

Council 21 February 2018 - Questions submitted by Members

Question No.	Question from:	Question:	Question to:	Service area:
1.	Cllr Harrison	I understand that Swale Borough Council has a zero tolerance policy towards access refusal from taxi and minicab drivers. Disability equality training will further help drivers understand the rights and needs of disabled people, particularly assistance dog owners, and I would ask the Cabinet Member if he would be prepared to make it a requirement that all taxi and minicab drivers take part in disability equality training.	Cllr Alan Horton, Cabinet Member for Safer Families and Communities	Della Fackrell
<p>Response:</p> <p>Our driver recruitment process includes a medical assessment where an applicant would need their doctor to sign off any reason why they may need to be exempt from carrying dogs or lifting wheelchairs. We also test disability and safeguarding knowledge during the recruitment process.</p> <p>We have a compliance process where we would investigate any allegations that discrimination has happened but this is very rare.</p> <p>The new policy clearly reiterates this requirement where the driver would be subject to being issued up to 12 penalty points for 'Refusal to take a fare without a reasonable excuse'. If they were issued 12 points they would then be required to appear before the Licensing Sub-Committee.</p>				
2.	Cllr Harrison	It has long been my view that the Sheppey College campus of Canterbury has been under-utilised. It has been brought to my attention recently that students who have no choice but to access the college by car have to pay £88 a month or £235 for 3 months for parking. Apart from Christmas time, the car park next to the College is not greatly used. Would the Cabinet Member be prepared to enter into discussions with the College with a view to reaching a mutually beneficial agreement?	Cllr Alan Horton, Cabinet Member for Safer Families and Communities	Martyn Cassell

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<p>Response:</p> <p>Bridge Road car park is a long stay car park with 47 spaces that is directly opposite the college campus. The Council is supportive of further education in the area, particularly in Sheerness and we already have an agreement in place with the college for staff parking in our car park. Although not based on formal evidence, we are aware that students utilise other car parks, however we would be more than happy to open up a conversation to speak further to the college and see what preferences they would have for their students.</p>				
3.	Cllr Roger Truelove	At the most recent Local Development Framework Panel Meeting, members were advised that the Government's likely new housing target for Swale is 1054 dwellings per annum and that the Council should begin to review the Local Plan, or deliver a new Local Plan, with that in mind. I recognise that planning for all eventualities is sound but do you not agree that as this figure as an indicative number contained within a consultative document, the Council should, at least, indicate some doubts about the figures passed down by a centralising government to a vassal borough? Of course, the formula is highly technical but it is based on population growth, both indigenous and migration from London, market sensitivity and deliverability. I frankly don't believe that brings us to 1054 a year, do you? Isn't this all a continuation of your Government's determination to free up more land than is needed to support their friends in the construction industry?	Cllr Gerry Lewin, Cabinet Member for Planning	James Freeman
<p>Response:</p> <p>The reason why we are using 1054 dwellings per annum (DPA) was rehearsed recently at the LDF Panel meeting. In view of the National Planning Policy Framework revisions expected shortly, it is therefore prudent to begin our review of the Local Plan with that figure. Any figure over 776 DPA in the Local Plan just adopted represents a significant challenge, as does 776 DPA.</p> <p>A letter to the Minister and a consultation response on this subject, sent in November last year, was signed by the Leader and myself. It</p>				

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argued for Government and developers to commit to working with Planning Authorities to address issues around housing, infrastructure and economic growth that allows local voices, who know best the limitations of their area, to be heard.				
4.	Cllr Ghlin Whelan	Members have one week left to use their Members Localism Grants. It is clear to see that some Councillors are very keen to publicise their grants in the hope of deriving personal political benefit whilst others are more retiring and modest. With this in mind, will you publish a statement in full of how the grants for 2017-2018 have been used by each councillor?	Cllr Duncan Dewar-Whalley, Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance	Charlotte Hudson
<p>Response:</p> <p>Member grant awards are regularly published on the Council website https://www.swale.gov.uk/member-grants/ . A hard copy of this report will also be available in the members room in April once all allocations to project are known.</p>				
5.	Cllr Mike Henderson	The Peter Brett report stresses the need to attract well qualified people to Swale. Does the Leader agree that it is even more important to improve the skills and qualifications of people already living in Swale?	Cllr Bowles, Leader	Charlotte Hudson
<p>Response:</p> <p>Ensuring the Borough has the relevant skills is paramount to support and stimulate growth in Swale. This is best achieved by actively working on both fronts to attract relevant skills through working with our strategic partnerships in the Thames Estuary and to also grow and develop the skills of those living in Swale. Our emerging Economic Regeneration Framework which will be put out for consultation shortly sets out our areas of focus, which include Further Education provision for Sittingbourne; developing apprenticeships and ensuring local labour outcomes from new developments in the borough. We will also continue to partner with organisation such as Optivo on their social inclusion learning programmes.</p>				

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6.	Cllr Roger Truelove	At a previous meeting you told us that whilst the Swale CCG were forecasting a £6 million deficit risk they would mitigate this with a break even financial position at the end of the financial year. How has that worked out?	Cllr Ken Pugh, Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing	Amber Christou
<p>Response:</p> <p>The latest Swale CCG Financial forecast is predicting a £4million deficit risk. However, they are expecting to be able to mitigate some £2million of that due to ongoing negotiations with Medway Foundation Trust.</p>				
7.	Cllr Ghlin Whelan	How is your plan to adapt the Sheerness Military Hospital for Homeless accommodation progressing?	Cllr Ken Pugh, Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing	Amber Christou
<p>Response:</p> <p>A feasibility Study has been carried out to assess possible uses and costs of those uses regarding the Military Hospital. This including converting the site into housing.</p> <p>The cost of bringing the hospital back into use is not considered viable. The cost of conversion to housing would cost over £6million.</p> <p>The council continues to look for opportunities for affordable housing projects but any options that may emerge in the future would require a business case to establish operational and financial viability.</p>				