

**MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL
HELD ON**

11 April 2024

7.30 - 8.40 pm

PRESENT

COUNCILLORS

Andrew Johnson (Chair)
Sue Livings (Vice-Chair)

David Carter	Colleen Morrison
Simon Carter	Kay Morrison
Joel Charles	Aiden O'Dell
Jodi Dunne	Russell Perrin
Tony Durcan	Matthew Sagggers
Tony Edwards	Stacy Seales
Michael Garnett	Lanie Shears
James Griggs	Clive Souter
Alastair Gunn	John Steer
Michael Hardware	Dan Swords
Maggie Hulcoop	Chris Vince
Eddie Johnson	Nancy Watson
Ash Malik	Mark Wilkinson

OFFICERS

Yvonne Rees, Interim Chief Executive
Niel Churchill,
Communications Manager
Julie Galvin, Legal Services Manager
Amanda Lucas, Graphic Designer
Hannah Marriott, Governance Support Officer

96. **WEBCAST INTRODUCTION**

The Chair said the meeting was being webcast live and would be available for repeated viewing after the meeting has ended. By continuing to attend the meeting, you were consenting to being filmed and to appearing in the webcast.

97. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors James Leppard, Daniella Pritchard and Nicky Purse.

98. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Matthew Sagggers raised a pecuniary interest as a council appointed director of HTS and a non-pecuniary interest as a leaseholder of a council property.

Councillors Jodi Dunne and Eddie Johnson raised pecuniary interests as council appointed directors of HTS.

99. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings held on 15 February 2024 and 22 February 2024 are agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

100. **COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR**

The Chair reminded all that his next charity event, Celebrate Harlow, would be taking place on 23 April 2024.

The Chair paid tribute to two long standing Councillors, Eddie Johnson and Mark Wilkinson, who would be stepping down at the next election. The Chair presented both Councillors with a gift and thanked them for their many years of service to Harlow. Both Councillors gave short speeches, noting that it was a privilege and honour to represent the people of Harlow.

101. **MATTERS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

Julie Galvin, Legal Services Manager, left the meeting for the consideration of this item.

Full Council received a report on the appointment of a Monitoring Officer.

Proposed by Councillor Dan Swords (seconded by Councillor Chris Vince) it was:

RESOLVED that Julie Galvin be appointed as the council's Monitoring Officer (MO) under section 5 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 (as amended). The appointment to take immediate effect.

Julie Galvin returned to the meeting.

102. **PETITIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

None.

103. **QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

The questions, together with the answers, are appended to the minutes.

104. **HARLOW YOUTH COUNCIL UPDATE**

Full Council received an update from Harlow Youth Council, on the work they had carried out over the last six months. A copy of the update is attached to the minutes.

The Chair, on behalf of all Councillors, thanked the Youth Council for their attendance and the work they had done.

105. **QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS**

The questions, together with the answers, are appended to the minutes.

106. **MOTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS**

a) Becoming White Ribbon Accredited

Proposed by Councillor Lanie Shears and seconded by Councillor Kay Morrison:

“Harlow Council take violence against women and girls seriously.

The Council has recently adopted the women’s safety charter. We are J9 accredited and ensure we have staff who have completed J9 training. These are excellent initiatives but we can do more.

We can go further by becoming a white ribbon accredited organisation. White ribbon accreditation is a nationally recognised Accreditation which applies to a whole organisation and must have the support and commitment of senior leaders.

There are four criteria for becoming White Ribbon Accredited:

Strategic Leadership,
Changing Culture,
Raising Awareness
Engaging with Men and Boys.

White Ribbon work with organisations to develop a three year action plan to demonstrate how they are working to make lasting change.

This Council therefore resolves to continue to work towards eradicating violence against women and girls and as part of that commitment will seek to become White Ribbon Accredited.”

RESOLVED that the above motion be agreed.

107. **CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2024/25**

RESOLVED that the calendar of meetings for 2024/25, as appended to the minutes, be approved.

108. **ANNUAL REPORTS FROM COUNCILLORS APPOINTED TO OUTSIDE BODIES**

RESOLVED that the Annual Report from Councillors Appointed to Outside Bodies be noted.

109. **REFERENCES FROM CABINET AND COMMITTEES**

- a) Referral from Cabinet - Financial Performance Report, Quarter 3 2023/24

Full Council received a referral from Cabinet on the Financial Performance Report Quarter 3 2023/24.

Proposed by Councillor Dan Swords (seconded by Councillor David Carter) it was:

RESOLVED that Full Council approves the Budget allocations identified for 2023/24 within the Housing and Non-Housing Capital Programmes included within Appendices C and D to the report.

110. **REPORTS FROM OFFICERS**

- a) Appointment of Independent Persons

Full Council received a report on the appointment and role of Independent Persons.

Proposed by Councillor Dan Swords (seconded by Councillor Chris Vince) it was:

RESOLVED that:

- i) The Deputy Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive, and Assistant Director for Governance, HR and Legal is given delegated powers to:
 - Commence the process (to include recommended remuneration) to advertise for one or more “Independent Persons”
 - To finalise a governance structure to appoint a Statutory Officer Investigatory and Disciplinary Committee.
 - Return to Full Council in May 2024 with a recommendation to appoint both Independent Persons and Investigatory and Disciplinary Committee Members.
- ii) All allowances payable be benchmarked.
- iii) The role of Independent Persons as shown at Appendix A of this report is noted and approved.

- iv) The draft terms of reference for the Investigatory and Disciplinary Committee as shown at Appendix B of this report is noted and approved.

111. **MINUTES OF CABINET AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the following meetings be noted.

