

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Tuesday 7 December 2021 at 7.30 pm
Council Chamber - Civic Centre

1. Apologies for Absence and Substitutions
2. Declarations of Interest

To receive Councillors' declarations of interest (if any) in relation to any matters on the agenda.
3. Minutes (Pages 3 - 6)

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2021.
4. Matters arising
5. Written questions from members of the public

To receive any questions from members of the public in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 10.
6. Written questions from Councillors

To receive any questions from Councillors in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 11.
7. Responses of the Cabinet to Reports of the Scrutiny Committee

To consider responses (if any) of the Cabinet to reports and recommendations from the Committee.
8. Delivery of Council House Building Programme - Update (Pages 7 - 16)
9. Allotments - Initial Report (to follow)
10. Review of Turnout in Local Elections - Final Report (Pages 17 - 40)
11. Work Plan (Pages 41 - 42)

To review the Committee's work plan for the current year.
12. References from Other Committees

13. Matters of Urgent Business

Such other business which, in the opinion of the Chair, should be received as a matter of urgency by reason of special circumstances to be specified in the minutes.

**MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON**

14 September 2021

7.30 - 9.30 pm

PRESENT

Committee Members

Councillor Tony Edwards (Chair)

Councillor David Carter (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Nick Churchill

Councillor Tony Durcan

Councillor Mike Garnett (as substitute for Councillor Gareth Williams)

Councillor Eugenie Harvey

Councillor Shona Johnson

Councillor Nicky Purse

Also Present

Councillor Joel Charles

Councillor Alastair Gunn

Councillor Andrew Johnson

Councillor Dan Swords

Officers

Andrew Bramidge, Head of Environment and Planning

Jane Greer, Director of Community Wellbeing

Simon Hill, Head of Governance

Alison Hodgson, Electoral Services Manager

Adam Rees, Senior Governance Support Officer

14. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Gareth Williams.
Councillor Mike Garnett was in attendance as his substitute.

15. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Nicky Purse declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 11 as her husband worked for Veolia.

Councillor David Carter declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 12 as a site rep for Harlow Allotment Association.

16. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2021 are agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

17. **MATTERS ARISING**

None.

18. **WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

None.

19. **WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS**

None.

20. **RESPONSES OF THE CABINET TO REPORTS OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

- a) Housing and Accommodation Requirements for Adults with a Moderate/Severe Learning Disability

RESOLVED that the Committee noted that Cabinet adopted the recommendations in the consultant's report (attached as Appendix A to the report).

21. **PRE-SCRUTINY OF COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGY**

The Chair invited Councillor Charles to speak about the Community Safety Strategy. He said that one of the focusses would be to confront anti-social behaviour in partnership with other organisations. He also wanted to focus on domestic abuse on a cross party basis. The Strategy would outline how the Council could address these issues as a community leader. In response to questions by the Committee, Councillor Charles said that the Strategy would refresh the Council's general approach to issues including anti-social behaviour to support early intervention and to complement the Resilience Strategy. The Community Safety Strategy would also aim to support third sector and informal groups.

The Strategy would have thematic targets. Whistleblowing processes were already in place, both internally and externally, but he would look at how the Council could act as a community leader.

He wanted to push the Police to be more proactive in terms of engagement with the public, and to see a resumption of engagement following the pandemic.

Engagement with young people would be an important part of the Strategy and he welcomed input from the Committee on how best to achieve this. On the issue of domestic abuse one of the aims would be to ensure that people were confident that they would be supported.

RESOLVED that the Portfolio Holder would be invited to attend the Scrutiny Committee meeting before the Community Safety Strategy was due to be considered by Cabinet.

22. **REVIEW OF TURNOUT IN LOCAL ELECTIONS - INITIAL REPORT**

The Committee received an initial report on the review of turnout in local elections.

It was agreed that question 2 in the consultation would have an additional option 'choose not to vote,' question 3 would be amended to read 'if you choose not to vote' and the first option on question 5 would be split into two separate options.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- A** Noted the information within the report as background and future government proposals.
- B** Approved the questions (attached as Appendix D to the report) for consultation subject to the following amendments:
 - i) Question 2 in the consultation would have an additional option 'choose not to vote.'
 - ii) Question 3 would be amended to read 'if you choose not to vote.'
 - iii) Question 5 would be split into two separate options.

23. **PADDLING POOLS**

The Chair explained that Councillor Charles had been asked to attend to speak about paddling pools following a request made to the Chief Executive in accordance with the scrutiny procedure rules.

Councillor Charles explained that the delay in the opening of the Town Park was caused by a sealant not drying fully before the initial opening. This required specialist contractors to fix. Pending an internal investigation he was limited on what he could tell the committee. He had however reviewed the project planning in place and had requested a four week buffer no work period before opening in future years.

Councillor Charles said the Council's previous policy for toilet provision at paddling pools and splash parks was to work with co-located facilities. There would need to be a considered approach for providing further toilet provision as these facilities would require ongoing supervision.

24. **REFUSE COLLECTION**

The Chair explained that Councillor Gunn had been asked to attend to speak about refuse collection following a request made to the Chief Executive in accordance with the scrutiny procedure rules.

Councillor Gunn said that the decision to suspend separate food waste collection was based on staff shortages experienced by Veolia. The Council was adopting a robust approach on managing the contract with Veolia. There were a number of wider issues, including a national shortage of HGV drivers. Communication with the wider public could be improved if the Council was made aware of potential issues by Veolia ahead of time.

He explained that there was a need to rebalance waste collection routes as new developments in Harlow meant that there were more collections at the beginning of the week. Veolia needed to present a viable case on how the routes could be rebalanced. This expected to take until at least Christmas to be finalised.

25. **WORK PLAN**

The Committee received a report summarising its work plan for 2021/22.

It was agreed that Councillors David Carter and Tony Durcan would assist Officers with the review of allotments.

Councillors Eugenie Harvey, Maggie Hulcoop, Shona Johnson, Nicky Purse and Tony Durcan would assist with the review of support for victims of domestic abuse and sexual harassment.

RESOLVED that the work plan be noted.

26. **REFERENCES FROM OTHER COMMITTEES**

None.

27. **MATTERS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE

REPORT TO: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: 7 DECEMBER 2021

TITLE: DELIVERY OF COUNCIL HOUSE BUILDING PROGRAMME – UPDATE

LEAD OFFICER: JANE GREER, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT (01279) 446406

CONTRIBUTING OFFICERS: ALISON FOX, REGENERATION PROJECTS MANAGER (01279) 446407

ANDREW START, HOUSING REGENERATION AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGER (01279) 446456

RECOMMENDED that Committee:

- A** Notes the progress made on delivering the recommendations of the Scrutiny Report on Council Housebuilding.

BACKGROUND

1. In March 2021 the Scrutiny Committee recommended to Cabinet that the recommendations set out in the Delivery of Council House Building programme scrutiny report presented by appointed consultants be adopted.
2. There are a total of 20 recommendations contained within the report covering both strategic and operational aspects.
3. Since the adoption of the report, the Regeneration, Housing and Planning teams have worked together on progressing the recommendations to help support the successful delivery of a Council Housebuilding programme.
4. Appendix A highlights the progress made on each of the recommendations.

