

Council 14 December 2016 - Questions submitted by Members

Question No.	Question from:	Question:	Question to:	Service area:
1	Cllr Mark Ellen	Does Sheppey have a dedicated Regeneration Officer? If not, why not?	Cabinet Member for Regeneration	Emma Wiggins/ Regeneration
<p>Response: Thank you for acknowledging the hard work of the Regeneration Projects Officer. Officers within the team cover the whole of the Borough, and this approach enables greater knowledge and expertise to be applied to each project. Regenerating the Isle of Sheppey will of course continue a priority for the Council</p>				
2	Cllr Paul Fleming	<p>With this Spirit of Sittingbourne can the Council help clean up our High Street by contacting the landlords of various properties in Sittingbourne High Street and tell them to sort the mess out?</p> <p>Buddleia growing from walls & roofs - one growing to a height of over 6 metres next to Mother Care (do they care)?</p> <p>A beautiful Kent Peg roof covered in thick moss - hopefully this would not be allowed in the villages and parishes around Swale so why in our High Street?</p> <p>A few gutters are full with weeds growing from them, the worst case being Sports Direct (would we let our homes get like this)?</p> <p>Shop fronts in some cases could be made to look so much better. These things did not happen over night - take a look at OUR High Street - have we lost pride?.</p> <p>Our Town Centre is a Conservation Area - isn't it about time Swale used the powers they have to make sure it looks like one - after all, surely it's all part of the spirit of Sittingbourne?</p>	<p>Cabinet Member for Regeneration/ Cabinet Member for Planning</p>	<p>Emma Wiggins/ Regeneration James Freeman/ Planning</p>

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<p>Response: A major focus of the Council has been to bring forward the Spirit of Sittingbourne development, which will act as a catalyst for further investment and improvement in the Town Centre offer. We envisage the start of the development taking place early in the New Year.</p> <p>I agree with Cllr Fleming's view of the state of the High Street, and that the Council should consider what actions are appropriate to bring forward a comprehensive improvement to the whole Town Centre. As a result I have asked officers to consider what actions/mechanisms are required to bring about such improvement, and what resource would be needed to support such an approach, before the Council can consider what priority it should be given.</p> <p>In the meantime, as a Local Authority we do have powers at our disposal to tackle properties which are in a state of disrepair where they impact on the local amenity and / or where the integrity of a Listed Building or the Conservation Area is put at risk.</p>				
3.	Cllr Mike Baldock	What were the legal grounds by which members of the public were locked out of the building and denied access to the Scrutiny Committee Meeting on November 29th 2016, before the meeting had even begun, let alone a vote taken by Councillors at that meeting to exclude them?	The Leader	Mark Radford/Corporate Services
<p>Response: As the Member is aware, he has raised this matter formally with the Chief Executive asking that it be investigated. As this investigation is currently ongoing it would not be appropriate for me to comment any further at this time.</p>				
4.	Cllr James Hunt	<p>At the Council meeting in November the Leader gave a brief mention of the Artisan Market in Sittingbourne High Street and how well it went, thanks to the officers involved in organising things in a short space of time.</p> <p>It is clear that having an Artisan Market in the town has been a good decision and welcomed by residents, as well as having the market in the High Street bringing benefits to other shops in the Town.</p> <p>I'm aware that the two markets in November and December were a pilot, so could the Cabinet Member for Regeneration please say whether there are any plans to continue the Artisan Market in the future?</p>	Cabinet Member for Regeneration	Emma Wiggins/Regeneration

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<p>Response: Having now had two pilot Saturday markets in Sittingbourne High Street, initial reaction from both stallholders and Sittingbourne residents has been overwhelmingly positive. "When can we have more?" residents have asked.</p> <p>We will look closely at the results of our survey, and get some more feedback from individual stallholders to inform the way forward, but our plan is to resume a regular High Street Saturday market from March 2017 after the two bad weather months.</p>				
5.	Cllr Mike Whiting	Does the Cabinet Member agree with me that not all new developments will require fully equipped play areas, especially when there are other facilities nearby, and that more innovative ways of using developer contributions should be properly investigated on a case-by-case basis?	Cabinet Member for Environment and Rural Affairs	Dave Thomas/ Head of Commissioning & Customer Contact
<p>Response: The new Open Spaces and Play Strategy will evaluate all current facilities, and enable us to formulate an action plan to better direct our limited resources and maintenance programme towards the identified priority areas, where they are needed.</p> <p>This might mean closing some older, dated play facilities where there are suitable alternatives nearby, as we can then target our investment to improve these alternatives.</p> <p>For similar reasons, it may be appropriate on occasions where new developments are being planned, that Section 106 monies are targeted at improving nearby existing open space and play facilities, rather than requiring a new facility to be built.</p>				
6.	Cllr Lloyd Bowen	<p>As members who serve the public for the public interest, do you agree that it is imperative that members are aware of the impact our communications, including social media for those who use it, has on public opinion, and that statements that are inflammatory, factually incorrect, and without substance embarrasses the office in which we serve and the electorate's faith in us?</p> <p>With this in mind, what plans are being made to ensure members are trained on the subject of Data Protection and communication skills?</p>	The Leader	Emma Wiggins/ Regeneration
<p>Response: I thank the member for his question, and agree that social media nowadays is an integral part of our communication and engagement with Swale residents, businesses and community groups. We have to expect that increasingly our communities and those seeking information from us will use social media, and that councillors will be expected to engage through social media.</p>				

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<p>It is therefore imperative that members are aware of their responsibilities to ensure that anything posted on social media in their capacity as councillors must not make statements that are inflammatory, factually inaccurate, and without substance. I recall the Director of Corporate Services only recently reminding members of the pitfalls that can arise from postings done in haste, and would also point members to the guidance issued by the Monitoring Officer and included in the Constitution in relation to defamation.</p> <p>Where statements are posted which are obviously without any foundation whatsoever, one must ask what the motive or rationale of the member doing the posting might be? If it is sheer incompetence, I think one should expect a full and very public apology. I then think it is imperative that the member goes away and reflects on whether local government is the right place for him.</p> <p>However, should it be totally malicious along the line that mud sticks, however ludicrous the comment, then I think expecting genuine remorse or recall might be over ambitious. In this case it remains with the electorate and/or the political party to which the member belongs removing him from any position in which he could again bring the Council and his own party into further disrepute.</p> <p>With public confidence in the political process eroding, and with voter turn-out increasingly reaching crisis point, it is important that we all avoid making public perception even worse by the use of total untruths.</p> <p>I understand that there will be a training session in the New Year on data protection and the Code of Conduct, and I would ask that all members attend the session for the reasons given above.</p>				