

Full Council – 28 October 2021

Questions from Councillors

1 Councillor Mike Danvers to Councillor Michael Hardware (Portfolio Holder for Strategic Growth):

Will you give an estimate of the cost of drawing up a town plan including officers' time, meetings, published documentation and public consultation?

Reply from Councillor Michael Hardware (Portfolio Holder for Strategic Growth):

There are no direct costs involved in the production of the Town Plan. The Town Plan seeks to create a long term vision for the future of the town and does not require significant amounts of external consultancy support. The plan is being produced through the use of officer time across the Council. This is part of their day to day job and does not incur additional cost for the Council.

Supplementary question from Councillor Mike Danvers:

Why has it taken six months for a reply?

Supplementary reply from Councillor Michael Hardware (Portfolio Holder for Strategic Growth):

I was supposed to write you but I forgot.

2 Councillor Mike Danvers to Councillor Michael Hardware (Portfolio Holder for Strategic Growth):

Will the present leader of the Council please give details, if any, of official meetings between Harlow council members and officers and Epping Forest council members and officers since May 2021 to discuss the Epping Forest local plan? If meetings have taken place can minutes of these meetings be published?

Reply from Councillor Michael Hardware (Portfolio Holder for Strategic Growth):

Harlow Council has extensive liaison with Epping Forest District Council at both Member and Officer level as part of the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Partnership. Many of the conversations about the Epping Forest Local Plan have taken place in these fora. Additionally, informal meetings took

place in late August and early September at a political leadership level between Harlow Council and Epping Forest District Council to discuss the Epping Forest Local Plan. There are no minutes of these meetings as the discussions were informal. At officer level, formal meetings, outside of ongoing meetings within the HGGT structures took place with EFDC to discuss Local Plan issues, as well as other matters, on 15 September and 6 October. Minutes of these meetings are not published.

Supplementary question from Councillor Mike Danvers:

Why hasn't the new leadership met formally with Epping Forest since May?

Supplementary question from Councillor Michael Hardware (Portfolio Holder for Strategic Growth):

It is Epping Forest's local plan so it is up to them how they take it forward.

3 Councillor Tony Durcan to Councillor Russell Perrin (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance):

On Tuesday 12 October 2021, the local social media newspaper published a statement from the editor Michael Casey "Comment is free (but don't abuse the privilege)."

The article indicated that a significant number of articles that at times were offensive against others including myself came from an address within Harlow Council.

I have two asks of the new Leader.

Would under your leadership re enforce to all councillors the need to maintain the Nolan Principles and I ask that they are included in your reply? Could you assure me that you will work with the Chief Executive of the council to ensure no staff member is using IT equipment to provide personal views and comments of a political nature?

Reply from Councillor Russell Perrin (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance):

I thank the Councillor for his question. I agree that all Councillors should be held to the highest standard of conduct whilst in office and abide by the Nolan Principles as required by the Council's Code of Conduct. You will be aware that the Monitoring Officer has undertaken a number of training sessions for Councillors on the Code which has given guidance to members about their online activities, and all but one of the current Councillors has attended this

training in the last year or so. This training is repeated every year so members should be well aware of the codes requirements.

A number of training sessions have also been carried out by the Monitoring Officer for Officers again this year on their own Code of Conduct which is set out in Part 5 of the Constitution. These were well attended and this training specifically covers use of Council IT equipment and online media.

The Nolan Principles are set out below:

- a) Selflessness - Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.
- b) Integrity - Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or takes decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.
- c) Objectivity - Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.
- d) Accountability - Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.
- e) Openness - Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.
- f) Honesty - Holders of public office should be truthful.
- g) Leadership - Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

Supplementary question from Councillor Tony Durcan:

What actions will you take to stop abusive messages being sent using council equipment as its clear they are Tory led?

Supplementary reply from Councillor Russell Perrin (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance):

If he has specific instances where members have breached the Code he should report these to the Monitoring Officer. All Councillors should be held accountable to those standards.

4 Councillor Tony Durcan to Councillor Russell Perrin (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance):

This year we have seen an increase in racial tension both at locally and at national level.

This is due to many factors but would he agree that we need to call this out and speak with one voice that these matter are anti-racist and we need to take strong action against those who promote hatred against others.

Black History month enable us to reflect and celebrate the wonderful diversity of culture within the town.

As the new leader what difference will you make to ensure that you will do everything to reduce and stop such vile racial behaviour against our friends and neighbours?

Reply from Councillor Russell Perrin (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance):

Hate Crime, and incidents that are not considered a crime in law but are equally unacceptable, not only harm victims but also their friends and families and the wider community.

Such behaviour is not acceptable and we are committed to raising awareness of what Hate Crime is; how damaging it can be to communities; the difference between a hate crime and a hate incident and how to report concerns to ensure that perpetrators are dealt with appropriately and are aware that this behaviour will not be tolerated in our town.

