

Full Council – 23 February 2023

Questions from Councillors

1 Councillor Chris Vince to Councillor Alastair Gunn (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

Having met with council officers before Christmas I am aware that there is to be a re-tender for fire safety work being done on Morley Grove.

Can I ask that residents of Morley grove are communicated with throughout this tendering process and that all costs involved are explained in detail so there are no surprises when they are re-charged.

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

The Council has recently reviewed the way it consults with residents for major works schemes.

Following completion of the initial surveys to identify the work required in relation to the Fire Risk Assessment, a newsletter will be sent to all residents which will include information from the initial surveys.

Section 20 Notices (NOI's) will be issued to leaseholders on completion of the scope of works and estimated costs have been finalised and agreed. This will be the first of two Section 20 Notices issued to leaseholders, in order to inform them of the intent to carry out works.

Supplementary question from Councillor Chris Vince to Councillor Alastair Gunn (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

When it comes to the newsletter that is sent to residents, can I ask that I am sent a copy as well please?

Supplementary reply from Councillor Alastair Gunn (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

I am happy to make that undertaking yes.

2 Councillor James Griggs to Councillor Russell Perrin (Leader of the Council):

At Cabinet on 13th October last year Robert Halfon presented his disability charter. This you enthusiastically accepted with warm words about my response to it and my proposed additions.

You said it would be considered in the next budget round which we will see presented for approval this evening. Would you please update me on progress with the charter and point me to any reference to it in the budget?

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

I can provide the following update on the items in Robert Halfon's Disability Charter:

New signage and line painting on Council owned disabled parking spaces: The Council's Environment Team are conducting an audit of all spaces in Council-owned car parks and if any works are required then this will be delivered and funded through existing highways budgets. Additionally, the Council is reviewing the location of disabled parking spaces as part of the regeneration of Playhouse Square under the Levelling Up Fund.

Installation of ANPR cameras for disabled parking spaces: I agree with Cllr Grigg's previous comment that the installation of such cameras, as well as being very costly, would not resolve any problems since Blue Badges are not linked to individual motor vehicles. However, the enforcement of parking in disabled spaces lies within the contract for the North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP) and we will be asking them to ensure that this is vigorously enforced.

Enforce blocking of dropped kerbs: I am advised that there are limited legal avenues to enforce this. However, I have asked officers to look at rolling out a Communications campaign to highlight the problems that this causes and also target NEPP to focus on any locations that are identified as having a persistent problem.

Ensure signal-controlled crossing points have rotating cones to replicate visual and audible crossing alerts: This is an Essex County Council responsibility and ECC have advised us that "all push buttons now include a tactile rotating cone to assist visual and hearing impaired users".

Ensure tables and chairs are in designated areas: This is managed through our licensing work and is monitored by the Council's Licensing Team with any action taken as appropriate.

Ensure A Boards are in designated areas: This is not covered by licensing regulations but the Council's Regeneration team monitor this in the town centre and speak with retailers and others where any transgressions occur.

Audit of Disabled Toilets on Council premises: A list of all such toilets is currently being compiled and the Council's Property and Facilities team will

undertake an inspection of these, although it is not envisaged that any do not meet the standards required.

Require private landowners to install ANPR on disabled parking spaces and to ensure that their accessible toilets are fully accessible: The Council has no power to require private landowners to do anything in relation to parking spaces or toilet provision. However, in the spirit of Robert Halfon's petition, I have written to more than 30 private landowners urging them to vigorously enforce abuse of disabled parking spaces and to ensure all accessible toilet are properly accessible.

There is no direct reference in the budget to measures to implement elements of the petition because it has been identified that any actions that the Council can take, can all be delivered within existing budgets. None of the items I have listed require an additional budget line.

Supplementary question from Councillor James Griggs to Councillor Russell Perrin (Leader of the Council):

Thank you, I am pleased to hear that there has been some thought given to this important charter. There are a few things there that appear to be within the gift of Essex County Council and as we have discovered earlier on this evening that's not a very productive avenue of exploration on other matters so lets hope that they do better on this one. I also sincerely hope that North Essex Parking Partnership will vigorously pursue their enforcement role as they are not that great in some other areas. There is a lot of use of the word ensure in your answer so can I ask you to please ensure that you adhere to your commitment given in the debate that any engagement will be cross party on any further action on this charter.

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

I am happy to say that following our last meeting where this was raised Councillor Griggs, that I was happy to work cross party on some of the things that you have suggested and any other further suggestions that arise and I am still happy to do that going forward so yes absolutely I undertake that.

