

Council – Schedule of written responses to Public and Members’ questions

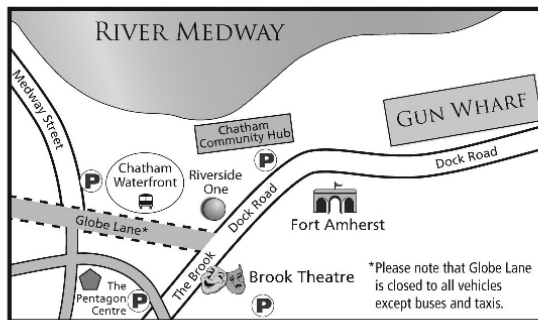
Date:	26 January 2017
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For further information please contact Julie Keith, Head of Democratic Services on Telephone: 01634 332760 or Email: democratic.services@medway.gov.uk

Date: 8 February 2017



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Full Council 26 January 2016

Schedule of written responses – public questions

Question	Response
<p>7C - David Crowhurst of Hempstead had submitted the following question to the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe:</p> <p>“I note that the Council was unsuccessful in two applications to the Government’s Homelessness Prevention Programme whilst a number of our fellow Kent local authorities were successful. I also note that those successful authorities appear to have worked in collaboration with other authorities.</p> <p>So could the Portfolio Holder please inform me whether Medway worked in collaboration with any other local authority and if this was not the case, perhaps he could inform me why Medway chose not to?”</p> <p>As David Crowhurst was not present at the meeting, the Mayor stated he would receive a written response to his question in accordance with Council Rule 8.6.</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Mr Crowhurst.</p> <p>We explored the possibility of working in partnership with other local authorities in Kent, however, we felt that being a unitary authority put us in a unique position to develop our well-established partnerships with Medway Clinical Commissioning Group, Social Care, Police, supported accommodation providers and the wider agencies tackling homelessness in Medway.</p> <p>Our proposals were tailored to meet the specific issues and challenges faced in Medway and the complex needs of vulnerable members of the community.</p> <p>The bids were worked up in partnership with a broad range of services both from within the Council and externally. Our proposals were discussed and consulted on via the Homelessness Forum.</p> <p>We feel that we submitted a strong, innovative bid that addressed the specific challenges currently experienced in Medway, and are very disappointed to have not been successful. However, we are still exploring other funding streams with our partners to take forward aspects of our proposals.</p>

Question	Response
<p>7E - Steve Dyke of Strood had submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty:</p> <p>“The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recently conducted a public consultation on its draft guidance about practical measures that can be taken to improve air quality, including in relation to planning and transport. The guidelines are intended for local authority staff and Councillors, among others, and Medway Council would seem to be an eligible stakeholder in relation to the guidance.</p> <p>Medway has an acknowledged problem with certain types of air pollution. The Council is also currently developing its Local Plan.</p> <p>It is to be hoped therefore that as a responsible local authority, Medway Council will have responded to this consultation. Can the Councillor advise if this is indeed the case and if its responses will be made public?”</p> <p>As Steve Dyke was not present at the meeting, the Mayor stated he would receive a written response to his question in accordance with Council Rule 8.6.</p>	<p>Medway is an active member of the Kent and Medway Air Quality Partnership, which is a stakeholder for The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), and contributed technical advice and information to NICE in its original consultation on the draft scope in August 2015.</p> <p>I can confirm that our Environmental Protection Team registered separately as a stakeholder for the NICE consultation, which closed on 25 January in order to register its comments and the Council submitted a response before the consultation closed to evidence the progress already made by Medway Council as set out in our Air Quality Action Plan.</p> <p>Medway Council’s Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) was approved by Cabinet in December 2015 and is published on the Council’s website. Medway provides statutory updates to Defra annually to report on progress with the identified measures. Medway also has a steering group, chaired by the Assistant Director for Front Line Services, with membership across all relevant stakeholders, including planning, public health, integrated transport, green spaces and procurement (exceeding the recommendations NICE has made in the current consultation).</p> <p>The responses to NICE consultation are submitted electronically and published by NICE.</p>