ISSUES/PROPOSALS

5. The recommendations covered a wide range of areas of work which included measures aimed at improving the understanding of the supply and demand for Council Housing in order to influence what is built as part of the Council House building programme, ensuring adequate staff are employed and that existing staff have access to project management training.
6. Work has continued on the development of new Housing Strategy which is due to be considered by the Councils' Policy Development Working Group and Cabinet early in 2022. The Housing Strategy covers a number of priorities that

includes “Creating a suitable supply of new housing to meet local housing needs” under which the objective of “Develop a Council Housebuilding Programme” is included.

7. In addition to the Housing Strategy a further, more detailed document called the Council Housebuilding Delivery Plan is being developed. This is a framework that outlines the processes and decision making points linked to Council Housebuilding. It is not a public document as it includes details that are commercially sensitive. It covers details on the processes to be undertaken to develop the pipeline of future Council Housebuilding including undertaking feasibility studies on sites and how sites are prioritised, deciding on what is due to be built on each site, assumptions linked to financial modelling and how schemes are to be funded as well as outlining practical aspects of the housebuilding process including the use of professional services and contractors.
8. The Council House building Delivery Plan document will be a live document that will be updated as new practices are adopted and others are reviewed and refreshed.
9. The Council Housebuilding Delivery Plan includes a planned five year pipeline of Council Houses to be delivered as outlined below:

Year	Target number of new Council Homes built
2021/22	18 units
2022/23	60 units
2023/24	100 units
2024/25	120 units
2025/26	120 units

10. The five year pipeline has been established after reviewing the feasibility and priority of each site, exploring funding opportunities and considering practical issues such as lead-in times for each scheme. To ensure a continuous pipeline of schemes work on schemes across the whole programme is undertaken in parallel to each other.
11. Currently, there are two Council housebuilding schemes progressing on site that are due to be completed by April 2022. These are 16 houses at Bushey Croft and 2 houses at 4 The Hill. A £460,000 grant from Homes England has been awarded for the Bushey Croft development which is being developed by Borrás Construction. The two units at 4 The Hill are being developed by HTS Group Ltd.
12. It is recommended that Committee notes the progress that has been made on successfully delivering against the recommendations of the scrutiny report and as a result clear targets of Council Housebuilding have been set which will be delivered against.

IMPLICATIONS

Environment and Planning (Includes Sustainability)

None specific.

Author: Andrew Bramidge, Director of Strategic Growth and Regeneration

Finance (Includes ICT, and Property and Facilities)

None specific.

Author: Simon Freeman, Deputy to the Chief Executive and Director of Finance

Housing

As contained within the report.

Author: Andrew Murray, Director of Housing

Community Wellbeing

As set out in the report.

Author: Jane Greer, Director of Communities and Environment

Governance (Includes HR)

As contained in the report.

Author: Simon Hill, Director of Governance and Corporate Support

Appendices

Appendix A – progress report

Background Papers

None.

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

None.

Appendix A

Council House Building Scrutiny Report recommendations progress

November 2021

Background: A report was presented to scrutiny committee in March 2021 outlining the Council's House Building Programme. It made 20 recommendations. This table summarises feedback and progress made on those recommendations.

Report Recomm'n number	Scrutiny Report Recommendation	Comments on recommendations	Latest Progress update	Target date
1	It is recommended that the Council gives consideration as to whether it still wishes to enable households with no housing need to join the Housing Register. It is suggested that the Council may wish to review the allocations policy	The Allocations Policy was last reviewed and updated in 2018. It lasts 5 years and is due to be reviewed / updated in 2023/24. The possibility of removing Band 4 (lowest priority) will be included as part of the consultation process for the review	6/8/21 – This will be included in review of Allocations Policy due in 2023/24.	March 2024
2	It is recommended that the Council uses data from the Housing Register to inform its development plan.	1) Regeneration Team are developing a Housing Delivery Plan that will outline the processes and key decision making points in Council House Building process. 2) Agreed that reviewing the requirements of the households in the highest priority bands will be useful. Also useful to consider whether there are groups of people	6/8/21 –Housing Delivery Plan document structure has been developed and work has begun on drafting key aspects of document. Allocations to provide Regeneration Team with 6 monthly reports on Band 1 and 2 property entitlement. Report will be broken down into age brackets. To review those on Housing Register	March 2022 On-going March 2022

		in the high priority bands whose housing requirements are not easily met.	aged either 55 years plus or 65 years plus who wish to downsize from larger family sized houses (Harlow Homes Incentive scheme).	
3	It is recommended that officers receive regular reports that break down total annual lets by bedroom size for all annual lets. This would enable demand to be compared with supply, providing more accurate intelligence on housing need in Harlow	<p>1) Allocations will be able to provide regular reports for all Council House lets.</p> <p>2) Unable to provide same report on Registered Providers units as this is a different system. However, summary of all Registered Providers nominations is now kept and is being supplied to Regeneration Team.</p>	<p>Allocations to provide Regeneration Team with 6 monthly reports on all new council tenancies – broken down by size.</p> <p>Allocations Team providing Regeneration with regularly updated spreadsheet outlining all Registered Providers nominations requests received.</p>	<p>Complete and on-going</p> <p>Complete</p>
4	It is recommended that moving to an online Housing Register application form would enable staff resource to be more effectively focused on other activities to meet housing need, and ensure that applications are automatically reviewed and that the Register provides an accurate understanding of current housing need	<p>1) Agreed that it would be desirable to have an online housing register application form, as this would enable clear efficiencies in the long term however, there are resource and cost implications that needs to be resolved.</p> <p>It will be considered as part of the Housing IT delivery Plan</p>	The earliest date this can be considered is 2022/23.	June 2022

5	It is recommended that an awareness session is held with Elected Members and Senior Managers to ensure that the house building process is better understood and that expectations can be managed and are achievable.	<p>1) Regular Councillor briefings are being set up with key staff to develop wider understanding.</p> <p>2) The awareness sessions could be linked to the development of the Housing Delivery Plan</p>	<p>Briefing session for key portfolio holders and key senior officers from Housing and Regeneration to be arranged at a future date.</p> <p>Regular updates to Portfolio Holder on process and reasons why schemes succeed or fail.</p>	March 2022
6	In order to ensure a focused approach on house building it is recommended that achievable annual house building targets are set, and progress against these targets should be reported quarterly	<p>1) Annual Targets to be included in the Housing Delivery Plan.</p> <p>2) Once targets are set, progress can be monitored.</p>	Regular updates on progress made to Senior Management Board. Last update October 2021. Housing pipeline document sets of plan for delivery. Currently under review.	On-going
7	In order to ensure a clear strategic vision for the delivery of housing the new Housing Strategy should be finalised and adopted	<p>New Housing Strategy is being finalised that was produced in conjunction with Overview Working Group Subgroup. Key priorities have been consulted on.</p> <p>New Housing Strategy includes a short chapter on Council House Building. The detail will be captured in the Housing Delivery Plan.</p>	Work continues on finalising the Housing Strategy and at the same time the Housing Delivery Plan is also being developed. Must align to corporate strategy and so timing to be considered and strategy to be reviewed after adoption of corporate strategy	March 2022

