

Council – 24 April 2025

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

10 Members' questions

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Date: 12 June 2025

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Full Council 24 April 2025 – 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 Wildey asked the Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor Murray, the following:

“Medway NHS Foundation Trust has recently appointed a new Interim Chief Executive, following the departure of Jayne Black. Can the Deputy Leader please update the Council on engagement she has had with the new Interim Chief Executive, particularly around the outcomes of the Care Quality Commission (CQC) report?”

Response:

Thank you for the question, Cllr Wildey, to date I have had no direct contact with the new CEO at Medway Maritime Trust Jonathan Wade but do have a meeting planned.

However, as you may know Mr Wade's CEO role is shared with his existing role at Darent Valley hospital and will work with Medway Maritime 2 and a half days a week. When the Chair of our hospital announced the new appointment, I raised immediate concerns. Accepting that shared senior management roles can work I was concerned that Medway Maritime did not have a designated Deputy CEO and that the Trust was in a vulnerable position having just had to put an improvement plan in place following poor CQC report on the emergency department.

At the time I spoke to the Chair the Trust we were optimistic that the new arrangements and an associated service review would yield better performance. When I meet Mr Wade I will be asking him to provide evidence of how he intends to secure those improvements whilst continuing to support the hospital with the help of better Labour Government funding restoring those years of damaging Tory Austerity.

Question I – Councillor Lawrence asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, the following:

“Does the Leader of the Council agree with me that the Prime Minister should apologise for breaking his promise not to increase Council Tax?”

Response:

Thank you for your question - as Councillor Lawrence well knows, that commitment was made for a previous year. Since then, I am aware he has written an article criticising the referendum cap for councillor tax, so presumably he agrees with the fact that the Prime Minister didn't freeze it this year.

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

“This administration has risen to praise the breakfast club for all at primary schools, with disturbing news that some of the piloting schools have dropped out due to funding not covering the cost. With other schools in Medway looking at what is funded (the food element, but just for one item and a drink), there has been no consideration of the required facilities to implement the clubs for the government target of 75% to be achieved, of the required staffing to deliver (meeting required ratios) and also the lost revenue to schools that currently have a chargeable service (providing food choices that does not limit what they can have).

With several schools maintained by the Council, what is the financial impact on delivering it, presuming that an area within Education and/or Children’s Services will be cut to fund it?”

Response:

Thank you for your question.

It has been evidenced that providing breakfast clubs can help reduce inequality, improve school attendance, punctuality, and make a contribution towards academic performance. Added to this, parents save money and the free additional half hour before the start of the school day helps working parents. These are all things which we support and the Labour government’s roll out of universal free breakfast clubs for all primary children is hugely welcome.

Large numbers of schools applied to join the Early Adopters scheme, and I’m delighted that St Helens Primary was one of the 750 successful schools, allowing them to build on their established and popular breakfast club.

It’s important to remember this is a pilot programme and the Early Adopters scheme only started on 22nd April. The pilot encourages schools to work together with the support of local authority officers and a national network to share best practice and overcome any difficulties in rolling out the scheme. Any challenges will be picked up through the early stages of the pilot and these issues will be worked through ahead of a full national rollout.

The pilot is fully funded and includes a one off lump sum payment for set up costs and a recurring lump sum towards staffing and administration costs. This is on top of the per pupil funding.

To be clear, the LA will not be funding or subsidising this wrap around care and in fact Medway Council has received funding from the government for a wraparound coordinator. It’s important to note that most primary schools in Medway are already doing a wonderful job in providing Wrap Around Care through breakfast and after school clubs at no additional cost to the Council. These new funded breakfast clubs will be provided at no additional cost to parents either and we fully support this boost to children and families.

Question K – Councillor Gulvin asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, the following:

“Can the Leader of the Council tell the people of Medway if the £40M of borrowing he and his administration have undertaken to balance the first two budgets is going to be reimbursed through increases in government funding or through increases in Council Tax?”

Response:

Thank you for your question - I would refer Councillor Gulvin to the Council's Medium Term Financial Outlook.

Question L – Councillor Etheridge asked the Portfolio Holder for Business Management, Councillor Van Dyke, the following:

“Procurement Policy Note 009, ‘Tackling modern slavery in Government supply chains’, provides guidance, which applies to all central government departments and their executive agencies. Modern slavery is often a hidden crime involving one person denying another person their freedom. It includes slavery, servitude, forced and compulsory labour and human trafficking. To tackle these crimes, the Modern Slavery Act 2015 (the Modern Slavery Act) was introduced.

Therefore, will the Portfolio Holder guarantee, that the Government's £200 million purchase of solar panels from the Chinese Solar Power industry using forced labour - which is rife in the solar supply chain - will not be used on any Medway Council owned building, by including this within your annual report at the appropriate scrutiny committees and using Medway's influence to help ensure that no other neighbouring authorities also use these solar panels?”

Response:

Clearly the Labour administration, and we would hope that the whole Council, will be opposed to any form of modern slavery, including generally or specifically, in respect of all elements of our procurement processes, arising from such practices for goods and services sought and/or provided to or for Medway Council.

That will include the purchase of solar panels from the Chinese solar power industry.

This is reinforced by the announcement from Ed Miliband that Britain's state-owned energy company will not use solar panels linked to Chinese slave labour. He is set to introduce amended legislation that will require GB energy to ensure that slavery and human trafficking is not taking place within its supply chain, in spite of the importance of meeting climate change ambitions.

