

# Cabinet – 13 October 2022

## Questions from the Public

### **1 Janet Jackman to Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):**

Why have tin hats been put on at Five Acres just to do a survey? It is totally unnecessary and a very expensive cost. The roof of 45 to 49 is in perfect condition and just needs minor repairs. It still has 20 years of life, and the new roof is only guaranteed for 15 years.

### **Reply from Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):**

Thank you for your questions, Ms Jackman. As stated previously we welcome questions at any time in the process. Harlow Council require these works to be completed as part of the “investigatory works” as part of the statutory process. This provision is required whilst the investigatory works are in place to protect the properties from the elements and potential damage through bad and adverse weather. Once the roof surveys are completed copies will be sent to all Leaseholders.

### **2 Janet Jackman to Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):**

The cladding on 45 to 49 is in perfect condition and under 11 metres, so it doesn't require changing. They are saying they are charging the cladding for like for like which it isn't. Like for like would be changing it to UPVC from UPVC. Hardie board is an upgrade, as it is a totally different material, so we class that as an upgrade.

Please can you explain if it is like for like why are you changing it when it is in perfect good condition with many years life and why are we not being updated with the works?

It really is shocking how long they are taking to survey the job. The leaseholders are very concerned about the costs and how we going to pay. It has been going on for too long with not knowing what works need doing. It is affecting our health and wellbeing.

### **Reply from Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):**

It is acknowledged that the cladding is below the threshold of 11m, and it is noted that the cladding is not being replaced due to height. The cladding, however, is being replaced due to its age and updated fire regulation after inspections.

In the case of block 45-49, it hasn't been possible to provide an exact date when it was replaced as legislation states the records must only be kept for a maximum of 12 years. It is estimated the cladding to be over 20 years old. This type of cladding becomes brittle and prone to breakages as it ages. It is also unlikely to have sufficient insulation behind it, but we won't know that until the investigations have been carried out. The cladding will be replaced with current industry standards materials for the reasons stated above.

**3 Sally Jones to Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):**

At the last Cabinet meeting, I queried who made the final decision regarding 'appropriate and necessary' works. Councillor Swords kindly explained that the Director of Housing would consult with you, Councillor Carter, as the Portfolio Holder. The Rt Hon. Robert Halfon made Andrew Murray aware that the Leaseholders are not happy with the situation at Five Acres and we still believe that a blanket approach has been adopted to all the blocks despite our continual comments on how they differ.

What proof will you provide of your discussions and what guarantees can you give us to ensure the details will be reviewed thoroughly and fairly for each individual block?

**Reply from Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):**

Thank you for your questions Ms Jones. All works are individually reviewed a on a block-by-block basis.

When the works are completed and signed off, the invoice will be raised and a full breakdown of the works carried out to individual blocks will be supplied to all leaseholders. All leaseholders then have a further opportunity to raise questions concerning the works carried out to individual blocks and individual flats.

**4 Sally Jones to Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):**

Please can someone explain if all the individual blocks will have scaffolding all at the same time for the surveys to be conducted soon, or will the scaffolding be removed once works are complete and moved to another block?

We are already five weeks into the project and the surveys have not been conducted on the pitched roofs or cladding. We trust we will not be penalised for the extra time that appears necessary to do these works correctly.

**Reply from Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):**

All works are split into sections, scaffolding works will overlap to keep to programme. The Council is working to schedule for the agreed scaffolding completion dates that fit within the overall works programme. Survey dates have been previously advised and are still within these timeframes.

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## Questions from Councillors

**1 Councillor Chris Vince to Councillor Joel Charles (Portfolio Holder for Business and Community Resilience):**

Monday was world mental health day. What steps will the Council take to support the mental health of our town who are facing not only the fallout from the pandemic but also the cost-of-living crisis?

**Reply from Councillor Joel Charles (Portfolio Holder for Business and Community Resilience):**

This year's World Mental Health Day theme was focused on making mental health and wellbeing for all a global priority. It is the council's ambition as a community leader to look at new ways to raise awareness of maintaining good mental health and to break down barriers associated with talking about personal wellbeing.

The Council is currently working with local primary care leaders and Essex County Council to refresh the town's existing Health and Wellbeing Strategy with the clear intention that mental and physical health will be considered on an equal footing. One priority to structure the strategy is a focus on an evidenced-led approach to help determine the specific response to mental health needs in the town. The Strategy and Action Plan is currently subject to a consultation process with the Health and Wellbeing Partnership, which the Council leads. The document will come to the Scrutiny Committee in November and Cabinet on the 1 December.

