

**Council – 28 February 2018****Councillor Questions****1. From Councillor Mrs Mary Lawes to Councillor Mrs Jennifer Hollingsbee, Cabinet Member for Communities**

Can the cabinet member for communities advise me as to what this council has been actively doing to reduce deprivation in the District, especially around employment, housing, GP services and health & Wellbeing?

**ANSWER:**

The Economic Development team has been working over the last two years to secure £2.2 million European Structural Investment Funds for a community-led local development programme to tackle issues around deprivation in the east, central and harbour areas of Folkestone. The specific aim is to support residents in these areas on their journey into employment and to support local businesses to grow. The council is providing the required 50% match funding – equivalent to around £250,000, to manage this programme over its five year duration to the end of 2022. This will enable projects that will bring 50% match fund, to be developed, thereby bringing a total of almost £4.5 million into Folkestone to address issues of deprivation within the community.

Communities team have been proactively engaging with the health sector and addressing health and wellbeing issues at both strategic level and operational level. Shepway is represented at the South Kent Coast Health and Wellbeing Board and at other relevant forums eg the Local Children's Partnership group (LCPG,) to ensure that these services address the needs of our residents.

The LCPG has recently awarded funding (2 years in a row), together with the Shepway Community Safety Partnership, to the Shape up project (Gillingham Football Club) which works with disaffected young people. They run activities at the local sports centre that support health outcomes such as reducing obesity. Healthy eating workshops in schools have also taken place.

The council has also been involved in the redesign of GP services, attending workshops with GPs and other representatives of the health sector and helping to identify where GPs can access more information to support patients eg sports centre activities or housing advice to counter depression linked to poor housing conditions. Minor illness appointments are being seen within locality hubs (one at RVH and a number at location n Hythe and Rural areas for the Marsh). These services would like to expand to include wider health and wellbeing services eg mental health support and the council supports these ideas.

The Council continues to support Shepway Citizens Advice with significant funds (£58k GF and £10.8k HRA funds) which provides much needed support and advice to those most deprived and suffering crisis in terms of debt and other issues. They also provide employment advice.

The Housing Options Team has employed a Prevention Plus officer that looks at housing and employment issues for single homeless people.

The engagement of the council has ensure the involvement of GPs in work shops around new developments such as Princes Parade and Otterpool Park, which has supported the wider health and wellbeing benefits associated with good design principles.

In addition the Councils wider services across the various housing teams, economic development, lifeline, environmental protection and provision of good quality parks and recreational facilities all support health and wellbeing outcomes for the community.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

Can you offer an update on the situation regarding recruitment to GP surgeries?

**ANSWER:**

I will provide an update to you after the meeting.

**2. From Councillor Mrs Mary Lawes to Councillor Stuart Peall, Cabinet Member for the Environment**

Can the cabinet member explain to me the criteria for replacing a bin if waste bins are damaged or go missing while put out for collection on collection day? Could the cabinet member also explain to me why staff have been told to tell the public, if they complain about having to pay £49.99 to get a new bin, that this is a political decision and to contact their local councillor? Could you explain what does this mean?

**ANSWER:**

In answer to the first point and referring back to my earlier response to questions from the public.

The council policy on fees and charges is based on the principle that the 'user pays' and this has applied to the purchase of new refuse bins and containers.

Following the wider rollout of recycling bins at the start of the current contract in 2012 an exception to the fees and charges policy was agreed whereby the council would directly fund the replacement of bins that were reported lost or damaged as the result of the collection operation.

In light of escalating costs, this approach was reviewed in 2016 and cabinet took the decision to change the policy and charge for the replacement of residual bins in all circumstances. The purpose of this was to cap the cost of

replacement bins and bring it within budget; which it has. The policy remained unchanged for recycling bins and containers, which continue to be replaced free of charge when damaged or lost at collection. This is to encourage continued participation in the recycling scheme.

As discussed in my previous answer since the change in the replacement bin policy came into effect in April 2017, 130 residual bin replacements have been charged; however in the same period over 2000 recycling bins and containers have been provided free of charge to residents.

In answer to your second point the Customer Services Manager has confirmed that there has been no instruction to staff to describe the policy change as a 'political decision' or to specifically contact their local councillor on this matter. Clearly, if the public wish to contact their councillor and register views on any council matter they are not discouraged from doing so.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

On 1 February, a resident had reported a lost bin, which was subsequently replaced by 9 February. Two other residents in the same ward had also reported their missing bins, and were still awaiting replacements. Can you confirm the correct procedure will be followed to deal with this?

