

Council – 18 July 2024

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

10 Members' questions

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Full Council 18 July 2024 – Schedule of written responses to Members’ questions not answered at the meeting

Note: Questions A to G were answered during the meeting. These questions and responses are set out in the minutes of the meeting.

Question H – Councillor Gilbourne asked the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Highways and Enforcement, Councilor Paterson, the following:

“The Portfolio Holder may be aware of the Lazybones Boot Fair that operates on the edge of Hempstead Village 14 weeks a year. Last year, the operation of the boot fair caused significant disruption to traffic at the junction of Hempstead Road, Lidsing Road and Capstone Road with some residents rightly complaining that they could not get off their drives, whilst through traffic was severely delayed.

Cllr Lawrence and I, as Members for Hempstead & Wigmore, made representation to officers requesting some action to manage the traffic, to ensure that those attending the boot fair could enjoy the day and residents were caused as little disruption as possible.

Can the Portfolio Holder please attend a future boot fair with me to better understand the traffic issues faced by residents in Hempstead?”

Response:

Thank you for your question, Councillor Gilbourne. I will ask Officers to consider your comments and arrange a meeting with you so we can fully understand and discuss the traffic issues residents are experiencing.

Question I – Councillor Fearn asked the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Highways and Enforcement, Councillor Paterson, the following:

“The Portfolio Holder will be aware that enforcement action taken by the Council has fallen to very low levels. Under this Labour and Co-operative administration comparing 2021/2022 to 2023/2024 prosecutions and sanctions are down 45%, district enforcement is down 26%.

Can the Portfolio Holder explain why enforcement action has decreased since he became the Portfolio Holder when the complaints about littering/fly tipping etc remain a large part of Councillors’ inboxes, reaffirming that enforcement is an essential tool for dealing with maintaining the quality of life in Medway.”

Response:

Thank you for your question. The issue of enforcement actions are specific to each scenario presented to the local authority and the evidence available to officers. Year on year statistics are therefore not meaningfully comparable.

It is important to recognise the obligation placed on the Authority for proportional and appropriate enforcement. This involves challenging local issues through advice, education and engagement. These are all part of the suite of available enforcement tools and the role of the teams are not solely based on the metric of enforcement actions.

The Anti-social, Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, Part 4 encourages the progressive use of enforcement using Community Protection Warnings (CPWs), Community Protections (CPNs) and ultimately Fixed Penalty Notices. This mechanism enables the authority to take our local community on a journey to legal compliance and ensures that issues are discharged at the most practical level possible.

In terms of enforcement statistics, I am able to advise you that the Q1 illustrates an increase in overall enforcement activities:

436 CPWs issued

19 CPNs (417 CPW's complied with)

48 s34(5) Trade Waste notices issued

36 FPN's issued by EET in Q1 (54 cumulative total last year).

630 Littering FPNS served in Q1

Question J – Councillor Anang asked the Portfolio Holder for Education, Councillor Coombs, the following:

“Education is the closest thing to a silver bullet in ensuring that all of Medway’s children and young people can secure well paid and secure jobs, allowing them to play a productive role in the economy. The Portfolio Holder will be aware of the wide differences in Progress 8 scores across Medway’s secondary schools.

Can the Portfolio Holder please inform the Council if she has challenged poor performing schools and in doing so what commitment has she been able to secure for future improvements?”

Response:

Thank you for your question. I attend regular liaison meetings between officers and the Regional Director’s office that focus on the performance of all schools, including highlighting areas of underperformance.

Informed by educational attainment outcomes for children and young people across all phases of education, the Medway Education Partnership Group (MEPG) has identified and agreed several key priority areas, including the Quality of Education. This includes a focus on the progress that pupils make from the end of their primary school to the end of key stage 4 when GCSE examinations are taken – the Progress 8 measure.

Representatives from both primary and secondary headteacher associations are invited to present agreed priorities and report progress against current planning to improve educational achievement and consequently, employment opportunities. I am a member of the Medway Education Partnership Group.

At points throughout the academic year, comprehensive disaggregated performance data is shared with schools, headteacher associations, the MEPG and CEO network to support sharing of good practice, promote understanding of potential underlying issues and to encourage school-to-school support.

