

## COUNCIL

**20 JANUARY 2022**

### MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Report from: Neil Davies, Chief Executive

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#### Summary

To set out the Members' questions received for this meeting.

#### 1. Background

- 1.1. Section 9.1 of the Council Rules, as laid out in the Council's constitution, sets out the rules for the receipt of Members' questions as follows:
- 1.2. A member of the Council may ask a question with notice on matters to do with their Council responsibilities to:
  - the Leader;
  - a Member of the Cabinet;
  - the chairman of any Committee or Sub-Committee.
- 1.3. At any one meeting no Member of the Council may submit more than one question. The time allowed for answers to each question at Council meetings shall not exceed three minutes. If a Member who has submitted a question is unable to be present, the question will be answered in writing. There is no provision for supplementary questions.
- 1.4. The questions received for this meeting are set out in below in the order they were received, allowing for the rules above.

#### 2. Members' Questions

- 2.1. **Question A – Councillor Tranter will ask the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty, the following:**

In October 2021 the Local Plan was withdrawn from the Council agenda because (a) it was not complete and (b) because a majority of members had

made it very clear they will not support it. Public consultation would have changed nothing in the plan and so it was pointless until there is agreement. Three months have passed and still Members have not seen a complete plan; also there appears to be no attempt to discuss or resolve Members' key concerns, such as the proposed mixed use designation of Chatham Docks which will destroy an important local industry.

Are the Cabinet still hoping this current plan will be accepted by this Council, or will they amend it in order to reach agreement?

**2.2. Question B – Councillor Rupert Turpin will ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, the following:**

The current target for Medway's housing need is an eye watering 27,000 homes by 2037. However, this is based on out of date population statistics which go all the way back to 2014. More up to date figures were rejected by a group of Kent MP's and in January the government acceded to their demands as set out in a letter and scrapped the more up to date calculations based on 2017 population statistics which would have reduced Medway's target by 8,000 homes.

This, and other factors, such as the unique ecology and character of the Hoo Peninsula which includes large amounts of marshland liable to flooding, RSPB sites, RAMSARs, NPZs, SPAs, grade 1 agricultural land and SSSIs including the most important breeding site for nightingales in the country, gives Medway a unique natural heritage to protect and along with a supportive MP gives the Council a strong argument to present a case for lowering the housing numbers for Medway, which would benefit Medway as a whole, and Rochester and Strood in particular, since the constituency has 90% of the future pipeline of housing in Medway.

In addition, since 2014 there have been major changes to society, such as our departure from the European Union, the effects of a worldwide pandemic and an election result based on the promise of levelling up the North of England none of which was a factor in the 2014 statistics.

What steps have been taken or will be taken to work with Kelly Tolhurst MP and present to the DHCLG and Michael Gove strong arguments buttressed with scientific evidence from the Sustainability Appraisal and the Habitats Regulation Assessment (assuming they have been completed) amongst other sources, to argue persuasively for a reduction in the housing target by at least the 8,000 calculated with the 2017 figures?

**2.3. Question C – Councillor Mrs Elizabeth Turpin will ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, the following:**

In January 2021 a disappointing decision (from the Medway perspective) was made by the MHCLG to pay heed to a letter written by a consortium of Kent MPs which did not include Kelly Tolhurst. This letter was in protest at the revision of housing needs assessments released in August 2020, which for

many boroughs of Kent had resulted in a rise in required housing, but for Medway had resulted in a lowering of the housing needs assessment by 8,000 homes over the period of the Local Plan. The revision, which was scrapped, was almost certainly more accurate as it was based on more recent population figures.

Medway Council was informed that if they submitted their Local Plan within 6 months of the reversal decision, i.e. by June 2021, then the lower figure (8,000 homes fewer) would have been accepted. Previous to this timeline, in the Full Council meeting of January 2020, the Council was reassured in a written answer to public questions that the draft Local Plan would be released in the summer of 2020.

For the residents and the nationally renowned wildlife of the Hoo Peninsula reeling under the proposed impact of a quadrupling of the population of Hoo, taking its population higher than that of Strood, and for the businesses in Chatham Docks under threat of flatted regeneration, this delay seems, to put it mildly, a missed opportunity of epic proportions.

As this deadline was over a year later than when we were led to expect the draft Local Plan would be ready, why were we unable to take advantage of this situation and submit a far less controversial plan likely to have gained the support of a majority of Members of the Council?

**2.4. Question D – Councillor Williams will ask the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty, the following:**

With a huge number of homes in the pipeline for the Hoo peninsula it is vital that we as Councillors, and the public, get the most detailed and accurate information needed for consultation purposes. With regard to the latest consultation I, as Councillor for Strood Rural, would like to thank the HIF team for their efforts, and in particular for the removal of the flyover option for Higham Road, which has been welcomed by residents.