**ANSWER:**

Please provide details of names and addresses after the meeting, and I will look into the matter for you.

**3. From Councillor Mrs Mary Lawes to Councillor Stuart Peall, Cabinet Member for the Environment**

Members of the public have complained about food waste being thrown in the purple lid bins (recycled waste). These incidents have been witnessed by the public as well as their bins being stained by food waste. Members of public have complained and received reference numbers from SDC but have not had any answers. Can you explain why this is happening and do you believe that recycling is working well in the district?

**ANSWER:**

In response to the point about complaints being made, logged but not being answered, I have checked with the council's Complaints Officer and they have no record of any complaints registered in the past year that match this description. If the councillor provides me with details then I would be happy to look into this further and ensure any matters are investigated and responded to.

As a general point, there have been occasions in the past where residents have been confused by the use by Veolia crews of what is called a 'slave bin'.

This is where a work bin is taken down the street to collect food waste from several houses, and then attached to the loader for tipping. To an outside observer the crews could appear to be emptying food bins into a recycling bin. I have also heard reports of the crews also putting the green food caddies into the recycling bin for ease when collecting but still tipping separately. It is also worth making the point that tipping food waste directly into the recycling bin contaminates the load so it would certainly not be in our contractor Veolia's interests if this was the practice. If specific incidents on routes are reported, the local management will investigate and take action

Finally, Councillor Mrs Lawes asks if I believe recycling is working well in the district. Overall, I do think the recycling scheme is working well. We continue to post strong recycling figures around 42% of the total waste produced, which is comparable and in many cases better than similar authorities. The garden waste scheme remains popular and in fact grew in the number of subscriptions last year. We have a strong working partnership with DDC, which allows us to punch above our weight when working with large contractors and work has already begun on the next contract in January 2021 with our East Kent colleagues.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

I have emailed you with details of four incidents of food waste being thrown in to recycled waste. Please can you provide me with a proper answer with numbers, details and results?

**ANSWER:**

A proper answer to your question has been given. If you have something to add, please provide more information, and I will discuss with Veolia. However, I would need categorical proof, such as video evidence.

**4. From Councillor Mrs Carol Sacre to Councillor Alan Ewart-James, Cabinet Member for Housing**

I understand from figures compiled in October 2016 there were 1773 vacant properties in Shepway, of which 547 of these have remained empty for six years or more.

Are we taking an active role to re-establish those remaining empty properties, as much-needed residential units particularly for our local residents?

**ANSWER:**

The Council recognises that Empty Homes are an unnecessary wasted resource and we continue to work to bring these homes back into use to provide much needed homes for local people in the district. Returning Empty homes back into use is a key priority within the Council's current Corporate Plan

During 2016/17 intervention by the Council resulted in 72 empty homes being brought back into use in the district. This was achieved through Shepway No Use Empty Loans, enforced sale (where sufficient council tax debt has arisen) and subsequent owners bringing homes back into use, and other enabling work by the Council to encourage the owners of empty homes to bring them back into use or to sell them on to buyers who do want to refurbish and bring the homes back into use. Where appropriate the Council's Planning enforcement officer also intervenes to tackle any properties that pose a detriment to the amenity of the area.

The Council works closely with Kent County Council to provide loans to the owners of long-term empty homes so that they can be brought back into use. The extremely successful and award winning Shepway "No Use Empty Plus" loan scheme provides a useful local top-up to the KCC loans so that we can effectively widen the scope on the number of units we can bring back into use within Shepway. The scheme was recognised as a national example of good practice at the 2017 Empty Homes Awards. Over the last two and a half years, the Council has provided loans totalling approximately £750,000, which has resulted in 50 long-term empty homes being brought back into use in Shepway. This would not have been possible without the loan funding made available by the Council. Moreover, the loans will be repaid back to the council over the next three years for further investment against our key priorities.

The Council will continue its work to target and bring long-term empty homes back into in the district over the coming year. This will include further assistance through Shepway 'No Use Empty Plus' in partnership with KCC. As part of this initiative, the Council has an agreed budget of £350K available to provide further loans during 2018/19.

As you can see, bringing long-term empty homes back into use is clear priority for the Council.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

Can we ensure adequate provision is made to accommodate ex-servicemen?

**ANSWER:**

There is a covenant where ex-servicemen have a priority.