

Council – 22 July 2021

Schedule of written responses to Members’ questions not answered at the meeting

Item

10 Member questions

(Pages 3-14)

For further information please contact Wayne Hemingway, Head of Democratic Services on Telephone: 01634 332509 or Email: democratic.services@medway.gov.uk

Date: 9 August 2021

This page is intentionally left blank

Full Council 22 July 2021 – Schedule of written responses to Members' questions not answered at the meeting

Agenda reference	Question	Response
10G	<p>Councillor Hubbard asked the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty, the following:</p> <p>The cost of air pollution to the country is well documented, and current estimates put this at around £16 billion a year! The cost to individual lives is perhaps less well publicised, but we have seen the effects in the number of people with compromised lungs suffering in the ongoing COVID crisis.</p> <p>The Council’s 2020 Air Quality Annual Status Report from June last year states that:</p> <p>“An AQAP for Four Elms AQMA is currently being produced, however this has been delayed with permission by Defra to coincide with the release of the new Medway Local Plan. A draft plan is expected to be available for consultation late 2020.”</p> <p>This draft plan is not now expected until late 2021. The proposals in the Hoo Development Framework will lead to significant increases in the number of cars using the Four Elms Hill. This coupled with the loss of the rail link into Strood from Sharnal Street and the lack of any proper plans for sustainable transport in relation to the new developments at Hoo is inevitably going to lead to even worse air pollution issues in this part of Medway.</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Councillor Hubbard.</p> <p>We are committed to improving the air quality for our residents and future generations, and this was reinforced by the declaration of a Climate Change Emergency Motion by Full Council in April 2019, and the subsequent production of the Climate Change Action Plan.</p> <p>The production of the Air Quality Action Plan for the Four Elms Hill Area is being brought forward alongside the development of the Local Plan. However, the current Air Quality Action Plan which is in place, contains a range of measures that are aimed at improving air quality across Medway, so will have a positive impact on all areas, including the Four Elms Hill Air Quality Management Area.</p> <p>There is an Air Quality Action Plan in place for the Central, Rainham and Gillingham Air Quality Management Areas. Measures within the plan work towards improving the air quality across the whole of Medway. These measures include, amongst other things:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • raising awareness through the Air Quality Communications Strategy, • promoting active travel (walking and cycling), • increasing the uptake of electric vehicles and • continuing to implement the Medway Air Quality Planning Guidance.

	<p>Can the Portfolio Holder please let us know what the Council plans are for reducing air pollution in this and other areas of our community?</p>	<p>Progress with implementing the action plan is reported on an annual basis to Defra, and the latest progress can be found in the 2020 Annual Status Report. Feedback from Defra states that Medway has a “proactive and dedicated approach to improving air quality” and to “continue their good and thorough work”.</p>
<p>10H</p>	<p>Councillor Murray asked the Portfolio Holder for Adults' Services, Councillor Brake, the following:</p> <p>As the vaccine programme continues to demand resources and staffing, patients from many areas in Medway are struggling to obtain GP appointments in a timely way and experiencing unacceptably long waits for the phone to be answered at their local surgery. Primary care services are now under huge pressure in the aftermath of Covid and an already fragile, under resourced system is in danger of collapse.</p> <p>Will the Portfolio Holder join me in writing to the Secretary of State for Health and Care asking that he makes resourcing for primary care an urgent priority?</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Councillor Murray. General practice is indeed under considerable strain at the moment.</p> <p>I am aware that the Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HASC) received a report in June from the Kent and Medway NHS clinical commissioning group. The report acknowledged the pressures and highlighted that the total number of appointments is now higher than pre-pandemic levels.</p> <p>Increased demand for appointments, and many appointments still taking place by telephone, is making it hard for practices to answer phones and frustrating patients.</p> <p>In reference to the vaccination programme, a significant part has been delivered by general practice; although my understanding is that in many cases vaccination clinics have been run as additional services outside normal surgery times with staff doing extra hours to deliver them.</p> <p>This does not detract from the pressure general practice is under and the frustrations patients are experiencing. I know the HASC will continue to scrutinise what actions the local NHS is taking to improve the position.</p>

