

Council 21 October 2015 - Questions submitted by Members

Question No.	Question from:	Question:	Question to:	Service area:
1	Cllr Monique Bonney	It is evident that whilst many planning documents are being scanned in, officers have no ability to look at documents on site thus incurring a considerable amount of inconvenience to officers, hindering their ability to perform and doubt unduly increasing the council's bill for printing. What plans does this Council have to properly equip officers, specifically the planning department, with the necessary IT?	Cabinet Member for Planning	James Freeman/ Head of Planning
<p>Response: Planning Officers are able to view paper documents on-site as they are sent paper files from MKPS within five days of validation. Furthermore, officers can, if they so wish, print copies of plans/documents from the DMS before going on site if they are not contained within the paper file.</p> <p>Within the IT action plan it is intended for the service to go paperless, which will mean that officers are able to go on site and view documents remotely online. Prior to this being implemented, full training of staff will be required, together with full trialing of the necessary electronic devices prior to implementation.</p>				
2	Cllr Monique Bonney	How many officers in the Planning Department are seconded, on temporary inter depart loan or agency staff, and what is the split by function; planning, policy, enforcement, etc?	Cabinet Member for Planning	James Freeman/ Head of Planning
<p>Response: Within the Swale Development Management Service there are currently 2 X agency planning officers, 1 X temporary fixed term planning officer covering maternity leave, 1X Agency Planning Technical Officer, and 1X temporary Planning Enforcement Officer. There are no agency or temporary staff within Spatial Planning Team. Within Mid Kent Planning Support there are 2X temporary staff in the Validation Team, and 6X temporary staff in the Document Management Team. Some of these staff are covering permanent posts, but we have a permanent recruitment freeze due to disaggregation, so are unable to appoint on a permanent basis until that project is complete.</p>				

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3	Cllr James Hunt	<p>I have dealt with a number of complaints since I was elected in May with regards to parking on new developments in The Meads. There just isn't enough parking allocated per household when the developments are given planning approval, which is clear when you walk around newly developed areas such as the Meads and Iwade and see the amount of vehicles having to park around the streets on pavements.</p> <p>I'm sure the Cabinet Member for Planning would agree with me that parking is a real problem and that the KCC parking standards of 1 to 2 spaces per dwelling which this Council has adopted just doesn't work with the average number of cars families now have. Could the Cabinet Member please tell me whether the Borough Council could develop our own parking standards and if so when can we start work on developing a policy for this?</p>	Cabinet Member for Planning	James Freeman/ Head of Planning
<p>Response: There is an intention to produce a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) pursuant to Policy DM7 of the Emerging Local Plan. Resources are currently concentrated on getting the Local Plan itself adopted, as this is a pre-requisite for any SPD reliant upon it. Given current resources and the Local Plan timetable for Examination in Public and beyond, work on a Swale Vehicle Parking SPD is unlikely to be able to commence before mid-2016, and adoption is unlikely before early 2017. However, there has already been some preparatory work undertaken jointly with Kent CC Highways which involved resident surveys of new residential developments across Kent, including Swale.</p>				
4	Cllr Mark Ellen	<p>I recently was involved in organising a charity event involving musicians from all over Kent. An all day event where bands gave their services for free. This was part of a nation-wide event. Free admission but folks were asked to bring non-perishable food for local food banks. It turns out that there is no longer a food bank in Sheerness. the Collection point is Ashford!!! then they distribute without any guarantee that the food reaches local people.</p>	Cabinet Member for Housing	Amber Christou/ Head of Resident Services

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		<p>What can this Council do to rectify this tragic situation bearing in mind Britain is the sixth richest country in the world and we have bottle banks but not places of collection and distribution where desperately required ? Perhaps a collection point could be the Gateway on Sheerness High Street.</p>		
<p>Response: It is encouraging to note that events of such scale are seeking to support food banks, but disappointing that the local provision is not understood in all areas. We are fortunate in Swale to have three foodbanks, two run by the Trussel Trust in Sittingbourne and Faversham, and the Family Food Bank covering the whole of Swale via 12 distribution points, including Seashells Children’s Centre at Sheerness, Ladybird Children’s Centre at Queenborough, and Beaches Children’s Centre at Leysdown.</p> <p>The staff at these centres are fully trained in assessing the requirements of a household and working with partner agencies to tackle associated issues, such as employment, housing and welfare benefits. Swale BC officers at the Sheppey Gateway and at Swale house work closely with the foodbanks to help meet the needs of local people.</p>				
5	Cllr Katy Coleman	<p>Given instances from the continent of council tenants being evicted to make way for refugee families, can the Cabinet member give us an assurance that he will ensure that this will not be allowed to happen in Swale.</p>	Cabinet Member for Housing	Amber Christou/ Head of Resident Services
<p>Response: As Cllr Coleman will be aware, we do not own any council housing stock, having transferred our housing to Swale Housing Association in 1990, now AmicusHorizon.</p> <p>In any case, to evict from a council tenancy for this reason would be unlawful in the United Kingdom, and we would not support such action under any circumstances.</p> <p>AmicusHorizon and other housing associations are highly regulated and would also be acting unlawfully by evicting tenants in such circumstances, as indeed would private landlords.</p> <p>I trust that this reassures Cllr Coleman that this will not happen in Swale.</p>				