

## Council 23 November 2016 - Questions submitted by Members

Question No.	Question from:	Question:	Question to:	Service area:
1.	Cllr James Hunt	<p>Since being elected as member for The Meads one of the biggest complaints I receive from residents is about litter. Whilst new litter bins have been installed in the last couple of years, I seem to have to constantly contact the Cleansing Team to report that Biffa have once again not emptied the bins and that they are overflowing. Not only is this a health issue, especially with regards to the dog waste bins, but it also doesn't help in keeping the ward tidy, with rubbish blowing out of the bins and littering the area. Many residents now go around with carrier bags picking up litter themselves whilst out and about walking their dogs etc.</p> <p>The Cleansing Team do an amazing job and get any issues dealt with quickly, but these problems shouldn't be happening in the first place, and surely Biffa should be following the routine set out in the contract and empty these bins before problems arise. Can the Cabinet Member please reassure myself and residents that this issue is being dealt with, and that Biffa are making changes to ensure that these problems don't continue in the future?</p>	Cabinet Member for Environmental and Rural Affairs	Head of Commissioning and Customer Contact
<p><b>Response:</b> The Street Cleansing Contract is an output-based contract and is monitored by a small but effective Contract Monitoring Team. The Team cover a large area, and so it is necessary to prioritise workloads in order to ensure any problem areas receive regular monitoring, and resolutions to any issues are identified quickly.</p> <p>In order to do this a 'hotspot list' is maintained by the Monitoring Team, and any reoccurring problem areas are placed on the list for regular monitoring. The Meads is one of the areas on the hotspot list due to the reoccurring issues with overflowing bins, and as such it has been monitored weekly by the monitoring officers.</p>				

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<p>We have also been advised that there have been incidents of household waste being placed into some of the litter bins in the area, and this has been investigated by our Enforcement Team. The deposit of household waste in a litter bin can cause the bin to become full immediately after emptying.</p> <p>As a result of the repeated failure to ensure the litter bins are emptied before becoming full, four Rectifiable Default Notices and 11 Rectification Notices have been issued to Biffa since the performance mechanism was established in April 2014 (whilst the contract commenced in December 2013, a 'honeymoon period' is allowed for during contract mobilisation).</p> <p>As a result of the regular monitoring and use of the performance mechanism, the issue with overflowing bins has improved substantially, and I have been informed that the recent reoccurrence was due to the regular crew being on annual leave. The Monitoring Team have raised this with Biffa and requested that sufficient handover meetings are carried out to ensure the smooth running of the contract. A Rectifiable Default was also raised for each overflowing bin on 8/11/16.</p> <p>The Monitoring Team will continue to monitor the area closely, and I can assure the Member that any further breaches of the contract will be met with further penalties.</p>				
2.	Cllr Harrison	Would the Cabinet Member let Members know what has happened to the £100,000 Section 106 money from Morrisons from Queenborough? Has any of the money been spent?	Cabinet Member for Planning	Head of Planning
<p><b>Response:</b> The £100k for Sheerness High Street improvements from the Neats Court Morrisons site s106 Agreement has not been spent.</p> <p>The money was set aside to be used as match funding for a Townscape Heritage (TH) Bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), first made in 2014 and then again in 2015. Both bids were aimed at leveraging in over £1million of environmental improvements in Sheerness, focused around the Mile Town Conservation Area. Unfortunately, having passed the regional panel stage, neither bid was ultimately successful when advanced to the national panel.</p> <p>The TH funding continues to be available, and feedback from the HLF and from Historic England has indicated a strong desire to support our work in Sheerness. They have recommended the development of a Regeneration Framework for the Town, within which the role of any future TH bid (or indeed other HLF funds) could be seen to contribute. The Council has commissioned this work, and intends to pursue a TH or similar bid for Sheerness in 2017. This demonstrates the Council's positive commitment for Sheerness and the Island.</p> <p>The 'spend by' date for the s106 monies was extended to 31 October 2020 by a Deed of Variation made earlier this year.</p>				

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3.	Cllr Roger Truelove	<p>The Labour Group is prepared to support the use of reserves for investment generation, but also argues that this should not preclude the use of some reserves for community benefits which may not be a wealth generator.</p> <p>I have frequently asked for £500K to go on updating our play areas, and your answer to me has been that we must wait for a play area strategy to emerge, which in February was imminent. A draft has finally appeared.</p> <p>As the Administration is considering using some reserves to help fund parts of the Sittingbourne Town Centre changes, can you say clearly whether you will fight for our children's play areas?</p>	Cabinet Member for Environmental and Rural Affairs	Head of Commissioning and Customer Contact
<p><b>Response:</b> I recognise the important role play areas have in our communities, and we continue to make use of all methods to develop and improve them. I recently met with one of our local MPs, Helen Whately, to discuss this, and asked her to raise the question of future play strategy and its links to social and health gains at a national level, so as to present the case of play against the demands on local budgets.</p> <p>It is therefore imperative that we ensure the Open Spaces and Play Strategy, which is currently being developed with our consultants, is the best it can be. The delays have been made to ensure we achieved a good return on our extensive consultation, and we expect to see a first draft before Christmas.</p> <p>Once we have worked through this and developed an action plan based on its findings, it is intended that it is presented to Cabinet in March 2017, together with the estimated costs for each element. Whilst there is no associated 2017/18 revenue budget growth bid relating to play areas, there are reserve funds in place, and the report to Cabinet will make the request for capital funds bids to deal with the outcomes of the review.</p> <p>The Strategy will provide the evidence base for the Council to help secure further contributions from external sources as well as utilising our own existing budgets. Our aim is to ensure a fair spread of facilities over the Borough, combining the rationalisation of some in poor condition or unsuitable places with improvements to others. We will also investigate upgrading a site in each of the three major areas to create flagship/destination play areas.</p>				

