

Council 18 October 2017 - Questions submitted by Members

Question No.	Question from:	Question:	Question to:	Service area:
1.	Cllr Mike Baldock	Can the Cabinet Member tell us whether any consideration has been given to creating a park or area where quad bikes and motorbikes could be used in safety, possibly involving a workshop where young people could learn about mechanics as well as rallying on their vehicles? This is a request that has arisen from residents many times over the past few years, and which would give Sittingbourne an unique attraction within the local area.	Cabinet Member for Environment and Rural Affairs	Martyn Cassell
<p>Response: No recent consideration has been made to this matter. Whilst we recognise that the illegal riding of these vehicles is experienced in the Borough, and work with partners including the Police to try and stop this, it is felt that this is not a facility that the Council should be responsible for providing.</p> <p>Such a facility is best run privately and in a secure, controlled environment to ensure safety. There have been examples of local groups and private companies trying this in the Borough in the past on public and private land. They have not been successful due to the difficulties with profitability, health and safety and noise pollution.</p> <p>There is a successful charity that runs mechanical education and motocross experience days for young people in Dover that may provide further information about how they were established.</p>				
2	Cllr Roger Truelove	At the February meeting of the Council I asked you about the financial difficulties being faced by the Swale Clinical Commissioning Group. You somewhat implausibly tried to dismiss the problem. Could you update the Council on the current financial position of the Swale CCG and its implications for patient care in the area it serves?	Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing	Amber Christou
<p>Response: I reported a break even position at the beginning of the year. (2017). By the end of the financial year, Swale CCG were</p>				

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<p>reporting a £2m deficit but stated no adverse effect on Swale residents. To date the CCG are forecasting a £6m risk which they are mitigating with a 'break even' financial position at financial year end. They have £5m of risk mitigated leaving £1m unmitigated which they will cover through efficiency savings.</p>				
3	Cllr Ghlin Whelan	At our July meeting we agreed an amended motion relating to our local MPs lobbying for Government money for A roads in Swale, with the labour group alone expressing a priority for completing the Northern Relief Road. What action was taken with this resolution and what response, if any, from our two MPs?	Leader	James Freeman/Kieren Mansfield
<p>Response: Working with KCC, our local MP's and other partners, a significant amount of work has gone into making bids to support investment into local Highways Infrastructure in recent weeks. In the summer bids were made to both the National Productivity Investment Fund and the Housing Growth Fund for improvements on the A2500 Lower Road between Barton Hill Drive and Cowsted Corner. If successful these will complement the money already secured to improve the Barton Hill Drive Junction.</p> <p>In response to the Governments initial call for bids against the the £2.3bn Housing Infrastructure Fund in July, a submission has also been made, promoting improvements to key junctions on the A249, the completion of the Northern Relief Road and a Southern Link.</p>				
4	Cllr Ghlin Whelan	At the recent Conservative Party conference, the current Prime Minister pledged to invest £2billion into social and affordable housing over a 5 year period. Is this the solution to Swale's desperate need for both social and affordable housing and the crisis in Homelessness?	Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing	Amber Christou
<p>Response: The announcement is a positive step forward, but not the solution on its own. Working to support Optivo and the social housing providers, it means there's more funding to bid for (£9b total now over a number of years and programmes for affordable homes). But the devil will be in the detail.</p> <p>It will make getting grant into schemes easier as there is more to go around. We don't know yet if that grant can be allocated to schemes in any different ways than before. By that I mean if it'll be the same allocation regime or a more flexible approach that might unlock</p>				