Question	Response
<p>71 - Robert Heathfield of Chatham had submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Business Management, Councillor Turpin:</p> <p>“The public consultation on Business Rates highlighted that the proposed option two will mean charity shops paying 20% business rates, this means in reality Medway Council is taking money from many local charities including those who help terminally ill children.</p> <p>What do you say to families who have terminally ill children who will see reduced funding for those charities?”</p> <p>As Robert Heathfield was not present at the meeting, the Mayor stated he would receive a written response to his question in accordance with Council Rule 8.6.</p>	<p>I, along with many of my fellow councillors the conservative party have wrestled with what were very difficult decisions. Had it not been for the change in funding environment and huge cuts to central government grants to their colleagues in local government, we would have settled for the status quo, however when we made our decision we decided to spend council taxpayer’s money on charities dedicated to the vulnerable, both adults and children, rather than those charities involved in lifestyle choices. As such, any charity which looks after terminal ill children will continue to receive 100% rate relief. The only part of such a charity which would pay any rates would be the charity shop arm, which is an arm’s length commercial organisation set up to raise funds for the associated charity rather than carry out the charity’s principle aim. In the case of the charity I think you are referring to in your question, the charity shops are a small part of the overall fund raising operation, and the extra business rate we are looking at will be a tiny fraction of that turnover, amounting to 0.15% of an overall income of nearly 10 million so this amount needs to be seen in its proper context.</p> <p>Charity shops will continue to have many advantages over their competitors, including the one everyone knows, no VAT on second hand goods, but also the claiming of Gift Aid on all donations which gives an extra 25% income of all sales which can be claimed back from the exchequer. Last but not least the work of the many dedicated volunteers is an indirect benefit of huge value. As an example, an average sized shop with two shop assistants will from April have to pay an extra £1 per hour over and above what the minimum wage was just two years ago. This alone would mean extra wages of around £4,000 per annum for a retailer which a charity shop with volunteers will not be affected by, an amount by itself more than the vast majority of business rate demands which charity shops will face. In terms of competitiveness therefore on a purely financial level the introduction of business rates will recalibrate the relative competitiveness of the retail</p>

Question	Response
	<p>sector and the charity sector to 2015.</p> <p>There is no doubt that charity shops will look to raising their game in the light of their increased cost. This could be done in many ways, including consolidation of multiple shop outlets, raising prices, claiming Gift Aid on donations (which many still do not do), better window displays, changing premises to a cheaper location and multiple other options. It will be a challenge but it is one which is faced by other retailers on the High Street with far fewer advantages and I am confident that the charity shop sector will rise to the challenge. Indeed there are already charity shops which are operating at a very high level and setting a standard of excellence.</p>

Full Council 26 January 2016

Schedule of written responses – Members' questions

Question	Response
<p>10L - Councillor Khan had submitted the following question to the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe:</p> <p>“Given that a number of neighbouring local authorities, including Canterbury, Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells and Thanet were successful in securing funding through the Government’s Homelessness Prevention Programme, could the Portfolio Holder please update Council as to why the two bids that we submitted to that programme were unsuccessful?”</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Councillor Khan.</p> <p>The Government announced on 17 October a new £40m programme to tackle homelessness and its underlying causes. The funding consisted of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• £20 million to establish a network of Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer areas• £10 million for intervening with new rough sleepers• £10 million Social Impact Bond funding for rough sleepers. <p>We submitted a bid of just over £1.2million under the Trailblazer fund and the New Rough Sleeper fund.</p> <p>As I set out in an earlier response, we explored the possibility of working in partnership with other local authorities in Kent, but, we felt that being a unitary authority put us in a unique position to develop our well-established partnerships with Medway Clinical Commissioning Group, Social Care, Police, supported accommodation providers and the wider agencies tackling homelessness in Medway.</p> <p>The bids were worked up in partnership with a broad range of services both from within the Council and externally and our proposals were discussed and consulted on via the Homelessness Forum.</p> <p>We are of course disappointed not to have been successful, however, we are still exploring other funding streams with our partners to take forward aspects of our proposals.</p>

Question	Response
<p>10M - Councillor Cooper had submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Business Management, Councillor Turpin:</p> <p>“Elderly users of the Age UK Medway day centres currently pay £42 per day. Any decision to withdraw the 20% support that Age UK Medway currently receives as a result of qualifying for business rate relief would result in an increased cost for those elderly people and will price many people out of using the service.</p> <p>Does the Portfolio Holder believe that this is acceptable?”</p>	<p>The scale of the charitable operations of AGE UK, which is a well respected partner of Medway Council dwarfs the operations of its charity shop in Gillingham, therefore the effect of the 20% business rate will also be commensurately small. This would amount to roughly an extra 15p per day on top of the day rate of £42. (based on 90 customers per day and a five day week).</p> <p>The triple lock on pensions introduced by the coalition government will ensure that old age pensions will go up by more than this amount. I don't believe that this amount would force people to give up their day care and therefore I find it acceptable and in line with our ambition that these proposals are fair, modest and affordable. In addition I would recommend that Age UK review its policies and procedures at its shop to introduce claiming of Gift Aid which, since 2013 has had a minimal bureaucratic burden and can raise a shop's income by up to 25%.</p>
<p>10N - Councillor Gilry had submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Business Management, Councillor Turpin:</p> <p>“Medway Council relies on the voluntary sector to deliver services and to provide support to local residents. If costs to voluntary sector organisations rise then the service that they are able to deliver will be limited at the expense of local residents.</p> <p>Conservative members of the Council's Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee voted unanimously against Labour Group proposals to retain the 20% support to all organisations that qualify for business rate relief due to being a community, voluntary or charity organisation. The removal of this support will have a hugely detrimental effect on voluntary sector organisations who will be unable</p>	<p>Thank you for your question. Many charities provide services as part of commissioning with Medway Council. As such these are separately tendered and each charity tenders for a service bearing in mind its costs and its financial position. These amounts are often far more than the figures we are talking about which are the 20% business rates charged to the charity shops.</p> <p>I also refer you to my earlier answers on the evening of Council, that some charity shops are not claiming the 25% Gift Aid which alone would pay for their business rates with room to spare and also my reference to the fact that charity shops are competing with each other in a crowded market which will be reducing each shop's profitability.</p>