		<p>In terms of writing to the secretary of state for additional resources for primary care, this action falls outside of the remit of the Health and Wellbeing Board. The powers to make referrals to the Secretary of State sit with the Health and Adults Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the issue is already being reviewed by that committee.</p> <p>The Kent and Medway CCG have acknowledged the local concerns about primary care and are taking action to mitigate the issues.</p> <p>The Health and Wellbeing Board will play its part and work with HASC, the CCG, Medway and Swale Integrated Care Partnership and the emerging Kent and Medway Integrated Care System, to ensure NHS and Care services are in place to meet the needs of local residents.</p>
101	<p>Councillor Maple asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, the following:</p> <p>Plantlife, which led the No Mow May campaign, produced a Good Verge Guide with clear advice on maintaining road safety while allowing the grass to grow. It says:</p> <p>“When implemented, the practical steps outlined in this guide will help to maximise flowering plant diversity on our verges and the subsequent benefits for invertebrates and other wildlife. These guidelines recognise that roads must kept safe for all users, and that cutting safety cuts, sightlines and junctions are a priority and must be carried out to ensure safety.”</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Councillor Maple, however if you had listened correctly and not taken that comment out of context, you would have heard me say that we are not going to do it in the same form next year. I did say that it was, as you say, “poorly thought through”, and next year we will take a different approach. It’s interesting though as when I had a meeting with Plantlife a couple of weeks ago, they actually said they don’t advocate “No Mow May”, which is different to what I was led to believe. However, at the meeting, the representative did give me a booklet on how to manage grassland and verges and I set up a small meeting group to look at this issue and look at how we do this properly going forwards. So no, we are not completely scrapping it but we are going to look at how we can implement it better next year.</p>

	<p>The public reaction to the campaign has been overwhelmingly positive, as the people of Medway really do care about our collective environment and tackling the climate emergency.</p> <p>In response to my question at Business Support O & S on improving the communication around No Mow May and ensuring the work in June and July is dealt with adequately you said “The concept is deeply flawed, and it will not happen again next year as far as I’m concerned, as far as this administration is concerned. It was poorly thought through, the consequences weren’t thought through and it was a rush to a biodiversity wheeze.”</p> <p>Do you still plan to scrap No Mow May next year?</p>	
10J	<p>Councillor McDonald asked the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, the following:</p> <p>The Labour and Co-operative Group have been consulting on ideas for the new Splashes. These include extensive local community facilities, a health and wellbeing centre, and new facilities for Cozenton Park, linking the indoor with the outdoor.</p> <p>Now that plans for the redevelopment of the Splashes Leisure Centre are being drawn up can the Portfolio</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Cllr McDonald.</p> <p>Splashes has been an extremely popular centre for a number of years and the views of customers have always played an important role in developing the programme and seeking improvements.</p> <p>That ongoing feedback has allowed key priorities for customers in the development of a new centre.</p> <p>On Tuesday, Cabinet formally approved the principle of a new fun, family-friendly sports centre on the site of the existing Splashes centre in Rainham.</p> <p>This development will play an integral</p>

	<p>Holder reassure us that there will be full consultation across both parties and most especially with the local community?</p>	<p>part in Medway's child-friendly city ambitions as well as supporting community health and wellbeing. It will also support the vital climate change agenda.</p> <p>The next stage is to procure a specialist architect and design team to develop detailed plans for the new centre. Once these have been produced – as stated in the Cabinet report – an exhibition of the proposals will be held in the Rainham area to ensure residents are fully informed of the plans.</p>
10k	<p>Councillor Prenter asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, the following:</p> <p>Following the Freedom of Information request to the University for the Creative Arts, which states that Medway Council officers and at least one Councillor were made aware of the challenges faced by the Rochester campus as early as 2018, why did Medway Council not take immediate action to safeguard the long-term benefits of retaining it?</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Councillor Prenter.</p> <p>I have not been made aware of the Freedom of Information request you refer to and would be happy to respond to any details you have on that. Let me tell you of a Freedom of Information Act request I am aware of: one sent to us asking for any documents or correspondence we had received on this issue over the last 5 years... our response was that we have received none.</p>
10L	<p>Councillor Mahil asked the Portfolio Holder for Education and Schools, Councillor Potter, the following:</p> <p>The proposed closure of the Medway campus of the University for the Creative Arts will have a major impact on education and skills in Medway, particularly the loss of 280 FE students.</p> <p>What action is the Portfolio Holder taking to mitigate</p>	<p>Whilst the UCA facility, under various guises, has played a key role in supporting the arts in Medway they are far from the only organisation working in the field locally.</p> <p>In recent years the most impactful work with schools and local children has come from other organisations, such as the Theatre 31 project, delivered through a partnership between Medway Council and Royal Opera House Bridge. There is also the highly successful Medway Music Hub, Dynamics, where I am proud to be a Council appointed director. Dynamics works with schools across</p>

