

**MINUTES OF THE CABINET
HELD ON**

22 September 2022

8.00 - 10.10 pm

PRESENT

Committee Members

Councillor Russell Perrin, Leader of the Council

Councillor Dan Swords, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration

Councillor Joel Charles, Portfolio Holder for Business and Community Resilience

Councillor Alastair Gunn, Portfolio Holder for Governance

Councillor Stephen LeMay, Portfolio Holder for HTS, Properties and Facilities – with special responsibility for the roads

Councillor Nicky Purse, Portfolio Holder for Environment

Additional Attendees

Councillor Matthew Saggars

Other Councillors

Councillor David Carter

Councillor Jodi Dunne

Councillor Tony Durcan

Councillor Tony Edwards

Councillor James Griggs

Councillor Kay Morrison

Councillor Daniella Pritchard

Councillor Lanie Shears

Councillor Chris Vince

Councillor Nancy Watson

Councillor Mark Wilkinson

Officers

Rob Tinlin, Interim Chief Executive

Andrew Bramidge, Director of

Strategic Growth and Regeneration

Simon Freeman, Deputy to the Chief

Executive and Director of Finance

Simon Hill, Director of Governance

and Corporate Support

Julie Houston, Strategy and Economic

Development Manager

Andrew Murray, Director of Housing

Adam Rees, Senior Governance

Support Officer

35. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Simon Carter, Michael Hardware and James Leppard.

36. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

37. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2022 are agreed as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

38. **MATTERS ARISING**

None.

39. **WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

The questions, together with the answers, are appended to the minutes.

40. **WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS**

The questions, together with the answers, are appended to the minutes.

41. **PETITIONS**

None.

42. **FORWARD PLAN**

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan is noted.

43. **RECENT RELEVANT DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE LEADER, DEPUTY OR PORTFOLIO HOLDER(S)**

RESOLVED that the following decisions be noted.

- a) Portfolio Holder for Strategic Growth - 29 July 2022
- b) Leader of the Council - 31 August 2022

44. **YEAR END 2021/22 JOINT FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE REPORT**

Cabinet received the year end joint finance and performance report for 2021/22.

Proposed by Councillor Russell Perrin (seconded by Councillor Dan Swords):

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- A** Acknowledged the outturn position set out within the report in respect of the General Fund for the year ending 31 March 2022.
- B** Recognised the End of Year operational performance and risk management that has been achieved in 2021/22 across all Council services.
- C** Approved the movements through reserves as set out in the Appendix 3c to the report.

- D Approved the transfer of £1.215 million from the Budget Resilience Reserve to meet the 2021/22 overspend.
- E Noted the carry forward of resources from 2021/22 to 2022/23 as set out in the report totalling £217,986 approved under delegated powers by the Leader.

45. **JOINT FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE REPORT, QUARTER 1 2022/23**

Cabinet received the Quarter 1 joint finance and performance report for 2022/23.

Proposed by Councillor Russell Perrin (seconded by Councillor Dan Swords) it was:

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- A Noted the forecast outturn position set out within the report in respect of the General Fund for the first quarter (April-June) of 2022/23 of a projected overspend of £80,000 or 0.13 percent of the gross General Fund Budget.
- B Noted the Quarter 1 operational performance and risk management that has been achieved in 2022/23 across all Council services.

46. **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT, QUARTER 1 FINANCE REPORT 2022/23**

Cabinet received the Quarter 1 Housing Revenue Account report for 2022/23.

Proposed by Councillor Russell Perrin (seconded by Councillor Dan Swords) it was:

RESOLVED that Cabinet noted:

- A The Quarter 1 - HRA Budget Monitoring report as set out in the report and in Appendix 1.
- B That the forecast HRA general working balance as at 31 March 2023 will be £6.793 million.

47. **CAPITAL PROGRAMMES, QUARTER 1 FINANCE REPORT 2022/23**

Cabinet received the Quarter 1 Capital Programmes report for 2022/23.