The Safer Harlow Partnership has identified Hate Crime as one of five top priorities for 2021/22 and there is an established multi-agency working group that concentrates its efforts on delivering an action plan that aims to raise awareness of what Hate Crime is and how to report it. The group also works with Essex Police to deliver a programme of Hate Crime Ambassador training and to date more than 130 Ambassadors have been trained in Harlow. Harlow Youth Councillors have also been trained as Hate Crime Ambassadors to help educate other children and young people in Harlow and help protect the next generation from this abhorrent and intolerable type of behaviour.

During Hate Crime Awareness Week (9 – 16 October 2021) the working group delivered awareness raising events in the community, at Harlow College and at places of worship and were successful in engaging around 200 people at these events and distributing useful and informative resources to members of the public.

Councillor Durcan will be aware that Cabinet has recently approved a draft Community Resilience Strategy which will be published later this year following a short consultation period. At the heart of this strategy lies a commitment to build a strong, better connected town that celebrates diversity and helps people from all backgrounds feel a greater sense of belonging and empowerment. It is a strategy that will help build a renewed sense of community purpose and contribute towards identifying and tackling inequality and ensuring social inclusion for all. The strategy is supported by six strategic pillars to ensure the whole community will benefit from recovery, opportunity, inclusion and future prosperity regardless of identity or background. One of the six pillars is centred around Safe Communities and we have set out how we will tackle and reduce crime, violence and ASB and how we will work collaboratively with partners to ensure that all residents feel and are safe in the community and in their own homes and have the confidence to report crime and concerns without fear of recriminations.

We will continue to support events like Black History Month and work with partners such as the Harlow Ethnic Minority Umbrella (HEMU) and Integration Support Services (ISS) to both support and celebrate our wide and wonderfully diverse population and promote all the benefits that this can bring to our town.

Supplementary question from Councillor Tony Durcan:

What will you do that is different?

Supplementary reply from Councillor Russell Perrin (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance):

I will make sure the Community Resilience Strategy is fully embedded within our organisation.

5 Councillor Chris Vince to Councillor Russell Perrin (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance):

In February of this year Mervyn Juliff sadly past away. In the 1970s, Mervyn served as Leader and Chair of Harlow Council, as well as becoming Chair of

the Harlow Development Corporation. He was also the last Labour Leader of Essex County Council from 1997 to 2001.

Would it be possible to get a cross party group together to form a policy to ensure civic leaders of all political colours, like Mervyn, are properly recognised with a permanent tribute to him either in the form of a blue plaque or other memorial?

Reply from Councillor Russell Perrin (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance):

Like you, I was saddened by Mervyn's passing. His legacy in and commitment to the town was considerable. Just outside the Chair's suite, you can find Mervyn's portrait, along with other previous Chairs of the Council. All of these people served the town with distinction.

I recognise that many civic leaders never receive the honour of being Chair so this administration will look to develop a framework for commemorating civic leaders. I will ensure that there is cross-party involvement in developing this.

6 Councillor Bob Davis to Councillor Joel Charles (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience):

Would you consider having a thank you event for the people that put in so much effort during the worst of the Covid Pandemic? There are Officers, Councillors, Nurses, Charities and Individuals that put in a lot of effort during this crisis and I think they should be recognised.

Reply from Councillor Joel Charles (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience):

The Council continues to recognise what the NHS, charities, key workers, faith groups and the many volunteers are doing to support all residents, and those who are particularly vulnerable from COVID-19. Their acts of courage and selflessness will not be forgotten. The level of community spirit and resilience in Harlow was evident from the first lockdown and I want the Council to harness this as we work towards a social and economic recovery, but we cannot become complacent as the pandemic is not over yet.

The timings for when and how to celebrate the commitment of those who have stepped up to support our community is something the Council has been actively considering. I feel it is premature to say more at this time as the Council continues to monitor COVID-19 infection levels in the town carefully. The judgement about when the appropriate time for the celebration should take place will be included as an action for the Cross-Party COVID-19

Recovery Working Group. I expect the celebration will take place after the winter period and once COVID-19 infections have returned to lower levels across the town.

7 Councillor Jean Clark to Councillor Joel Charles (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience):

Can you confirm that the town park will have a revenue budget for the year April 2022-23?

Reply from Councillor Joel Charles (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience):

Yes, the Town Park has a revenue budget of nearly £300,000 per annum to enable the park to be maintained to a high standard. This investment has been put in place because the Council takes pride in the fact that it has successfully been able to secure yet another Green Flag award and is determined to maintain its record on the environment.

Supplementary question from Councillor Jean Clark:

If the Town Park receives another Green Flag award next year will the Council give it another £100,000?

Supplementary reply from Councillor Joel Charles (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience):

One of our key priorities is the environment and we would consider further environmental support as part of the budget process.