

COUNCIL

24 APRIL 2014

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Report from: Neil Davies, Chief Executive

Author: Wayne Hemingway, Democratic Services Officer

Summary

To set out the public questions received for this meeting.

1. Background

1.1 Section 8.3 of the Council Rules, as laid out in the Council's Constitution, sets out the rules for the receipt of public questions as follows:

- At any one meeting no person may submit more than two questions and no more than two questions may be asked on behalf of one organisation. Members of the public who have not submitted questions before will be given priority over those who have, and second questions will only be dealt with when all first questions have been dealt with. Any questions that have not been dealt with within the time limits will receive a written reply after the meeting.

1.2 The questions received for this meeting are set out in below in the order they were received, allowing for the rules above.

2. Public questions

A Gerardo Esposito of Chatham will ask the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Deputy Leader, Councillor Jarrett, the following question:

You are on record as stating that the financial return on ratepayers £4 million investment into the airfield paved runway and infrastructure will be better than depositing the money in a Building Society.

The Rochester Airport Limited bid submission business model reveals you are mistaken. The £4M taxpayers' return on investment (ROI) in the paved runway and airport facilities upgrade is pitiful.

The disastrous ROI figures legitimise the WS Atkins report 2001 assessment that there is no financial case for investing in a paved runway and proposed a grass option B nearly identical to the Airport Masterplan.

- You say the airport accident record is good.
- You say Medway Council is not going to commercialise the airport.
- You say the paved runway and concentrated flights will result in 'less noise than at the moment' but that is untrue.

Please tell us why the taxpayer is paying millions of pounds for a small number of budget fliers to have a paved runway when they cannot afford it and they have been safely using grass since 1933?

B Jennifer Sanders of Rochester will ask the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Deputy Leader, Councillor Jarrett, the following question:

Please tell us how Medway Council arrived at a £4M ratepayer contribution towards the Rochester Airport paved runway and facility upgrade?

C John Castle of Chatham will ask the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer, the following question:

Can the Portfolio Holder tell me, if plans for the replacement of the current public car park in Station Road, Rainham go ahead, who will be responsible for construction costs?

If this falls on the local taxpayer, will the revenue eventually recoup these costs, as well as running and maintenance costs?"

D Nick Alderson-Rice of Chatham will ask the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Customer Contact, Councillor Hicks, the following question:

Do you believe that the Transforming Rehabilitation agenda, which will have an adverse impact on local accountability and insight here in Medway, is in the best interests of residents of Medway?

E Sue Berry of Strood will ask the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, the following question:

We believe that 133 High Street is not a suitable site to combine the library with other council services. The current building has a mezzanine level in the reference section and we understand that the original plans for Strood Library contained a mezzanine level across the whole library, utilising the roof space. Indeed, the foundations were dug deep enough to accommodate and support this.

How far have the Council investigated this option for a community hub? It would be a cheaper option and the library would be left intact.

F Kim West of Strood will ask the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, the following question:

The Council claim that they have a consistent policy of converting libraries into community hubs. However, there are no plans to site Rainham library and contact point together.

How can the Council justify this while moving and downgrading Strood library (a purpose built, well used, much loved, library) while maintaining a separate Library in Rainham? There is no consistency here.

G Vivienne Parker of Chatham will ask the Chairman of the Employment Matters Committee, Councillor Wicks, the following question:

Unison are alleging that Neil Davies, the Chief Executive, has seen his pay and benefits package rise by 11% to £186,587 at a time when other Council staff have had a pay freeze. Is this true?

H Harrinder Singh of Chatham will ask the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, the following question:

Since the Council last met, the already strong public opposition to the relocation of Strood Library has only grown. Will the Council now reconsider its position?

I Stuart Taylor of Rochester will ask the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Development and Economic Growth, Councillor Chitty, the following question:

Medway Council know that Rochester Airport limited bid submission shows projected air movements of 32,000 rising to about 40,000 per annum.

Medway Council stated in their Public Consultation publicity material and invitations that they were going to recommend a cap of 50,000 air movements.

In response to public feedback Medway Council then announced a reduction to 40,000 air movements per annum.

Listening to public opinion, Medway Council announced a further reduction to a cap of 38,000 air movements per annum.

Analysis has revealed that a cap of 38,000 air movements on a single paved runway is abnormally high for any runway at Rochester Airport, for which the highest recorded number of air movements for 02-20 runway was 32,643 in 2003.

In accordance with Council supplied - but unverified figures - in 2012, residents only experienced 13,122 air movements on the same runway.

A cynical observer might suspect Medway Council inflated the initial air movements figure up to 50,000 in order to manipulate public opinion and manufacture an acceptable outcome for Rochester Airport limited.

Please tell us why you are supporting an unprecedentedly high number of air movements which is almost 300% above the current levels if you have no intention to commercialise Rochester airport.

Further our cynical observer might also suspect that you are perhaps trying to mislead the public, or do you think we are all turkeys like Councillor Jarrett appears to?

J Rita Mew of Rochester will ask the Portfolio Holder for Educational Improvement, Councillor Tolhurst, the following question:

I am sure you know that there are a total of 17 Primary, Junior and Secondary schools within a 1-mile radius of Rochester airfield and that many of the schools hold educational classes outside during good weather. As the Portfolio Holder for Educational Improvement I am sure you are well aware of the Government's commitment to reduce the impact of aviation noise on the learning environment. I wonder therefore why you supported a plan (at Council on 23 January), which recommends an unprecedented high volume of air movements for a single runway at Rochester Airport.

Replies to date of a questionnaire I sent to the 17 schools reveals that you did not consult with the Heads or Principals about the Rochester Airport plans.

