

# 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](mailto: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.