Proposed by Councillor Russell Perrin (seconded by Councillor Dan Swords):

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

A Notes the progress and forecasts in the delivery of the Council's Housing Capital Programme (HCP) as at Quarter 1 2022/23 as follows:

i) The current budget is £39.395 million, including £2.762 million carried forward from 2021/22. The projected outturn at Quarter 1 is £34.715 million as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

B Notes the progress in the delivery of the Council's Non-Housing Capital Programme (NHCP) as at Quarter 1 2022/23 as follows:

i) The current budget is £22.786 million, including £4.066 million carried forward from 2021/22. The projected outturn at Quarter 1 is £22.786 million as set out in Appendix 2 to the report.

C Approves the inclusion in the NHCP budget of an additional £60,083 for the installation of electric vehicle charge points within Harlow Council owned Car Parks. Expenditure is to be fully financed from a grant from The Office for Zero Emission Vehicles.

48. **COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGY**

Cabinet received a report to approve the Community Safety Strategy for consultation.

Proposed by Councillor Joel Charles (seconded by Councillor Alastair Gunn) it was:

RESOLVED that:

A The Community Safety Strategy 2021/22 – 2024/25 be approved, subject to consultation, to support and strengthen the council's work with statutory and non-statutory partners to identify and tackle: all forms of anti-social behaviour (ASB) and crime; help reduce reoffending; increase visibility and engagement with residents; and support victims of crime.

B Cabinet authorised that consultation be undertaken on this draft for a period of six weeks. Minor amendments will be submitted to the Director of Communities and Environment who will, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Business and Community Resilience, develop the final version of the strategy following the conclusion of the consultation period.

49. **CONFIRMATION OF OFFICE/RETAIL TO RESIDENTIAL ARTICLE 4 DIRECTION**

Cabinet received a report to confirm revised Article 4 Directions throughout the town.

Proposed by Councillor Dan Swords (seconded by Councillor Steve LeMay) it was:

RESOLVED that:

- A** Cabinet noted the revised geographical extent of the areas covered by the Article 4 Directions, as defined in Appendix A to the report, together with the supporting statement in Appendix B to the report.
- B** The revised Article 4 Directions be confirmed to limit the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 to limit changes from Use Class E (retail and office) to Residential Use in Harlow Town Centre, Pinnacles, Templefields and Burnt Mill upon receipt of formal confirmation from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities that they will support the Direction.
- C** Delegated authority is provided to the Director of Strategic Growth and Regeneration in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, to make any minor amendments to the Directions as required by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

50. **COMMUNICATIONS FROM COMMITTEES/WORKING GROUPS/PARTIES AND PANELS**

None.

51. **MINUTES OF PANELS/WORKING GROUPS**

None.

52. **MATTERS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Cabinet – 22 September 2022

Questions from the Public

1 David Forman to Councillor Dan Swords (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration):

I congratulate Harlow Council for developing a housing, shops and offices scheme to rectify the eyesore in Perry Road that the last Labour administration left behind. However, would you please consider including in the contract documents traffic management conditions and penalties to discourage contractors vehicles parking on and damaging the lawn surrounding St James' church?

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

I thank Mr Forman for his question and greatly appreciate his support for our fantastic scheme on the Old Lister House site which is just one part of our package to transform the Staple Tye neighbourhood.

In response to the concerns about the contractors parking arrangements, we will ensure that appropriate compound facilities are available for the contractor and will certainly look at contractually binding options to prevent inappropriate parking in neighbouring areas to the site. We will also liaise with St James Church as to what best meets their needs as well as others in the immediate vicinity to the site.

2 David Forman to Councillor Alastair Gunn (Portfolio Holder for Governance):

Under Agenda Item 11 on page 124 the KPI CS50 shows the average waiting time for calls received by Contact Harlow. Despite a target of 40 seconds, the average waiting time increased successively in each quarter of 2021/22 from 1m 15s to 2m 56s. In quarter 1 of 2022/23 the average waiting time was 2m 43s and this was despite increasing the target time to 44 seconds.

In relation to Contact Harlow, under Agenda Item 10 on page 61 it shows that Harlow Council saved £32,000 in staffing costs due to staff vacancies.

