

Members' Questions

Question A – Councillor Paterson will ask Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, the following:

Our region is as varied as it is distinctive, with residents proud to say that they come from very specific places. Some people from Borstal might take issue with the suggestion they hail from Rochester, while a Frindsbury resident definitely does not live in Strood.

But just at the moment where such distinctiveness has been rightly recognised in the names of the new wards we have been elected to represent on this unitary authority, it seems bean-counters at the BBC are moving in precisely the opposite direction.

Proposed cuts to BBC local radio will mean a loss of BBC Radio Kent's distinctive identity. The station – home to journalists and presenters of the highest calibre including Anna Cookson, Julia George and Pat Marsh – will be forced to share an increased part of its schedule with other parts of the south and south east which we have little or nothing in common with, beyond a county boundary or relative proximity on a map.

I am proud of the BBC, not only for its international reputation for the finest journalism which lives up to its motto "Let Nation Speak Peace Unto Nation", but for the way it reflects the places it serves at a very local level. I am also proud of the unique way it is funded, which puts it at arm's length from politicians who might seek to influence its editorial policy and out of reach of the sort of rapacious, tax-dodging media moguls who covet and resent it in equal measure.

Last year the Leader joined forces with senior local government figures from around the country, signing an open letter to the Director-General pointing out that these changes are ill-considered, highly damaging to regional identity and bad news for the communities local radio gives a voice to.

Will he join with me in paying tribute to the National Union of Journalists members at BBC Radio Kent who have taken industrial action as they campaign to reverse the cuts and #KeepBBCLocalRadioLocal to Kent?"

Question B - Councillor Spring will ask the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration, Councillor Curry, the following:

Recent weeks have seen chaos caused by the ongoing substantial number of roadworks across Rainham, causing significant inconvenience to our residents. Can the Portfolio Holder please explain how officers are ensuring proper coordination around street works, and if any consideration is taken to the impact on air quality, given the challenges faced in this area, particularly around the A2?

Question C - Councillor Sands will ask the Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor Murray, the following:

Councillors will be aware of the Boys Need Bins and Dispose with Dignity national campaigns to bring awareness to the lack of public toilets and importantly the lack of facilities in male toilets.

1 in 8 men will get prostate cancer, and some of those men experience urinary and bowel problems as a direct effect of their treatment. 1 in 3 men over the age of 65 will suffer urinary incontinence problem and 1 in 25 men over the age of 40 will experience some form of urinary leakage. A lack of public understanding of these conditions and the stigma surrounding incontinence and the lack of facilities for men are damaging men's physical and mental health.

More and more men are having to use incontinence products. It's something men can become very embarrassed about. And of course, for councils this can cause extra expense and maintenance problems if incontinence products are flushed rather than properly disposed of in a discreet way. But there is a relatively cheap and easy solution, putting sanitary bins in our men's toilets, a small but important difference for those who need it.

All sufferers know that embarrassing leaks can happen from time to time and so a "Just can't wait" card to enable access a toilet quickly and explain to someone discreetly that you need to use a toilet urgently. The 'Just Can't Wait' card is now available as a digital card for your smartphone to ensure you always have your toilet card at easy reach.

Will the Deputy Leader commit the Council to the following:

- To encourage businesses across Medway to put incontinence bins in their male toilets.
- To encourage the acceptance of "Just can't wait" cards throughout Medway.
- To help Medway become a place where men's lives are not limited by incontinence, by ensuring every men's public toilet has an incontinence bin so men can dispose of incontinence pads and stoma products easily, safely and with dignity?"

Question D - Councillor Perfect will ask the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services (including statutory responsibility), Councillor Price, the following:

Providing an outstanding Children's Services provision should not be seen as an aspirational target but be the standard for all upper-tier local authorities. Over the past four years, the previous administration worked tirelessly on this goal, and now, as an opposition, we remain committed to supporting the improvement journey. Can the Portfolio Holder please update me on the action he has undertaken since his appointment at Annual Council to support the improvement journey and preparations for the Ofsted Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) inspection?

Question E - Councillor Tejan will ask the Portfolio Holder for Business Management, Councillor Van Dyke, the following:

Care providers play a vital role in providing essential support and care to their loved ones, often sacrificing lucrative employment and promising careers to ensure the well-being and quality of life of those they care for. Care providers typically receive a daily allowance of £9.40 from the state for their caregiving responsibilities, which does not adequately compensate for the financial burdens they face; and the Adult Social Care charge element of Council Tax can impose an additional financial strain on care providers, creating an unfair burden that hinders their ability to meet their own financial obligations.

I hope the Portfolio Holder will acknowledge the significant contributions and sacrifices made by care providers in our community, the financial challenges they often face due to limited financial support, and whether she agrees with me that care providers should be exempt from the Adult Social care charge element of Council Tax, when they are directly responsible for providing care for their loved ones at huge savings to the local authority?

Question F - Councillor Lawrence will ask the Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor Murray, the following:

Can the Cabinet Spokesman for Health give her view on the effectiveness of the Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board (ICB) with particular reference to its delivery of services needed by the residents of Medway?

Question G - Councillor Gilbourne will ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, the following:

Will the Leader of the Council confirm that the new Labour Administration has no plans to sell any land that it owns and/or controls in Capstone Valley, opening the way to large scale house building on an important green space, which is vital to the environment and to the wellbeing of the surrounding communities?

Question H - Councillor Spalding will ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, the following:

At the end of your first Cabinet meeting you stated categorically, on behalf of the Labour Group “We want ultimate transparency”. During that meeting, Councillor Curry when telling the cabinet about the HIF situation reminded the Cabinet that as part of your election promises you made a “Commitment to deliver a more transparent and inclusive Medway Authority”.