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<p>previously unviable sites. My guess is more of the same but it's still great to hear more allocated to rented housing</p> <p>The bigger news is the rent certainty for Social Landlords like Optivo. After the minus 1% year on year until 2020 we've now been promised CPI+1% year on year for 5 years from 2020 onwards. This is excellent and allows them to business plan with certainty. This in turn means they are able to leverage more borrowing to spend on developments as there is certainty about income levels.</p> <p>The council will continue to work with Optivo on joint opportunities going after the pots of money.</p> <p>This announcement won't solve problems straight away but it will help towards them. Sites still need to be viable and sites are needed locally.</p>				
5	Cllr Roger Truelove	Have you any update on the Council's need to find a developer to come forward with a plan to regenerate the Bell Centre in Sittingbourne?	Cabinet Member for Regeneration	Emma Wiggins
<p>Response: A developer has come forward and the current planning application which was submitted in October 2016 is for 165 apartments, Health Centre and pharmacy.</p> <p>The Planning Service are in the process of assessing the scheme viability. A revised viability assessment was submitted to CBRE 6 October 2017. This revision has come about due to amendments to the site based on discussions between the developer and the Planning Service. Amended drawings have also been submitted. This is now being re-consulted upon. CBRE are carrying out their assessment of the viability report which is due in the next month or so and will inform how the Planning Service approach the issue of viability in the recommendation to an upcoming planning committee.</p>				
6	Cllr Harrison	With a minimum 7 week wait to process applications which are complicated and time consuming to the claimant, the introduction of the government's Universal Credit promises to be a disaster for many vulnerable Swale families and a stimulus to the loan shark industry. Should this Council join many other councils, plus Sir John Major, in calling for a delay in the introduction and roll out of this ill prepared policy?	Leader	Zoe Kent
<p>Response: I thank Cllr Harrison for her question, I also have been keeping an eye on the introduction of Universal Credit and at least to</p>				

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<p>some degree share her concerns. Although to be fair having listened to various press reports, and indeed a radio phone in programme, the pilots seem to have been better received in some areas and by some “customers”. I am informed by officers that the Sittingbourne and Sheerness Job Centre Plus offices will go-live with Full Service Universal Credit on 6 December 2017. The Department for Work and Pensions are committed to the rollout timetable so this date is not likely to change. The Revenues and Benefits service in conjunction with the Housing team is currently working with Job Centre Plus staff to ensure we have support in place to help the vulnerable. I am sure that Cllr Harrison will work with me on keeping in close contact both with our officer team and with the recipients of these credits to monitor the roll out in Swale.</p>				
7.	Cllr Tony Winckless	At our September meeting the Council unanimously agreed that option 12 A was not the solution to the traffic congestion on the A 249 on the approach to junction 5 of the M2. What has been done since to let the government know that their financially inadequate proposal will not do?	Cabinet Member for Regeneration	James Freeman/Kieren Mansfield
<p>Response: There have been ongoing discussions with Highways England, during the consultation on option 12A, throughout which the Council has made its position clear. Formal submissions to the consultation have also been made by the Council and by the local business community, with our preference for an option with a fly-over being echoed by many of our residents.</p>				
8.	Cllr Tony Winckless	Can you give me an update on how the proposed improvements to the A249 interchange at Kemsley are progressing, bearing in mind the additional traffic that will be generated with the additional housing being built in north west Sittingbourne?	Cabinet Member for Regeneration	James Freeman/Kieren Mansfield
<p>Response: There are ongoing discussions with landowners with regard to the potential developer contributions towards improvements to the Grovehurst junction to meet the traffic needs generated by those particular developments. In parallel to this, a bid has also been made to the Housing and Infrastructure Fund for a major redesign of the Grovehurst Junction at an estimated cost of £30m to cater for potential traffic growth demands beyond the current Local Plan period and to cater for any future proposals to complete the Northern Relief Road and Southern Relief Road.</p>				
9.	Cllr Mike Henderson	Will the cabinet member please outline all projects which are being pursued by SBC to increase the availability of temporary or permanent housing for those in the Borough needing either of these, including the two projects he mentioned at the recent	Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing	Amber Christou

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		Cabinet meeting. Please include the expected timing of each project and the number of homes each will provide.		
<p>Response: We continue to look at options available to increase the numbers of both temporary and permanent housing in the Borough. As a non-stock holding authority we have a service level agreement with Optivo to provide 100 homes within the Borough for use of temporary accommodation. With the new Homeless reduction Act being enacted in April 2018 we will continue to focus on prevention and aim to increase the access to the private sector through an updated landlord incentive scheme. We also continue to manage the allocations of homes within the Borough through our Allocations policy with priority given to local residents in housing need. Additionally we work with local developers and Housing Associations to ensure the delivery of new build affordable housing in the Borough.</p> <p>Work continues to assess the viability of accommodation working with the Prison service, with outcomes of that work expected by mid-November.</p> <p>A wider option appraisal and viability assessment is being undertaken on the Crimean Hospital, to ascertain if the building could be brought back into use for TA or other uses. The challenge is that it is Grade II listed and has other constraints, but officers will be looking at possible options and their associated costs, before any decision is made by end December.</p>				