

Council – 8 October 2020

Schedule of written responses to public questions and Members' questions not answered at the meeting

Items

7	Public and Members' questions	(Pages 3 - 10)
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Date: 16 October 2020

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Agenda reference	Question	Response
7T	<p>Bryan Fowler of Chatham asked the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer, the following:</p> <p>“Medway Council has recently introduced dedicated cycle lanes in line with its commitment to more active travel. What influence have Medway Councillors, especially those who are Bridge Wardens, had on the decision to remove the separate cycle lane on the new Rochester Bridge between Strood and Rochester?”</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Mr Fowler. The changes to cycle facilities on the New Bridge form part of the overall refurbishment project owned and managed by the Rochester Bridge Trust. The Bridge Trust fully engaged with the Council throughout the design process and the Council supported the scheme proposals. The New Bridge now has a shared footway/cycleway that accords with the design standards in place when the project was designed.</p>
10D	<p>Councillor Andy Stamp asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, the following:</p> <p>“If the Lower Thames Crossing is given the go-ahead, will the Leader join the Medway Labour and Co-operative Group in calling upon Highways England and the Secretary of State to ensure that Medway residents and businesses are exempt from any future toll charges?”</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Cllr Stamp.</p> <p>Not for the first time Labour is playing catch up!</p> <p>We have already had this discussion with Highways England, and although no conclusion has yet been reached we are continuing with an open dialogue. Once further progress has been made the Labour Group is of course free to follow our lead.</p>

