

Public Questions

Question A – Sandra Fowler, of Chatham, will ask the Portfolio Holder for Heritage, Culture and Leisure, Councillor Mahil, the following:

Some Councillors, particularly those who are football fans, will have visited last year's well received exhibition at the Guildhall Museum, which celebrated the life and achievements of Strood-born Isaac Newell. There is a growing national and international campaign to erect a statue of Newell in his birthplace.

Will Medway Council offer support to this worthy campaign and in doing so will it help find a site in Strood for this statue?

Question B – Jessica McCann, of Hoo, will ask the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration, Councillor Curry, the following:

I am concerned at the lack of rail links in Hoo. Our nearest station is 5 miles away and we are forced to drive. Yet money is spent on cycling lanes. In an area where there are no shops or infrastructure for the locals, cycle lanes will not help transport in Hoo. We need better bus routes in the morning. It takes someone 35 minutes on the bus to get to the nearest station.

If you think this is acceptable, please explain why?

Question C – Lindsey Burke, of Rochester, will ask the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services, Councillor Price, the following:

As Medway Council has now entered a SEND Safety Valve Agreement with the Conservative Government, I hope they can reassure parents of SEND children in Medway how they are making sure they are fully compliant with their legal obligations to children and young people with SEND over the five-year safety valve agreement.

Will they explain what this arrangement is in more detail to help us understand better what the safety valve intervention programme means for children and young people's Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCPs) unlike the current Government's smoke screen?

Question D – Peter Harrison, of Rainham, will ask the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration, Councillor Curry, the following:

'Have your say' would seem to be another complete waste of time, as the Council listen and take absolutely no notice of the general consensus of the majority of Medway residents.

For example, regarding the red route through Rainham, sixty percent of respondents don't think it is needed, yet, the Council is still going ahead at a cost of £805,000 (the total cost for the introduction of the five schemes across Medway).

So, I do wonder what is the point of 'Have your say', I believe that Medway is turning into a communist council, not a democratic council.

Why are you not listening to the residents of Medway?

Question E - Tracey Wilson, of Strood, will ask the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Property, Councillor Khan, the following:

If you cannot even run a proper facility for shoppers to go to the toilet (In relation to the unusable automatic public convenience (APC) in Newark Yard, Strood – and which has recently been set fire to), how on earth are you supposed to be running Medway?

Question F – Nicholas Chan, of Gillingham, will ask the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration, Councillor Curry, the following:

Under Medway Council's contract with Veolia on Dry Mixed Recyclables (DMR), can the Portfolio Holder please set out what means of transport will Veolia use to ship DMR to the Southwark Integrated Waste Management Facility, including details of the carbon footprint of those transportation methods for the October 2022 to October 2024 contract?

Question G – Mathew Broadley, of Chatham, will ask the Portfolio Holder for Social Regeneration and Inward Investment, Councillor Edwards, the following:

In 2019, the Tory-run Medway Council purchased the Pentagon Shopping Centre, for £34.8 million.

In 2021, the Tory-run Medway Council purchased Mountbatten House, for £1.975 million.

The cross-party Medway Towns Centres Strategy (2022) has failed already and is not robust enough to weather the storm of national, household brands collapsing and market-behaviours moving towards online shopping. This is evident following Wilko, one of the largest shopping units by floor space, recently closing in the Pentagon.

At the time of writing, there are a large number of vacant shopping units within the Pentagon, with more long-term tenants indicating that they will shortly be closing up shop.

Kelly Tolhurst, the MP for Rochester and Strood (which includes Chatham Town Centre and the Pentagon Shopping Centre) has recently made an intervention stating that she wants the Pentagon “levelled to free up space for new housing”.

Labour’s response to the 2019 Tory acquisition of the Pentagon was to declare that “a future Labour controlled Council would deliver an effective strategy to revitalise the Pentagon and the wider Town Centre”.

It has been three years since the acquisition, where is Labour’s “effective strategy to revitalise the Pentagon and the wider Town Centre” as the decline appears to be accelerating under this Labour administration?

Question H – Trish Marchant, of Gillingham, will ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, the following:

Accessibility has been a phrase that multiple administrations, both locally and nationally, have promoted for over a decade.

The Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and The Equality Act (2010) are in place to support the needs of a wide range of people and the Accessibility Regulations (2018) emphasise the need for online resources to “meet accessibility standards” and highlighted that “1 in 5 people in the UK have a long-term illness, impairment or disability, many more have a temporary disability”, which is the equivalent of approximately 56,000 people in Medway.

At our last Council meeting my friend’s question could not be asked in person as she was unable to attend due to her disability. Questions not asked receive a written response which I feel falls short of the accessibility expectations of the Council.

The current process thus actively disempowers people who struggle to attend these meetings and so are unable to “exercise their public function”. Disabled people should be able to engage in their democratic duty in the same way as non-disabled people and this needs to be reformed by Medway Council.

