

**Council 17 June 2015 - Questions submitted by Members**

Question No.	Question from:	Question:	Question to:	Service area:
1.	Cllr Roger Truelove	Swale Council is responsible for 78 Play Areas throughout the Borough. Many of these were first equipped in 1989 and they are often derelict and plainly out of date. Play Areas, such as those at Hazebrouk Road, Faversham; Manor Grove, Sittingbourne; and New Road, Minster are in desperate need of investment. Can the Council commit to a programme of one off capital investment of £500K for this important community asset?	Cabinet Member for Environmental and Rural Affairs	Finance/Nick Vickers and Commissioning & Customer Contact/Dave Thomas
<p><b>Response:</b></p> <p>We are not in a position at this stage to commit such a large sum, but will consider priority needs and seek to fund them through the budget process.</p> <p>The Council currently has 78 play areas throughout the Borough and, as identified, many are of reasonable age and increasingly tired, despite the priority and continual work to ensure that they are safe for our community to use. The Commissioning &amp; Customer Contact Unit have included within their Service Plan for this year a review of the Play Policy, and the review will amongst other things need to consider the provision of facilities, balanced against our limited resource to maintain them, and how we can invest in these well-used community facilities.</p> <p>Following the review of the Policy, Members will be able to fully consider the funding and investment needed to sustain the service, both in terms of ongoing maintenance and refurbishment.</p>				
2.	Cllr James Hunt	Can the Cabinet Member for Finance please tell me how successful the Council was in the last financial year in collecting Council Tax and what procedures are there in place to collect arrears?	Cabinet Member for Finance	Amber Christou/ Head of Resident Services
<p><b>Response:</b></p> <p>In 2014/15 the Revenues Section collected 97.3% of the Council Tax due (£61,488,540). Any outstanding Council Tax is collected by arrangement with the council tax account holder, via attachment to benefits or attachment to earnings, or by using external enforcement agents.</p>				

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3.	Cllr Cameron Beart	How many Planning Enforcement cases were handled by Swale Borough Council compared to neighbouring authorities in the past year?	Cabinet Member for Planning	James Freeman/ Head of Planning
<b>Response:</b>				
<p>Attached are the latest comparison figures produced by DCLG setting out the number of formal planning enforcement actions undertaken by all Kent Planning Authorities for the year ending December 2014. Also included are the numbers of planning enforcement complaints received by the Mid Kent Planning Authorities for the 12 month up to 3 June 2015.</p> <p>I would also like to bring to the attention of Cllr Beart that the Policy Review and Development Committee have agreed a scope for the review of the Planning Enforcement Service, and I understand that the Head of Planning Services is due to report on the review findings at its meeting on 23 July 2015.</p>				
4.	Cllr George Samuel	Can the Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Heritage and Culture confirm the number of organisations which benefitted from Members' Localism and other Council grants schemes last year?	Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Culture and Heritage	Emma Wiggins/ Head of Economy and Communities
<b>Response:</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 170 organisations benefitted from the Members' Localism Grants</li> <li>• 8 organisations benefitted from the Culture Grants</li> <li>• 13 organisations benefitted from the Heritage Grants</li> <li>• 23 organisations benefitted from the Sport and Physical Activity Grants</li> <li>• 30 organisations benefitted from the WW1 Centenary Grants</li> </ul>				
5.	Cllr Sarah Aldridge	Will the Cabinet Member consider how we might better use technology to cut the cost of democracy in Swale, particularly by the use of tablets as replacement for paper agenda and committee reports?	Cabinet Member for Performance	ICT Shared Services/ Andy Cole

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<p><b>Response:</b></p> <p>Swale Borough Council is committed to using technology to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of all aspects of the authority's service delivery. This commitment includes modernising communication and the reduction in paper-based processes.</p> <p>As such the Cabinet Member for Performance has been working with Mid Kent ICT Services to facilitate a trial of the use of tablet devices for Cabinet Members.</p> <p>We expect this trial to commence during July 2015, and Tony Bullock (Chief Technology Officer), in liaison with The Cabinet Member for Performance, is finalising a paper to present to the Corporate Management Team within the next two weeks.</p>				
6.	Cllr Mike Baldock	Can the Leader inform the Council as to what action is being taken with respect to the apparently unlawful tipping activities around Hernhill and Dargate and assure us that Swale Borough Council will work closely with other agencies including KCC and the Environment Agency to ensure this activity is closed down?	Cabinet Member for Environment and Rural Affairs	Emma Wiggins/ Head of Economy and Communities
<p><b>Response:</b></p> <p>These activities are the remit of the Environment Agency who have reported that they are dealing with two sites with regards to illegal deposits in these areas. Swale's Planning Enforcement Team are pressing the EA to investigate and are assisting where they can. KCC officers are also involved.</p> <p>For further information Cllr Baldock should contact Robin Gregory at Kent CC, and Mark Jager at the EA (<a href="mailto:mark.jager@environment-agency.gov.uk">mark.jager@environment-agency.gov.uk</a>, tel: 01732 222 874).</p>				
7.	Cllr Katy Coleman	Can you confirm how the Green Cluster Study on Milton Creek compares with the current priorities for Swale Borough Council, and give an indication as to the time scale for the development of the Barge Museum, Skate Park and Leisure facilities planned for the area?"	Cabinet Member for Environment and Rural Affairs	Emma Wiggins/ Head of Economy and Communities
<p><b>Response:</b></p> <p>The Cluster Study was a workstream initiated by the now defunct 'Greening the Gateway Kent and Medway' (GGKM) organisation, which had responsibility for leading on pan-North Kent environmental issues. The Milton Creek Cluster Study led by the Council with GGKM and key local stakeholders was prepared in 2006/07 in response to the Thames Gateway Parklands agenda, and supported the business case made to central government for monies (£2m) to develop the Milton Creek Country Park.</p>				

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<p>The cluster study set out a vision for the area, which led to additional monies from KCC (£225K) for the development of the Churchfields Wharf site which forms an integral part of the country park, and supported green spaces, leisure and recreation in the immediate area of the Country Park. Milton Creek Country Park still remains a priority for the Council in the context of our commitment to enhancing green space to improve Swale's environment.</p> <p>Regarding the Barge Museum, a planning application has been submitted proposing a new museum building on the Creek edge, with parking and access from Sittingbourne Retail Park. A decision is likely to be taken July/August 2015, and the Museum Group has funding in place for construction of the new museum if planning permission is granted. The Council is providing the land which includes the Creek frontage to allow the museum to gain an income from the mooring of barges at the site.</p> <p>The Mill Project (Skate Park) has been granted phase 1 planning permission, and £280,000 has been secured for the project to date. Again, the Council has provided the land, and the next step will be to establish a Trust to manage the site before phase 2 planning (design and build) can be submitted. It is expected that this will be resolved in the coming months.</p>				