

Full Council – 15 July 2021

Questions from the Public

1 Nicholas Taylor to Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

Members may recall that two questions about the external repair and painting of Council owned houses were asked of Councillors in 2020. This was as a result of my seeking a Freedom of Information request to the Council which revealed that the Council have not kept any record of work done prior to 2016 and very few houses have been done since. I am aware of a council house that has only been repaired and painted externally once in the last 25 years.

In response to the first question Councillor Wilkinson said on 27 February 2020 that a programme of cyclical maintenance would be prepared and appear on the Council's website in May 2020. It did not, hence my question on 10 September to which Councillor Ingall responded by saying that following a review of the implications of Covid-19, it is expected that a revised Housing Investment programme will be published later in the year. To date, nothing on this subject has appeared on the Council's website.

When does the Council intend to carry out such work and when will the website be updated with such information?

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

In 2020 the Council's Housing Investment Programme (HIP) was largely suspended due to the restrictions placed by Covid 19. However, as part of the Government's published Road Map - "Emerging from Lockdown", these programmes of work are re-commencing including the external redecoration of Council owned houses and bungalows within the resources available.

Programmes are currently being revised in order to both complete last year's (HIP) as well as the work planned on the estates for 2021/22. It is expected that the Council will publish its revised and reprioritised HIP programmes for the next five year cycle of investment from 2021/22 later this year.

2 Nicholas Taylor to Councillor Alastair Gunn (Portfolio Holder for Environment):

In September 2020 Cllr Ingall was asked about the maintenance of trees. In response he said that working with HTS a pro-active planned maintenance regime would be put in place from April 2021. I note that at the Cabinet meeting on 26 March it was reported that there had been a shortfall in performance in the 3rd quarter of 2020/2021 which was likely to be maintained through to the end of the year, the recruitment of a specialist consultancy had in fact identified a larger number of works to be completed and the situation would not be recovered fully until 2021/2022.

Can you advise me if a pro-active planned maintenance regime has been put in place, has the list of works been prioritised, what targets have been set for work to be completed and when will this information be placed on the Council's website?

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

A proactive management regime for tree maintenance is to be implemented in this financial year. HTS have now produced a costed proposal for this and Council officers are now in discussions with HTS about its implementation and the setting of targets. This will be in a phased approach since a planned maintenance regime requires a survey to first map and then inspect every substantial tree in the town which will clearly take some time to undertake. It is estimated that in reality this will take 2 – 3 years to complete across the whole town but it will deliver a planned maintenance programme that will commence this year.

In the meantime, HTS continue to deliver works to trees and residents can report dead or dangerous trees by phone or via the Council's website. I am pleased to be able to report that performance on tree works has recovered and in the second quarter of this year HTS expect to be delivering in full against their performance indicators.

3 Alan Leverett to Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

It is pleasing to see at long last the occupation of the flats at Prentice Place.

With a new administration is the public going to be informed of the true reason for a delay of over a year from what appeared completion of the project to actual occupation? It was also evident that 24 hour security of the flats was provided to protect them from any unwanted occupation or damage. Can the council please inform me of the cost of this service what budget it was taken from?

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

Thank you for your question Mr Leverett.

It is pleasing to see that after years of delay under Labour we have been able to allocate these properties to ten homeless families. The scheme began in 2008/9 under a Conservative administration so you could say it has come full circle.

The delays to the completion to Prentice Place occurred because:

- a) The fire stopping between the retail and residential units did not meet current fire safety regulations and therefore needed to be upgraded.
- b) Issues with electrical distribution.
- c) The doors specified in the original drawings complied with building regulations at that time. However, at the time of completion, building regulations had been changed and updated, requiring alternative fire doors to be installed.

Although the fitting of the alternative doors could not be legally enforced, as the structure of the building had not been altered, as a local authority, the decision was taken that we should be fully compliant with the current fire safety and building regulations, to enable the properties to be offered to people from the housing register.

As you will see, some of the delays were caused by the extreme delay between drawing up the specifications for the scheme and actually implementing them.

The overall expenditure, for security services at Prentice Place is £209,900.06 over a three year period. The overall percentage split is per below:

- a) Regeneration – 25 percent
- b) Property and Facilities – 50 percent
- c) Housing – 25 percent

4 Alan Leverett to Councillors Dan Swords (Portfolio Holder for Regeneration):

We were informed previously that the Osler House Part of Prentice Place was to be refurbished as a Community Hub. Can the council inform me of what progress has been made and as to when it's likely to be available for use?

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

I want to begin by paying tribute to Cllr Hulcoop who I know has worked extremely hard to ensure the Osler House site is used for the benefit of the community. To that end, I share Mr Leverett's disappointment that the previous administration did not complete the full plans for the redevelopment of the Prentice Place site and it is particularly upsetting that the promised work has not been carried out on the Osler House site to date - given that the last administration spent 10 painful years attempting to deliver the redevelopment.

However, our new Council is committed to delivering the scheme at the Osler House site which will be of huge benefit to the local community. The Council is in active negotiation at present and thus, I will update Mr Leverett and, of course, the public on that progress very soon.