

Full Council 26 January 2016

Schedule of written responses – Members' questions

Question	Response
<p>10L - Councillor Khan had submitted the following question to the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe:</p> <p>“Given that a number of neighbouring local authorities, including Canterbury, Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells and Thanet were successful in securing funding through the Government’s Homelessness Prevention Programme, could the Portfolio Holder please update Council as to why the two bids that we submitted to that programme were unsuccessful?”</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Councillor Khan.</p> <p>The Government announced on 17 October a new £40m programme to tackle homelessness and its underlying causes. The funding consisted of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• £20 million to establish a network of Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer areas• £10 million for intervening with new rough sleepers• £10 million Social Impact Bond funding for rough sleepers. <p>We submitted a bid of just over £1.2million under the Trailblazer fund and the New Rough Sleeper fund.</p> <p>As I set out in an earlier response, we explored the possibility of working in partnership with other local authorities in Kent, but, 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>The bids were worked up in partnership with a broad range of services both from within the Council and externally and our proposals were discussed and consulted on via the Homelessness Forum.</p> <p>We are of course disappointed not to have been successful, however, we are still exploring other funding streams with our partners to take forward aspects of our proposals.</p>

Question	Response
<p>10M - Councillor Cooper had submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Business Management, Councillor Turpin:</p> <p>“Elderly users of the Age UK Medway day centres currently pay £42 per day. Any decision to withdraw the 20% support that Age UK Medway currently receives as a result of qualifying for business rate relief would result in an increased cost for those elderly people and will price many people out of using the service.</p> <p>Does the Portfolio Holder believe that this is acceptable?”</p>	<p>The scale of the charitable operations of AGE UK, which is a well respected partner of Medway Council dwarfs the operations of its charity shop in Gillingham, therefore the effect of the 20% business rate will also be commensurately small. This would amount to roughly an extra 15p per day on top of the day rate of £42. (based on 90 customers per day and a five day week).</p> <p>The triple lock on pensions introduced by the coalition government will ensure that old age pensions will go up by more than this amount. I don't believe that this amount would force people to give up their day care and therefore I find it acceptable and in line with our ambition that these proposals are fair, modest and affordable. In addition I would recommend that Age UK review its policies and procedures at its shop to introduce claiming of Gift Aid which, since 2013 has had a minimal bureaucratic burden and can raise a shop's income by up to 25%.</p>
<p>10N - Councillor Gilry had submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Business Management, Councillor Turpin:</p> <p>“Medway Council relies on the voluntary sector to deliver services and to provide support to local residents. If costs to voluntary sector organisations rise then the service that they are able to deliver will be limited at the expense of local residents.</p> <p>Conservative members of the Council's Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee voted unanimously against Labour Group proposals to retain the 20% support to all organisations that qualify for business rate relief due to being a community, voluntary or charity organisation. The removal of this support will have a hugely detrimental effect on voluntary sector organisations who will be unable</p>	<p>Thank you for your question. Many charities provide services as part of commissioning with Medway Council. As such these are separately tendered and each charity tenders for a service bearing in mind its costs and its financial position. These amounts are often far more than the figures we are talking about which are the 20% business rates charged to the charity shops.</p> <p>I also refer you to my earlier answers on the evening of Council, that some charity shops are not claiming the 25% Gift Aid which alone would pay for their business rates with room to spare and also my reference to the fact that charity shops are competing with each other in a crowded market which will be reducing each shop's profitability.</p>

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<p>to provide the services that the Council currently relies on them providing. When these organisations are no longer able to provide these services local residents will turn to the Council for help and support. The cost to the taxpayer and the Council to substitute the services that are currently being provided by voluntary sector organisations will be greater than the savings made as a result of removing the 20% support.</p> <p>Please could the Portfolio Holder inform Council what long term measures he has taken to ensure that taxpayers will not be out of pocket as a result of its short term decision?"</p>	<p>I would suggest that if a shop cannot make even £2,000 per year or so for rates despite gift aid, volunteers, donated goods and no VAT then perhaps it is in the wrong location or has some other business problem. The charities you refer to dealing with the vulnerable are protected by 100% rate relief (except on their charity shop premises).</p>
<p>100 - Councillor McDonald had submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty:</p> <p>"Could the Portfolio Holder please outline the following three figures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How many Medway Council licensed taxi drivers are currently operating in Medway; • How many 'out of borough' are currently operating in Medway and; • How many Uber taxi drivers are currently operating in Medway?" 	<p>Medway Council currently licence 482 Hackney Drivers, 243 Private Hire Drivers and 174 Private Hire Restricted who carry out Executive Car hire and home to school contract work. This gives a total of 725 drivers licenced to operate within Medway without restrictions. Hackneys may be hailed on the street or work for an operator and Private Hires are pre booked via an operator. Unfortunately officers are unaware of how many Medway Licensed Drivers are operating at any one time.</p> <p>(Out of Borough/Uber)</p> <p>The short answer is we are not aware of the number of "out of borough" or Uber taxis operating in Medway.</p> <p>The reason for this is in respect of "out of borough" and Uber taxis, there is no legal requirement for these drivers to inform officers that they will be working in the area. Unless there is a change in legislation, the Council has no enforcement powers to deal with these drivers, unless these drivers are committing an offence in respect of Medway Council Byelaws.</p>

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	<p>For information, Officers and Councillors when drafting the latest Medway Taxi Policy looked at the operator licences to see if there was anything that could be done to stop the influx of out of towners working in Medway and were unable to do anything that would not be challenged as unlawful.</p>
<p>10P - Councillor Johnson had submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer, the following:</p> <p>“Municipal bus companies provide some of the best bus services in the country and the current Bus Services Bill, which prevents local authorities from setting up their own company to provide bus services is opposed by 57% of the population.</p> <p>Does the Portfolio Holder agree with me that, where there is a need and a demand, Councils such as Medway should be able to provide their own bus service?”</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Councillor Johnson.</p> <p>Within Medway, approximately 95% of bus services are provided on a commercial basis following the deregulation of the bus industry in the 1980s.</p> <p>The network, frequency and quality of buses, including the introduction of more low emission buses has been improved over the last few years. All the operators in Medway, principally Arriva and the independent operators such as ASD, Nu-Venture and Chalkwell are all continuing to invest in their fleets.</p> <p>The Council already supports services at times where the operators have deemed it not commercially viable, such as in the evenings, on Sundays and some suburban estates. Significant funding is provided each year to support these “socially-necessary” services, together with funding for Concessionary Bus Passes, Medway Youth Passes, MY School services and bus stop infrastructure.</p> <p>Medway Council works extremely well with all our operators by way of a Quality Bus Partnership with Arriva, and a Punctuality Improvement Partnership with all our operators. There has been regular investment in new buses and passenger numbers are strong. In addition, over the last three years, careful stewardship by Arriva and imaginative network design by the Council has seen the bus operator able to take on more journeys which previously required subsidy, helping to reduce the Council's expenditure.</p>

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	<p>Initiatives such as funding the Traveline system, Real Time Information, improved bus stop information and the launch of a Smartcard on bus services have helped see latest bus patronage figures rise. Quarter 3 of this year saw bus patronage of over 2.3 million journeys made, which is the highest figure since 2013/14.</p> <p>A “council owned” service (and currently this is not permitted under the legislation), would be likely to require significant capital expenditure and high levels of resourcing over a number of years, and there are no guarantees that it would result in a better level of service in the medium to long term.</p>