Therefore, do you think:

- a) There is a correlation between excessive waiting times and fewer staff in Contact Harlow;
- b) That filling the staff vacancies would consistently achieve your less rigorous target waiting time of 44 seconds;

- c) The stress levels of the existing staff in Contact Harlow would be reduced by filling staff vacancies;
- d) That staff in Contact Harlow would suffer less verbal abuse if waiting times achieved your target of 44 seconds; and
- e) Conservative local election pledges in 2021 to run services better than the last dire Labour administration are now looking dubious?

Reply from Councillor Alastair Gunn (Portfolio Holder for Governance):

I thank Mr Forman for the question as it gives me the opportunity of specifically thanking our Contact team who have, since the beginning of the pandemic, worked extremely hard to field the many enquiries from the public whilst the offices were shut and during a period of a significant shift in the channels the public have chosen to contact us.

Contact Harlow now do far more for customers than they ever have done. Many more calls are being taken. (Average daily calls have risen from 475 in 2019/20 to 600+ in 2022/23) The types of enquires they receive are also far more wide ranging and so whilst the wait to speak to an advisor is increased, the depth and quality of advice when they do speak to them means that they are far more likely to have their issue resolved on that call. This has meant that individual calls to our team have taken longer to resolve, (average call length has gone from 3m 24s in 19/20 to 4m 9s in 22/23. It was as low as 2m 25s in 2012/13 so this shows just how much the service has developed) but they are being resolved. Our emphasis is on providing accurate information and services on each call for customer satisfaction.

Yes, there has been staff turnover within Contact Harlow in the last six months and this has had an impact on the call waiting times. The underspend in the staffing budget is due to this. This is not the only factor in the increase in wait times.

But I am pleased to say however that the vast majority of the staff have moved to other Council departments, seeking new opportunities and have not just left the Council. They take with them the excellent knowledge and experience they have gained whilst working in Contact Harlow.

There are some delays between a staff member leaving and a new one being starting with us, but I am happy to say that all vacancies are now filled and the new staff are undertaking their training. I envisage that in the coming months there will be a reduction in call waiting times as these staff are brought online.

I re-emphasise that we have a zero tolerance policy to any verbal or other abuse of our staff. I would also highlight the many ways that residents can contact the Council as an alternative to calling, these include the many services offered through our website and face to face contact.

We are shortly due to launch a new Customer Service Strategy with an associated action plan and we will be reviewing our targets and measures as part of this.

Supplementary Question from David Forman to Councillor Alastair Gunn (Portfolio Holder for Governance):

I am pleased to note your answer that Contact Harlow vacancies are filled. However, Appendix 3A on page 62 under the Governance portfolio shows vacancies accounting for a total budget saving of just under £504,000.

Would you please state how concerned you are that least one member of staff has not been able to take their annual leave amounting to a monetary value of £3036 since March 2020, as stated in comments in Appendix 3B on page 64 relating to the Communications department, and whether this in accordance with Harlow Council's document 'Harlow Health and Wellbeing Partnership Strategy 2018 - 2028'.

Supplementary Reply from Councillor Alastair Gunn (Portfolio Holder for Governance):

Thank you Mr Forman for the supplementary. I can't confess I am not familiar with the personal circumstances that underlie that question, I think I can guess who it would be as they are very hard working indeed in that service area. I would have to take that away and look at into it. I am not aware of anything untoward but I am not able to answer that to the depth that I think you require so if you could leave that one with me Mr Forman, thank you.

3 Cliff Phillips to Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

I am still fully not convinced that the only 2 tenders submitted were coincidentally almost identical. Previous quotes on other major works on The Hides and The Hornbeams for example were 20-30% difference between the highest and lowest estimate.

Therefore, my question is:

Of the original 7 tenders for this work offered to various builders, 2 were dismissed as non-compliant. Why were they non-compliant and why would they have been offered to tender in the first place?

Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration) on behalf of Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

Thank you for your additional question to Cllr Carter's written response. As I set out to Mr Phillips when we met last week, we fully recognise the concern these works

are causing leaseholders and I am committed to ensuring they receive all information possible about the process.