I would like the Council to ensure that all efforts are made to co-ordinate and bring forward the Local Plan in synchrony with the HIF bid as far as humanly possible. With this in mind I am disappointed that the Habitats Assessment, the Sustainability Appraisal and the Air quality data for Four Elms Hill roundabout was not available in time for the latest HIF residents' consultation which closed on 10<sup>th</sup> January. These documents were promised to us by November 2021 to support the s19 Draft Local Plan as late additions and seem to be even now not available.

Can I request that these are made available to the public at the earliest possible convenience?

**2.5. Question E – Councillor Etheridge will ask the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, the following:**

It has been identified, that Chattenden and the Hoo Peninsula, has a unique Military Heritage, possibly the only one in the world. During World War One, this area was specifically used because of its location for the development of Zeppelins, the testing of new weapons, especially explosives, and the experimentation and design of trench warfare. Various branches of the Military, were based here, including the Royal Naval Air Service. Today, we can still see the remnants of the very first torpedo launch pad, along with the world's first anti-aircraft gun emplacement. These measures had a major effect on the course and final outcome of World War One, saving countless British and Allied soldiers' lives. This area was at the centre of military technology.

This, and other factors, such as the unique ecology and character of the Hoo Peninsula, which includes large amounts of marshland liable to flooding, RSPB sites, RAMSARs, SSSIs, gives Medway a unique natural and military heritage to protect.

Can you tell me what measures are being put in place to document this particular piece of history, whilst protecting this unique military heritage, ensuring that it will be in a condition to be viewed by generations yet to come?

**2.6. Question F – Councillor Pendergast will ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, the following:**

In recent months areas of the Peninsula have once again suffered power cuts.

On Christmas Day large areas of Hoo were without electricity for several hours ruining what for many is regarded as a very special day.

Can the Leader of the Council please state how much of the much vaunted Housing Infrastructure Fund is allocated for utility infrastructure so the existing homes and all the new dwellings are guaranteed uninterrupted supplies?

**2.7. Question G - Councillor Curry will ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, the following:**

Bearing in mind the strength of feeling from the public and the Members of his own party for the protection of Chatham Docks, will the Leader of the Council now support the majority of elected Members in this chamber for the retention of the Chatham Docks as employment land in the forthcoming Local Plan?

2.8. **Question H - Councillor Khan will ask the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, the following:**

What action is Medway Council taking to support council tenants in light of the sharply rising energy costs that hit record levels last month?

2.9. **Question I – Councillor Edwards will ask the Portfolio Holder for Education and Schools, Councillor Potter, the following:**

The government's announcement regarding 7,000 air purifiers being made available for schools seems woefully inadequate considering there are 300,000 classrooms across the country.

Could the Portfolio Holder give their assessment of the adequacy of ventilation in Medway schools whilst confirming how many air purifiers have been secured from the 7,000 for Medway?

2.10. **Question J – Councillor Van Dyke will ask the Portfolio Holder for Education and Schools, Councillor Potter, the following:**

Does the Portfolio Holder feel that, due to the delay in building the Maritime Academy, transporting the first and, potentially, second, cohort of young people from Strood to Stoke is environmentally and educationally acceptable?

2.11. **Question K - Councillor Maple will ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, the following:**

Whose decision was it to:

1. Publish the local plan draft on the agenda for the 7<sup>th</sup> October
2. Withdraw the local plan draft from the agenda for the 7<sup>th</sup> October?

2.12. **Question L – Councillor Murray will ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, the following:**

There are currently 10,207 households in Medway identified as experiencing fuel poverty. These families will now be forced to choose between eating and heating as the cost of household fuel is rising and set to possibly double by April 2022. Labour have proposed removing VAT on household fuel in order to mitigate the impact of rising costs.

Does the Leader of the Council agree with me that Medway Council should be doing all we can to help the families we represent and in doing so will he sign a joint letter urging the government to act quickly and remove VAT for household fuel?

**2.13. Question M – Councillor Osborne will ask the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer, the following:**

Despite opposition from nearly 2,000 local residents, Medway Council introduced car parking charges at the Strand Leisure Park on 9th July 2018.

Can the Portfolio Holder advise how much income the Council has received since the charges were introduced, with a breakdown for each of the financial years 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2021-22?

**2.14. Question N - Councillor Johnson will ask the Portfolio Holder for Business Management, Councillor Hackwell, the following:**

In view of the fuel shortages during September, I would have expected the Portfolio Holder to have ensured the following:

- To review business continuity plans to identify workforce, key workers and how they travel to work
- To review requirements or consider requiring certain key workers maintain half a tank of fuel at all times to mitigate the impact of disruption
- To establish the potential for some forecourts to prioritise certain groups or to hold fuel back for designated workers or services, such as SEND transport
- To facilitate access to electric bikes or the use of pool cars
- To establish mutual aid agreements with other agencies to share and/or bunker fuel

What actions did the Portfolio Holder take to ensure that essential council services were protected?

**2.15. Question O - Councillor Chrissy Stamp will ask the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services – Lead Member, Councillor Mrs Josie Iles, the following:**

According to the Cooperative Party, in Medway there are 1856 pregnant women and children entitled to Healthy Start vouchers, but the take-up rate is only 57%. That means at least £5,843.75 worth of vouchers for fresh fruit, vegetables and milk go unclaimed every week. Given the appalling levels of family poverty and child hunger in Medway, what is the Portfolio Holder doing to ensure that the take-up of Healthy Start vouchers is 100%?