During a subsequent meeting with Councillor Curry I asked for copies of the letter from Homes England with the recommendation to withdraw HIF monies and a copy of the detailed plan which allegedly would achieve the HIF objectives.

Nothing has been provided and despite further requests these documents are still being kept secret.

Barely two months into this administration and you have already broken an election promise. Can you please explain why?

Question I - Councillor Mrs Turpin will ask the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration, Councillor Curry, the following:

At Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 30 March 2023, Councillor Curry, in regard to the Housing Infrastructure Fund asked, “Conversations were being had with Homes England, why weren't we aware of these conversation, why haven't we been told?”

Later in the same meeting Councillor Murray said, “I'm uncomfortable about all these discussions going on and nobody knowing about it. This Committee needs to send a message to Cabinet to ask them to pause the discussions that everyone is having with Homes England and decide what scheme exactly we are committed to.”

On 13 June at the Cabinet meeting it was announced that the Council had received a letter on 9 June from Homes England advising that they were no longer recommending the funding for Medway's HIF project, with a final decision being made by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. It was made clear at this meeting that all efforts would be made to persuade Homes England and the Department not to withdraw the funding and that the Leader would be requesting an urgent meeting.

However, except one cancelled meeting, there has been no discussion or updates to Members representing the communities on the Peninsula.

Can the Portfolio Holder provide an update on the current position of discussions with Homes England, including any proposals and plans to communicate this to local members.

Question J – Councillor Joy will ask the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services (including statutory responsibility), Councillor Price, the following:

Schools across Medway are facing extreme delays from Medway Council in; Firstly, getting an agreement to additional funding needs for children with Special Educational Needs, with schools in some instances waiting for over 6 months incurring additional costs (that they can ill afford) to ensure that they meet their requirements under statutory duties from current legislation.

Secondly, when funding levels are agreed, actually getting the money paid, with schools being owed thousands by Medway Council, with the majority from the last few months.

Please can the Portfolio Holder explain what is being done to speed up the process, including confirmation when all funding currently agreed is paid and the procedures being put in place to ensure that all monies are paid promptly?

Question K – Councillor Crozer will ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, the following:

I note that the Cabinet Local Plan Advisory Group is allocated 7 Members using the ration of 4:3 Labour: Conservative, as such it excludes our Independent Group.

You will, I'm sure, be acutely aware of the implications of the Hoo Peninsula being excluded from this advisory capacity.

The Local Plan has been the subject of some difficulty since 2007 when the previous administration began to bring forward its update to include 5000 houses at Lodge Hill on the Peninsula and of course the various failures of Medway to bring forward a successful Local Plan of late, predicated on the back of the Hoo Development Framework and the Housing Infrastructure Fund Project.

After almost 3 years of development of the HIF project, following the grant determination agreement and some circa £18m spent, Homes England recommended its withdrawal citing some 42 points of failure. Deloitte, one of the experts, concluded there are a "considerable number of planning risks that remain outstanding since the original HIF submission. A key risk which underpins the entire

planning strategy is the delay to the adoption of the Local Plan and risk of legal challenge".

Given that the HIF project has been cancelled it is essential that we, Medway, quickly adopt a sound evidence based Local Plan that we might, once and for all, move forward together.

You have remarked recently that the residents have given Independents a clear mandate that over developing the Peninsula is not acceptable.

We have asked time and time again for transparency and to be part of the process to develop a fair and evidenced based Local Plan. We want to be part of that transparent process. Representation on a Cabinet 'Advisory' Group of the Hoo Peninsula would be a step in the right direction together.

I therefore respectfully ask you to carefully consider changing the allocation for the Local Plan Cabinet Advisory Group to that similar to the Climate Change advisory group of 9 in the ratio of 5:3:1.

Question L – Councillor Field will ask the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration, Councillor Curry, the following:

Residents in Cliffe Road in Strood have raised the issue of high vehicular speeds presenting a danger to property and residents. They would like the Council to review speed limits, with a preference for a 20 miles per hour restriction. What measures is the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration taking to ensure that our streets are safe for all?

Question M – Councillor Williams will ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, the following:

Despite the recommendation of the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee from 30 March being a "Refreshed governance structure for the (HIF) project going forward to include relevant community groups such as councillors, parish councillors and other community groups", the Cabinet Report of 11 July advises that the Future Hoo Delivery Board will not be re-established and that where this is the case Cabinet Members will continue to have the necessary dialogue with relevant Members, officers and partners, as applicable, to inform the work of the Cabinet."

Assuming that over the past 4 weeks, discussions have been held with Homes England and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, there has been no such dialogue between Cabinet Members and local ward Councillors. Despite criticism of the previous administration's governance of this project, it would appear from the withdrawal of the Future Hoo Board and many other Cabinet Advisory Groups, that Governance is going to get increasingly worse with this administration. How can the Leader give us reassurance that this is not going to be the case?

Question N – Councillor Pearce will ask the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration, Councillor Curry, the following:

Will the Council, as a matter of policy, condition all new houses built to include beneficial wildlife measures, such as bat boxes, bee hotels, swift boxes and other wildlife items, to ensure that ecological benefits are realised quickly for local wildlife?

Question O – Councillor Jones will ask the Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services (including statutory responsibility), Councillor Price, the following:

Please can the Portfolio Holder outline what steps are being taken by Medway Council, to ensure that all Children in Care are treated as if they have a protected characteristic, under the Equalities Act 2010?