3 Councillor James Griggs to Councillor Russell Perrin (Leader of the Council):

As ECC have failed to deliver on your promise of immediate action on 21st January to fix the potholes on First Ave, and your subsequent abandonment of the post of having 'special responsibility for roads' you must have come to the conclusion that ECC are treating your administration with the same contempt they showed for the previous Labour administration.

In the past few days Essex County highways portfolio holder, Cllr Lee Scott, has declined my invitation to visit Harlow to see the extent of the problem.

Will you, therefore, accept my invitation to sign my pothole petition and join councillors and residents on the next public protest event?

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

As has already been said tonight the responsibility for repairing and maintaining the majority of the roads on Harlow rests with Essex County Council. I have made no promise that potholes will be fixed, I cannot promise what is not within my power to deliver. However, I have stated publicly Essex County Council's commitment to ensure that safety critical repairs to First Avenue would be made immediately (relative to 21st Jan 2023) weather permitting. I have included here a copy of the press statement which was released to Your Harlow:

"News / Sat 21st Jan 2023 pm31 08:36pm

THE LEADER of Harlow Council has issued a statement regarding the state of First Avenue in Harlow.

Councillor Russell Perrin said: "Since becoming Leader of Harlow Council I have been in regular contact with Essex County Council regarding the state of our roads. It is no secret that our roads are in a poor state. This is not a problem that is confined to Harlow or even Essex this is a nationwide issue.

As many people know, the responsibility for maintaining our roads is not a Harlow Council responsibility but one that rests with Essex County Council. That said I, like everyone who lives and works in Harlow, travel on these roads and as such I want to see them better maintained.

Many will have seen the gradual deterioration of First Avenue. The recent bad weather and snow has made the situation worse. My team and I have been in contact with Essex since the recent thaw of snow to accelerate safety works to this and several other roads. **We received confirmation this week that safety works to First Avenue would take place immediately.** Two thirds of First Avenue safety works have now taken place with the remaining third due to take place this evening (Sat 21st Jan), the rest of the weekend and early next week, weather and temperature conditions permitting.

The only delay to further work taking place will be if we have wet weather or if the temperature drops below 0 degrees as this can cause any repairs to rupture further, making the initial repair pointless."

The Labour Party have protested for many years when they were in administration yielding no discernible improvement in the condition of our roads. We are committed to working with Essex County Council to increasing funding and speeding up repairs So, no I will not sign the petition.

Supplementary question from Councillor James Griggs to Councillor Russell Perrin (Leader of the Council):

Given your clear transference of blame for all of this to Essex County Council its extraordinary that you created a role with special responsibility for roads in this Council, but we will move on from that. We can debate the semantics of when is a promise not a promise. If you issue a statement saying that a repair is going to be immediate I think it is entirely reasonable that the public would see that as...we didn't need to be Mystic Meg on the night of 21 November to realise that it would be zero and wet, it was already close to zero when your statement was issued and subsequent work didn't happen over the next few days when four of the following six days were dry and above zero. So I'm just going to ask you with your thing about protests failing, I mean clearly it doesn't work when you protest, does it, with Essex County Council because you had as much success as we did and you share my frustration at this?

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

Thank you very much. That protest that you referred to there, was not a protest. It was a petition and it was not to get potholes repaired so that's completely different. In terms of transferring the blame, I seek to transfer no blame, merely to state the fact that Essex County Council are the legally responsible authority to deal with roads and, therefore, anything that the council does has to be in a liaison role because we work with the County Council on a vast range of issues, not least the levelling up agenda where hundreds of thousands of pounds flows into this authority for many other things other than just roads. In terms of the Portfolio Holder for roads, the former Portfolio Holder for Roads did an awful lot of work to work with Essex County Council and the team to generate various ideas and to promote the need for further repairs to our roads. It was to give emphasis and to promote the need to get those roads repaired that we had that position. We have heard recently that £9 million extra is going into roads. That is in no large part due to the continual work of people in my Administration and across the district in Essex working with the County Council to highlight this issue. Essex County Council have recognised the issue, recognised the work our County Councillors are doing and are putting the additional funds towards doing that. No protest in the past has ever yielded an extra £9 million in funding for that cause as far as I am aware. It is working in partnership and raising the issue in a calm, considered way that that has been brought about. Also, that calm, considered attitude has now yielded a situation where we are shortly to

announced a match funded scheme where potholes can continued to be repaired at a much faster rate so I much prefer the way that we are doing it because we have got increased funds for the roads above any beyond the initial funding for the roads and we are in the middle or we are about to announce details of a match funded scheme, all of which would never have happened if we had of just shouted and protested like the Labour previous Administration did for a great many number of years.