We know that more than 11 million Uyghur people are used as forced labour and our position is that no industry should rely on these practices and we will be diligent in our procurement processes in assuring that this will not happen.

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

“China released 11.9 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions in 2023, making it by far the world's largest polluter that year. While most countries experienced dramatic emission reductions in 2020 due to COVID-19, China was one of only a handful of countries where emissions increased. They are still building coal, oil and gas power plants at an expanding rate.

Shipping goods from China to the UK is highly energy-intensive, as a single trip by a container vessel here can emit up to 900 metric tons of CO2.

Meanwhile, Britain, which puts out just one per cent of emissions, is using China to build our clean energy so we can pretend to be clean.

As Medway's Green Champion, will you guarantee that by using your influence in Kent and neighbouring authorities, that our green initiatives and associated procurement is initially UK based?”

Response:

Thank you for your question. Both China and the USA are the world's largest carbon emitters have shown a very varied history in their efforts to reduce their carbon footprints.

Regarding sea freight, when large quantities need to be imported then the most environmentally friendly solution of transport is sea freight. Air freight is much more damaging for the planet.

When Medway Council procures services or goods, officers are dealing with tier one suppliers who for at least the past 12 years have not been based in China. Even so and as with any free market, our tier 1 supplier's supply chains and sub-contractors have discretion as to where to source their products.

Our current procurement policy is reviewed on an annual basis and key factors are the social and environmental implications of what we purchase and where it comes from.

Our neighbouring authorities have similar policies, and I am sure do the best they can to source goods and services in a sustainable and ethical way.

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

“As the Councillor for Rainham North ward and a parent, I have been contacted by several concerned parents regarding road safety in and around Rainham Mark Grammar School. This follows a recent incident where a student was hit by a car near the school. Parents have indicated that this is not the first occurrence, and the school has stated that they have previously contacted the Council regarding the matter but have seen no action taken.

Given the severity of the issue and the continued risks to students, it is probable that the Council may have received communications from Rainham Mark Grammar School regarding this. Could the Portfolio Holder please confirm what steps, if any, are being considered or planned to address these concerns, such as the provision of a zebra crossing or other traffic calming measures?"

Response:

Thank you for your question. I can confirm that our Road Safety Officers have maintained ongoing dialogue with Rainham Mark Grammar School in line with the Council's road safety education programme and have recently conducted transport assessments on Pump Lane to coincide with the beginning and end of the main school day.

These concluded that the provision of a School Crossing Patrol facility is warranted.

A suitable site location on Pump Lane has subsequently been identified and an advert for the School Crossing Patrol vacancy on Pump Lane has recently closed.

Officers are currently in the process of shortlisting and inviting candidates for interview, and hope to successfully appoint a patrol over the coming weeks. The school warning signage will also be upgraded as part of this process.

It is of no comfort to me when action is taken after an accident happens, however given the need to prioritise scarce resources that is the sad reality.

That is not the case when it comes to School Streets schemes, where the Safer Healthier Streets funding allows proactive intervention.

It is worth noting here what criticism of School Streets from some of your front bench, and their demands for accident data to justify a road's inclusion actually means in practice.

It is the argument that I should wait for another child to be involved in a collision before I act, even when I have the funds to do so.

That is not my approach at all.

That's why it should be of reassurance to you, and to parents and pupils at Rainham Mark and across Medway, that decisions on matters of road safety are in my hands and not my opposite number's.

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

"In addition to School Streets, what is the Council doing to keep children safe from traffic outside their schools?"

Response:

While School Streets represent a fantastic opportunity to improve road safety, encourage active travel and improve air quality outside many schools in Medway, I am conscious that they will not work everywhere.

However, I am pleased to report that as well as using ANPR for enforcing box junctions, red routes and school streets to challenge selfish driver behaviour, we have also begun using cameras to enforce Keep Clear zig zag markings at a number of schools which do not have School Streets in place.

These markings have been part of the Highway Code for decades but are flouted by a minority of drivers every day putting children and those walking with them in unnecessary danger outside school.

Unlike the new moving traffic offences where a six-month grace period means first-time offenders get a warning instead of a PCN, there is no such grace period for School Keep Clear contraventions, on the basis that these are not new rules. Anyone flouting these rules does so in full knowledge of what they mean and with a wilful disregard for the safety of others.

The Council also oversees the School Crossing Patrol Service, with over 20 patrol officers helping pedestrians safely cross the road during school term times in the mornings and afternoons.

In addition, the Council's Sustainable Transport Team works closely with schools in Medway to make our roads safer and encourage better road user behaviour. They offer a free road safety education programme and promote active travel to and from school, like walking and cycling, through effective School Travel Planning and other initiatives.

The team provides a variety of interactive sessions tailored to different age groups, from pre-schools and nurseries all the way up to secondary schools and colleges. These sessions aim to enhance students' road safety knowledge and behaviour at every stage of their development.

Our officers visit schools throughout the year to teach our children vital road safety skills, raise awareness, and equip them with the knowledge to be safe and responsible road users. Last year alone, they reached 16,000 children and young people across Medway. The team have also developed a new School Streets road safety lesson that will be introduced to our schools soon. They also promote campaigns like Road Safety Week each year and work collaboratively with other stakeholders, including the Kent and Medway Safer Roads Partnership, to keep our roads safe.