

Full Council – 31 October 2019

Questions from the Public

1 Mr David Forman to Councillor Lanie Shears (Portfolio Holder for Governance, Equality and Diversity):

The Department for Communities and Local Government document 'Progress report by the ministerial working group on tackling inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers' published in April 2012 stated in paragraph 4.11 that training for councillors was available from autumn 2011 through to 2015 to support councillors with their leadership role around Traveller site provision. Paragraph 4.10 states the objective which is as follows:

'Local Government Group has been running a successful course delivered by councillors for councillors to support them with their leadership role around traveller site provision, including advice on dealing with the controversy that can sometimes accompany planning applications for traveller sites. Councillors have reported that the training helped them to conduct better planning meetings leading to fair and more effective decision-making.'

Consequently, firstly I would like to know if any councillors from Harlow District Council completed this training course, and if not what are the reasons for not doing so?

Secondly, paragraph 4.11 states the training will 'support councils or groups of councils to find locally acceptable approaches to increasing the number of planned-for pitches that gain consent in their area without going through the planning appeal process.'

As the training aims to reduce the costs of councils by avoiding the costly process of planning appeals, should both the Section 151 and Chief Finance officers have exercised their duty of care in ensuring this training was undertaken?

Reply from Councillor Lanie Shears (Portfolio Holder for Governance, Equality and Diversity):

None of the Council's Councillors attended the training between Autumn 2011 and 2015. From 2011 until today, the Development Management Committee has considered zero applications in relation to traveller site provision. It was therefore considered that there was no significant need for training to be undertaken. If, during that period, an application had been due to be considered by the Committee, appropriate training would have been accessed.

Additionally, there is no provision for additional traveller's pitches in Harlow's

emerging Local Plan (for the period to 2033) and so it is unlikely that new applications for this use will come before the Development Management Committee in the foreseeable future. If it transpires that an application does come forward, and it is felt that Committee members need specific training, then this would be organised.

2 Mr David Forman to Councillor Danny Purton (Portfolio Holder for Environment):

A recent Your Harlow news story highlighted the high cost of green waste wheelie bin collections in our district.

Given the fact that not all of Harlow's elderly and disabled citizens are able to make use of Essex County Council's recycling depot at Temple Bank, yet partly pay for it through their council tax, would you agree with me:

- a) That the green waste wheelie bin collection charge is unreasonable; and
- b) Through its application is discriminatory towards both the elderly and disabled, thus breaching the Council's public sector equality duty under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, which states in paragraph (1):

'A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- b) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it'?

Reply from Councillor Danny Purton (Portfolio Holder for Environment):

The principle of collective provision is well established and most residents probably contribute through the Council Tax to the provision of services that they do not or are not able to use – In the case of the ECC Civic Amenity site a rough calculation would suggest that the cost of operations spread equally over the catchment population would amount to a fraction of a penny per week.

The Council's current provision for garden waste collection as set out on its website consists of a bookable service for the collection of bagged garden waste which starts at a cost of 97 pence per bag, and a regular wheelie-bin based service that costs £97 per year.

The Council is satisfied that charging for these discretionary services in common with many other authorities is not in breach of any of its legal duties. The Council offers assisted collections for people who have difficulty in using either collection method.

The regular wheelie-bin service has proved so popular that we currently have over 1000 householders subscribing to the scheme.

On average over 3000 bags per week are booked and collected on the more flexible scheme.

The Council's domestic waste collection services are provided under contract. The existing collection options were a write across from the preceding contract. The advent of a replacement contract provides the opportunity to make changes.

The existing contract that the Council have entered into with Veolia provides for the replacement of the current service options with a single wheelie-bin based service which is likely to reduce the cost of the service to each household.