

# Full Council – 23 February 2023

## Questions from the Public

### **1 Mick Patrick to Councillor Stacy Seales (Portfolio Holder for Governance):**

It has been brought to our attention that due to the ULEZ zones in London and the proposed extension of ULEZ zone. That Arriva buses and post office vehicles have been transferred to Harlow from London. So, we now have higher emission vehicles in Harlow. What has Harlow Council done to encourage the use of lower emission vehicle from our public services.

### **Reply from Councillor Stacy Seales (Portfolio Holder for Governance):**

Road transport is one of the biggest contributors of nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter emissions. The London ULEZ is an example of how some authorities are tackling air pollution in a bid to improve public health. Unfortunately, as a result of low emission schemes in London, bus operators on commercial routes in Harlow and other towns outside of London are operating buses with higher polluting vehicles which are not the most up to date with regards to EURO standards.

Harlow Council is working with multiple stakeholders to encourage a modal shift within Harlow to use more sustainable forms of transport. Buses play an important part to this and so the Council and its partners are encouraging local bus operators and businesses to shift to lower/zero emitting vehicles.

As you may be aware, the Council is supporting the establishment of sustainable transport corridors (STC) in Harlow, with the development by Essex County Council of the Harlow North to Town Centre STC.

The Harlow Bus User Group was established to discuss bus services across the town. The meetings are open to the public and give the opportunity for the public to have their say on the bus network, including giving the opportunity for a wider discussion on the need to reduce air pollution emissions from the local bus operating network. The next meeting is currently being arranged and is expected to take place during April 2023.

### **2 Anthony Wiseman to Councillor Russell Perrin (Leader of the Council):**

What plans has the council agreed with the Essex County Council for repairs to the pot holes in Harlow and are they planning to publish those plans via Your Harlow or the next quarterly leaflet distribution?

**Reply from Councillor Russell Perrin (Leader of the Council):**

As Mr Wiseman is no doubt aware Harlow Council has no legal responsibility to repair and maintain the vast majority of roads in Harlow, this is the legal responsibility of Essex County Council. However, whilst recognising that the deterioration of roads is a nationwide problem and not just isolated to Harlow or even Essex, my administration has been keen from the outset to raise the poor state of the roads here in Harlow with Essex County Council and to work with them to find solutions to speeding up and increasing the number of repairs to our roads.

I have been in discussions with the ECC cabinet member for highways over a good many months and we are close to agreeing a match funded scheme between our two authorities to increase the number of repairs to our roads. More details on this will be released to the media in due course.

Our County councillors, are in regular contact with their 'highway buddies' at Essex County Council to notify them of urgent works required to our roads.

An announcement by Essex County Council last week to increase the funding for pothole repairs by £9M will also have a positive impact on the rate of repair to our roads.

**3 Anthony Wiseman to Councillor Russell Perrin (Leader of the Council):**

Please explain what the additional cost per household would be, via Council Tax, if a special levy were to be used to raise the funds for pot hole repair. And could Harlow Council carry out those works if ECC will not?

**Reply from Councillor Russell Perrin (Leader of the Council):**

We have asked Essex County Council if they can provide us with the data that would enable us to make the calculation that would answer your question. If and when they are able to provide us with this data we would be happy to provide you with an answer in writing to your question.

It is not considered that a special levy can be sought for highway maintenance. It is understood that there are restrictions upon both who could seek a special levy and the purpose of any such proposed levy and that this request would fail on both aspects.

**Supplementary question from Anthony Wiseman to Councillor Russell Perrin (Leader of the Council):**

If people understood the costs, they might be a little bit more understanding of your situation.