8	Develop a defined process for identifying and agreeing sites with a minimum number of agreed outcomes	1) The process for agreeing which sites to be included in the Council Housebuilding pipeline along with the expected units to be delivered from each site is being included in the Housing Delivery Plan. The process includes undertaking desktop review to establish position in Local Plan, feasibility reviews etc. for each site.	As part of the Housing Delivery Plan work details of the decision making process for prioritisation of pipeline of potential sites is being developed. A checklist for potential schemes in being reviewed and passed to the monthly development team for comment before submission	March 2022
9	Have a clear decision making process for awkward sites with a high build cost	1) As part of the Housing Delivery Plan a process is being developed that clarifies the process for dealing with awkward / high cost sites.	As part of the Housing Delivery Plan work details on decision making process for such sites are being developed including understanding of the options of what can be done with land which could include: -Exploring regeneration non-housing options -Selling land on open market; -developing serviced plots to sell for self-build to meet Council's Self-build requirements .	March 2022
10	Explore the opportunity of acquiring both land and property from major site developers both within Harlow and neighbouring districts	1) Can be included within the Housing Delivery Plan. 2) Need to understand political appetite, budget implications, value for money and other factors.	Liaising with planning team to understand major house builders appetite for social housing, although these are mostly in areas that Housing doesn't currently have any stock, so possible management issue moving forward	
11	The importance of appointing and retaining the right person to lead the housebuilding programme is critical to		Regeneration and Housing Delivery Manager has been in post leading the Council House Building Programme for the past 18 months. Training of other staff on-going to aid succession planning.	Complete

	its success.			
12	Focus on staff retention through the appraisal process	Do not consider that staff retention is a problem; however this will be considered during Personal Performance Plan process.	Appropriate feedback through Personal Performance Plan process made July 2021	Complete
13	Undertake a benchmarking exercise to understand if an increase in staffing resources would be likely to lead to an increase in developments	Not yet started	Additional staff resource required. Recruitment of additional staff member completed Nov 21 – benchmarking to be included as part of work plan	June 2022
14	Ensure that project management expertise is embedded within the team responsible for housebuilding either through existing resources or via a project management officer	Underway	Project management training has been identified via Personal Performance Plan process and training underway. Project management training undertaken by relevant team members.	Complete but keep under review
15	Establish an Officers Project Group to meet regularly with representation from Housing, Planning, and Finance and chaired by Regeneration, with the involvement of contracting partners where appropriate.	1) For the past 18 months there have been regular Officer Project Group meetings focused on developing joint understanding of the Council Housebuilding programme.	Meetings taking place on a regular basis	Complete
16	It will be important to recognise that any	1) Current contractor contract is for 3 years with possibility of 2 year	Liaising with Procurement team start the process of enrolling 2 or 3 local	March 2022

	further procurement exercises when the current contract with the selected contractor comes to an end has the potential to introduce delays	extension. Recommending that procurement process for additional professional fee contracts is commenced asap in order to be ready for April '22 when 3 years potential extension to take place which will give us potential options of alternative consultants and prevent slippages in procurement process.	multi-disciplinary companies that we can use on a rota system.	
17	Hold a meeting with planning, regeneration and housing to identify opportunities to overcome some of the delays within the current process	1) Process / reduction in delays is being reviewed as part of the development of the Housing Delivery Plan 2) Quarterly meeting between planning, Regeneration and Housing are underway.	Regular meetings taking place	Complete
18	Ensure that meetings with planning take place at the pre-application stage.	1) Pre-application stage meetings to be incorporated into process as part of Housing Delivery Plan 2) Meetings arranged on ad-hoc basis as schemes get to pre-application stage 3) Request that planners notify whole team of schemes brought to pre-planning application stage to ensure greater awareness.	These arrangements are in place.	Complete
19	Work with HTS to develop, plan and deliver future housing and regeneration schemes through a structured process	To progress – work in hand	Work with HTS ongoing. Trial site underway at The Hill. Future pipeline being worked up so that HTS can forward programme resources	On-going
20	It is recommended that the Council undertakes	Initial conversations have taken place with Homes England	Homes England Investment partner status granted – to achieve this proof of	On-going and linked

	further research into highlighted good practice in order to identify what learning and opportunities could be embedded locally	regarding best practice. Further work to be undertaken.	good practice must be evidenced	to item 13
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REPORT TO: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: 7 DECEMBER 2021

TITLE: TURNOUT IN LOCAL ELECTIONS – FINAL REPORT

LEAD OFFICER: SIMON HILL, DIRECTOR OF GOVERNANCE AND CORPORATE SUPPORT (01279) 446099

CONTRIBUTING OFFICERS: ALISON HODGSON, ELECTORAL SERVICES MANAGER (01279) 446038

ADAM REES, SENIOR GOVERNANCE SUPPORT OFFICER (01279) 446057

RECOMMENDED that:

- A** The Returning Officer be requested to develop an action plan to deal with issues identified by the survey that are within the control of the Council on:
- i) Specific issues raised about polling stations; and
 - ii) Communications on voting options and absent voting

BACKGROUND

1. At its meeting on 14 September 2021, the Committee agreed to carry out a consultation on what could be done to improve turnout at local elections. This consultation ran from 20 September until 1 November. The survey was available to complete online and paper copies were available at the Civic Centre. Libraries were also provided with copies.
2. In total 168 people responded. A copy of the survey results is attached as Appendix A to the report.
3. All bar one of the respondents was registered. This is in line with the registration rate in Harlow.
4. The answers show that respondents are most likely to vote in Parliamentary elections and least likely to vote in the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner elections. This reflects general turnout patterns. The figures would reflect a much higher turnout than ordinarily seen, but this is likely due to people who are most likely to respond to this type of survey also being more likely to vote.
5. The answers to question 5 indicate that a lack of information about candidates and their policies is the most likely to stop someone from voting and these are

the factors which were most likely to have stopped someone voting in the past as set out in question 7.

6. Issues relating to polling stations had a moderate impact. Issues completely out of the Council's and political parties control such as weather or work commitments have a limited impact.
7. The age profile of respondents largely mirrors voter turnout patterns, with particularly low response rates in the 18-24 and 25-34 age categories.
8. Most wards had fairly consistent response rates with the exception of Church Langley. Whilst both wards have larger electorates, the response rate was disproportionate and may suggest higher general levels of engagement with the voting process.

ISSUES/PROPOSALS

Findings of the survey for action by Councillors and Political Parties

9. Overwhelmingly the three biggest reasons for people not voting were, not knowing the candidates, not knowing the candidates' policies, or not feeling that the parties standing in their ward represent their views.
10. The Council is only able to provide limited information about candidates. During the pre-election period the Council has to avoid doing anything that could be seen as promoting a particular party or candidate. This is set out in Section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986, as amended by section 349 Communications Act 2003 and Section 27 of the Local government Act 1988. The Government published a code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity in 2011. The Code is based around seven principles to ensure that all communications activity meet the requirements of the statutory framework. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/recommended-code-of-practice-for-local-authority-publicity>
11. The rules applying to the pre-election period do not stop councillors from issuing their own publicity as long as council resources are not used. The Council's guidance on the pre-election period is attached Appendix B.
12. This Council is required to appoint a Returning Officer who is responsible for the conduct of elections in accordance with the law. One of the Returning Officer's responsibilities is to publish a statement of persons nominated these are published on the Council's website and are available at the Civic Centre as well as sent to the polling stations and other locations around the town to be displayed on a notice board.
13. It is noted that a significant number of people do not feel that the parties in their ward represent their views. For the district elections in 2021, four out of the eleven wards had a choice between two political parties. No ward had more than four candidates.