Reflecting on the above, will the Leader of the Council now commit to reforming the process by which public questions are asked to:

1. Allow those who have submitted a public question to ask it remotely using an online facility.
2. Allow those who have submitted a public question to appoint a person who can ask the question on their behalf?

Question I – Vivienne Parker, of Chatham, will ask the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration, Councillor Curry, the following:

Would the Council be willing to install a crossing near Bridgewoods ASDA?

People have already broken down the fence at this point to cross to the other side and without the crossing they are having to navigate the Bridgewoods roundabout on foot or walk back to Watson Avenue carrying heavy shopping, not good if you are elderly or disabled.

Question J – Carl Dunks, of Rainham, will ask the Deputy Leader, Councillor Murray, the following:

Can there be a wholesale review of mental health in the Medway Towns?

As with my Tourette’s, Autism and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), there is no help whatsoever and a lack of knowledge about the condition as well.

Question K – Alan Wells, of Chatham, will ask the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration, Councillor Curry, the following:

The Environment Agency's report TE2100 has stated that flash floods and flooding are projected to rise considerably by 2050.

Land on some parts of the Hoo Peninsula falls within flood zone 3 which has a high probability of flooding. Flood defences have been built to protect and reduce flooding, but do not completely stop the chance of flooding because they can be overtopped or fail.

Flood defence upgrades can deliver social value and multiple benefits. In some places in the outer estuary, they will need to be in place earlier. This is because planning for defence raising will need to start before 2030.

In relation to North Kent Marshes Policy Unit: Thames Estuary 2100 (TE2100), on what needs to be done to manage flood risk and adapt to rising sea levels. The North Kent Marshes Policy Unit consists of two large areas north and west of the village of Cliffe. It extends from Gravesend to St Mary's Marshes and includes Cliffe.

The areas at risk of flooding include freshwater grazing marshes and designated freshwater habitats. There are also designated intertidal habitats along much of the estuary frontage. The marshes also contain valuable historic, military and industrial features, such as: Shornemeade Fort, Cliffe Fort and Cliffe Gunpowder Works. TE2100 states that there is currently no riverside strategy for this area.

The Council will need to produce strategies either as a standalone document or part of a Local Plan, and be in place by 2030. In some places in the outer estuary, they will need to be in place earlier. This is because planning for defence raising will need to start before 2030. Decisions taken by the Council in the 2020s will determine the quality of public space along the river for generations.

What strategies will the Council put in place to manage flood risks, for future flood defence requirements, so that communities and businesses are more aware of flood risk and able to adapt, respond and recover from flooding? This is particularly important in areas where flood risk will increase over time with climate change.

Question L – Stuart Bourne, of Rainham, will ask the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration, Councillor Curry, the following:

We are currently facing a climate emergency and a cost-of-living crisis, where growing your own fruit and vegetables can have a dramatic impact on reducing food miles and providing cheap healthy food. And for those without large gardens allotments have been the only way for many people to do this.

Yet the data I have seen, shows that since 2018 the waiting list has nearly tripled from 695 to 2009 people. And the average waiting time for a new plot is now 2.5 years, whilst some people have been waiting 5 years and have still not got a plot.

It is shocking that so many people want to do the right thing, but are hampered and discouraged.

Can the Portfolio Holder please explain the cause of this ever increasing backlog, setting out what action will be taken to ensure it will be cleared?

Question M – John Castle, of Chatham, will ask the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Enforcement, Councillor Osborne, the following:

The sewage leaks by Southern Water are a matter that all levels of government should rightly take seriously. Medway has a large estuary and the Medway estuary continues to see regular sewage leaks from Southern Water. This is a health risk and environmentally damaging, Medway Council should not allow the companies to get away with these leaks.

Other councils with rivers and where coastal access is vital to individuals and businesses in their communities have taken action to ensure that Water companies cannot hide from their leaks. Currently, water companies are obliged to test water quality, but can do so at a time of their choosing, allowing them to pick and choose when to carry out the tests.

I trust the Council agrees with me that this is insufficient, therefore, will the Council work with partners to ensure that Water companies cannot get away with marking their own work, including to ensure that regular testing of the estuaries in Medway is carried out?

Question N – Onyx Rist, of Rainham, will ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, the following:

Does Councillor Maple agree with Medway Liberal Democrats of the need to be inclusive of the non-binary community on equality monitoring forms?

Question O – Kate Belmonte, of Gillingham, will ask the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration, Councillor Curry, the following:

In 2021 I was part of the Pump Lane Steering Group who successfully fought against AC Goatham's application to destroy 126 acres of prime agricultural land in Rainham.

Medway Council has now published a new Land Availability Assessment report as part of its Local Plan consultation process. I note that within the report it recommends that the land, which was saved from development, should proceed to Stage 2 of the assessment process.

Medway Council spent tens of thousands of tax payers' money to protect this land, are they now happy to concrete over the orchards?