Specifically on the point Mr Phillips raises, Financial Standing Orders for the Council require that, for works with an estimated value in excess of £350,000, Officers must seek at least five written tenders from suitably qualified suppliers. On this occasion, seven suitably qualified suppliers from the initial investigation were identified and invited to tender, using selective tendering from an Accredited Supplier List.

The Council received four tenders by the deadline, and upon careful review of all submitted tenders, two of the four tenders received were found to be non-compliant, either owing to the omission of quality information and/or being unable to deliver the contractor design portion for elements of the works specified.

Supplementary Question from Cliff Phillips to Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

Of the only two tenders submitted Chase Berger listed fully all sub-contractors they have intended to employ in this work as it will tend to be a requirement for Harlow District Council. Why then did the winning bid from Prosper not list the same? Surely, we as paying customers we should be able to check who will be working on our properties?

Supplementary Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration) on behalf of Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

Thank you Mr Phillips for your further question. Just to clarify that the contractors approach were valid, it was the tender response that we received in those two cases that were not but on this specific question about sub contractors and the tender responses that we received, I will write to you with the detail.

4 Cliff Phillips to Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

One of my questions that mysteriously got lost before the last Council meeting has now been answered by Councillor Carter's. He stated "an intrusive survey of the pitched roofs would be carried out by Harlow Councils specialist consultant Stace. These would be analysed and communicated with leaseholders with next steps outlined so there is clarity going forward before an instruction will be issued to the contractor."

We as leaseholders are not happy that the same company (Stace) who formalised the specification, will also be carrying out the survey for the possible roof work.

Will we be able to fully inspect and possibly challenge the surveyors report before the work goes ahead?

Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration) on behalf of Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

I thank Mr Phillips for his further question. I would like to clarify the issues regarding the surveys.

The surveys, such as the one he mentions, are being carried out by the contractors appointed through the tender process.

The role of Stace is to independently review the surveys and subsequent findings to advise the Council. Stace are not carrying out the surveys.

The surveys are underway now to identify exactly what works are required.

Once the surveys are complete, leaseholders will be written to with copies of the survey reports and asked to comment before works commencing.

Supplementary Question from Cliff Phillips to Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

With so much high priced work proposed at Five Acres I would like to know what department was responsible for setting this up? Did it cross anyone's mind these high costs would not be affordable to the majority of leaseholders? I know for a fact that the stress and worry over this this is causing a number of leaseholders, the elderly, disabled lady who lives close to my flat has been so worried she tells me it is badly affecting her health. This is not a one off. I am 74 and have a heart problem and this is causing me sleepless nights and stress related problems including angina attacks. Others, I am told, are losing days of work over the worry. Why was this work proposed in this way? Why re things like the roof replacement costing including when it is still unsure that the work needs doing? Why is the cladding being updated to such a high extent as to be well above the requirements? Why is this building work being pushed ahead when work on other flats have been delayed? It would seem that the builder is very keen on getting this started. Is this because they have been able to secure an extremely high contract through almost total lack of competition? This is what's winding us all up and we are asking you lot as Councillors to try and understand where we are coming from and help us. It doesn't matter whether you are Labour or Conservative or whatever you are, we are just asking for you to try and help.

Supplementary Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration) on behalf of Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

Thank you for your question, I genuinely and sincerely understand and I hope that I met with you and some of the other leaseholders last week to listen to your concerns and talk through the process, that was helpful. I won't cover each point but, in terms of the works specified as set out, that is the tender of surveys currently ongoing. The process that's been followed is set out in law and that's the process that we have to follow for these works. As we discussed last week, at any time if any leaseholder wishes to challenge the costs of works or the tender process or anything in between, they have the ability and chance to do so through the independent tribunal. The process that we are following is one set out in law, and as I said when we spoke last week, all leaseholders will be individually written to once the conclusions of the surveys are found and complete and reviewed by an independent party, you will be written to and have your chance to comment on such works. As I say, you can challenge that any other time through the independent tribunal.

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

Unfortunately I find your last response to our questions at Cabinet in July are replies not answers.

