

Council – 20 January 2022

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

Item

10 Members' questions

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This report sets out the Members' questions received for this meeting.

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Date: 3 February 2022

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**Full Council 20 January 2022 – Schedule of written responses to
Members' questions not answered at the meeting**

Agenda Reference	Question	Response
10L	<p>Councillor Murray submitted the following to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett:</p> <p>There are currently 10,207 households in Medway identified as experiencing fuel poverty. These families will now be forced to choose between eating and heating as the cost of household fuel is rising and set to possibly double by April 2022. Labour have proposed removing VAT on household fuel in order to mitigate the impact of rising costs.</p> <p>Does the Leader of the Council agree with me that Medway Council should be doing all we can to help the families we represent and will he sign a joint letter urging the government to act quickly and remove VAT for household fuel?</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Councillor Murray. It's true that we have seen a rise in the cost of household fuel in recent times, however last October we received £2.262million from the government's Household Support Fund to help support Medway's most vulnerable residents with essential household costs during the winter and so far, we have distributed more than £308,000 to residents to help with food, fuel, energy and water bills. We have also used the funding to provide free school meals during the winter break to eligible children and have donated £150,000 to food charities to help support residents. We are committed to doing everything we can to support Medway's most vulnerable residents and government has provided us with the means to deliver on that. Given that we have already been given additional support to help residents counter these costs, I think your issue has already been resolved.</p>
10M	<p>Councillor Osborne submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer:</p> <p>Despite opposition from nearly 2,000 local residents, Medway Council introduced car parking charges at the Strand Leisure Park on 9th July 2018. Can the Portfolio Holder advise how much income the Council has received since the charges were introduced, with a breakdown for each of the financial years 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2021-22?</p>	<p>Thank you for your question, Councillor Osborne.</p> <p>The breakdown is as follows:</p> <p>2018 – 2019 - £73,721.50</p> <p>2019 – 2020 - £56,162.89</p> <p>2020 – 2021 - £46,371.60</p> <p>2021 – 2022 - £67,764.56 (April – Dec)</p>

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10N	<p>Councillor Johnson submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Business Management, Councillor Hackwell:</p> <p>In view of the fuel shortages during September, I would have expected the Portfolio Holder to have ensured the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To review business continuity plans to identify workforce, key workers and how they travel to work • To review requirements or consider requiring certain key workers maintain half a tank of fuel at all times to mitigate the impact of disruption • To establish the potential for some forecourts to prioritise certain groups or to hold fuel back for designated workers or services, such as SEND transport • To facilitate access to electric bikes or the use of pool cars • To establish mutual aid agreements with other agencies to share and/or bunker fuel <p>What actions did the Portfolio Holder take to ensure that essential council services were protected?</p>	<p>Thank you for your question, Councillor Johnson.</p> <p>I would like to assure you that we have well-developed and tested Business Continuity Plans, which ensure that services are maintained and our residents supported, regardless of the type of emergency. These plans identify business disruption risks, including threats affecting key worker and travel arrangements. To help mitigate, staff and service vehicles are expected to have sufficient fuel to enable their duties to be undertaken. It is also the responsibility of partner organisations and businesses to maintain their own business continuity.</p> <p>Managers were asked to review and enact their business continuity plans as soon as we became aware of the potential disruption as a result of the fuel shortage. We monitored service delivery throughout, via daily situation awareness reports and actions were taken accordingly to relieve any localised pressures. On this occasion, critical staff could not obtain priority fuel as the National Emergency Plan for Fuel was not invoked, but teams were able to make sufficient alternative arrangements. Social workers can use electric pool cars and if necessary, this can be extended to other critical workers. There is an established Kent and Medway Mutual Aid Agreement, which can be activated for any emergency.</p>