Please tell me why we the public should not reasonably expect your resignation as Education Portfolio Holder as a result of my findings which appear to reveal a neglect of duty in the care of our children's educational environment and failure to ensure compliance with the Statement of Community Involvement.

K James Brewood of Chatham will ask the the Portfolio Holder Strategic Development and Economic Growth, Councillor Chitty, the following question:

The Rochester Airport Masterplan report to Council 23rd January 2014 owned by Robin Cooper Director, Regeneration, Community & Culture, authored by Catherine Smith, Development Policy & Engagement Manager, showed a table entitled,

'Rochester Airport – annual flight movements reported to the CAA since 2000.'

My FOIA request to validate the legitimacy of the table title and figures reveals that Medway Council officers do not have CAA confirmation or

endorsement to support the presented table.

Please tell us what measures Council Members use to verify the accuracy of statements and figures used in determining air movement levels for Rochester Airport.

Additionally, what procedures are in place to reprimand any individual found to be misleading Council Members or the public using unverified information in the public domain which is liable to bias or influence opinion when determining future guidelines or policies. If any allegations are proven to be correct, are these determinations reconsidered?

L Keith Baldock of Rochester will ask the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Deputy Leader, Councillor Jarrett, the following question:

The Council publicity information for the Rochester Airport states:

"The Council cannot afford to pay for these improvements without private sector funding."

Documents recently released under a Freedom of Information Act request reveals Medway Council nor Rochester Airport Limited has major private sector funding for the airport project yet the Council continue with their plans. The airport publicity statement is therefore untrue.

Given that you feature in the publicity leaflet in which the statement appears, please explain why the public should not consider you untrustworthy and dishonest?

M Michael Fowler of Rochester will ask Chairman of the Planning Committee, Councillor Mrs Diane Chambers, the following question:

Robin Cooper Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture submitted a report authored by Catherine Smith, Development Policy and Engagement Manager to the Planning Committee on 19 February on the Rochester Airport Masterplan which stated:

"The consultation work was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)."

The report contains factually misleading statements such as above and others which attempt to lead the Planning Committee to believe the Rochester Airport masterplan consultation is fully compliant to the Medway Council SCI.

The report also appears to confer planning benefit to a large contentious project in advance of it being adopted in the new Local Development Plan to avoid external scrutiny by the Government Planning Inspectorate. As chairperson of the Planning Committee please confirm you have or intend to recommend rejection of the report and if not tell us why?

N William McLennan of Rochester will ask the Chairman of the Councillor Conduct Committee, Councillor Hicks, the following question:

As the Chairman of the Councillor Conduct Committee, I would like you to provide your personal view on verbal bullying of the public by Councillors.

O Susan McLennan of Rochester will ask the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Deputy Leader, Councillor Jarrett, the following question:

The District Auditor Mr R Grant has offered to undertake a financial review of the ratepayers £4M investment into the airport facility.

Given that you appear to have no professional financial accounting accreditation, and seemingly tried to mislead the public on the airport investment return, will you please give your approval for the District Auditor to be invited to review the airport paved runway investment and RAL business model to demonstrate your honesty and transparency in this matter. Yes or No!

P Gareth Batts of Strood will ask the Portfolio Holder Strategic Development and Economic Growth, Councillor Chitty, the following question:

Councillor Chitty, you are quoted in the April Medway Matters magazine talking about how good the new "Community Hub" will be for Strood. This is the exact same quote as published in the October edition of Medway Matters. Haven't you got anything new to say?

Within the last 6 months of your first quote petitions have been handed in, there has been a march from Strood Library to Rochester Community Hub, public have asked a number of questions at the last Full Council as well as putting the case forward for the library not to be moved at Overview and Scrutiny. Members of the public have protested at a couple of council meetings.

I therefore would like to ask the Portfolio Holder, Councillor Chitty, is your view still the same that the library will be a good idea being situated in the high street despite growing opposition from the voters of Strood North?

Q Tony Jeacock of Rainham will ask the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer, the following question:

Can the Portfolio Holder please tell me whether the road surface at the junction of Montgomery Road, Windmill Road and the main entrance to the Medway Maritime Hospital is on the list of road surface repairs to be carried out in the next few weeks?

If not, then when can we expect this dangerous situation to be resolved in the interests of the safety of both motorists and pedestrians?

R Vivienne Parker of Chatham will ask the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Development and Economic Growth, Councillor Chitty, the following question:

If a planning application came in covering part of the so called Medway Magna site, would the Council be able to refuse it due to lack of nearby services and the need to use CPO powers to widen both Ham Lane and Capstone Road in order to carry construction traffic, thus rendering the Medway Magna site "unsustainable" under the terms of the National Planning Policy Framework?

S Gareth Batts of Strood will ask the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, the following question:

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T Nick Alderson-Rice of Chatham will ask the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services (Lead Member), Councillor O'Brien, the following question:

The Transforming Rehabilitation agenda will have an adverse impact on the available pool of staff that are eligible to be seconded to Medway's Youth Offending Team.

Do you support the changes which the Transforming Rehabilitation agenda will bring in and do you think the changes are in the best interest of Medway's young people?

U Tony Jeacock of Rainham will ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor Rodney Chambers, the following question:

With Medway being the leader in the UK with more involvement in EU projects than any other council in the country, is it the desire of this Conservative-run council that the UK should remain members of the EU, and if not, why not?

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Background papers

Council Rules, Constitution (Part 1, Chapter 4):

<http://www.medway.gov.uk/thecouncilanddemocracy/council/constitution.aspx>