Yes indeed the leaseholders of Five Acres have received: A Notice of Intention; a 'Notice of Estimate'; the intended works specification; and a breakdown of works

However, I ask you:

- a) 'Notice of Intention' Surveys are still to be conducted, we look forward to viewing the results.
- b) My Notice of Estimate is one of the lower estimates but still comes in at £26,000 - an amount of money that most people would struggle to pay back even if extended to a period of 10 years. What guarantee can you give us that the Council will work with us to understand our positions to pay any monies owed?
- c) The intended works specification is incomprehensible when clearly the buildings appear not to have been visited before this being written. We state we delighted to know the individual surveys will take place on each block.

Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration) on behalf of Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

Thank you for your questions, Ms Jones. As I said to Mr Phillips, I fully recognise the concern this has caused, and I hope that clarity on the process will be helpful.

The Notice of Intention (NOI) details is formed by information currently available, and indicative list of works developed by the Council's stock condition data and initial

external inspection. Further surveys, which are now underway, will develop information for the particular works considered to be required for each block.

Each individual leaseholder will then be informed and will have the opportunity to discuss their situation and positions. The Council, as outlined previously, has put in place several repayment options to spread the cost and provide support.

Following the end of the Notice of Intention (NOI) stage and insight into the observations received from consultation and shared with the surveyors, more intrusive surveys are carried out in order to develop a specific schedule of works.

Supplementary Question from Sally Jones to Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

The Council did indeed provide the information about the repayment. My personal understanding and that of the group was the maximum loan period was 5 years so we would ask you please to work with us to see if any other extensions could be made on those periods.

Supplementary Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration) on behalf of Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

As I said, the details of those things that are already in place have been sent out to you but there is the opportunity when the surveys are completed, at that stage of consultation when each individual leaseholder is written to to discuss the best way forward for each individual leaseholder.

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

You state in your reply in July that “The formal consultation processes and information provided are aimed to ensure that only works that are appropriate and necessary are carried out.” Clearly the leaseholders and the Council have huge discrepancies on this matter, so who will make the final decision about what is appropriate and necessary?

Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration) on behalf of Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

Thank you for your further question. I hope that the surveys and their findings will help both parties in this case. As I have detailed, each individual leaseholder will be written to. Ultimately, at the appropriate time, it is the responsibility of the Director of Housing, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, to approve Housing Contract Awards and review their progress.

Leaseholders can challenge the intended work and/or costs through the First Tier Tribunal (FTT). As I highlighted to Ms Jones last week, these challenges can be undertaken at any time, even when the works are complete or when an invoice for works has been received. They are an independent statutory body which will hear the case for both the Applicant (leaseholders) and Respondent (the Council) and consider all the evidence provided by both parties and reach a considered decision. I will write to you with the details for the First Tier Tribunal.

7 Denise Gillies to Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

After my questions disappeared at the last Council meeting, I was told to resubmit those questions and I would receive a reply within 10 days. It took over 3 weeks for Councillor Carter to reply, but only after I sent an email stating that I would take it further if I didn't get a reply by the of the week.

My question to Councillor Carter is after waiting so long for a reply is, can you explain to me why my answers are word for word identical to those of Mr Phillips answers when we asked 4 completely different questions?

Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration) on behalf of Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

Thank you for your further question, Ms Gillies. I am sorry to hear of the delay in responses getting to you and I do sincerely recognise the concerns of all leaseholders in these blocks. I understand that Cllr Carter grouped the responses for clarity, but if you have any further questions or concerns, I would be more than happy to discuss those, as we did last week.

8 Janet Jackman to Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

Note – Janet Jackman did not attend the meeting, therefore, the questions and answers below were noted.

The pitched roof at 45 to 49 five acres does not need a new roof. I have photos & a video evidence showing roof is in perfect order & just needs a few minor repairs on valleys & verges. Can you guarantee work will not go ahead till we leaseholders get our own surveyors in. When are roofs getting surveys done?

Why do we need a tin hat when other council properties in the same borough not using them. In this current difficult climate surely you should be trying to keep costs to a minimum.

Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration) on behalf of Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

Thank you, Ms Jackman, for your further questions.