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100	<p>Councillor Chrissy Stamp submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services – Lead Member, Councillor Mrs Josie Iles:</p> <p>According to the Cooperative Party, in Medway there are 1856 pregnant women and children entitled to Healthy Start vouchers, but the take-up rate is only 57%. That means at least £5,843.75 worth of vouchers for fresh fruit, vegetables and milk go unclaimed every week. Given the appalling levels of family poverty and child hunger in Medway, what is the Portfolio Holder doing to ensure that the take-up of Healthy Start vouchers is 100%?</p>	<p>Thank you for your question, Councillor Stamp. Giving every child a good start is a key priority for Medway Council and our Health and Wellbeing Board partners. The Healthy Start voucher is an important element of our support offer to families.</p> <p>The Government funded Healthy Start scheme provides vouchers to families on low incomes that can be exchanged for cow's milk, and fresh or frozen fruit and vegetables. The scheme also provides access to Healthy start vitamins for expectant and nursing mothers, and children over 6 months old.</p> <p>The NHS Healthy Start webpage regularly updates the uptake rates for vouchers and the most recent data covers a 4 week period of October and November 2021. In common with all other areas of the country, the uptake rate of Healthy Start Vouchers in Medway was not 100%. Data from the latest reporting period shows uptake in Medway to be 62%. This was in line with our regional partners and the rest of Kent, where uptake ranged from 57-66%. Our aim is to make sure every eligible Medway family receives their vouchers and we are committed to increasing the uptake rate.</p> <p>The Healthy Start scheme is regularly discussed by Health and children’s care professionals. It is widely promoted through our community programmes. This includes our newly formed Medway Food Partnership and Medway Infant Feeding Strategy Group. That said everyone living and working in Medway should raise the awareness of the Healthy Start Scheme. This</p>

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		will ensure everyone eligible comes forward and claims their vouchers and free vitamins.
10P	<p>Councillor Prenter submitted the following to the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe:</p> <p>Can the Portfolio Holder please let us know when the work on the redevelopment of Splashes will begin? What consultation has there been with the local community?</p>	<p>Thank you for your question, Cllr Prenter.</p> <p>I am delighted how work is progressing on the development of our new fun, family-friendly Splashes sports centre.</p> <p>Demolition of the existing centre has begun; indeed, I was there last week to see the work in person. It will be completed next month, and we are pleased to be working with architects SPACE & PLACE, who specialise in leisure swimming pools, on detailed designs for the new centre which will provide high-quality facilities for Medway's families to enjoy.</p> <p>The local community has always been integral to the success of Splashes and as the previous centre aged, they were rightfully vocal in telling us they wanted a modern centre which the whole family could enjoy. That is what we will deliver.</p> <p>Residents will have the opportunity to comment on the planning application when it is submitted, and the Council also plans to hold a public exhibition in Rainham and Twydall to give residents a chance to see the plans for the new centre.</p> <p>The new Splashes supports Medway's aspiration to become a child-friendly city, and I very much look forward to seeing the plans progress.</p>

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10Q	<p>Councillor Adeoye submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer:</p> <p>Families and communities across Medway will want to come together, safely, to celebrate the platinum jubilee of Her Majesty the Queen. Can you confirm there will be no charge by the Council for any community wanting to hold a street party in Medway for road closures etc?</p>	<p>Thank you for your question, Councillor Adeoye.</p> <p>We are all looking forward to Her Majesty's platinum jubilee over the extended Bank Holiday in June, as communities and people throughout the United Kingdom come together to celebrate. We want to help communities in Medway celebrate this occasion by providing guidance for holding street parties and we will be publishing more information on this very soon.</p>
10R	<p>Councillor Price submitted the following to the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe:</p> <p>What measures are in place to ensure that the new housing developments and infrastructure on the Hoo peninsula are carbon neutral and pollution free?</p>	<p>Thank you for your question, Councillor Price.</p> <p>Government has agreed a plan for reaching net zero which includes energy efficiency, using more renewable energy to produce electricity for heating and transport, and making use of hydrogen or heat networks to replace fossil fuels. A study has recently been commissioned into the use of hydrogen to support the heating of businesses and new homes within Medway.</p> <p>The Local Plan will include policies specific to sustainable design and construction, energy efficiency and active transport. The Government has also announced the introduction of the Future Homes Standard, which will be an energy efficiency standard for new homes and is due to come into force in 2025. This is likely to require reductions in energy use in typical new-build homes of between 20% and 30%. New homes built on the Hoo Peninsula will be required to meet these new levels of efficiency and energy use from that date.</p>