My visits to schools across Medway provide a vital insight into the excellent work that teachers, support staff and education leaders carry out, reflecting an unwavering commitment to the children and families they serve.

Question K – Councillor Cook asked the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Highways and Enforcement, Councillor Paterson, the following:

“I was excited to see measures in the Labour Manifesto which would help tackle antisocial behaviour issues like that experienced by people in my ward. How will the Portfolio Holder work with Medway’s Labour MPs and the new government to tackle this issue?”

Response:

Work to crack down on anti-social behaviour has already begun locally here in Medway, and I am confident with a Government which will now be in lockstep with us we will have more tools to tackle this issue.

Our party’s manifesto includes several key initiatives designed to tackle antisocial behaviour effectively. Here is how we plan to collaborate with Medway's Labour MPs and the new government:

1. **Increased Neighbourhood Policing:** Labour will significantly boost the presence of police in our communities by introducing a Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee. This will involve recruiting thousands of new officers, police community support officers, and special constables. Medway will benefit from these additional resources, ensuring a visible and reassuring police presence on our streets.
2. **Tough Penalties for Offenders:** New tough penalties for antisocial behaviour, including Respect Orders, will be introduced to target persistent offenders. This will help tackle issues like public drinking and drug use, making our public spaces safer and more pleasant for everyone.
3. **Youth Engagement and Prevention:** Labour's new Young Futures programme will establish a network of youth hubs across the country, including in Medway. These hubs will provide mental health support, career advice, and activities to keep young people engaged and prevent them from falling into antisocial behaviour.
4. **Community Collaboration:** We will work closely with local communities to identify hotspots of antisocial behaviour and develop targeted interventions. This approach ensures that our strategies are responsive to the specific needs and challenges of different areas within Medway.

By implementing these measures and working closely with Medway's Labour MPs, the local council, and community organisations, we aim to create a safer and more secure environment for all residents.

Question L – Councillor Field asked the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration, Councillor Curry, the following:

“Does the Portfolio Holder believe that there is a great advantage for local authorities like Medway to use the powers that are proposed by the incoming Labour Government, which is supported by all 3 Medway MPs, to take back control over bus services rather than leave the planning, provision and operation of bus services to the private sector without local accountability?”

Response:

Thank you for your question. Yes, there is a significant advantage for local authorities like Medway to use the powers proposed by the incoming Labour Government to take back control over bus services.

The Labour Party's 2024 manifesto emphasizes the need to grant local authorities the ability to franchise bus services and lift the ban on municipal ownership. This approach offers several key benefits:

1. **Improved Services:** By allowing local authorities to plan and manage bus services, we can ensure that routes, schedules, and fares are better tailored to meet the needs of our communities. Labour's plan includes creating up to 1,300 new routes and facilitating 250 million additional passenger journeys per year ([The Independent](#)) ([Route One](#)).
2. **Economic Efficiency:** Local franchising is expected to deliver better value for money for taxpayers. Labour's proposal includes safeguards for vital routes and provides local leaders with more control over bus funding, aiming to achieve cost efficiency without additional central government spending ([The Independent](#)) ([Route One](#)).
3. **Community Focus:** Public ownership and local control will ensure that bus services are more responsive to the needs of residents, improving accessibility and reducing social isolation. This community-focused approach contrasts with the current system, where private operators, without local accountability, dictate services ([The Independent](#)) ([Greater Birmingham Chamber](#)).

By leveraging these proposed powers, Medway can create a more reliable, affordable, and efficient bus network that directly benefits our residents. This initiative is supported by all three Medway MPs and aligns with Labour's commitment to revitalizing public transport across the country.

Question M – Councillor Mandaracas asked the Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services, Councillor Price, the following:

“Given we now have a Labour government and 3 Labour MPs across Medway, how would you work with those MPs and government to ensure ‘children matter in Medway’?”

Response:

To ensure that "children matter in Medway," the Portfolio Holder plans to collaborate closely with Medway's Labour MPs and the new Labour government, to deliver the policies outlined in Labour's 2024 manifesto.

The Labour government is committed to transforming childcare and early education, ensuring every child has the best start in life. This includes creating over 3,000 new nursery classes and converting spare school classrooms into high-quality spaces for nurseries, funded by ending tax breaks for private schools.