I have set out the process in terms of the surveys to previous questioners, but I understand that it is expected for the roofing survey to be completed and reviewed by middle of October. The surveys will be revised by Harlow Council and independently assessed by Stace LLP. Stace LLP is a leading, independent property consultancy, delivering services to local authorities across the country. The Council will ensure works to be undertaken are required and completed to a satisfactory standard.

It is important that under no circumstances must any persons not instructed or employed by Harlow Council access the roof of any block as they are not insured for their own safety or safety of others.

These works are to be completed with the aid of a tin-hat roof. This provision has been put in place to protect the properties from the elements and potential damage through bad weather. All projects are specified on an individual basis.

9 Janet Jackman to Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

Our block is a unique block. It is totally different from the other blocks. It seems the blocks have not been assessed individually.

It has UPVC Facias & cladding which is in perfectly good order & below the 11mts of the fire regulations. It was renewed under 17 years ago to plastic.

Why are you replacing something that doesn't need doing? It is unnecessary.

Can you answer how you are going to dispose of hundreds of feet of UPVC which does not need replacing. Not very environmentally friendly.

Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration) on behalf of Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

Thank you for your further question. As I have set out the works will be informed by surveys and the independent review. Therefore, until these surveys are complete, I cannot comment on specific work is required. When the surveys are done, leaseholders will be written to and have the opportunity to respond, as I have already set out. Any leaseholder may also appeal this through the tribunal system I detailed earlier.

Cabinet – 22 September 2022

Questions from Councillors

1 Councillor Tony Edwards to Councillor Steve LeMay (Portfolio Holder for HTS, Properties and Facilities – with Special Responsibility for the Roads):

Could you please detail, both verbally and in writing, what action has been taken and what progress if any has been made since the last Cabinet meeting to develop the Strategic Short Term, Medium Term and Long-Term Ambitions the Strategic Outcomes with respect to Harlow's roads?

Reply from Councillor Steve LeMay (Portfolio Holder for HTS, Properties and Facilities – with Special Responsibility for the Roads):

As Cllr Edwards knows, getting work done by Essex Highways in Harlow has been historically tough which has led to unacceptable states of our roads. Often it has taken months to get small jobs done and therefore, I hope he does not underestimate how challenging this is.

That's why we are committed to changing this and we have worked through three very complex options on how best to affect that change and are now working on a fourth with Essex County Council - which we are making good progress on. Both myself and Cllr Perrin have worked very hard on this, and we are due to meet with the Cabinet Member at Essex to resume these talks in the next week or so.

I look forward to updating Cllr Edwards and all members on our progress to improve Harlow's roads. I would also point out that since June, that under the Members scheme Essex Highways are fixing at least 144 potholes in Harlow and this figure does not include 'make safe repairs'. Furthermore, thanks to the work we are doing, a number of major roads are scheduled to be or have already been resurfaced and properly repaired since June including: A414 (between Edinburgh Way and First Avenue), Cambridge Road, Elizabeth Way, Third Avenue, Millersdale, Watersmeet, Second Avenue, Momples Road, Harefield Road - some of which have already been completed and others starting very soon – in fact, Second Avenue is starting this week and Third Avenue is starting next week.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Tony Edwards to Councillor Steve LeMay (Portfolio Holder for HTS, Properties and Facilities – with Special Responsibility for the Roads):

Thank you very much for the response and I certainly don't underestimate the challenge it takes to get these roads fixed. However, what I would like you to do

is answer as to how do you reconcile your statement that, under the members scheme, they are fixing at least 144 potholes, whereby we have a Freedom of Information request with a response on 16 September which shows that only 59 potholes have actually been identified by Councillors so how you are possibly fixing 144, you could potentially fix 144 but to say you are fixing it is not exactly the same.

Supplementary Reply from Councillor Steve LeMay (Portfolio Holder for HTS, Properties and Facilities – with Special Responsibility for the Roads):

There is the sum on how this has been worked out and they are the figures that have been given to me by Essex County Council.

2 Councillor Tony Edwards to Councillor Russell Perrin (Leader of the Council):

It has been stated in Your Harlow that Councillor Morrison has reportedly carried out an audit of 350 neighbourhoods at your request. Will all Ward Councillors be given copies of these audit reports together with the criteria for “agreeing the order in which restoration work could be done”?