Question	Response
<p>to provide the services that the Council currently relies on them providing. When these organisations are no longer able to provide these services local residents will turn to the Council for help and support. The cost to the taxpayer and the Council to substitute the services that are currently being provided by voluntary sector organisations will be greater than the savings made as a result of removing the 20% support.</p> <p>Please could the Portfolio Holder inform Council what long term measures he has taken to ensure that taxpayers will not be out of pocket as a result of its short term decision?"</p>	<p>I would suggest that if a shop cannot make even £2,000 per year or so for rates despite gift aid, volunteers, donated goods and no VAT then perhaps it is in the wrong location or has some other business problem. The charities you refer to dealing with the vulnerable are protected by 100% rate relief (except on their charity shop premises).</p>
<p>100 - Councillor McDonald had submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty:</p> <p>"Could the Portfolio Holder please outline the following three figures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How many Medway Council licensed taxi drivers are currently operating in Medway; • How many 'out of borough' are currently operating in Medway and; • How many Uber taxi drivers are currently operating in Medway?" 	<p>Medway Council currently licence 482 Hackney Drivers, 243 Private Hire Drivers and 174 Private Hire Restricted who carry out Executive Car hire and home to school contract work. This gives a total of 725 drivers licenced to operate within Medway without restrictions. Hackneys may be hailed on the street or work for an operator and Private Hires are pre booked via an operator. Unfortunately officers are unaware of how many Medway Licensed Drivers are operating at any one time.</p> <p>(Out of Borough/Uber)</p> <p>The short answer is we are not aware of the number of "out of borough" or Uber taxis operating in Medway.</p> <p>The reason for this is in respect of "out of borough" and Uber taxis, there is no legal requirement for these drivers to inform officers that they will be working in the area. Unless there is a change in legislation, the Council has no enforcement powers to deal with these drivers, unless these drivers are committing an offence in respect of Medway Council Byelaws.</p>

Question	Response
	<p>For information, Officers and Councillors when drafting the latest Medway Taxi Policy looked at the operator licences to see if there was anything that could be done to stop the influx of out of towners working in Medway and were unable to do anything that would not be challenged as unlawful.</p>
<p>10P - Councillor Johnson had submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer, the following:</p> <p>“Municipal bus companies provide some of the best bus services in the country and the current Bus Services Bill, which prevents local authorities from setting up their own company to provide bus services is opposed by 57% of the population.</p> <p>Does the Portfolio Holder agree with me that, where there is a need and a demand, Councils such as Medway should be able to provide their own bus service?”</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Councillor Johnson.</p> <p>Within Medway, approximately 95% of bus services are provided on a commercial basis following the deregulation of the bus industry in the 1980s.</p> <p>The network, frequency and quality of buses, including the introduction of more low emission buses has been improved over the last few years. All the operators in Medway, principally Arriva and the independent operators such as ASD, Nu-Venture and Chalkwell are all continuing to invest in their fleets.</p> <p>The Council already supports services at times where the operators have deemed it not commercially viable, such as in the evenings, on Sundays and some suburban estates. Significant funding is provided each year to support these “socially-necessary” services, together with funding for Concessionary Bus Passes, Medway Youth Passes, MY School services and bus stop infrastructure.</p> <p>Medway Council works extremely well with all our operators by way of a Quality Bus Partnership with Arriva, and a Punctuality Improvement Partnership with all our operators. There has been regular investment in new buses and passenger numbers are strong. In addition, over the last three years, careful stewardship by Arriva and imaginative network design by the Council has seen the bus operator able to take on more journeys which previously required subsidy, helping to reduce the Council's expenditure.</p>

Question	Response
	<p>Initiatives such as funding the Traveline system, Real Time Information, improved bus stop information and the launch of a Smartcard on bus services have helped see latest bus patronage figures rise. Quarter 3 of this year saw bus patronage of over 2.3 million journeys made, which is the highest figure since 2013/14.</p> <p>A “council owned” service (and currently this is not permitted under the legislation), would be likely to require significant capital expenditure and high levels of resourcing over a number of years, and there are no guarantees that it would result in a better level of service in the medium to long term.</p>

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