	<p>the loss of that provision, which is notable for its diversity, creativity and its capacity to raise aspirations?</p>	<p>Medway to support music education provision and is one of the best performing music hubs in the country. I know many Members will have been fortunate to attend the youth concerts organised by Medway Music Association in the cathedral, the theatres and St George's.</p> <p>Furthermore, the Council is a founding member of the Medway Cultural Partnership and we have recently expanded the Education Partnership. The Council will use these forums, along with other avenues, to work with partners in supporting arts and culture in schools along with FE opportunities.</p>
10M	<p>Councillor Osborne asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, the following:</p> <p>In light of the cross-party consensus behind the initial bid for City of Culture status, and the revelation that Lancashire County Council has withdrawn its bid due to a £22m underwriting commitment, can the Leader confirm the total figure Medway Council has underwritten for the Medway bid and whether this might represent an operational risk to our future financial position?</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Councillor Osborne.</p> <p>Firstly, I would like to thank all Members for their support with Medway's Bid to become UK City of Culture 2025; this will be a significant achievement for Medway and will establish Medway as a national cultural destination, bringing together communities and ensuring arts and culture are easily accessible for Medway's residents and visitors. The proposed programme for 2025 will promote Medway's current offer and underscore the national recognition Medway has been building over the last 20 years.</p>

		<p>We have successfully submitted our Expression of Interest and we await to hear of the longlisting in early September. In the meantime, work will continue with our young people and hard-to-reach communities to help shape our thinking.</p> <p>You will have seen that there may yet be a re-think on the Lancashire position, and that the figure quoted has been questioned as being overstated. In terms of Medway, any formal financial commitment can only be made by Full Council, so while we are undoubtedly and fulsomely supporting the Bid, Members will be making the decision on finances at the appropriate time.</p>
10N	<p>Councillor Cooper asked the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer, the following:</p> <p>I have noticed that there seem to be a lot more use of e-scooters recently in Medway, especially in pedestrian areas. I have had residents tell me that they have become a nuisance. Some of these riders do not wear helmets and are uninsured. They have complete disregard for pedestrians, and the number of accidents involving pedestrians has increased. Sadly, we have even seen the tragic news of fatalities as a result of collisions with motor vehicles.</p> <p>How is the Portfolio Holder ensuring that Medway residents are fully aware of the laws concerning e-scooters, what authority is there with regards to enforcement of the current laws and what provision is the Council putting in place to make sure that</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Councillor Cooper.</p> <p>My team has been working closely with Kent Police to deliver road safety messaging on the legalities around the use of e-scooters and liaising with educational settings across Medway to raise awareness. An e-scooter infographic was produced earlier this year and recently promoted on our social media pages.</p> <p>It is not currently possible to insure for privately owned e-scooters, meaning it is illegal to use them on the road or in public spaces. Rental e-scooters are permitted within recognised trial areas, however, there are no such areas in Medway at present. The nearest location is in Canterbury.</p> <p>The Police will take the appropriate action against rider behaviour, whether private or rental, and this is something we will continue to work with partners on to promote in line with road safety education.</p>

	<p>residents are safe, as well as fully aware of the laws, and their consequences?</p>	
100	<p>Councillor Paterson asked the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty, the following:</p> <p>In April 2018 Lloyds Bank closed its Rochester High Street branch. This impacted on businesses and individuals across Rochester. To then see Lloyds Bank then using the image of Rochester High Street to promote the recovery is embarrassing.</p> <p>Does the Portfolio Holder agree with me that if Lloyds truly wants to help the recovery of Rochester High Street they should install a free to use ATM in the High Street?"</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Councillor Paterson. I am aware that there are several ATM's within Rochester High Street, including one at Rochester Station and a further 2 which I know currently aren't free, but many of the shops and businesses in the High Street are able to provide cashback, which is free.</p> <p>However, Euronet Worldwide has successfully received full planning consent on 23rd June to install a free to use ATM at the Visitor Information Centre at 95 High Street. We are currently working on the lease agreement for the installation of the machine as the council does not own the freehold of 95 High Street and this should be finalised soon (the existing landlord is The French Hospital). Once the agreement is in place the ATM will be installed, it will be free to use and accessible 24/7 located at the front elevation of the Visitor Information Centre.</p>
10P	<p>Councillor Howcroft-Scott asked the Chairman of the Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Wildey, the following:</p> <p>I am increasingly supporting constituents who are in a telephone queue for nearly 2 hours trying to speak to their doctor's surgery. In many instances, residents are being cut off from the queue as it is too long.</p> <p>When questioned about this the practice management have blamed telephony errors but these have still to be rectified. While we appreciate that there</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Councillor Howcroft-Scott. The Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a Covid-19 update report in June 2021 from the Kent and Medway NHS Clinical Commissioning Group.</p> <p>The report noted the pressures on General Practice and the challenges patients are facing getting through on the phone. It highlighted that like all parts of the NHS general practice is seeing a significant increase in demand as pandemic lockdown restrictions have eased.</p> <p>General practice is open and the total numbers of appointments taking place are actually higher than before</p>