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4.	Cllr Ghlin Whelan	Could you tell the Council and the wider public exactly what benefit there will be to the local community in transferring Sittingbourne Town Centre car parks to the private sector for housing development, bearing in mind that it is now the local community that has to fund the leisure and retail side of the Sittingbourne Town Centre phase 1 project?	Cabinet Member for Regeneration	Interim Director of Regeneration
<p><b>Response:</b> The Councillor is entirely incorrect to suggest that it is the local community that has to fund the leisure and retail side of the Sittingbourne Town Centre development – that will be entirely funded from rental income from the cinema, hotel, retail and restaurant operators, most of which have already signed up.</p> <p>The additional local housing (including from developments not associated directly with the STC project, such as the Mill Site and Church Marshes) will help to ensure a thriving and cohesive community, generating increased footfall in the Town Centre and so supporting the local economy, all of which are key aspirations for the overall project.</p> <p>And in addition, the Council will benefit significantly from the residential elements, in terms of producing much needed local housing, in terms of Council Tax income, and in terms of generating New Homes Bonus.</p> <p>In my view, any reasonable observer would count this as a win-win for local residents and the Council.</p>				
5.	Cllr Mark Ellen	Does the Cabinet Member for Regeneration realise that in the light of the vast amount of public money proposed to be spent on the Sittingbourne Town Centre scheme and lack of any major investment on the Isle of Sheppey there is a growing movement on the Island towards secession from SBC, regardless of just how impractical this may be, and to form an Island Council?	Cabinet Member for Regeneration	Interim Director of Regeneration
<p><b>Response:</b> I am very grateful to the Councillor for his question. Knowing his roots, this may be part of a concerted plot by some Scots to avoid the consequences of Brexit. However, I would wish to correct his assumptions.</p> <p>Firstly, the £28million he refers to is a financial investment and not a regeneration-led scheme. Secondly, given the long history of investment in Sheppey by successive administrations since Swale was created, and the schemes this Administration has brought to fruition such as Neats Court and the Aldi regional centre, this may not be the time to walk the plank of self-rule.</p>				

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<p>Also, he may not be aware that this has been considered previously; and were it possible Sheppey rather than Rutland would be one of the smallest administrative areas. At that stage how it might fund and run schools, social services, libraries and refuse is open to question.</p> <p>In any case, and unfortunately, there is no current legislation which would allow the Island to secede. Historically, matters of this type are triggered following consideration by national Commissions or the like, by national local government reorganisation legislation or, as it was the case with the two predecessor authorities on the Island, a local act to reflect the need for more viable and sustainable local government. Currently devolution proposals all envisage larger units of local government, not a more fragmented one.</p> <p>Last week's announcement of a further £250,000 invested in developing Sheerness infrastructure shows the positive commitment this Council has in its approach to Sheppey, as does the scheme to ease congestion on the Lower Road that is within SELEP's current submission to Government.</p>				
6.	Cllr Katy Coleman	With the welcome news that there is discussion in Sheerness about forming a Town Council, could the Cabinet Member consider revisiting the plan to introduce a Sittingbourne Town Council, and possible parochialisation in the surrounding communities, such as Milton and Kemsley?	The Leader	Director of Corporate Services
<p><b>Response:</b> I thank the member for her question.</p> <p>Councillors will recollect that the Council conducted a Community Governance Review into the establishment of addition town and parish councils in the Swale area. We listened to the public's response to the consultation, and at that time it was clear that there was no public appetite for new councils, including in Murston and Kemsley which, incidentally, were ruled out at the first stage of consultation due to a low public response.</p> <p>The member will be aware that I am a strong supporter of parish councils; however, I believe that the creation of any new ones should be led 'bottom up'.</p> <p>There is clear guidance on how local electors can petition Swale Borough Council for a Community Governance Review to be undertaken. Such a Review can be about a variety of matters, including the creation and naming of a new parish council.</p> <p>I therefore await any valid petition in respect of the areas mentioned in order that the officers can then follow the due process if there is sufficient will of the local electorate to achieve the requisite threshold to trigger a further CG Review.</p>				