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10S	<p>Councillor McDonald submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Councillor Gulvin:</p> <p>Following the closure of Splashes as result of serious structural problems with the building, can the Portfolio Holder reassure us that the other leisure facilities under the control of the Council are safe and fit for purpose. When was the last structural survey done on Council leisure facilities?</p>	<p>Thank you for your question, Councillor McDonald.</p> <p>Condition surveys are periodically undertaken on all our buildings and these were previously undertaken for our leisure centres in 2016.</p> <p>The procurement team is currently in the process of tendering for new condition surveys. If the new condition surveys were to raise any concerns, these would of course be dealt with accordingly.</p> <p>The Corporate Property Board, which meets regularly, has oversight of all our buildings, and produces, in co-operation with Medway Norse, a planned maintenance programme for them. Building managers are also able to raise any emerging issues there.</p>
10T	<p>Councillor Hubbard submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty:</p> <p>The £1.6million that Medway Council taxpayers are having to stump up to fund the DfE and the Thinking Schools Academy to transport pupils to the former Stoke Primary School site is outrageous. The three-part nature of Manor Farm hybrid planning application delayed Frindsbury's Maritime Academy by many months. An application for just the school would have come to committee much earlier and would have probably not resulted in others referring the granted planning</p>	<p>Thank you for your question, Councillor Hubbard.</p> <p>As you are aware, there was a lot of background to this which has extended over many years, and there have been multiple applications for this site as well as a number of presentations to Members on the application.</p> <p>Those presentations to Members and the detailed committee report relating to the application set out very clearly the reasons for this "hybrid" application and the inter-relationship between the 3 elements. This interlinking and mixed nature of the application is not unusual in Medway nor around the Country.</p> <p>Notwithstanding that, prior to any inclusion of the school, the landowner and applicants had been working on a scheme for the site</p>

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	<p>permission to the Secretary of State. Do you agree that the Council accepting the nonsense hybrid Manor Farm/Barn planning application that developer had embarked on, linking the school to a housing development and the conservation of Grade 1 listed Manor Barn, was pure folly?</p>	<p>which included housing (to deliver much-needed housing in a sustainable location), linked to a re-use of a Grade 1 Listed Barn of national importance. The decision to bring forward a school on the site reflected the requirement to find a site for a secondary school in this area to serve a current need.</p> <p>Discussions were held between the DfE and the land-owner. They then chose to submit an application for this mixed development on the site and explain why the three elements were all linked.</p> <p>The Council, as the Planning Authority, cannot decline to consider a validly submitted application, nor is it legal to approve one part of an application and refuse another.</p> <p>We therefore had to consider all the elements of the application, and that is what Members did.</p>
10U	<p>Councillor Browne submitted the following to the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe:</p> <p>What new events are planned as a direct result of making the City of Culture bid?</p>	<p>Thank you for your question, Councillor Browne.</p> <p>Bidding for City of Culture, alongside the extensive engagement undertaken in the development of our new cultural strategy, genuinely brought Medway's communities together demonstrating how culture can positively impact on everyone's lives. Responding to ideas drawn from these conversations, last summer saw a series of new community-led events including Medway Pride, Festival of the Fort, The Festival of Chatham Reach and Medway Fun Palace. We will also be running a similar series of events this summer, and details will be available soon.</p>

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		<p>But making the Bid for City of Culture was not just about putting on a show, it was an opportunity to showcase Medway’s incredible cultural offer and creative community, and our confidence to play on a national stage. I think that resulted in Medway being named as one of Arts Council England’s 54 Priority Places, in us hosting Together, the outstanding installation on Chatham Waterfront, and securing £14.4m in Levelling Up Funding for our cultural offer. All great gains, brought about as a result of our Bid.</p>
10V	<p>Councillor Paterson submitted the following to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett:</p> <p>Just like his boss in Downing Street, the Leader was forced to account for his own movements during the first lockdown, a month before the infamous No10 party, when he bragged on Instagram about having shot some “fresh wood pigeon ready for the oven later”.</p> <p>After being challenged about whether he was continuing his wildfowling hobby while the rest of us were still limited to half an hour’s outdoor exercise per day, Medway Tories then released a comical clarification that the “fresh wood pigeon” was in fact, and I quote, “fresh out of the freezer”.</p> <p>A new Defra definition of “livestock” includes game birds and will allow gamekeepers to kill wild birds such as crows, jackdaws,</p>	<p>If Cllr Paterson would like to ask a question, preferably about Council business, rather than wasting time talking about my own personal preferences, I would suggest he does so for the next Council meeting, as what’s currently been submitted doesn’t constitute a question, more a statement to besmirch my character.</p>

