

**COUNCIL – 7 FEBRUARY 2019
QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

Agenda item 6 refers

1. Mr David Forman to Councillor Danny Purton, Portfolio Holder for Environment

Will the Council be supporting the Great British Spring Clean organised by Keep Britain Tidy, which runs from 22 March until 23 April, or does the Council have other plans to mount a public campaign to combat litter?

Response from Councillor Danny Purton, Portfolio Holder for Environment

Yes, the Council will be supporting the Keep Britain Tidy Great British Spring Clean 2019. This year we will be doing more to actively encourage groups and schools to take part. As in previous years the Council and HTS will work together to support the initiative by offering community groups the use of litter picking equipment and arranging for the collection by HTS of litter collected. We plan to offer £100 to groups and schools as a way for them to fundraise. This year will be buying extra litter picking equipment so we can support more local groups, not just during the Great British Spring Clean but also all year round.

There is an important message which we want to communicate to the community. Every year the Council spends around £2 million on its daily cleaning of the streets; whether that is picking up litter, clearing dumped rubbish, or cleaning off graffiti. By working together residents, the Council and HTS can help reduce this cost and make Harlow a more pleasant place to live. To support this, the Council is working closely with HTS to look at a long-term campaign to encourage people to take pride in our town and to work with us to keep Harlow clean and tidy.

Promotion of Harlow's Great British Spring Clean will start this week in the local press and on various social media channels Facebook, Twitter and Instagram as well as within the March edition of the Council's household magazine Harlow Times. We will also be writing to schools and local community groups including residents associations and working with Rainbow Services to help get the message out.

I know that serial local litter picker Councillor Chris Vince will also be helping spread the message and will be contacting local groups, schools and residents associations and I encourage all councillors to do the same. Councillor Vince is also a director of HTS so he will also be encouraging them to get fully behind this initiative.

2. Mrs Waida Forman to Councillor Eugenie Harvey, Portfolio Holder for Community and Wellbeing

Do you agree:

- a) With the Museums Association's claims that "Museums boost people's quality of life and improve mental and physical health" and are "good for wellbeing to engage closely with collections and ideas in the presence of other people"?
- b) That 'the best museums embody the concept of social justice by being accessible to all and offering a supportive environment for everyone, whatever their backgrounds and needs' and that Harlow Museum can best achieve this by being owned and managed by Harlow Council?

Response from Councillor Eugenie Harvey, Portfolio Holder for Community and Wellbeing

- a) Yes I agree.

There is a growing body of evidence which describes the social inclusion role of museums and the role that museums play in improving health and wellbeing, including previous research funded by the AHRC (Arts Humanities Research Council).

This research has shown that engaging in museums provides: positive social experiences, leading to reduced social isolation; opportunities for learning and acquiring new skills; calming experiences, leading to decreased anxiety; increased positive emotions, such as optimism, hope and enjoyment; increased self-esteem and sense of identity; increased inspiration and opportunities for meaning making; positive distraction from clinical environments, including hospitals and care homes; and increased communication between families, carers and health professionals.

The Five Ways to Wellbeing are a set of evidence-based actions to improve and promote personal wellbeing. These are core principles and contained in Appendix 2 of the Harlow Health and Wellbeing Partnership Strategy 2018-2028 and were developed by the New Economics Foundation (NEF). The Five Ways to Wellbeing provide a useful framework to inform how museums can think about, contribute to and enhance health and wellbeing.

- b) An inclusive approach which engages different cultural groups and backgrounds in a learning experience which meets differing needs is essential and an important public health principle. Through this the

health and wellbeing differences or strengths of local people can be supported to engage in living a healthier and culturally informed life.

The Council is currently operating the museum pending further review about the service and its future sustainability. This review will involve a range of partners and consider the contribution of volunteers in supporting the museum going forward.

3. Mr Mick Patrick to Councillor Eugenie Harvey, Portfolio Holder for Community and Wellbeing

The public toilets in Harlow at the Stow, Bushfair, the Town Park and Old Harlow have been closed for many years. This has obviously caused a lot of distress to Harlow residents, particularly with young children and those with medical problems and disabilities. These closures can deter, or often stop, people from having a more active life. When will these public toilets be reopened?

Response from Councillor Eugenie Harvey, Portfolio Holder for Community and Wellbeing

The decision to close a number of public toilets across Harlow came into effect in 2008 and 2011 following Council budget setting process. The public toilets were under-used and subject to regular vandalism causing them to be in a dilapidated state and inappropriate for use. The toilets had unfortunately become disproportionately expensive to run which is why the decision to close was made.

An equalities impact assessment was carried out by Council Officers as part of the decision making process, this took into account the effect of toilet closures on a broad spectrum of people including those with young children, disabilities, health issues and the elderly. Resulting from this assessment a Community Toilet Scheme was identified as a more cost efficient way to provide facilities and this is being offered to businesses currently. I will, however, speak with Officers to discuss if this scheme can be viable to reinstate.