14. Issues of visibility and political diversity of candidates are for political parties to address. The Committee may wish to evaluate the general results and the comments left by respondents to the survey and consider them with their political groups.

Findings which the Council can action

15. Some residents highlighted that polling station access was difficult. The Council does have to follow the Government's guidance when selecting polling stations and it has a statutory responsibility for reviewing polling districts and polling places every 5 years. The next review is due to be completed before the elections in 2024 however the Council can carry out reviews of polling station arrangements at any other time. An interim review has recently been carried out on some polling stations and a report will be considered by Full Council shortly.
16. This survey has highlighted concerns at polling stations in Bush Fair, Church Langley, Old Harlow and Toddbrook. In these wards every polling station has a car park with the exception of St Mary's Church Centre where there is no specific off-street car park. However this polling station has a fairly small electorate and alternative locations are not known. No particular parking issues were identified at the time of the last review.
17. It is recommended that the Returning Officer develops an action plan to address any specific issues which may be identified with polling stations in these wards. This will take place after the local elections in May in case the issues experienced were a result of the Covid restrictions in place at the time.
18. It is noted that some people did not vote due to work commitments. As Councillors will be aware absent voting by post and by proxy are available to all electors. Furthermore, emergency proxies are available to those who cannot attend at shorter notice for reasons such as work, or ill health. The Council does have a communications plan which includes how electors can vote if they cannot attend their polling station in-person, however It is recommended that the Returning Officer's action plan looks at how the Council can further raise awareness of absentee voting methods.

IMPLICATIONS

Environment and Planning (Includes Sustainability)

None specific.

Author: Andrew Bramidge, Director of Strategic Growth and Regeneration

Finance (Includes ICT, and Property and Facilities)

None specific.

Author: Simon Freeman, Deputy to the Chief Executive and Director of Finance

Housing

As contained in the report.

Author: Andrew Murray, Director of Housing

Community Wellbeing

As contained in the report.

Author: Jane Greer, Director of Communities and Environment

Governance (Includes HR)

As contained in the report.

Author: Simon Hill, Director of Governance and Corporate Support

Appendices

Appendix A – Results of Local Turnout Elections Survey

Appendix B – Council Purdah Guidance

Background Papers

None.

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

None.

Appendix A - Local Elections Turnout Consultation Questionnaire

1. Are you registered to vote?

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes 	99.40%	167
2	No 	0.60%	1
3	Don't Know	0.00%	0
		answered	168
		skipped	0

2. If you are not registered to vote, why not?

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Confusion about the voter registration process	0.00%	0
2	None of the political parties represent my views 	40.00%	2
3	Don't know enough about the political parties and their policies	0.00%	0
4	Vote is unlikely to affect outcome 	60.00%	3
5	Not eligible to vote (e.g. due to nationality)	0.00%	0
6	Choose not to vote 	20.00%	1
7	Other (please state):	0.00%	0
		answered	5
		skipped	163
Other (please state): (0)			
No answers found.			

3. If you choose to vote, which type of elections do you normally vote in?

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	District 	74.40%	125

3. If you choose to vote, which type of elections do you normally vote in?

2	County		67.26%	113
3	Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner		50.00%	84
4	Parliamentary		88.69%	149
5	None		8.33%	14
			answered	168
			skipped	0

4. Which voting method do you normally use?

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total	
1	In-person		66.07%	
2	Postal		26.19%	
3	Proxy		0.60%	
4	Don't Vote		7.14%	
			answered	168
			skipped	0

5. How likely would the following stop you from voting?

Answer Choices	Very likely	Likely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Unlikely	Very unlikely	Response Total
Didn't know the candidates	32.74% 55	17.86% 30	16.07% 27	14.29% 24	19.05% 32	168
Didn't know the candidates' policies	42.26% 71	20.24% 34	13.10% 22	8.33% 14	16.07% 27	168
Couldn't park at or get to the polling station	16.07% 27	10.12% 17	14.29% 24	17.26% 29	42.26% 71	168
Polling station access was difficult	13.69% 23	10.71% 18	16.67% 28	13.69% 23	45.24% 76	168
Poor weather	5.36% 9	10.71% 18	23.21% 39	20.24% 34	40.48% 68	168
Work commitments	10.12% 17	13.10% 22	19.64% 33	21.43% 36	35.71% 60	168
Parties that stood in my ward don't represent my views	29.17% 49	20.24% 34	25.60% 43	9.52% 16	15.48% 26	168
Confusion about the voting process	4.76% 8	5.36% 9	19.64% 33	21.43% 36	48.81% 82	168

5. How likely would the following stop you from voting?

		answered	168
		skipped	0
Other (please state) (43)			
1	I found it difficult to find meaningful information about the candidates for my area in the last local elections. I very nearly didn't vote as a result. It meant that national issues influenced my thinking rather than local issues		
2	Not enough women represented in our council		
3	Voting is a total waste of time. Whatever is promised is never given		
4	I always vote but we need to see more of local cllrs in our wards (more accessible) . Many people don't know who they are or how to contact them. Would it be possible to put names of cllrs (those in position & prospective candidates) in local areas eg shopping areas and libraries ? Voters also need more info about where they stand on local issues. In general elections there needs to be a clearer connection between national and local issues. We also need an end to blatant lies / misrepresentation on publicity material (both paper and on line) which leads to disengagement by voters . That's for starters. People I know think if only the political parties could stop point scoring and attempt some kind of collaborative working to solve problems for residents that would be a good start at regaining trust . Focus on resident needs often gets lost . . And that loses those who most need to engage. Can we also have some clear , accessible information about which area of local govt is responsible for what . . And how people can get their voices heard ? Eg the appalling state of Harlow roads is not directly a local Council issue. It rests with ECC but local people can contact local County Cllrs and urge them to be proactive on their behalf. It would be good to have accessible live on line feed of council meetings. Great if the Council can make the physical process of voting easier but its the areas I have mentioned that I think will go some way to improve engagement.		
5	feel like district council of all parties have no pride in our town and allow things to get run down. drivers allowed to park however they like with no regard for safety, bushes overgrown across footpaths, litter everywhere and cycle tracks left in disrepair. also if the problems down to essex council surely its up to Harlow council to chase them.		
6	Yes. I don't think candidates are visible enough. They don't broadcast their views, or policies widely enough. Some candidates I vote for solely because of the party they represent. Not because I know of the candidate or their policies and what they stand for.		
7	Women fought long and hard to achieve voting rites we in particular must use our vote always		
8	Local elections..... I never have a clue who's even running. I haven't seen details on these people for a long time, nor seen social media posts locally about them. I also detest the fact my kids school gets shut as well and that is our polling centre, so I can go in for a 2 minute job but for that my child loses another 5 hours of education on top of what they've already lost.		
9	Decent candidates and parties are needed. The choice in Harlow is Tory who only care about pensioners and homeowners (both protected from austerity cuts) or Labour who are a complete and utter joke now. There is no one for a low paid, working age person to vote for. We just pay the tax rises that support and protect the Tory's favourite demographic, pensioners. National insurance rise, a nice way to thank us for working on the front line during the pandemic. Thanks for the pay cut, it was so worth putting myself at risk 😊 FYI we won't forget how poorly we have been treated.		
10	I didn't know I had three slips last time so filled in two but posted all 3 together so I could have the police chief one again		
11	Moving away from FPTP would considerably dissuade me from voting. The country has already given it's view on PR in a once in a generational referendum and it should not be considered again.		
12	Not knowing candidates has never stopped me from voting before, HOWEVER, it's extremely rare that I know anything about the local candidates at all before I get to the polling station. There is terrible lack of campaigning and visibility. I imagine that this will stop many people from voting, even if I always make a point to vote in every election (local or national) that is called.		
13	Local elections should be about the person ,have become too political,which is a shame.		
14	The whole voting process is stuck in the past and that is a key reason why voter turnout is getting lower as		

