

Members' Questions

Question A – Councillor Johnson will ask the Portfolio Holder for Education and Schools, Councillor Potter, the following:

Given the government's derisory increase of 7p to the funding for Universal Infant Free School Meals and the consequent threat to the quality of meals for Medway's young people and the risk to school meals providers' long-term viability and willingness to continue contracts, what action has he taken to ensure that Medway's young people have a healthy daily school meal in September?

Question B – Councillor Edwards will ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, the following:

Fair taxation is vital to making sure that local government can run decent and well-funded public services. Yet research commissioned by the Fair Tax Foundation showed that between 2014 and 2019, UK public procurement contracts worth £37.5bn were won by businesses with connections to a tax haven. If they choose to, progressive councils can help tackle this by promoting responsible tax conduct through their own procurement processes.

Will Medway Council join the 20+ councils across the UK that have so far signed the Fair Tax Foundation's Councils for Fair Tax declaration?

Signing the declaration would involve Medway Council leading by example in its own tax conduct, demanding greater transparency from suppliers, and joining calls for more meaningful powers to tackle tax avoidance amongst suppliers when buying goods and services. Doing so would no doubt be popular with Medway residents, with polls showing that almost two-thirds of the public agree that the government and local councils should consider a company's ethics and how they pay their taxes, as well as value for money and quality of service, when undertaking procurement. We are in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis and need every pound of tax possible to support local people and local services. I hope that Medway Council will commit to being part of the solution.

Question C – Councillor Khan will ask the Portfolio Holder for Education and Schools, Councillor Potter, the following:

Given the extreme financial pressures facing the Early Years Sector, what discussions has the Portfolio Holder held with local providers to ensure the long-term viability of local services?

Question D – Councillor Maple will ask the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services – Lead Member, Councillor Mrs Josie Iles, the following:

Medway Labour and Cooperative Group supports the work of Council staff to continue to ensure that Medway's Children's Services improve rapidly and sustainably. We welcome the positive steps that the service has taken. However, as the most recent Ofsted Monitoring Visit Letter establishes, too many staff supporting the improvement are temporary because funding for them is temporary. Why is this?

Question E – Councillor Curry will ask the Portfolio Holder for Inward Investment, Strategic Regeneration and Partnerships, Councillor Rodney Chambers OBE, the following:

The delivery date for projects under the Housing Infrastructure Fund was originally 2024, this has now been extended to 2025. If the Portfolio Holder can no longer be confident that the 2025 date is achievable what will be the consequences of missing this target?

Question F – Councillor Adeoye will ask the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, the following:

The Horsted Valley is one of the most important areas of Medway for both landscape and biodiversity. As well as supporting a rich and diverse range of habitats and important wildlife species, it has stunning views and beautiful walks.

Would the Council be prepared to apply to have this area designated as a Local Nature Reserve under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act?

Question G – Councillor Osborne will ask the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer, the following:

Can the Council confirm the annual revenue and capital itemised spend on the Medway Tunnel since 2010/11 in a table by year; and the total sum over that period that was not funded through government grant?

Question H – Councillor Chrissy Stamp will ask the Portfolio Holder for Education and Schools, Councillor Potter, the following:

In view of rising costs on schools, which include extremely high and quickly-rising energy costs, and the constrained budgets which they have faced over the period of Conservative government, the Portfolio Holder should be monitoring school budgets, informing local MPs of the need for increased funding and mitigating the potentially adverse impact on educational opportunity. What action has he taken in these regards?

Question I – Councillor Howcroft-Scott will ask the Portfolio Holder for Adults’ Services, Councillor Brake, the following:

The Government unveiled its long-awaited food strategy, which was a response to food adviser Henry Dimbleby’s independent review into our food system. With the cost-of-living crisis driving even more families into food poverty, we needed a comprehensive plan that would help tackle our country’s growing hunger problem.

The Government’s response ignored many of the independent review’s key recommendations, like expanding the eligibility of key food schemes like Free School Meals and Healthy Start.

If the Government's own food adviser says that the Government's response is "not a strategy", is "not radical enough" and "needs to be much bolder", then questions must be asked about how seriously the Government is taking the hunger crisis that threatens to envelop even more families as inflation soars. In the context of rising childhood obesity and today’s challenging economic climate, what is Medway Council’s response to combat hunger?

