Ride service from Abbey School to the town centre on each Saturday in December. We will have marshals on site and on the bus to survey our customers. In addition to this service, we will be providing free parking through a printed voucher available from local business, local press, the Council's website and Inside Swale, which will enable free parking after 1pm for the four Sundays in December in our Faversham Car Parks.</p> <p>On the Isle of Sheppey we will be providing free 'Christmas Special' buses on a circular route from to Eastchurch to Neats Court via Sheerness. Buses will run every 20 mins from 9am to 5pm on each of four Saturdays in December. A shuttle bus will also operate</p>				

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<p>between Leysdown and Minster via Eastchurch to support the circular bus service and we will have marshals on all buses to survey our customers. As with Faversham, we will be providing free parking through a printed voucher available from local business, local press, the Council's website and Inside Swale which will enable free parking after 1pm for the four Sundays in December in our Sheerness Car Parks.</p> <p>In Sittingbourne we will be providing extended free parking in our car parks again using a printed voucher after 1pm every Saturday, Sunday and Wednesday from Saturday the 2nd December to Sunday 24th December inclusive. We will have marshals in primary car parks each day handing out vouchers to visitors whilst conducting a customer survey, in addition to those vouchers available through local business, local press, the Council's website and Inside Swale.</p> <p>As with the Christmas concession in 2016, we will be closely monitoring the services and considering the views of our customers through survey data. This will enable a full evaluation of the 2017 concession in early 2018.</p>				
4	Cllr Mike Baldock	Does the Cabinet Member feel that the current proposals for an upgrade to the Stockbury Roundabout meet the future needs for residents in Swale?	Leader	Emma Wiggins/Martyn Cassell
<p>Response:</p> <p>Working with the local MP the Council lobbied hard to secure funding to address the long-standing congestion and safety issues experienced by road users passing through Junction 5 of the M2. The Government was persuaded to allocate up to £100m to the project, but it is disappointing to find that this is sufficient to provide only one possible option. Whilst current proposals have been designed to budget, I am yet to be convinced that they will provide an adequate solution. I believe an option which includes a fly-over would make the most sense - providing more capacity to serve the medium to long-term demands and a more straightforward junction for road users, helping improve safety.</p> <p>Whatever the final design, the junction must be able to cope with not just the growth we, and other local authorities in Kent, are being asked to deliver. Any investment must also recognise that the A249 and its junctions with both the M2 and the M20 are a key intersection on internationally important corridors between the UK and the rest of Europe. The proposed Lower Thames Crossing will drive increased traffic flows along the M2 and we need a resilient strategic road network that reflects this.</p>				