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<p>10K</p>	<p>Councillor McDonald asked the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, the following:</p> <p>“The voluntary sector and partnerships within are vital, and arguably have never been as important to our local community as the previous 6 months amidst the Coronavirus pandemic.</p> <p>Will the Portfolio Holder join me in formally recognising the hard work of those in the voluntary sector at such an extraordinary time?”</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Councillor McDonald.</p> <p>I would like to join Councillor McDonald in formally recognising the voluntary sector in how they have helped Medway residents and the community over the last six months. As you rightly say the partnership working between the council and a wide range of partners has been an integral to our pandemic response. Since the outset of the pandemic, some of our most vulnerable residents have benefited from some incredible voluntary sector services and it has been fantastic to see such a commitment from sector partners to work in partnership. This includes working with the councils own vulnerable peoples hub to provide food, medicine and other essential services and supporting our NHS partners when they were under extreme pressure.</p> <p>Over the last six months we saw some of our established voluntary sector organisations and some brand new organisations step up to support residents of Medway. We are extremely lucky to have so many fantastic community sector and charities in Medway, that provide such a valuable service, so I don’t just want to thank them for their efforts over the last six months, but for their efforts before the COVID-19 pandemic and for the services they will inevitably provide in future months and years.</p> <p>The council look forward to working with the sector not just in our pandemic response, but in other strategic projects. This includes projects such as our city of culture bid and our ambition to reduce social isolation, amongst many others. The community and voluntary are a highly valued partner in the council’s ambition to support residents and we are extremely grateful for their collective efforts.</p>
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<p>10L</p>	<p>Councillor Mahil asked the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer, the following:</p> <p>“At the beginning of August, three fatal road traffic accidents occurred on the streets of Medway within a two-week time period. This tragic loss of life is devastating for the families involved and our wider local communities.</p> <p>I trust that the Portfolio Holder agrees with me that we cannot wait for further fatalities to occur before we take action. For this reason, does he agree that the long-awaited pilot scheme for introducing targeted 20mph zones in Medway must now finally be brought forward as a matter of urgency?”</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Cllr Mahil. Fatalities on the road network are truly devastating for everyone and our thoughts are with the families of those involved.</p> <p>The Council has been carefully considering the evidence around the widespread use of 20mph limits. We have also been monitoring the performance of existing 20mph schemes in Medway. It is important to clarify, however, that there are no plans to implement a pilot scheme of targeted 20mph zones in Medway.</p> <p>The use of 20mph speed limits and zones is only one tool available to us as we seek to reduce casualties on our road network. We believe it is very important to address the specific issues at an identified location, and for us to consider all potential measures that would reduce the risk of further accidents, not just changes to speed limits.</p> <p>Our Road Safety Engineers will be working closely with the Police as the investigation into these deeply saddening events continues.</p>
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<p>10M</p>	<p>Councillor Cooper asked the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services, Councillor Mrs Josie Iles, the following:</p> <p>“Would the Portfolio Holder agree with me that the proposed relocation of Medway Family Courts will have an extremely detrimental impact on Medway’s vulnerable families at a time when they are most in need of support?”</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Cllr Cooper. I agree and that point was included in the Council’s response to the HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) consultation submitted in August.</p> <p>We included the following information in the response to the consultation on this point:</p> <p>“The Council is extremely concerned that by moving the court out of Medway the Court will be setting up respondent parents in care proceedings to fail. Such respondents are among the most vulnerable in society with the majority misusing drugs and/or alcohol or suffering with mental health issues. This group of court users regularly already struggle to get to their local Medway County & Family Court for hearings starting at 10am which results in hearings having to be adjourned. By closing the busiest family court in the South East of England it will create a significant difficulty for respondent parents to travel the additional distance in time for a hearing at 10am. Most respondent parents do not have cars and will be reliant on the longer journey by public transport with only one train an hour at 4 minutes past the hour.....the additional cost involved in travelling to Maidstone will cause significant financial difficulty for this group of court users and further reduces their ability to ensure they have access to justice.....</p> <p>Most concerning of all will be the likely further delays to all court users but especially children involved in care proceedings due to the court being unable to progress care proceedings due to court’s capacity to accommodate the hearing in a timely manner. There is already a significant delay in concluding</p>
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		<p>final hearings due to Covid-19 and it is inconceivable how the court will get through that backlog if it closes the Medway County and Family Court and instead put further pressure on other courts around the county.</p> <p>HMCTS have not considered the additional costs to the public purse and in particular in relation to local authority aspects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Professionals time - the additional travel time will prevent Social Workers from undertaking statutory and other visits to other families resulting in additional expense to employ further staff to meet the statutory deadlines. There will be a similar impact on the lawyers' time and taking them out of the office for longer and therefore unable to progress other cases.- Social Care costs – incurred due to court delays in progressing cases and listing final hearings including providing foster care for extended periods of time until hearings can conclude. By closing the busiest family court in the south-east of England there will be further delays in listing care proceedings cases in turn causing further delay to finalising care plans for children. <p>The consultation response suggested several venues within the council's estate that could be used as a court within the Medway area and I understand that the Chief Legal Officer has subsequently had discussions with HMCTS about these possibilities but no decision has yet been made.</p>
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<p>10N</p>	<p>Councillor Chrissy Stamp asked the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty, the following:</p> <p>“The proposed relocation of Medway Family courts was established on the basis that there are no other appropriate sites in the area to house the Medway Family Court. I trust that the Portfolio Holder agrees with me that this is dubious at best and there is plenty of space in Medway. Would she agree to press the Ministry of Justice for more details on this assessment and accept a move within Medway?”</p>	<p>Thank you for your question, Councillor Chrissy Stamp.</p> <p>My colleague, Councillor Mrs Iles, has responded to Councillor Cooper in respect of her question on the proposed relocation of the family courts (note: see 10M above), and so I hope that Councillor Stamp also found that response helpful.</p> <p>On the specific point that Councillor Stamp raises about lack of appropriate sites in Medway for the Family Court, I am pleased to report that in our consultation response the Council suggested no less than five alternative locations to the HM Courts and Tribunals Services. Two were within the Council’s estate and three within our partners’ estates.</p> <p>I also understand that the Chief Legal Officer has subsequently had discussions with HM Courts and Tribunals Service about these five alternatives but no decision has yet been made.</p> <p>The Chief Legal Officer is in addition actively pursuing the option for a temporary supplementary court provision, to be based within our estate, to ease the current backlog of cases. Once the details of that arrangement are available they will be shared with Members.</p>
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<p>100</p>	<p>Councillor Johnson asked the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services, Councillor Josie Iles, the following:</p> <p>“In what ways is Medway supporting UASCs (Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children) that have been placed in Medway from other authorities?”</p>	<p>Thank you for your question, Councillor Johnson.</p> <p>We are very aware that there are a significant number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) under 18 years old and UAS Care Leavers aged over 18 years old placed in Medway.</p> <p>In total, the known number of UASC placed in Medway is 47, 4 of whom are the responsibility of Medway.</p> <p>There are currently 8 UASC under 18 in the care of Medway, 4 of whom are placed in Medway and in addition 1 placed in Kent and 3 in other local authority areas. Of the 43 UASC placed in Medway by other local authorities, the majority have been placed in Medway by Kent (34) who, as a gateway authority, is responsible for large and growing numbers of UASC, particularly over the summer period.</p> <p>In terms of Care Leavers, Medway has 12 UAS Care Leavers (over the age of 18), 5 of whom are placed in Medway, 1 placed in Kent and 6 in other local authority areas. There are a large number of UAS Care Leavers placed in Medway by other authorities, however this figure is not reportable as LAs are not required to notify Medway when they place a Care Leaver in our area.</p> <p>It is the responsibility of Kent County Council and the other Local Authorities to support the placements of UASC they place in Medway. This will include the allocation of a Social Worker and/or a Personal Advisor. Placing Local Authorities will also be responsible for funding placements and other financial costs associated with these UASC. Whilst they remain living within Medway, they may require support from Medway's health services and will also access local school and college placements.</p>
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		<p>When the young people leave care, they may also wish to access local housing resources, although they will need to meet the criteria for being housed by Medway under Housing Legislation and guidance.</p> <p>The government is currently consulting on changes to the National Transfer Scheme, which was originally introduced in July 2016. We see this consultation as an opportunity to address unresolved issues that Local Authorities have raised over many years including inadequate levels of funding, the need for a range of suitable placement options to meet the needs of those who arrive as well as availability of specialist mental health support, access to education and housing. Medway has responded to the government’s consultation on this matter.</p>
<p>10P</p>	<p>Councillor Adeoye asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, the following:</p> <p>“At the end of September, a plaque was unveiled at Chatham Station to honour Asquith Xavier, a railway worker from Medway who overturned a whites-only recruitment policy in the 1960s. Asquith overcame adversity and prejudice in the campaign for racial equality in Britain, and as a result of his actions the racist recruitment policy was scrapped.”</p>	<p>Thank you Councillor Adeoye for your question.</p> <p>I am delighted to join you in recognising Mr Xavier’s contribution to the campaign for racial equality - breaking the colour bar in 1966 to assume his hard earned and well deserved position as a British Rail Guard at Euston Station.</p> <p>I am equally delighted that his links to Medway have been celebrated appropriately with the plaque’s location in Chatham station, and I hope the plaque is both thought provoking and educational to all who encounter it.</p>

Democratic Services

16 October 2020