Question J – Councillor Opara will ask the Portfolio Holder for Business Management, Councillor Hackwell, the following:

Across Medway many well-meaning residents have taken the initiative to set up voluntary groups, such as the Lordswood and Walderslade Community Litter Group, in order to eliminate litter and present the streets of Medway clean, together with the never ending efforts of our own street scene team and community wardens. It is however frustrating to see that many times this good work is often tarnished by those who have little or no respect for the environment or the cleanliness of our streets. The Council could continue to do more to show that the efforts of our volunteers and employees are respected.

Considering that numerous assets, including vehicles and large media screens, are owned by Medway Council, I would like to know why are the fines for throwing litter and fly tipping not clearly advertised on these assets for all to see? This would not only act as a deterrent against the inconsiderate practice of littering and fly tipping but would also have a significant impact on keeping Medway clean and attractive for both residents and visitors, thereby rewarding those who give their time to keep Medway clean.

Question K - Councillor Cooper will ask the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services – Lead Member, Councillor Mrs Josie Iles, the following:

It is estimated that 700,000 people in the United Kingdom are on the autism spectrum, which is more than 1 in 100. If we include their immediate families, autism is a part of the daily lives of around 2.8 million people in Britain.

Young people with autism face very specific problems when it comes to going to school, and it is vital that we as a local government do all we can to help them. We have had information in the most recent agenda items at both Children and Young People's and Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committees that Autism has been highlighted as the most prevalent cause for Children and Young People transitioning from Children to Adult Services.

Medway Council has taken steps to assign the role of 'care leavers champion' or 'education champions' to people involved in the Council set up. Given the prevalence of autism in society, would the Portfolio Holder agree with me that it is time that we have an Autism Champion at Medway Council who could be the focal point of work we do in the community related to autism?

Question L - Councillor Van Dyke will ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, the following:

The government has just appointed a national ambassador for Womens' health following a call for evidence that shows there is gender bias within NHS services, which means that women's health issues are taken less seriously and frequently deprioritised. Is the Leader of the Council prepared to appoint a Women's health ambassador for Medway to show our support for ensuring that women in our community receive the high quality health services they deserve?

Question M - Councillor Murray will ask the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services – Lead Member, Councillor Mrs Josie Iles, the following:

A recent survey presented to Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee in an item about the transition process for young people with mental health problems contained the shocking news that 82% of children and young people in Medway have experienced difficulty with their mental health and wellbeing and over a third of young people are currently receiving treatment and support for mental health issues. Furthermore, schools report the highest ever level of mental health problems amongst their pupils.

Does the Portfolio Holder agree that this undermines Medway's ambition to be a child friendly city, while explaining what she intends to do to ensure that the new strategy being rolled out to tackle these issues will be properly funded?

Question N - Councillor Hubbard will ask the Portfolio Holder for Education and Schools, Councillor Potter, the following:

Maritime Academy should have been located on Strood Riverside. That town centre site has great access for those walking, cycling, or using public transport. The school's site on Frindsbury Hill, expected to open in 2024, will just add to the levels of traffic congestion and pollution.

I am dismayed at the ongoing changes for students starting at the Academy this September. Temporary arrangements were in place to use the vacant Stoke Primary site. Money was spent. Financial costs incurred. Proposed bussing arrangements, delivering and collecting some 200 students a day, were in place. The last-minute intervention by the Government's Department of Education (DfE) stopping the use of Stoke has resulted in a scramble to get the alternate site at Twydall Primary, ready in time.

The Government's lead on this project is simply not good enough. Council staff have done their best and I am confident that the Academy's staff will deliver their educational best. Do you believe that the DfE should have been on top of matters much earlier, rather than letting matters fester, that in turn led to the disruption of plans at a very late stage?

Question O – Councillor Mahil will ask the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer, the following:

As in previous years Kent County Council is offering a free bus service for under 16s. The benefits of such a scheme are clear in relation to the environment, but even more so in relation to the health and wellbeing of the children and young people, our local communities and Medway's economy.

Can the Portfolio Holder please explain why Medway Council is, once again, not part of this scheme?

Question P - Councillor Browne will ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, the following:

The risk of another pandemic has been removed from Medway's risk register on the grounds that there is now sufficient resilience and expertise within the Council to tackle another pandemic should one arise.

Notwithstanding the good work that has been done and the skills that staff have gained from their experiences does the Leader agree with me that while there is still so much to learn about the development of Covid and its long-term effects that removing risk of a pandemic from the register diminishes awareness of the dangers of another pandemic and leaves the Council and our residents in a needlessly vulnerable position?

Question Q – Councillor Price will ask the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services – Lead Member, Councillor Mrs Josie Iles, the following:

What action has the Portfolio Holder taken to ensure that the administration of SEND funding for the Medway Early Years Sector is efficient and effective?