

Public Question

(Relating to Agenda Item No.12, Climate Change Action Plan 2025-2028)

Question A – Bryan Fowler of Chatham, asked the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration, Councillor Curry, the following:

‘The paper presented to Cabinet contains an "infographic" about Climate Change and depicts an item on Heat Stress relating it to health.

The paper mentions resilience and adaptation to climate changes.

This summer has been one of the hottest on records and stress has been caused by overheating in new build houses and flats.

What consideration to addressing this has been made by our local authority, including the opportunities for adaption?’

Councillor Curry said that older properties were more likely to be affected by heat stress and overheating. Building Regulation legislation determined the requirements for new properties with regard to overheating and all applications were assessed accordingly.

In relation to older properties, the Council only had control over properties that it owned and would consider the necessary adaptations to address overheating concerns.

The Housing Service has an Asset and Energy team, with an in house Retrofit Coordinator. The role of the Retrofit Coordinator is to review the energy efficiency of HRA housing, carry out assessments and complete Energy Performance Certificates (EPC).

The Housing Service was also in the process of installing remote monitoring environmental sensors which monitored temperatures, humidity levels and other things like excessive heat loss.

The HRA Retrofit Coordinator would visit properties where data was showing that a property was potentially at risk. This could be of a low EPC or Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) score, overheating, heat loss or damp and mould). They would assess the building’s fabric and see how it is being lived in.

The Retrofit Coordinator would then either instruct works via Housing’s repairs, voids, planned works and energy contract with Mears, to offer advice and guidance to the tenant or sign post them where other types of support may be required.

The Council had held its Developers’ Forum earlier in the summer and the issue about how resilience could be built into new designs came up as part of the discussions with the developers and it had been made clear that things needed to be done differently. New developments would better consider how resilience could be built in.

Bryan Fowler asked the following supplementary question:

‘As some of you may know, I do live in a new build house on Kitchener Barracks and there have been extensive problems this summer with excessive heat and there have also been a lot of items in the national press about heat and solar gain in new build flats, particularly in London. Can I ask you to commend this subject to your Planning Officers, particularly when we are looking at houses or flats that are of east / west orientation and could you come back to Full Council and Cabinet with some thoughts on this later?’

In response, Councillor Curry said that he would consider the matter in more detail. He said that everything about urban heating and cooling was crucial to how urban centres were considered. The Council was undertaking a decarbonisation programme in partnership with other local authorities and the Government. As part of that, everything relevant relating to public realm management would be considered and building design was part of that.

Public Question

Question B - Carl Dunks, of Rainham, submitted the following to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple:

‘Can Medway Council do more to support residents of Rainham with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism, Tourette’s and other neurodiverse conditions?’

Councillor Maple said that Medway Council was committed to supporting neurodiverse residents of all ages, including those with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism, Tourette’s Syndrome, and other conditions, whether they lived in Rainham or anywhere in Medway.

It was recognised that neurodiversity is lifelong, and Medway’s approach reflected that. Working across the Integrated Care Partnership with the Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board, Kent County Council, and people with lived experience, the Council had developed a joined-up system of support that was designed to be flexible, inclusive, and responsive to individual needs.

This included a new neurodiversity webpage, where residents could find information, advice, and guidance, whether they had a diagnosis or not. The webpage was a central place for tools and resources, including support for children, young people, and adults.

The Council was working with some schools to pilot tools like “This is Me” and Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINs), which were helping to improve school experiences and promote inclusion, with a view to expanding these over the coming years.

New community based support was also being commissioned, shaped by feedback from residents. This would include peer support and talking therapies and was expected to go live in September. GPs continued to play a key role in helping people access specialist services, whether that was for diagnosis or alternative forms of

support. For those with more complex needs, specialist health professionals were available to provide tailored, intensive support.

Support for Tourette's Syndrome was available through GPs and specialist services, and residents could access online and face-to-face support groups. One helpful resource was the Tourette's Action Group, which offered practical advice and community connections.

Medway Small Steps received Council funding and provided support for families. The service offered workshops, parenting courses, and coffee mornings for families with children either awaiting or following an assessment for ADHD or autism. It supported children aged 0 to 19 and those up to 25 with diagnosed special educational needs. It helped families access further support through referrals to services like SENDIAS and Early Help.

Medway was also working through its Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Improvement Board to improve outcomes for children and young people. This included increasing inclusion in schools and expanding mental health and therapeutic support.

Councillor Maple paid tribute to voluntary and third sector partners who did tremendous work and advocacy for individuals and families.

No supplementary question was asked as Carl Dunks was not present.

Members' Questions

Question C – Councillor Etheridge submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness, Councillor Louwella Prenter:

'Noting the Prime Minister's recent appearance in front of the Liaison Committee on 21st July and recent comments from the Leader of the Council surrounding the number of Medway families in temporary accommodation, can the Portfolio Holder confirm that Medway has "lots of housing available", clarifying whether this housing will be used as asylum seeker accommodation before that for Medway residents?'

Responding on behalf of Councillor Louwella Prenter, Councillor Maple said that Medway Council had a statutory duty to provide housing and homelessness advice to households who approached the Council for housing assistance. If a household became homeless and met the legislative requirements of the Part VII Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, temporary accommodation may be offered. At present, over 3,000 households per annum approached the Council for assistance with there being approximately 600 households currently in temporary accommodation. This included approximately 400 households with at least one dependent child.

Councillor Maple said that the need to reduce the number of children in temporary accommodation was one of the reasons why the development of Medway's new Local Plan was so important.

There were currently approximately 3,500 households on the Council's waiting list for social housing, with there being an average of 600 lets per year. Therefore, demand

for social housing far exceeded availability. This was also reflected in the private rented sector where there had been an increase in the average monthly rental price by 10.5%, leading to an average of £1,203 per calendar month.

The Council did not have a statutory responsibility to house asylum seekers or to provide asylum accommodation, however, this did not prevent the Home Office's contractors from procuring accommodation in Medway.

It was also important to note that to access temporary accommodation or social housing under the Housing Act 1996, the applicant was required to have permanent rights to remain in the UK and Medway Council's Policy, which was currently being reviewed required applicants to have first been a Medway resident for a period of time.

Question D – Councillor Pearce, submitted the following to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple:

'The Member of Parliament for Gillingham and Rainham recently declared her opposition to the Local Plan and development in North Rainham (800 houses off Pump Lane).

Is Naushabah Khan MP a NIMBY (Not in My Back Yard)?'

Councillor Maple said he would not use the term 'Not in my Back Yard'. He considered that the track record of Naushabah Khan MP on the issue of housing was without question, whether that was in her previous professional life before becoming an MP, including working with housing charities, or in her role on Medway Council's Cabinet, where she brought forward a number of important policy changes. In particular, she had started the conversation around temporary accommodation. The support she had given in her letter regarding the Regulation 18 consultation for the Local Plan set out clearly how she had supported house building.

In her role in Parliament, including as a member of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee, Naushabah Khan had said on numerous occasions that she supported housebuilding. Councillor Maple said that it was appropriate for an elected representative to take a view on an individual application and the views of the MP were valued and welcomed. He was grateful to have an advocate working on behalf of residents of Gillingham and Rainham and to have such an important and experienced voice on the Select Committee.