

Council – 19 October 2023

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

Agenda

10 Members' questions

(Pages 3 - 6)

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

This page is intentionally left blank

**Full Council 19 October 2023 – Schedule of written responses to
Members' questions not answered at the meeting**

Agenda Reference	Question	Response
101	<p>Councillor Tejan asked the Portfolio Holder for Economic and Social Regeneration and Inward Investment, Councillor Edwards, the following:</p> <p>“We are becoming more and more concerned about decisions made by Medway Council since Labour took charge in May 2023. It seems that they are spending on unnecessary projects like the Red Routes that nobody wants or needs and have even made the decision to extinguish the beloved Christmas lights across the Medway towns.</p> <p>This Labour administration is turning Medway into Halloween Towns for Christmas, and we do not know if they prefer a more traditional festive look or the spookier version.</p> <p>Explaining why, if they have not, has the portfolio holder considered engaging with businesses and communities across our towns to seek sponsorship for the Christmas lights and considered the reversal of this disastrous decision?”</p>	<p>Thank you for your question. The administration is currently managing the fallout from a 91% cut in Medway Council’s Revenue Support Grant since 2010. We have inherited at £17m budget gap for 2023/24, and because of this, a number of difficult decisions are having to be taken. This has meant that the Council cannot afford to fund this year’s Medway Christmas lights and light-up events. However, we have been successful in securing corporate sponsorship to cover the costs associated with having the regular Christmas lights up in all five towns across Medway. I give my thanks to Norse Group, Volker Highways and Marston Holdings for their support.</p> <p>There are many other activities across Medway to enjoy in the run up to Christmas this year. I am pleased local ward councillors are still able to fund a Christmas tree in each town, and that the character meet and greets will still be taking place in Gillingham, Strood and Rainham libraries for Medway’s young people, as well as a Christmas parade in Chatham on Saturday, 18 November. There will also be three weekends of Rochester’s Christmas Market, a new magical children’s Christmas village in Rochester Castle Grounds, the Dickensian Christmas Festival, Victorian traditions at Eastgate House, naughty elves on shelves at The Guildhall Museum and the annual pantomime at The Central Theatre in Chatham.</p> <p>In addition, our Town Centre Forums that applied for funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund will receive £12,500 each to use how</p>

Agenda Reference	Question	Response
		<p>they wish, which may include events at Christmas. This may mean there are different levels of Christmas festivities across the towns, but the Council is enabling the Forums to spend the funds based on their own priorities – empowering them and the businesses and residents they represent. We will work with any businesses or groups to support things they may want to do to celebrate Christmas this year where there are not significant costs to the Council.</p> <p>I would also like to remind Cllr Tejan that he voted twice in favour of introducing red routes in Medway prior to May.</p>
10J	<p>Councillor Barrett asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, the following:</p> <p>“At the Council meeting of the 20th July 2023 in the Leader’s Report, the Leader of the Council made the following very bold statement:</p> <p>“We have started to tackle the excessive use of consultants and locums in many Council Departments...”</p> <p>Can he tell the Council exactly how many consultants and locums have been dismissed or transferred to Council employment contracts, setting out the annualised net saving to the Council taxpayer?”</p>	<p>Thank you for your question. The Council, like many other local authorities, continues to have high locum and consultant engagement, due to many wide economic factors, including national and regional skills shortages of key professional staff for statutory services.</p> <p>However, we have started work to address this and have seen some successes with staff transferring from temporary to permanent effecting a reduction in costs. Recently we have seen (4) temp to perm conversions of senior staff in Children’s Services making a (per annum equivalent) saving of £221,246.</p> <p>We are also pursuing the conversion of Project Team Social Workers which are on a higher pay rate than those operating under the Memorandum of Cooperation rates. (3) SW’s have recently been converted to MOC roles generating</p>

Agenda Reference	Question	Response
		<p>a (per annum equivalent) saving of £46,176.</p> <p>We are also continuing with many positive actions to further reduce our locum and consultant use, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing our own professionals via apprenticeship programmes i.e. Social Worker, Occupational Therapist and Solicitor. • Supporting Step-Up to Social Work programme students annually and increasing the intake of newly qualified social workers. • Regular Temp to perm Events – capitalising on our ‘Good’ Ofsted rating in Children’s Services. • Complete review of our current Pay and reward programme. • Introduction of a new Range 8 for highly skilled roles. • Consideration for overseas recruitment <p>Work will continue to be targeted around attracting a permanent workforce, and project work continues to be reviewed for value for money.</p>