

Full Council 26 January 2016

Schedule of written responses – public questions

Question	Response
<p>7C - David Crowhurst of Hempstead had submitted the following question to the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe:</p> <p>“I note that the Council was unsuccessful in two applications to the Government’s Homelessness Prevention Programme whilst a number of our fellow Kent local authorities were successful. I also note that those successful authorities appear to have worked in collaboration with other authorities.</p> <p>So could the Portfolio Holder please inform me whether Medway worked in collaboration with any other local authority and if this was not the case, perhaps he could inform me why Medway chose not to?”</p> <p>As David Crowhurst was not present at the meeting, the Mayor stated he would receive a written response to his question in accordance with Council Rule 8.6.</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Mr Crowhurst.</p> <p>We explored the possibility of working in partnership with other local authorities in Kent, however, we felt that being a unitary authority put us in a unique position to develop our well-established partnerships with Medway Clinical Commissioning Group, Social Care, Police, supported accommodation providers and the wider agencies tackling homelessness in Medway.</p> <p>Our proposals were tailored to meet the specific issues and challenges faced in Medway and the complex needs of vulnerable members of the community.</p> <p>The bids were worked up in partnership with a broad range of services both from within the Council and externally. Our proposals were discussed and consulted on via the Homelessness Forum.</p> <p>We feel that we submitted a strong, innovative bid that addressed the specific challenges currently experienced in Medway, and are very disappointed to have not been successful. However, we are still exploring other funding streams with our partners to take forward aspects of our proposals.</p>

Question	Response
<p>7E - Steve Dyke of Strood had submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty:</p> <p>“The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recently conducted a public consultation on its draft guidance about practical measures that can be taken to improve air quality, including in relation to planning and transport. The guidelines are intended for local authority staff and Councillors, among others, and Medway Council would seem to be an eligible stakeholder in relation to the guidance.</p> <p>Medway has an acknowledged problem with certain types of air pollution. The Council is also currently developing its Local Plan.</p> <p>It is to be hoped therefore that as a responsible local authority, Medway Council will have responded to this consultation. Can the Councillor advise if this is indeed the case and if its responses will be made public?”</p> <p>As Steve Dyke was not present at the meeting, the Mayor stated he would receive a written response to his question in accordance with Council Rule 8.6.</p>	<p>Medway is an active member of the Kent and Medway Air Quality Partnership, which is a stakeholder for The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), and contributed technical advice and information to NICE in its original consultation on the draft scope in August 2015.</p> <p>I can confirm that our Environmental Protection Team registered separately as a stakeholder for the NICE consultation, which closed on 25 January in order to register its comments and the Council submitted a response before the consultation closed to evidence the progress already made by Medway Council as set out in our Air Quality Action Plan.</p> <p>Medway Council’s Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) was approved by Cabinet in December 2015 and is published on the Council’s website. Medway provides statutory updates to Defra annually to report on progress with the identified measures. Medway also has a steering group, chaired by the Assistant Director for Front Line Services, with membership across all relevant stakeholders, including planning, public health, integrated transport, green spaces and procurement (exceeding the recommendations NICE has made in the current consultation).</p> <p>The responses to NICE consultation are submitted electronically and published by NICE.</p>

Question	Response
<p>71 - Robert Heathfield of Chatham had submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Business Management, Councillor Turpin:</p> <p>“The public consultation on Business Rates highlighted that the proposed option two will mean charity shops paying 20% business rates, this means in reality Medway Council is taking money from many local charities including those who help terminally ill children.</p> <p>What do you say to families who have terminally ill children who will see reduced funding for those charities?”</p> <p>As Robert Heathfield was not present at the meeting, the Mayor stated he would receive a written response to his question in accordance with Council Rule 8.6.</p>	<p>I, along with many of my fellow councillors the conservative party have wrestled with what were very difficult decisions. Had it not been for the change in funding environment and huge cuts to central government grants to their colleagues in local government, we would have settled for the status quo, however when we made our decision we decided to spend council taxpayer’s money on charities dedicated to the vulnerable, both adults and children, rather than those charities involved in lifestyle choices. As such, any charity which looks after terminal ill children will continue to receive 100% rate relief. The only part of such a charity which would pay any rates would be the charity shop arm, which is an arm’s length commercial organisation set up to raise funds for the associated charity rather than carry out the charity’s principle aim. In the case of the charity I think you are referring to in your question, the charity shops are a small part of the overall fund raising operation, and the extra business rate we are looking at will be a tiny fraction of that turnover, amounting to 0.15% of an overall income of nearly 10 million so this amount needs to be seen in its proper context.</p> <p>Charity shops will continue to have many advantages over their competitors, including the one everyone knows, no VAT on second hand goods, but also the claiming of Gift Aid on all donations which gives an extra 25% income of all sales which can be claimed back from the exchequer. Last but not least the work of the many dedicated volunteers is an indirect benefit of huge value. As an example, an average sized shop with two shop assistants will from April have to pay an extra £1 per hour over and above what the minimum wage was just two years ago. This alone would mean extra wages of around £4,000 per annum for a retailer which a charity shop with volunteers will not be affected by, an amount by itself more than the vast majority of business rate demands which charity shops will face. In terms of competitiveness therefore on a purely financial level the introduction of business rates will recalibrate the relative competitiveness of the retail</p>

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	<p>sector and the charity sector to 2015.</p> <p>There is no doubt that charity shops will look to raising their game in the light of their increased cost. This could be done in many ways, including consolidation of multiple shop outlets, raising prices, claiming Gift Aid on donations (which many still do not do), better window displays, changing premises to a cheaper location and multiple other options. It will be a challenge but it is one which is faced by other retailers on the High Street with far fewer advantages and I am confident that the charity shop sector will rise to the challenge. Indeed there are already charity shops which are operating at a very high level and setting a standard of excellence.</p>