	<p>is a high volume of calls due to the pandemic the waiting time is often in excess of an hour.</p> <p>Alternatives have been suggested including using internet services such as 'idoctor' but these services are inaccessible to many of my residents, especially the elderly who we should not expect to be technologically literate in order to get a doctor's appointment. How does the Chairman of the Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee feel about this and what steps can be taken to ensure that all residents have decent GP access?"</p>	<p>the pandemic. There remain a significant number of telephone appointments, but face-to-face appointments are available and almost returning to pre-pandemic levels.</p> <p>I agree that it is concerning that demand for appointments is greater than capacity. It is right that internet based options are not accessible to everyone, but if those who can use them do, then it will help free up telephones for those who cannot.</p>
10Q	<p>Councillor Curry asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, the following:</p> <p>The Labour and Cooperative Group fully support the Council's bid for the City of Culture in 2025 and City Status bid.</p> <p>Does the Leader continue to share the concerns raised at the recent overview and scrutiny committee about Medway potentially losing out due to the government's levelling up agenda?</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Councillor Curry. In short, I do have some concerns about the levelling up agenda. I am keen for central government to understand there are pockets of deprivation all across the country, including in Medway, that should be able to benefit from this funding. However, as we are in priority group 2, I fear we won't receive funding in this round. There seems to be a political focus on the North/South divide and an image portrayed that the South is more prosperous than the North which only deepens my concern. However, with all that being said, we will still make a strong bid and we hope that we will be successful.</p>

<p>10R</p>	<p>Councillor Sands asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, the following:</p> <p>I've read with great interest the comments of your fellow ward Councillor in Kent online on 17th June with reference to his concerns about possible 650 houses planned for Gibraltar Farm area. His worries about whether there would be enough GPs to meet the demands of those House building numbers and of the impact on pre-existing health infrastructure and about our hospital bursting at the seams stating every person that moves to our area is a potential Medway Hospital patient I'm sure you agree with your ward colleague.</p> <p>As these are the same concerns of the residents of the Hoo Peninsula where the plan is for 12,000 Houses which would should it happen will completely overwhelm our local health services and overrun Medway Hospital.</p> <p>With this in mind can you ensure the people of the Peninsula they can count on both of your support when it comes to objecting to such unsustainable housing numbers on the Peninsula.</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Councillor Sands. With regards to the houses at Gibraltar Farm, we discussed this at Cabinet on the 13th of July and have decided not to sell the land to support housing.</p> <p>The difference between this project and the planned growth on the Peninsula, is that we would not have had the funding to improve the infrastructure around the Gibraltar Farm, to make the building viable for the area as it is already so urbanised. However, on the Peninsula, we have our HIF investment of £170m, so we are able to build key infrastructure in advance to support development in the area.</p> <p>There is further work on infrastructure planning as part of the new Local Plan and we are working with our partners in Health to secure new facilities for the growing communities.</p> <p>In terms of housing numbers, this is a matter for central government. The, in my opinion, unreasonable, Housing Delivery Test numbers we have placed upon us in Medway have been put there by central government and we will face a penalty if we do not build the numbers they impose with this test. Houses would have been built on the Peninsula with or without the HIF bid but this way, we do have the funding to build the infrastructure to make it a more comfortable transition, and to deliver planned growth that benefits from improved services alongside new homes. Hopefully with the additions of places like Cockham Community Parkland, we are able to maintain some of the green space which is so intrinsic to the Peninsula.</p>
------------	--	---

This page is intentionally left blank