**Supplementary reply from Councillor Russell Perrin (Leader of the Council):**

I thank Mr Wiseman and in the spirit in which the question was asked, it is certainly not my response to that helpful comment is not to offer excuses to the public but merely to inform them of the questions that our group are often asked as to the reasons why our roads are the way that they are. There are a number of things. Namely, Essex County Council oversee a road network that the size equivalent to Northern Ireland to put it into perspective number one. Number two, new towns, particularly ones like Harlow, many of the roads are built on a concrete sub-base which is moving and so our roads are more prone to deterioration to many other roads. Number three, we have had a summer of extreme heat and a winter of extreme cold and all of those that can remember their days of geography from school and the freeze thaw affect and expansion and contraction will know that the base in which the roads are sitting is shifting more and so, whilst at this time of year we are this time of year would experience more pot holes, we are experiencing even more than we would normally for those reasons based on the laws of physics. When the laws of physics come into contact with laws of the economy, we have problems and that's why we are grateful that Essex County Council have recognised the need to do more given those georpg and heat related problems and are investing more than £9 million to address that problem. Unfortunately, I suspect that pot holes and the problem of them will forever be with us because they are a physical thing and the roads are subject to mechanical wear but Essex County Council and us are determined to continue to work to speed up the rate of those repairs when they are necessary and that's what we will continue to do when we can so thank you for your question today.

**4 David Forman to Councillor Nicky Purse (Portfolio Holder for Environment):**

The cost of the premium green waste service was slashed by the last Labour administration from £96 to £42 on 28 February 2020. The then portfolio holder for Environment, the late Cllr Danny Purton, remarked in a press release: "...we recognise that many residents want the convenience of being able to recycle their garden waste from home. The cost has been too high for too long and we have listened and responded to our residents."

Does the portfolio holder for Environment consider the proposed above inflation increase of 14.29% for the green waste service - the largest percentage increase in the Analysis of Fees and Charges - mean that the Conservative administration has stopped listening to residents and failed to spread increased charges more evenly across the board?

**Reply from Councillor Nicky Purse (Portfolio Holder for Environment):**

A regular and reliable collection of green waste is a valuable service provided to Harlow residents, and is a service considered important for residents by me, the Portfolio Holder, as well as the wider administration.

There was no increase in the charge to residents last year for this service, despite there being a 7% increase in the charge made to Harlow Council for the provision of the service. It is anticipated that the price to the council will increase again with effect from 1 April, and this will be in line with the Consumer Price Index at that time. The increase proposed in the council's fees and charges for 23/24 is equivalent to an increase of 50p per month for household choosing to use the service, and this, in my opinion, remains good value for money for residents.

**Supplementary Question from David Forman to Councillor Nicky Purse (Portfolio Holder for Environment):**

Given that many pensioners use this service and the fact there are so many other charges that the Council kept to no increase at all, I'm just wondering what impact assessment was made of the increased charges to see whether or not they disproportionality affect any particular vulnerable group in our town? What assessment was made to the impact on vulnerable groups when this increase to charges was made?

**Supplementary Reply from Councillor Nicky Purse (Portfolio Holder for Environment):**

In terms of impact, I would have to get back to you to see. In terms of actually talking to residents, I have been out on many wards this week. The residents still believe that it is value for money and many of those being pensioners this week that I have been talking to. They still value the time and the pressures on their vehicle and the cost of petrol which outweighs it, in the sense that 50p is a good cost to have.

**5 Colin Thorpe to Councillor Michael Hardware (Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Strategic Growth):**

At a recent residents meeting in my capacity of Chairman my attention was brought to the decline of bus services in Harlow in general but in particular the possible withdrawal of the number 9 which serves Potter Street which would leave some areas more isolated than they already are.

In light of plans for a new bus terminus how does the Council plan to address these issues?

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

The new Sustainable Transport Interchange represents a key step in the regeneration of our town centre, delivering a fit-for-purpose transport hub that delivers significantly improved facilities and public realm.

These improvements will provide a safe and welcoming environment for current users and will act as one of a wider grouping of catalysts to increase the adoption of sustainable transport modes by new passengers. It will be through this adoption that sustainable transport options and bus services will become an increasingly popular mode of choice.