Reply from Councillor Russell Perrin (Leader of the Council):

I am sure ward councillors often carry out visits in their ward to identify issues that need resolving and take the appropriate action to do so. My administration is committed to restoring pride in our great town and that is why I appointed Cllr Morrison to the member champion role and champion that ambition she has. It is telling that we are needing to carry out such thorough work because the previous administration neglected our town and allowed our estates to tire. That’s why we also set aside record investment into estate renewal in our budget this year – which he voted against. These audits are for internal purposes, and I hope we can count on his support in our next budget which will further invest what is needed to restore pride in our town.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Tony Edwards to Councillor Russell Perrin (Leader of the Council):

I note that you didn’t answer the question so I will repeat it. Will all ward councillors be given copies of these audit reports together with the criteria for “agreeing the order in which restoration work could be done”? Given that Councillor Morrison appears to be carrying out an audit of 350 neighbourhoods I presume that’s across the town. Will we as ward councillors see this?

Supplementary Reply from Councillor Russell Perrin (Leader of the Council):

Seeing as your question is the same my answer will remain the same. Suffice is to say that I am extremely grateful to Councillor Morrison for the amount of work she put in to carrying out the audit and she is to be applauded for the amount of work and effort that she has put into the audit and for the work that's now being carried out as a result of that. The question doesn't change, the answer doesn't change.

3 Councillor Kay Morrison to Councillor Alastair Gunn (Portfolio Holder for Governance):

Plastic is polluting our planet, our oceans, our forests, our beaches, even the Arctic. The figures are stark. Only 12% of our plastic is recycled. More than 90% of plastic is made from fossil fuel; greenhouse gases from plastic continue to pollute and damage.

The UK exports more than 2.5 Olympic-size swimming pools of plastic waste every day because we can't cope with the quantity we generate. We're overwhelming other countries' recycling systems, particularly India, Indonesia, Malaysia. We've all been horrified by the toxicity in soil and ash in Southern Turkey dumpsites containing UK waste. In 2020 210,000 tons of UK plastic were dumped in Turkey. We're not doing well.

A deposit return scheme for single-use drinks containers is planned for 2024, to try to catch up with Denmark, Sweden and Germany. The government's environment plan aims to eliminate all avoidable plastic by 2042.

How important is eliminating the scourge of plastic waste to you? Will you commit to a ban on all single-use plastic where possible? Will you support supermarkets which choose re-use?

Reply from Councillor Alastair Gunn (Portfolio Holder for Governance):

Making best use of resources will be critical to our efforts to combat and adapt to climate change, and minimising waste of all kinds including plastic waste is an essential part of those efforts. This will require action on a national, if not international, level. The Government's current published approach to minimising packaging waste goes beyond deposit return schemes, including extension of the producer responsibility obligation so manufacturers will pay the full costs of managing and recycling their packaging waste, with higher fees being levied if packaging is harder to reuse or recycle.

The Council has a role to play in ensuring that its domestic waste collection functions support County level waste management strategy designed to reflect

government guidance, while supporting practical national policies. The Council itself eliminated single use plastics from all of its public buildings in October 2019 and at its meeting on 4 November 2021 Cabinet resolved to end the use of single use plastics in all of its tree planting and bio-diversity work with effect from the 2022/23 winter programme.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Kay Morrison to Councillor Alastair Gunn (Portfolio Holder for Governance):

Thank you Councillor Gunn, as you said it is a colossal challenge we are making some small steps. However, baring in mind our responsibility to do all that we can individually and collectively to contribute to meeting the UK targets promised at COP26, those targets I'm referring to are about net zero. Would you like to do more Councillor Gunn?

Supplementary Reply from Councillor Alastair Gunn (Portfolio Holder for Governance):

I'm satisfied with the progress that Harlow Council is making which is all I can really answer for I'm afraid. I am absolutely committed to doing what we can as a council to meet our own target on net zero set last year for 2040 and work is ongoing for a wider climate change strategy for the town at large. Naturally Harlow Council cannot solve the international problem to plastic waste but we can do all that we can and I am committed that we do what we can.