Furthermore, Labour's plan to provide free breakfast clubs in every primary school will ensure that children start their day with a nutritious meal, driving up attendance and improving educational outcomes.

Additionally, Labour's commitment to mental health includes introducing specialist mental health support in schools and boosting preventative services through Young Futures hubs in every community.

By working with our Labour MPs and the government, I will advocate for these initiatives to be implemented in Medway, ensuring children have access to quality education, mental health support, and essential services. This collaborative effort aims to make Medway a place where every child can thrive and succeed.

Question N – Councillor Spalding asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, the following:

“In 2021 the ruling Conservative Cabinet and its leadership supported bringing a draft local plan to full Council.

Member after member gushed enthusiasm for this long awaited document.

A document which the Conservative group should be reminded included provisions leading to the closure of Chatham Docks and the loss of hundreds of jobs.

A document which had reports missing and was littered with errors such as paragraph 1.1.10 which stated Medway’s population had grown to two hundred and eighty thousand in 2020 and would reach two hundred and eighty eight million in 2037.

Unsurprisingly said proposed plan was pulled at the last minute.

Can the Leader of the Council assure us that when the current local plan proposals are brought to Council it will not contain any of the above?”

Response:

Thank you for your question Cllr Spalding.

This administration is absolutely committed to delivering a much needed Local Plan and in February this year we agreed a new LDS which set out the timeframe and steps involved in getting a Local Plan to submission stage by June 2025 and, adoption by 2026. This is vital for the future of Medway in order to plan properly to meet our growth needs and deliver on the infrastructure to support that growth. We simply cannot continue as we have done, to have planning by application and appeal.

In that respect on 9 July, Cabinet agreed the next stage of the Local Plan process. A new regulation 18b consultation, which sets out the options for growth and seeks the views of Medway's residents and businesses on those options. This is a consultation and the responses to this, along with the final parts of the evidence base will inform the draft Local Plan which will come forward early in 2025.

You will have seen the consultation document, which is a significant piece of work, along with the evidence base that has been completed to support it, which runs into 1000's of pages and demonstrates the hard work undertaken by officers, consultants and members.

The consultation period started on 15 July and will run until 8 September. There will be briefings for all members, should they want them, and along with public exhibitions and stakeholder events, there will be many ways in which all residents can engage in the consultation and make their comments known.

Question O – Councillor Pearce asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, the following:

“The One Medway Council Plan 2040 explains our local population is expected to grow by 3.9% between 2021 and 2040. This figure suggests we only need to build around 8,500 new houses to meet this growth.

Does the Leader of the Council agree with the new Government's centrally imposed housing target of around 30,000 new houses by 2041?”

Response:

Thank you, Cllr Pearce, for your question.

There is already a housing crisis in Medway, before we factor in any growth. I want people who grow up in Medway to be able to stay in Medway, I want people who are currently stuck in their old bedroom to be able to move out of their parent's home and I want to be able to welcome those who want to come to our towns to make it their home.

Medway's housing building target is set using a standard methodology. This was set out under the last Government. Whilst they made noise regarding planning authorities right to challenge this methodology to receive exemptions from it. To my knowledge, this was not granted to a single planning authority.

There is no target for 30,000 houses. As all members have been well briefed on, the housing target for Medway which is at the heart of our local plan is 28,000. Some development towards this figure has already begun. The new Labour Government's commitment to housing building hasn't changed our targets locally, as the Labour administration in Medway was already committed to delivering it.

Question P – Councillor Jones asked the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Highways and Enforcement, Councillor Paterson the following:

“Good to see the turnout for Chatham Carnival on 6 July, both enjoyable to those attending and providing a focus for the spatial improvements being made to our City Centre.

Whilst visiting Chatham High Street, businesses have expressed concerns to me about increased parking charges and what effect this might be having, on trade.

Please can the Portfolio Holder set out the usage levels for Chatham Centre Council car parks, March, April, May 2024 against comparable months in 2023?”

Response:

Thank you for your question, Councillor Jones.

Identifying the number of payment transactions made gives us a broad understanding of how many customers are using our car parks. Between March and May of this year, there were 1,841 more transactions in our car parks across Chatham compared to the same period in 2023. This data suggests that our car parks remain popular with those visiting Chatham for work, shopping, and leisure activities.

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