The design of the Interchange has been developed in conjunction with Highways and Passenger Transport colleagues at Essex County Council, as well as wider stakeholders including the Bus Operators, to ensure the scheme delivers its intended outcomes.

With reference to the number 9 commercial bus service, we are aware it is due to be withdrawn by Arriva in April 2023. We understand the reason for this is due to lack of available drivers and the knock-on effect this has to services and profitability.

The Council is currently liaising with Essex County Council on the matter who have indicated they will be undertaking a sustainability study to understand whether they can directly support the service in the future. The timeframe of this study is currently being considered.

**Supplementary question from Colin Thorpe to Councillor Michael Hardware (Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Strategic Growth):**

In regards to Councillor Hardware's answer, with reference to the last two paragraphs of the answer, the question that is asked is what are you going to do about it and your answer says you are going to be talking but there is no time scale. This bus is needed. It serves from New Hall picking up school children, through Potter Street, through Brays Grove school, right the way round so it's quite a large area that it serves. Are you aware of that?

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

Yes, I am fully aware of the implications but the responsibility for supporting bus services is at Essex County Council and I have no answers until they provide them to me.

**6 Colin Thorpe to Councillor Joel Charles (Portfolio Holder for Community and Business Resilience):**

In the light of recent crime both in the Stow and Prentice Place CCTV footage should have been available. I have been informed by one resident after the theft of a motor bike from Prentice Place that the police were awaiting release of CCTV footage from the Council.

In Prentice Place cameras are facing to the ground so giving no overall view. The question asked is does the CCTV work in both the Stow and Prentice Place?

**Reply from Councillor Joel Charles (Portfolio Holder for Community and Business Resilience):**

The Council is committed to tackling anti-social behaviour and crime. In the new Community Safety Strategy for the town, the Council is clear that CCTV provision is a tool to assist in the identification of perpetrators of crime and can help to increase the number of successful prosecutions through the criminal justice system.

I can confirm that all the CCTV cameras at The Stow are fully operational – officers have made sure to check this is the case. All council-run CCTV cameras are checked regularly as part of a routine maintenance cycle.

The installation of the CCTV at Prentice Place was intended to be a temporary solution to monitor the refurbishment works that took place as part of the regeneration programme in response to the vandalism that was taking place at the site whilst the works were ongoing. As part of the works, security doors were also installed to reassure residents that access to certain areas of Prentice Place would be managed. The CCTV system is not currently operational as its specific purpose was to act as a building site deterrent. However, housing officers and the property and facilities team are reviewing the CCTV provision at Prentice Place to determine what is the most proportionate solution to meet ongoing monitoring needs.

The Council continues to use CCTV because it is proven that it deters people from using certain areas for anti-social and criminal activities.

**Supplementary question from Colin Thorpe to Councillor Joel Charles (Portfolio Holder for Community and Business Resilience):**

I find the answer rather strange but there you go. As you may be aware there is a service charge levied on all the shops in Prentice Place and I know for a fact that when we were going to be renting Osler House as a Potter Street Health and Wellbeing hub, included in that service charge was a charge for

CCTV. I'm sure the shop holders would be very happy if they would find out that they are paying for something that isn't it.

**Supplementary reply from Councillor Joel Charles (Portfolio Holder for Community and Business Resilience):**

Mr Thorpe, I have some good news for you. Housing colleagues have looked at the different options as I said in my earlier response. The results of that and looking at the installation charge, the regular maintenance and servicing that would be incurred for such a device, I am pleased to say that on an operational basis housing officers have instructed the programme to proceed. What that means is that operationally housing officers where this sits because of the works that took place at Prentice Place will be round there in the coming weeks to instal a system. They have actively been engaging with a number of residents in your local area about the ongoing complaints. It's not just the vandalism that took place, it has been ongoing and we are going to get it sorted, so I'm pleased to tell you that Mr Thorpe.