5. How likely would the following stop you from voting?

	<p>time moves on. In the rest of our lives technology progresses however voting still has to be done in person or by post. This is not practical for people in the 21st century. Voting should be a simple, quick task that only takes a couple of minutes, that could be done on the train while commuting to work, or in the evening while cooking dinner. Building societies, for example Nationwide, have managed to set up a system to allow voting online - it should be possible for the Government to do the same.</p>
15	<p>Having now gone to the end of the survey and noted that you have completely avoided the real question I must note that the thing which would stop me from voting is the blatant rubbish spouted to win votes, none of which ever comes to fruition. Bottom line, Harlow is a dump because the Council allows it to be a dumping ground! If they bothered to clean up people would be less likely to dump. This is a generic principle which applies to all manner of issues and is a far wider comment than that relating to emptying public waste baskets. If the Council has no pride, which they clearly don't, then they can't possibly expect anyone else to. Being an elected representative is not about earning a salary, it is not about party political tit for tat,, it is about caring for the local area and it's people. Until this returns to a voluntary position undertaken by people who actually care this situation will not change.</p>
16	<p>Some of these questions are not relevant. There should be a N/A option. For example - work commitments not relevant as I am retired. Similarly I have recently used postal voting to avoid contact due to the virus.</p>
17	<p>Parties are just playing politics all the time. Nobody can just say yep that was a good idea let's go with it. It totally puts the electorate off. Just do what's best for the town with your parties view on it, it's not a fight all the time. It looks childish and nobody cares</p>
18	<p>First past the post is the biggest con in the world. It's an abomination. All elections should be based on proportional representation. And this is coming from a floating voter. I've seen the same names as councillors for the last 20 years in some wards. And things don't change. Which says to me councillors don't care about their wards just their payments and expenses</p>
19	<p>No real choice same candidates e.g. Essex Highways etc Difficulty finding out what candidates stood for even with research. Each candidate should publish a mandate</p>
20	<p>I don't see anyone of the council actually doing anything. Lots of words being spoken but my perception is not a great deal actually being done.</p>
21	<p>Hate voting for candidates who don't seem to fight for what I believe in and who don't take ACTION to improve our town.</p>
22	<p>The problem is that even when residents contact the Council or Cllrs that little seems to get done: Cllrs are more concerned about doing down members from other political parties and telling the electorate what the politicians think would be good for us than really listening. People haven't the time for surveys or consultations like this because normally these documents long, take time to access and are either consciously or unconsciously biased to get responses the authors want or reflect their political views. The basics are clear, listen and survey existing complaints to contact Harlow, Cllrs should share with all Cllrs the issues upon which residents contact them, working together for the benefit of residents, make current services work, like fix pot holes, empty bins, improve amenities, cut pollution and congestion, enhance the quality of life for residents, preserve and improve green spaces and parks, fix cycleways, cut crime, secure better GP services, protect the Stort Valley and town from congestion, pollution and Flooding with surface water, and sewage from the Gilston Harlow North North hgg estate. . It's not rocket science. GET ON WITH THESE ISSUES rather than spending time and money on proposed underground railways, which again is assumed we all would really want. Again no one asked! To put out a consultation on the failure of involvement because the consultation system isn't working isn't the answer, get out and talk, be more direct. And consult in straightforward ways: via Your Harlow and local Social media groups, survey teams in Supermarkets and shopping centres: especially on big issues. But keep it short a direct: Use direct questions like : "Would you want to move PAH to the edge of town ? Here are possible advantages: here are possible disadvantages " Yes or No? Please give reasons:" Done. And agree with previous comments, same old faces, same old responses, whatever the party the bins didn't get emptied and the marketless market Square, that once thrived is still a desolate and dead area. What do we get high rise flats with the Council degeneration team promising more of these awful buildings. Haven't the Council realised that such housing provision was a disaster in the 1950s and are still not wanted (except by property developers) Just a lack of consultation again: we get a survey that fails to ask " What would you like high rise rabbit boxes of private homes or traditional homes with gardens : Council houses or private rental?" But instead get a survey recently that asks "What roof angle and what's the minimum distance between such high rise buildings we are going to build (whatever you think) would you like?" Better consultation and engagement is needed on the part of the council if residents are going to bother to vote: voting doesn't seem to change anything and a better system of local democracy is needed between elections. Otherwise repeating the same actions again and again and expecting different outcomes is the definition of madness. Einstein I think</p>

5. How likely would the following stop you from voting?

23	I have strong views about using your right to vote to the point I personally feel it should be mandatory
24	In local elections, I like to vote for the person, not the party. Unfortunately, the candidates are promoted by their party and the policies that are published are those that align with party policies. We don't get to know if a candidate actually supports something that is not the party line and they may lose votes (or people are less likely to bother voting) because it really does seem, even locally, that a vote is for the Conservative - or Labour - or LibDem - or other - party, not the person.
25	In past experience the elected party has not followed the pledges in its manifesto. Therefore, I find it very difficult to trust most of the parties. I vote for the party whose views I agree with and can trust the most
26	I live in Miles Close playhouse is awful polling centre have to pay to park if you dont walk. Really annoying when the little church couple of minutes walk away is a polling station
27	The first past the post system is not fit for purpose and many people feel it renders their vote valueless.
28	Not confusion of voting of process but no opportunity to ask questions to the candidates or their representatives. Now you just get a leaflet shoved through the door. No one canvasses any more. Have no real idea of what they stand for other than the generic blurb on their leaflets. If candidates can't be bothered to get their policies across then people can't be bothered to vote.
29	I research the candidates beforehand. I always vote in person.
30	There is no help to read the voting papers and anyone disability is not considered. Plus not disability's are visible
31	Every party comes to the table with an empty bowl of lies, so what's the point people are getting fed up with empty promises.
32	The candidates are suits who do not live in the real world.
33	This survey will not solve the low turn out at local elections. It is down to the fact that in my opinion, all local councillors should be independent the electorate are fed up with Westminster policies dictating local issues, and those having Parliamentary aspirations towing the party line to further their careers at the expense of the town. The reason there was a low turn out is due to the fact that the Town does not have a local newspaper it is proven that older people are more likely to vote and a lot of them do not have access to 'Your Harlow' which is the only local news medium. The local labour party had limited canvassing due to a split concerning 'Momentum' and the Conservative supporters who always vote were left with an open goal to take power of Harlow Council. But again this survey will not reveal the real reason there was a low turn out. just another political tick box exercise.
34	Candidates when elected do not do as promised.
35	The ward i am in had boundaries changed without consultation
36	I do have a political bias, so when the candidates of my preferred party do not bother to door knock or produce decent literature, I am more likely not to vote so that I am not actively voting against or for them.
37	Because the polling stations are usually in schools, the schools close and parents take advantage of the day to go out somewhere that would usually be busier or more expensive out of term time. Don't use schools as polling stations.
38	Reduced choice of candidates. It seems limited to conservative or labour, both of which do not represent the views of the majority of the public. The get voted in on promises that they never keep and don't act in the best interest for the people that they are paid to represent. Morally corrupt government at the moment, the worse i have seen in over 50 years
39	Whoever we vote for in local elections leads to no improvement in services. This question is pretty stupid as the "other" answer answers it - so putting very unlikely is meaningless.
40	Feel most of the candidates are Out of touch with what people want and policy's are never followed through or it's not clear what improvements have actually been made
41	Can't believe anything they say, they are only out for themselves.
42	Candidates don't seem interested in letting people know who they are and what they stand for etc. As someone who does a postal vote I find that I only get information about who they are through the door after the deadline for sending the postal vote back in. Its like they don't want you to vote for them. Even then half of the candidates don't have any information whatsoever that's easy to find and don't even bother to put a leaflet through the door.