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	<p>magpies and rooks – lest they interfere with the business of shooting game. Does the Leader welcome this new definition as, if so, I would expect his followers to look forward to future Instagram posts of “fresh magpie (from the freezer)” ready for the oven.</p>	
10X	<p>Councillor Andy Stamp submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Adults’ Services, Councillor Brake:</p> <p>There are reports in the national media that the free supply of lateral flow tests to residents may be stopping. Can you confirm that Medway will continue to supply free lateral flow tests as long as local decision makers feel it is required, not when central government tells us to stop?</p>	<p>Thank you for your question, Councillor Stamp. National government set the UK policy in relation to the overall Covid-19 pandemic response. This includes testing. The Secretary of State for Health has publicly stated the information presented in the media about changes to testing policy are not factual.</p> <p>Central government has not issued any direction to local authorities to charge people to access lateral flow tests. Medway Council was one of the first local authorities in the country and the first in the South East of England, to establish a Symptom free Community Testing Programme. We have enabled testing to be available for our population, even during the recent unprecedented demand linked to the Omicron Variant. We have provided mutual aid to essential services, including our hospital, GPs and other organisations. We will continue to provide the Medway population with access to symptom free testing, in-line with National Policy.</p>

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10Y	<p>Councillor Mahil submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Business Management, Councillor Hackwell:</p> <p>Residents have raised concerns in the last couple of weeks regarding the disgraceful act of fly tipping taking place in the Chatham Cemetery.</p> <p>What actions will the Portfolio Holder put in place to both deter future activity of this nature and take action against those individuals who have committed this highly antisocial activity?</p>	<p>Thank you for your question, Councillor Mahil.</p> <p>Our Environmental Enforcement and Street Scene Teams work diligently to discourage fly tipping in Medway, and where it does occur they proactively investigate cases to hold those responsible to account.</p> <p>The fly tipping incident that occurred on the weekend of the 8th and 9th of January in Chatham Cemetery is under active investigation by my team. The outcome of these enquiries could result in the issuing of a fixed penalty notice or a criminal prosecution.</p> <p>We have enhanced the level of security at Chatham Cemetery with an increased presence on site. Routine maintenance is currently being undertaken at Chatham Cemetery, and a quantity of waste material has been collected, which is due to be imminently collected for disposal.</p> <p>Anyone with information relating to the incident or any instance of fly tipping can contact my teams by calling 333333 or making contact online.</p>
10Z	<p>Councillor Lloyd submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services – Lead Member, Councillor Mrs Josie Iles:</p> <p>In view of the recent Cabinet decision to agree to fund future transport to the temporary site in Stoke for the delayed Maritime Academy, does the Portfolio Holder agree that this is</p>	<p>Thank you for your question, Councillor Lloyd. The delays to the opening of the Maritime Academy on its permanent site are due to delays within the wider planning process. This has meant that a temporary solution is needed to ensure that Medway’s Young People receive an appropriate education from a successful Academy Trust. The alternative to having this free school would be to increase the capacity at our other schools. These schools are already full to capacity and</p>

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	<p>unacceptable pressure from the Conservative government, showing Medway council tax payers and Medway's young people are paying the price for issues relating to the building of school places that result from government and council delay?</p>	<p>overcrowding, through further bulge classes, could potentially result in a reduction in the learning experience and outcomes of all the pupils at those schools.</p> <p>Central Government is spending around £40m on the Maritime Academy, as well as funding the first year of the temporary accommodation. Whilst the cost of transport to the school is not something we would have wanted to take on, the alternative was that the Council would need to cover the cost of the increased capacity at the other schools which was estimated at £10m.</p> <p>The Council has ensured throughout the past decade that sufficient places are available for all Medway's pupils, through a wide-ranging expansion programme and successfully supporting bids for free schools and continues to do so.</p>
10AA	<p>Councillor Cooper submitted the following to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett:</p> <p>The return of the Medway Queen after its recent restoration is undoubtedly a positive development for Medway. Will it be playing any role in the upcoming Platinum Jubilee celebrations?</p>	<p>Thank you for your question, Councillor Cooper.</p> <p>The return of the Medway Queen is indeed excellent news for Medway and is a rich element of our maritime heritage.</p> <p>We have a number of plans to celebrate the wonderful milestone of Her Majesty The Queen's Platinum Jubilee this year, and we will be announcing details in due course. We hope that the Medway Queen will play a role in those plans and now the ship has successfully returned to Medway we'll be reaching out to the Medway Queen Preservation Society to talk about their involvement.</p>