Cllr Nick Churchill is the Member Champion for Mental Health and Wellbeing. In his role, Cllr Churchill continues to be a passionate advocate for parity in the way mental and physical health is treated.

During the course of this year, officers have undertaken activities to highlight help available, ranging from outreach support in the Civic Reception to the Care House creative outreach project delivered by Harlow Playhouse at the bandstand in the Town Park, which again offered the opportunity to recognise mental health issues and provide ways to connect with support services.

In recognition of the continuing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the current economic challenges this coming winter, the Council will continue to fund the Community Hub. Some of the core aims of the hub are to help people deal with financial and other worries, and to ensure they can be referred to help, including mental health support services.

**2 Councillor Chris Vince to Councillor Dan Swords (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration):**

Please can you give us an update on the new Harlow Hospital and UK Health Security Agency developments?

**Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration):**

Both developments will have significant positive benefits for Harlow and the surrounding areas. Not only will they transform healthcare, research, and innovation in our town, but they will help to create more jobs and growth. In recent months, I have met with both parties and been involved with meetings with Ministers about the progress of these projects.

The Hospital has submitted a fantastic business case for the new development and is awaiting approval of that from the Department of Health and the Treasury to proceed with the next stages of the development. It is believed that announcements on this are expected this autumn.

At the UKHSA site, significant progress has been made on the site with demolition works completed and the installation of all utilities supplies for the new development. Work has also commenced on the fit out of the main building to create new lab space. UKHSA is awaiting confirmation of budgets from the Treasury before being able to finalise plans for the completion of the development.

The Council remains in regular dialogue with both PAH and UKHSA and will continue to do everything possible to ensure these projects are delivered as quickly as possible.

**3 Councillor Tony Edwards to Councillor Joel Charles (Portfolio Holder for Business and Community Resilience):**

Given the “Cost of Living Crisis” please tell us what specific actions are being taken by the Council to increase community resilience over the forthcoming winter period?

**Reply from Councillor Joel Charles (Portfolio Holder for Business and Community Resilience):**

One of the Council’s most important priorities is to work relentlessly to promote prosperity. Enabling people to access opportunities, through skills development and employment is crucial. The Council’s approach to addressing concerns about the cost-of-living will be focused on supporting people to enhance their life

chances. To do this there must be a focus on local economic growth, that is why the Council's Economic Development Strategy, to be published next year, will set out a plan to attract further inward investment in the town.

The Council is also setting up an internal working group to look at what practical action can be taken regarding the cost-of-living. One step already taken by the Council has been to further fund the Community Hub to ensure this outreach provision for residents will continue through the winter, connecting residents with sources of help and support. The Council continues to have a good working relationship with Citizens Advice Harlow and the town's Foodbank, where some hub users are referred, alongside the offer of mental health support.

Further opportunities are being explored through the Council's work with colleagues in primary care on the Harlow Health and Wellbeing Partnership, and the West Essex Health Partnership structures. The Council is also engaging with the local Poverty Alliance and listening to the issues raised to look at ways to assist. A separate meeting request has been sent to leading members of the Poverty Alliance to discuss what more the Council can do to help residents during the winter months.

The Council's website has been updated to include support and advice about the cost-of-living, and this will continue to develop. Projects under current consideration are the development of a campaign throughout the winter to ensure that residents can get the right advice on a range of matters, including additional benefits information, fuel efficiency and insulation best practice, and debt and mental health support. These matters have already been highlighted in the Harlow Times and further information will be posted on the Council's social media channels. As part of the Council's winter planning, the provision of warm spaces for vulnerable residents who may need support is being considered.

**4 Councillor Tony Edwards to Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):**

Given the current cost of living crisis and the recent concerns expressed by Five Acres leaseholders regarding the cost of refurbishment of their Housing Blocks (estimated at 30k per leaseholder), would the Council be willing to extend the interest free repayment period from 5 to 10 years?

**Reply from Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):**

At present one of the repayment options available to Leaseholders who reside in their property is an interest free loan up to a maximum of 5 years. On receipt of the completed application form the Homeownership Officers will assess the affordability of the applicant(s) before agreeing the loan. Harlow Council are prepared as responsible Landlord on a case-by-case application to extend the

repayment period to a maximum of 10 years for those Leaseholders who reside in the Leasehold property.