

Council 29 June 2016 - Questions submitted by Members

Question No.	Question from:	Question:	Question to:	Service area:
1.	Cllr Roger Truelove	How is the improvement to children’s play areas progressing?	Cabinet Member for the Environment and Rural Affairs	Head of Economy and Community Services/ Head of Commissioning & Customer Contact

Response:

Knight, Kavanagh and Page (KKP) have now been contracted to undertake a review of our play areas, alongside the look at other open spaces. Initial meetings have been held internally, and stakeholders/residents will be involved through various consultations over the summer. The audit will look at the quantity, quality and accessibility of play areas, and enable a priority action plan to be created to resolve any issues identified. The strategy will set out how we wish to see play in Swale develop over the next ten years, and so bolster the Council’s ability to argue for financial contributions from external sources such as grant funding organisations and developers. This, added to our annual maintenance budget and regime, will enable the improvements in the action plan to be delivered and any reactive repairs made.

In the meantime, we have some exciting new developments in the pipeline, with a new playground just about to be opened in Iwade, and three others that will be delivered thanks to section 106 contributions successfully negotiated by SBC, in the next year.

2.	Cllr Roger Truelove	Can you tell the Council whether the Spirit of Sittingbourne intends to remove the “It’s Here” signs which, if they ever had any utility, are now a little obsolete?	Cabinet Member for Regeneration	Director of Regeneration
----	---------------------	--	---------------------------------	--------------------------

Response:

I thank Cllr Truelove for his question that follows on from our discussion on 7 April. Given the general delight at Spirit of Sittingbourne gaining planning approval last year, I am sure he would agree that all residents wanted to know where the development would take place, and the signs have been a useful way of showing that. The project team has been reviewing their utility, and this is an item for discussion at the next board meeting in early July.

Question No.	Question from:	Question:	Question to:	Service area:
I would be happy to update him further after that meeting.				
3.	Cllr Cameron Beart	<p>Currently blue badge holding residents and visitors to our town centres are limited to 4 hour parking in the nearest short stay car parks and are unable to make the walk to our long stay car parks.</p> <p>This prevents disabled residents seeking employment in our towns, it prevents shoppers who require longer to move around the luxury to do so and prevents tourists from enjoying many of our facilities.</p> <p>Would the Cabinet Member for Safer Families and Communities consider extending current time limits for disabled blue badge holders in our short stay car parks from 4 hours to 8 hours?</p>	Cabinet Member for Safer Families and Communities	Head of Commissioning & Customer Contact
<p>Response:</p> <p>This is an excellent proposal, and on the face of it is an opportunity to provide a better service to those who need and use a blue badge in our community. I do not, however, wish to make changes to our town centre parking provision that turn out to have unforeseen consequences simply because we did not think it through, so I wish to be sure that Swale Borough Council have fully considered the implications of the proposed changes.</p> <p>The proposal is being progressed, and Parking Services are in the process of evaluating the benefits and impact on blue badge and non-blue badge holder parking, and will report back to me within the next two weeks.</p>				
4.	Cllr Angela Harrison	Would the Cabinet Member tell me what arrangements have been made to clear the weeds and other detritus in the gated alleys in Sheerness?	Cabinet Member for Environment and Rural Affairs	Head of Economy and Community Services/ Head of Commissioning & Customer Contact
<p>Response:</p> <p>Kent Highway Services report that the alleyways have been sprayed. Nonetheless, our own Cleansing Services will survey the</p>				