5. How likely would the following stop you from voting?

43 Requiring voter ID is the biggest form of disenfranchisement I can think of and seems deliberately calculated to exclude a certain demographic from voting in order to solve a problem that does not exist with postal voting fraud. Disgraceful policy reminiscent of authoritarian regimes. Not in my name.

Further, I just had to use an external website to find out what ward I live in as the information was not easily accessible on the council website. I'm fairly IT savvy so pretty sure this should be easier to find.

6. Have any of the matters set out in question 5 ever stopped you from voting in the past?

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		41.67% 70
2	No		55.95% 94
3	Don't Know		2.38% 4
		answered	168
		skipped	0

7. If yes to question 6, which of the following stopped you from voting?

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Didn't know the candidates		52.63% 40
2	Didn't know the candidates' policies		51.32% 39
3	Couldn't park at or get to the polling station		9.21% 7
4	Polling station access was difficult		5.26% 4
5	Poor weather		7.89% 6
6	Work commitments		17.11% 13
7	Parties that stood in my ward don't represent my views		50.00% 38
8	Confusion about the voting process		2.63% 2
9	Other (please state):		19.74% 15
		answered	76
		skipped	92

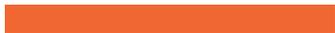
Other (please state): (15)

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | See above |
| 2 | Polling station in a country lane without pavements or street lights. No public transport which is poor service anyway stops there |
| 3 | A lot of younger people do not understand the process or the relevance and I think a lot of the people in the |

7. If yes to question 6, which of the following stopped you from voting?

	community often feel voting in a councillor is irrelevant to council staff leadership decision making process so can not be bothered to vote. Iv heard this a lot from older generations who all echo the same sentiments. Does not matter in the grand scheme of things who is elected in. One party may want better for the community but if disregarded by council staff it is a fruitless exercise. If one party remains complacent and gives up trying as the battle for change is ignored then motivation and morale is lost. I don't think it's a political party problem your tackling. I think it is a leadership and management problem deep rooted within the staff at the council that puts people off voting as they see it as a pointless exercise to take time out of their busy schedules.
4	Health and mobility issues
5	Candidates policies will always be an issue whether voting or not.
6	The fact no matter who you vote for nothing changes, Harlow as a town has gone so down hill over the last 10-15 years. The local authority dont seem to be interested in what the local people want and what the local issues are, the communication between residents and the council is poor, the actions of the council do not reflect the issues bringing the town down.
7	Didn't have any candidates to discuss or being able to challenge their policies either at my door or anywhere else in Harlow.
8	All current political parties are useless
9	My vote wouldn't affect the result. Need PR. No idea who my councillors are in newhall. They make no attempt to canvas voters as guaranteed to win because of the party they stand for.
10	Poor candidates
11	Pointless voting as they are all the same, liars!
12	We have not had any candidates from any party canvas our estate for many years now. Nor do we EVER see the local councillors in our ward. If you want to claim to represent your community you need to be part of it! An edition of Harlow News to coincide with the local elections clearly setting out the parties policies / how to register to vote etc could make a significant difference to intake in people voting.
13	No point - whichever party is in power makes no improvement - they are all as bad as each other.
14	You can tell when politicians are lying because there lips move
15	My barrier to voting, is that the government are hiding behind their language and neither show or stand under, the 7 Principles of Public Life (the Nolan Principles). As per government website: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life/the-7-principles-of-public-life--2

8. What is your gender?

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Male 	39.29%	66
2	Female 	57.74%	97
3	Prefer not to say 	2.38%	4
4	Other (please specify): 	0.60%	1
		answered	168
		skipped	0
Other (please specify): (1)			
1	Mind your own business this and other personal questions is not relevant: it's the poor process of engagement from politicians that's at fault		

9. Please select your age category

Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	18-24		2.38%	4
2	25-34		10.12%	17
3	35-44		22.02%	37
4	45-54		20.83%	35
5	55-64		26.19%	44
6	65-74		16.07%	27
7	75 or older		2.38%	4
			answered	168
			skipped	0

10. Please select which ward you live in.

Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Bush Fair		8.33%	14
2	Church Langley		23.81%	40
3	Great Parndon		6.55%	11
4	Harlow Common		4.76%	8
5	Little Parndon and Hare Street		5.36%	9
6	Mark Hall		11.90%	20
7	Netteswell		5.36%	9
8	Old Harlow		16.07%	27
9	Staple Tye		4.17%	7
10	Sumners and Kingsmoor		5.36%	9
11	Toddbrook		4.17%	7
12	Don't Know		4.17%	7
			answered	168
			skipped	0

11. Do you have a disability?

Answer Choices	Response Percent	Response Total
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11. Do you have a disability?

1	Yes		13.10%	22
2	No		82.14%	138
3	Prefer not to say		4.76%	8
			answered	168
			skipped	0

Appendix B

ELECTORAL PURDAH GUIDANCE FOR HARLOW COUNCIL

INTRODUCTION

This guidance is intended for both Councillors and Officers of Harlow Council, as well as for explanation to Candidates and Agents during the election periods.

It covers a number of issues which arise as a result of elections being held while the Council needs to continue with its normal business.

WHAT IS PURDAH?

Purdah describes the period of time immediately before elections or referenda when specific restrictions on the Council's communications activities are in place. The terms "pre-election period" and "heightened sensitivity" are also used.

It applies from the date of the Notice of the election to after the results of the poll.

THE LEGAL BASIS AND OFFICIAL GUIDANCE

The Council is prohibited at all times (not only during Purdah) from undertaking activities or providing publicity designed to affect support for a political party.

These restrictions on political publicity are contained in Section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986, as amended by Section 349 Communications Act 2003 and Section 27 of the Local Government Act 1988.

The Government published a [Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity](#) in 2011. The Code is based around seven principles to ensure that all communications activity meet the requirements of the statutory framework.

SUMMARY OF ADVICE

The statutory framework restricts the **Council's** activities. Those involved in the elections processes should not place Officers of the Council in such a position where any activity would call into question their political impartiality, or could give rise to the criticism that public resources are being used for party political purposes.

Purdah does not stop councillors from issuing their own publicity as long as council resources are not used.

Members holding Cabinet positions within the Council should avoid the use of titles within campaigning literature in such a way that a reasonable person would conclude that it was a statement of Council policy or that the Council were spending public money to influence the outcome of the election.