**2.16. Question P - Councillor Prenter will ask the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, the following:**

Can the Portfolio Holder please let us know when the work on the redevelopment of Splashes will begin, outlining what consultation has been undertaken with the local community?

**2.17. Question Q – Councillor Adeoye will ask Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer, the following:**

Families and communities across Medway will want to come together, safely, to celebrate the platinum jubilee of Her Majesty The Queen.

Can you confirm there will be no charge by the Council for any community wanting to hold a street party in Medway for road closures etc?

**2.18. Question R - Councillor Price will ask the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, the following:**

What measures are in place to ensure that the new housing developments and infrastructure on the Hoo peninsula are carbon neutral and pollution free?

**2.19. Question S - Councillor McDonald will ask the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Councillor Gulvin, the following:**

Following the closure of Splashes as result of serious structural problems with the building, can the Portfolio Holder reassure us that the other leisure facilities under the control of the Council are safe and fit for purpose, confirming when was the last structural survey done on Council leisure facilities?

**2.20. Question T - Councillor Hubbard will ask the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty, the following:**

The £1.6million that Medway Council taxpayers are having to stump up to fund the DfE and the Thinking Schools Academy to transport pupils to the former Stoke Primary School site is outrageous. The three-part nature of Manor Farm hybrid planning application delayed Frindsbury's Maritime Academy by many months. An application for just the school would have come to Committee much earlier and would have probably not resulted in others referring the granted planning permission to the Secretary of State.

Do you agree that the Council accepting the nonsense hybrid Manor Farm/Barn planning application that developer had embarked on, linking the school to a housing development and the conservation of Grade 1 listed Manor Barn, was pure folly?

**2.21. Question U – Councillor Browne will ask the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, the following:**

What new events are planned as a direct result of making the City of Culture bid?

**2.22. Question V - Councillor Paterson will ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, the following:**

Just like his boss in Downing Street, the Leader was forced to account for his own movements during the first lockdown, a month before the infamous No10 party, when he bragged on Instagram about having shot some “fresh wood pigeon ready for the oven later”.

After being challenged about whether he was continuing his wildfowling hobby while the rest of us were still limited to half an hour’s outdoor exercise per day, Medway Tories then released a comical clarification that the “fresh wood pigeon” was in fact, and I quote, “fresh out of the freezer”.

A new Defra definition of “livestock” includes game birds and will allow gamekeepers to kill wild birds such as crows, jackdaws, magpies and rooks – lest they interfere with the business of shooting game. Does the Leader welcome this new definition as, if so, I would expect his followers to look forward to future Instagram posts of “fresh magpie (from the freezer)” ready for the oven.

**2.23. Question W – Councillor Howcroft-Scott will ask the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, the following:**

The number of people sleeping rough in the UK has multiplied since 2010. Shelter revealed 274,000 people were homeless in England alone in December 2021.

But in Finland's capital Helsinki, rough sleeping has been almost eradicated thanks to a groundbreaking scheme. There is a principle that Finnish local authorities must stick to – at least a quarter of homes within each housing project must be genuinely affordable. Medway Council must be brave enough to follow this example - inroads are being made to tackle homelessness in many Labour controlled councils such as Manchester.

What is Medway Council currently doing to eradicate homelessness in Medway and in doing so explaining the plans they are making to get families out of bed and breakfast and temporary accommodation?

**2.24. Question X – Councillor Andy Stamp will ask the Portfolio Holder for Adults’ Services, Councillor Brake, the following:**

There are reports in the national media that the free supply of lateral flow tests to residents may be stopping.

Can you confirm that Medway will continue to supply free lateral flow tests as long as local decision makers feel it is required, not when central government tells us to stop?



**2.25. Question Y – Councillor Mahil will ask the Portfolio Holder for Business Management, Councillor Hackwell, the following:**

Residents have raised concerns in the last couple of weeks regarding the disgraceful act of fly tipping taking place in the Chatham Cemetery.

What actions will the Portfolio Holder put in place to both deter future activity of this nature and take action against those individuals who have committed this highly antisocial activity?

**2.26. Question Z – Councillor Lloyd will ask the Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services – Lead Member, Councillor Mrs Josie Iles, the following:**

In view of the recent Cabinet decision to agree to fund future transport to the temporary site in Stoke for the delayed Maritime Academy, does the Portfolio Holder agree that this is unacceptable pressure from the Conservative government, showing Medway council tax payers and Medway’s young people are paying the price for issues relating to the building of school places that result from government and council delay?

**2.27. Question AA – Councillor Cooper will ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, the following:**

The return of the Medway Queen after its recent restoration is undoubtedly a positive development for Medway.

Will it be playing any role in the upcoming Platinum Jubilee celebrations?

**Lead officer contact**

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**Appendices**

None

**Background papers**

None