Question No.	Question from:	Question:	Question to:	Service area:
areas, and if necessary respray and remove any remaining detritus from these areas.				
5.	Cllr Nicholas Hampshire	I understand that the Cabinet Member for Safer Families and Communities has been clear that he considers safeguarding as his number one priority within his new portfolio. Can I ask the Cabinet Member, therefore, to update us on the Council's capability and capacity in regards to meeting its safeguarding responsibilities?	Cabinet Member for Safer Families and Communities	Head of Economy and Community Services
<p>Response:</p> <p>We continue to fulfil our statutory duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. This is clearly evidenced through our recent S11 self-assessment submitted to the Kent Safeguarding Children's Board, which demonstrates our continued compliance in meeting the standards, and evidences the improvement journey we have undertaken. In summary, we have met the required standard in five sections, and partially met them in two. With only five outstanding actions, full compliance is anticipated by December 2016.</p> <p>Having permanently increased our staffing resource to a dedicated, full-time Safeguarding Officer, this investment has enabled us to deliver vast improvements, such as enhanced safeguarding training including sessions for a number of emerging issues such as Child Sexual Exploitation, Radicalisation, and Modern Slavery and Trafficking; the development of a detailed monitoring system for the compliance of our contracted services; the improvement of internal safeguarding processes; and greater investment in individual safeguarding cases.</p>				
6.	Cllr Ghlin Whelan	I note that the homelessness figure now stands at 105 residents and is still increasing. With further increases anticipated towards the end of the year when the benefit cuts begin to bite, what has this Administration done to reduce this figure?	Cabinet Member for Housing and Well-Being	Head of Housing Services
<p>Response:</p> <p>105 is the number currently in temporary accommodation, with 75 of that number currently living in self-contained homes that are available to them for the medium term while a more permanent home is sought. The number has been steadily increasing over the past two years, and is currently at its highest point. However, this picture is not unique to Swale, and certainly many of our Kent neighbours have similar or greater numbers of households in temporary accommodation.</p>				

Question No.	Question from:	Question:	Question to:	Service area:
<p>As a measure of homelessness this number does not show the full picture. During 2015/16, 277 households were prevented from becoming homeless by the Housing Options Team. Our Housing Officers continue to work closely with our public and private sector partners, including private and housing association landlords, statutory agencies, neighbouring Kent councils, and Swale residents, to develop solutions to homelessness, including increasing access to privately rented homes, helping homeless and potentially homeless households to find employment, and maximising the benefit take-up of families on low incomes.</p> <p>We are currently preparing a review of the Swale Homelessness Strategy, which will include a comprehensive review of homelessness within the Borough, and will set out strategies to prevent homelessness at its core.</p>				
7.	Cllr Ghlin Whelan	<p>Five years ago this council agreed to press ahead with a proposal to provide a state of the art Skatepark in Sittingbourne.</p> <p>In the spring of 2014 "Inside Swale" proclaimed that "skatepark plans scooting ahead", and in a more recent edition a year ago "Inside Swale" claimed "All was on Track"!</p> <p>In June 2015 it was agreed that:</p> <p>An operating trust was to be in place by Sept 2015</p> <p>Build contractor to be appointed December 2015</p> <p>Revised Planning application to be lodged with Swale Borough Council January 2016</p> <p>Land transfer to be initiated with Essential lands January 2016</p> <p>Final planning application and required funding to be in place April 2016</p> <p>Build to commence May 2016</p> <p>Why have none of these actions yet been expedited, and why has the St George's playing field and facilities in Faversham recently been granted major open-ended funding, possibly to the tune of £1,000,000, when Sittingbourne is being denied any real help with operating costs and in fact has achieved almost</p>	Cabinet Member for Housing and Well-Being	Emma Wiggins – Head of Economy and Community Services

Question No.	Question from:	Question:	Question to:	Service area:
		nothing after five years of talking? This time next year are we still going to be in the same position we were in a year ago?		
<p>Response:</p> <p>In March 2015 Cabinet agreed to provide up to £200k of capital funding to support the Mill project, subject to the balance of funding being secured to meet the full cost of the facility; that a trust is established that will operate and manage the facility to ensure sustainability of the project; and a business plan is provided.</p> <p>The Council asked for expressions of interest to deliver these, and the current position is that it is awaiting the submission of a business plan from Brogdale CIC. Given the formal decision of Cabinet, until a trust with a viable business plan comes forward, the council is not in a position to release its £200k.</p> <p>With regard to Faversham, the volunteer sports club that lease King George’s recreation ground in Faversham sourced all of the money to make improvements to the site. An application for £1.9m Heritage Lottery Funding has been submitted by Swale BC for Faversham Recreation Ground. Match funding secured by means of a section 106 agreement from a nearby development was referenced in the bid. This is money already secured from external investment, and will be used for improvements regardless of the outcome of the funding bid.</p> <p>It is not yet known if SBC have been successful in this bid as announcements are not due until early July. With the anticipated completion of the Open Spaces and Play Strategy later this year we will be able to identify the priorities for the future and as a result, alongside the finalised Local Plan, be in a strong position to lever in external investment.</p>				