During the Purdah period the Council **will not**:

- Produce publicity on matters which are politically controversial. The Council's day to day work will continue on a business as usual basis with decisions

being made and services provided, but it will seek to avoid consideration of, or publicity for, politically contentious matters.

- Make references to individual politicians or groups in press releases, press statements and comments and other publicity materials including items on the Council's social media channels which relate to the Harlow District area which will not include the name, photograph or quotations from any politician.
- Arrange proactive media or events involving candidates, election agents, other members, MP's or groups who could reasonably be seen as supporting a particular candidate.
- Issue photographs which include candidates. (The Council may issue photographs of the Chair in some circumstances)
- Supply council photographs or other materials to Councillors or political group staff unless the Council have verified that they will not be used for campaigning purposes.
- Continue hosting third party blogs or e-communications.
- Help with national political visits, as this would involve using public money to support a particular candidate or party. These should be organised by political parties with no cost or resource implications for the Council.
- Issue any publicity which seeks to influence voters (an exception being situations covered by legislation or regulations directing publication of information for clarification purposes).

USE OF RESOURCES DURING PURDAH

- No Councillor (including a member of the Cabinet and a Chair of a Committee), or Officer, is permitted to use any Council building, assets, equipment or staff resources for private or party political purposes (except use of meeting rooms provided for within electoral law to facilitate a political meeting during campaigning).
- Requests for information by candidates and political parties will be responded to in accordance with legal requirements, and normal policies, in an even handed way.

DECISION MAKING DURING PURDAH

- Business as usual will continue for services with decisions being made and services delivered, for example, determining planning applications.

- However, decisions, meetings, public consultation exercises and publicity campaigns on issues which it is considered have the potential to be politically contentious may be re-scheduled until after the election, unless it is required by law to undertake them, or it's necessary to decide the matter to meet a statutory timetable. This will avoid the risk of the decision making process being skewed or otherwise affected.
- The Senior Management Board members and Team Managers should familiarise themselves with the Council's approach to Purdah as set out in this guidance. They should not permit any issue to be brought forward during the Purdah period which is likely to create, or having the perception of political advantage.

DUTIES OF THE RETURNING OFFICER

- The roles and responsibilities of the Returning Officer are set out by law. They are a series of powers and duties which are the personal responsibility of the person appointed.
- Brian Keane is the Returning Officer for the District Council Elections. He has personal responsibility for conducting the Election.
- Returning Officers are not local government employees for the purposes of conducting elections and are not accountable to the Council or its Councillors in carrying out their statutory functions.
- The Returning Officer is required to conduct all elections entirely in accordance with the law.

PUBLICITY

- The law says the Council must never publish any material which, in whole or in part, appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party. In this context publicity is defined as any communication, in whatever form, addressed to the public at large or to a section of the public.
- It may be appropriate to quote a politician who is involved in the election, for instance, in an emergency situation or where there is a genuine need for a member-level response to an important event beyond the Council's control.
- The above applies to events and spoken communications as well as written communications.
- This guidance applies to publicity and events organised by HTS particularly items on their website.

- As per the Council's Communications Protocol, all Harlow Council press releases, press statements and comments require the approval of the Chief Executive before publication and are issued by the Communications Team.

QUESTIONS AND QUERIES

- Officers should seek general guidance on the issues in this document from their Manager, Head of Service or from Brian Keane, Chief Executive or Simon Hill, Monitoring Officer.
- All publicity matters should be referred to Simon Pipe, Customer and Media Services Manager.
- Councillors should raise electoral issues with the Returning Officer via their candidate's Agents.

GENERAL

All of the above is general guidance which should cover the majority of circumstances. There may, however, be legitimate exceptions to the guidance. These could include, for example, a major event outside the control of the Council, an emergency, or a statutory requirement to act within the timeframe of the election. Judgements about those issues will be made on a case by case basis in light of the legal requirements and the need to maintain balance and impartiality.

Visits by politicians and use of the Town Centre for campaigning are covered within the appendices to this advice as are FAQ's produced by the Local Government Association.



Brian Keane
(Acting) Returning Officer & Chief Executive

Appendix 1

GUIDANCE ON VISITS BY POLITICIANS

This note is to confirm guidance for the use of Council resources and the involvement of Council staff in connection with visits by politicians. It is important to make sure that the Council, its Officers and Councillors are safe from accusations of impropriety or, at worst, legal challenge.

The base legal position regarding this activity is to be found in Section 2 Local Government Act 1986. This says that "a local authority shall not publish (or assist others to publish) material which, in whole or in part, appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party." The Act defines publicity very widely as any communication, in whatever form, addressed to the public at large or to a section of the public. The impact of this is that case law has established that no Councillor, whether a Portfolio Holder, Chair of a Committee or any other Councillor, or Officer will be permitted to use any Council resources for private or party political purposes. This is not just restricted to the so called 'Purdah' period before elections but at any time.

The Councillors' Code of Conduct has provisions on this point as does the centrally issued Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. Nonetheless the base position which overrides all else is the Act of Parliament and the case law relating to it.

Put simply the Council's resources, whether they be cash, premises, or staff should not be used in a way which can be perceived to be designed to affect public support for any political party.

How does this affect political visits? There is a spectrum of possible scenarios. Hopefully some examples may help.

Firstly a visit that has no media coverage at all cannot fall foul of this rule. If an elected politician of whatever political hue is seen as having some influence to the advantage of the Council they may be invited, and Council resources may be used to help facilitate their visit and any meetings/briefings felt to be appropriate may be organised with Council staff. However, this is only the case if there is no media coverage at all.

At the opposite end of the spectrum a political group or individual Councillor might arrange for a visit to the town by a politician of their own party. They might make all the arrangements without engaging with any Council staff at all and the visiting politician might visit Council property open to the public in the same way as any member of the public might. If any media arrangements were arranged by the political group/individual Councillor and no assistance was given by Council staff then this would be acceptable. This might even be the case if some Council staff were photographed incidentally during the visit. Nonetheless there should be no expectation or requirement for Council staff to participate in staged photographs.

In the case of Government Ministerial visits the Council will co-operate with and make arrangements for the visit where it is taking place at the request of the Council. Where a Ministerial visit is not at the request of the Council, the Council will respond positively to requests for assistance. In both cases the Chief Executive will request (and expect) that representatives from all of the political parties on the Council will be invited to take part in the visit. If this request is not responded to positively the Chief Executive will decide whether or not the Council will provide support for such visits.

For the avoidance of doubt 'official' Ministerial visits are only those involving Government Ministers. All other visits are political visits.

Between these scenarios will be many other types of visit. The general rule however will be that Council staff and other resources should not be involved if there is to be publicity attached to the visit and that publicity may be perceived as making a point to the political advantage of any particular party. If you are in doubt about this then it is important to check with the Chief Executive or the Monitoring Officer before starting to make any arrangements. They will give a clear view on whether the perception of political advantage might be seen and whether or not the Council can support arrangements for such visits. Equally, it would be expected that a political party making their own arrangements as in the second situation above would inform the Chief Executive well in advance.

In the period known as election purdah, the period between the official notice of an election and the election itself, different arrangements will apply. During such periods no Council resources may be used at all and no Council staff may be involved in any visits by politicians whether from the Government in power or opposition parties.

If in doubt, please talk to the Chief Executive or the Monitoring Officer.