4 Councillor Chris Vince to Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

We know that residents in Harlow face a hard winter with the cost-of-living crisis, food and energy bills spiralling out of control. What steps have been taken by the council to help support our council tenants, many of whom will have to choose between feeding their families and heating their homes, during this difficult time?

Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration) on behalf of Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

The Council fully recognises the challenges the cost-of-living crisis is presenting tenants and our whole town. This will, of course, be disproportionately felt by those who are already struggling, and the Council is fully committed to doing everything we possibly can to support tenants and residents. Cllr Vince will have seen the Government's recent announcement about financial support in terms of energy bills as well as other measures announced earlier in the year such as the Council Tax rebate and Household Support Fund. The Council through Contact

Harlow, Housing Officers, the Revenues and Benefits team as well as others will actively support residents and tenants to access any support available to them.

A range of signposting is available on the Council's website which includes:

Government's [Help for Households](#) (income support, help with energy bills, help with childcare costs, housing support, help with transport costs, help with finding work) service to see what cost of living support residents could be eligible for. Additional support - 'Housing Support Fund' and locally as Essential Living Fund. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/household-support-fund-guidance-for-local-councils/household-support-fund-final-guidance-for-county-councils-and-unitary-authorities-in-england>

[Benefits and financial support you can get payment to help with the cost of living](#) if you're getting certain benefits or tax credits. Pension Credit gives you extra money to help with your living costs if you're over State Pension age and on a low income - [check if you are eligible for Pension Credit](#).

Local support includes:

[Harlow Citizens Advice Bureau](#) (0808 278 7856) - a local registered charity who offer free, confidential, impartial, accredited advice and information on a wide range of areas.

[Harlow Foodbank](#) (01279 724515) - designed to help individuals and families in crisis by providing free emergency food until the appropriate agencies are in a position to assist.

[Essex Essential Living Fund](#) - funding for people who live in Essex, which can help pay for furniture, household furnishings, white goods, clothing and footwear, including school uniforms in exceptional circumstances, general living expenses such as groceries, nappies, toiletries and money for pay-as-you-go fuel meters.

National support includes:

[Money Helper](#) - free and impartial help with money, backed by the government.

[National Debtline](#) (0800 808 4000) - free and independent debt advice over the phone and online.

[StepChange Debt Charity](#) (0800 138 1111) - expert debt advice and fee-free debt management.

Help with council bills

Please contact the Council straight away if you are having genuine difficulty in paying your council bills. If you are having difficulties call 01279 446655.

Help with Council Tax

You can apply for [Council Tax Support](#) to help you pay your Council Tax if you're on a low income or claiming welfare benefits. If you receive Council Tax Support, but still struggle to pay your Council Tax, you may be able to apply for an [Exceptional Hardship Payment](#) (EHP). An EHP is usually paid for a short time to help you make steps to pay your Council Tax in the future.

Help with your rent

You may be able to [claim Universal Credit](#) which can include help with housing costs.

You may be able to receive extra short-term help with your rent by applying for a [Discretionary Housing Payment](#) (DHP). You can claim a DHP if you already receive the housing element of Universal Credit, or receive Housing Benefit, but need help to meet your rent.

Supported housing tenants

If you are having problems paying your rent, please speak to your Housing Support and Telecare Officer.

Council leaseholders

If you are experiencing difficulties paying your annual service charges or major works invoice, contact the Home Ownership team on 01279 446206 or email homeownership@harlow.gov.uk

Supplementary Question from Councillor Chris Vince to Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

Taking into account that it appears that the majority of the support that you are proposing from the Council is basically signposting, are you concerned by the staffing levels and the issues with staffing around Contact Harlow? I appreciate that the previous answer about... states and the fact that waiting times at Contact Harlow and thousands of targets not met last year.

Supplementary Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration) on behalf of Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

Councillor Gunn recommend a written response to the other question. I'm sure it will come up as part of further reports. Those issues are being addressed obviously, there is always an ongoing concern cause for point of reference and the quicker we can answer the phones the better.