Appendix 2

USE OF THE TOWN CENTRE FOR CAMPAIGNING

Much of the land in the centre of Harlow is owned by the Council. Whilst, Council resources must not be used for party political purposes. Nonetheless it is also accepted that the streets, walks etc. in the centre of the town are public thoroughfares. The Council is thus prepared to accept the presence of electioneering stalls or similar activities in these public areas with certain procedures and restrictions attached to that permission.

The Council expects that:

- Political groups/parties will request permission for such activities to take place.
- Such permission must be requested a reasonable time in advance of the planned use.
- The actual position and type of activity needs to be communicated as well as the timing.
- Permissions will be issued on a 'first come, first served' basis but may be subject to alteration by the Council to ensure an equitable position between political groups.
- Activities connected with such stalls or similar activities must be reasonable in their behaviour (for the avoidance of doubt, this includes a requirement not to attach posters etc to street furniture or public art and a reasonable distance from any other campaigning group).
- Any associated littering must be cleared up by the user.

The request should be addressed to the Chief Executive, who will ensure that proper liaison with the town centre management takes place. Failure to adhere to these expectations may lead to the Council refusing permission or even asking that an activity is ended forthwith. All parties/groups will be expected to accept and comply with such a decision.

Appendix 3

The Local Government Association has helpfully provided some FAQ and answers below:

Frequently Asked Questions

Does this guidance only apply to councils?	No. The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity covers the full range of authorities.
What happens during the General Election purdah period in an area where there is no local election? Do these rules still apply?	Yes. In a general election year, the guidance applies to all local authorities, even if there are no local elections.
Do these rules apply to councillors who are not running for re-election?	Council business continues so all sitting councillors, whether seeking re-election or not, should have regard for the Publicity Code.
Can council officers get involved in campaigning in their own time?	Officers who hold politically restricted posts, or who are likely to be involved or employed in connection with the elections, should not take part in a political campaign or canvass on behalf of a political party or candidate. Please check local arrangements.
Do the restrictions apply to officers who are members of a trade union?	Trade unions themselves are not bound by the Code, but individual officers are, and must have regard to the Code.
Can council press offices still put out press releases ahead of the election?	Yes, but with limitations. Official, factual press statements about council decisions for public information purposes may still be issued. However, no publicity should deal with controversial issues or report views or proposals in a way which identifies them with individual councillors or groups of councillors.
Can a council put out a consultation, for example about changes to library provision, during purdah?	Consultations should be considered very carefully during purdah as it is a period of heightened sensitivity and should not be put out if they contravene pre-election rules.

Can we use the chair of a council-commissioned review, who is up for re-election, as spokesperson for the report?	The best approach could be to delay publication of the review until after the election. However, if there is an imperative to publish you should use another, non-political spokesperson.
Can we host a photo call for the council leader or other leading councillor to open a new council facility (such as a play park) during purdah?	Generally not; however if the timing of the event is unavoidable and postponing it would adversely affect local residents (for example the opening of the facility has been delayed by long-running work and postponing the opening will cause the council to lose income), you might choose to have the event hosted by a non-political spokesperson.
Can councils sanction the use of schools for political purposes?	Schedule 5 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 covers the use of meeting rooms in school premises for parliamentary elections. The Registration Officer is required to keep lists of such premises.
Do the restrictions apply to council notice boards?	Councils are required to publicise details of the election and how to register to vote. Material relating to wider political issues should not be posted on official notice boards which may be seen by members of the public. This includes publicity issued by, or on behalf of, a trade union.
Can councillors issue their own press releases or talk to the media?	Councillors are free to talk to the media and issue press releases, but must not use council resources to do so.
Can councillors write letters 'for publication' to their local newspaper?	Yes, as long as they don't use council resources (such as staff) to help them do it.
Can councillors still tweet or blog?	Councillors can continue, but must not use council resources (such as council twitter accounts, email accounts, telephones etc.) to do so.
Can councillors who are up for re-election refer to themselves as councillors in their public statements?	A person remains as a 'councillor' and can refer to themselves as such until they retire on the fourth day after the ordinary day of election.
Can councillors request to visit council establishments?	The guidance may vary by council. Generally reasonable requests by current members who are also

	<p>candidates at the election to visit council establishments in the course of their council functions would be approved. Again, check local arrangements and any such visits must not be supported by the council's media team or council officers.</p>
<p>Can councillors speak/ canvas at a student union (which is a registered charity) during the pre-election?</p>	<p>Yes they can. In fact it is to be expected. Councillors and those potentially standing for election can arrange to speak and canvass as long as these activities are not funded nor arranged by local authorities. The fact that the union is a charity has no bearing – the guidance applies to local authorities, not to other organisations.</p>
<p>Can the council still publish its newsletter/magazine during purdah?</p>	<p>Yes, if it is done in the ordinary course of business and meets all other purdah requirements</p>

Appendix 4

PURDAH – SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE

Given the council's increased use of social media and websites we provide the following specific guidance on the use of digital communications during purdah.

Officers who update social media accounts will operate under the following advice based on LGA guidance:

1. All social media platforms operated by staff are subject to the rules of Purdah.
2. When using Twitter, Facebook, YouTube or Instagram, explain that as a council channel of communication you are governed by Purdah. It may be helpful to tweet a link to an explanation of Purdah for guidance.
3. Do not retweet or share political opinion or content posted by political parties or politicians.
4. Do not tweet, post images or share updates on matters which are politically controversial.
5. Monitor your page and delete any content which is politically controversial.
6. Do not stage a significant social media-based campaign unless it can be demonstrated that it was planned before the election was called.
7. Social media by and about the Chair of the Council may be retweeted, shared or used as long as it is not of a political nature.
8. Disable the ability to download images of politicians during Purdah.
9. In exceptional circumstances seek permission from the communications team to tweet or retweet a comment by a politician or to use video and images of a politician during Purdah.
10. Third party social media profiles, including business partnership profiles which the council supports, are also governed by Purdah. Council staff who update these profiles can either continue to add content in line with Purdah restrictions or hand over ALL admin to a non-council member of the partnership during Purdah.

The following additional advice is provided to **Councillors**:

1. Members should ensure that during the pre-election period, Electoral Commission good practice is that your social media profiles should contain a link to where you electoral imprint can be found online.
2. Do not use social media output by the Chair of Council to make a political point. Any replies should not tag in the Chair's account.

Scrutiny Committee Work Plan 2021/22

Work	Tuesday 13 July 2021	Tuesday 14 September 2021	Tuesday 7 December 2021	Tuesday 8 February 2022	Tuesday 15 March 2022
Policing and Community Safety Annual Review				Agreement of questions	Q&A with Police
Delivery of Council House Building Programme			Update		
Housing and Accommodation Requirements for Adults with a Moderate /Severe Learning Disability	Final report				
Allotments	Review Submission Form		Report		
Domestic Abuse in Harlow (to be included in Police Annual Review)	Review Submission Form				
Support for Victims of Domestic Abuse and Sexual Harassment	Review Submission Form			Report	
Turnout in Local Elections	Review Submission Form	Report	Final Report		
Antisocial Behaviour (to be dealt with through pre-scrutiny of Community Safety Strategy)	Review Submission Form	Q&A with Portfolio Holder			
Online Gambling	Review Submission				

	Form				
Call In Sub Committee Procedures	Report				