- a) Minutes of meeting Tuesday, 6 February 2024 of Scrutiny Committee
- b) Minutes of meeting Tuesday, 13 February 2024 of Development Management Committee
- c) Minutes of meeting Thursday, 15 February 2024 of Cabinet
- d) Minutes of meeting Tuesday, 5 March 2024 of Licensing Committee
- e) Minutes of meeting Wednesday, 6 March 2024 of Audit & Standards Committee
- f) Minutes of meeting Tuesday, 12 March 2024 of Scrutiny Committee
- g) Minutes of meeting Wednesday, 13 March 2024 of Development Management Committee
- h) Minutes of meeting Thursday, 21 March 2024 of Cabinet

CHAIR OF THE COUNCIL

Full Council – 11 April 2024

Questions from the Public

1 Nicholas Taylor to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of Harlow Council):

Residents on the Council's Housing Register will have been pleased to see that Harlow Council has acquired the new flat block at Burnt Mill. As part of the financial sum done as part of the negotiation with the developer the council will have calculated how much rent will be paid for each type of flat.

Can you advise me how much rent tenants will be expected to pay for rent, when occupying a flat with an affordable rent and one that is on the open market for each property size?

Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of Harlow Council):

Thank you for your question about Harlow Council's work to stop Newham Council and ensure that all 172 of these homes are available for Harlow people. The acquisition of the Burnt Mill property will provide much needed homes for Harlow people. The Council's own housing and finance teams supported by a professional external advisory team have undertaken detailed modelling for rents of both the private rented units and the affordable tenure units, based upon prudent market assumptions and split between the differing unit sizes. Discussions are proceeding with property managers for the letting of the units, with the rents to be marketed to be finalised shortly. As such, the projected figures are commercially sensitive at present, but the actual letting figures post occupation can be released in due course.

Supplementary question from Nicholas Taylor to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of Harlow Council):

Bearing in mind the response that I've just been given, can you advise me when the property will be handed over to the Council and the first tenants can be expected to move in? Will it be after 2 May?

Supplementary reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of Harlow Council):

The property has been owned by the Council for a number of weeks now. It is in our ownership in its entirety. In terms of a timeframe for the first tenants moving in, as I said the work for property managers and the rent levels and all the requirements to ensure the tenants can move in quickly and efficiently as still ongoing and I can't give you a specific timeframe when the first tenants will be moving in at present.

2 Nicholas Taylor to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of Harlow Council):

I note that 32 of the flats are to be allocated to applicants on the Council's Housing Register.

Are these tenants to be given a secure council tenancy, if not, what sort of tenancy will they be given?

Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of Harlow Council):

To clarify 52 units will be allocated to applicants on the Council's Housing Register, not 32, which is significantly higher than the number which was proposed to be supplied as 'affordable' in line with the planning permission. To be clear however, all 172 units will be available for Harlow people just at differing rent levels which are required for financial viability. I hope that you will agree this is a significantly better outcome than Newham Council buying this development and will congratulate those who worked so hard to ensure this was the case. On your specific question about the tenancy types, this information will be published with the letting figures in due course as it is currently commercially sensitive.

3 Alan Leverett to Councillor David Carter (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing):

I note that at thousands of applicants are on the council's Housing Register and that on average 500 to 600 are provided with accommodation each year.

Can you advise me how long on average an applicant is on the list until they are provided with a home?

Reply from Councillor David Carter (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing):

The length of time an applicant has to wait to be allocated council accommodation can vary depending on a number of factors, such as their personal circumstances and property availability. The choice-based lettings scheme allows applicants to bid on properties that meet their housing needs, and therefore we are unable to provide an average timescale for allocation as each applicant's circumstances are different.

However, the radical changes that we have made to the council's Housing Allocations Policy will mean that it will be for easier for Harlow residents in housing need to access council housing.

Supplementary question from Alan Leverett to Councillor David Carter (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing):

I know from past experience that the information has previously been available and the period that people were on the waiting list was normally two years. Can you explain why now this information is not made available in the public domain?

Supplementary reply from Councillor David Carter (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing):

Thank you Mr Leverett for your supplementary question. This information will be available in due course.

4 Alan Leverett to Councillor David Carter (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing):

I am aware that the Council updated its Community Engagement Strategy about two years ago. I was therefore surprised to note on the Council's website, the last recorded minutes of the following meetings are as follows: Leasehold Standards Panel 19 July 2023, Housing Standards Board 26 June 2023, Tenancy and Property Standards Panel 7 June 2023 and there are no minutes of any Tenants Forums or the Bus Users Group.

Can you advise me if these meetings are still taking place, if not, why not and if they are being held, why there is no record of more recent minutes on the council's website?

Reply from Councillor David Carter (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing):

I can confirm that the council continues to hold Property, Tenancy and Leasehold Standard panels on a quarterly basis in line with our Tenant & Leaseholder Engagement Strategy. Housing Standards Board also continues to take place on a monthly basis, chaired by myself as Portfolio Holder for Housing. Following the recent review of the Tenant & Leaseholder Engagement Strategy, we are currently in the process of reviewing our Engagement pages on the Council's website, therefore once this has been finalised, agendas and minutes of standard panel meetings will be available.

Due to the continued lack of attendance at quarterly tenant Forums, these were brought to a close a number of years ago. The Bus User Group has not met since Covid and generally had poor attendance. Where issues are raised by residents, Officers help them get in contact with the service provider. The council however continues to engage with local people in a variety of different ways, such as more and better use of social media platforms, the hub located

in the Harvey Centre and email newsletter. The council's annual resident survey includes a representative sample of all residents, including council tenants, and provides additional opportunity for tenants to provide valuable feedback to the council, alongside the rest of the Harlow community.

Supplementary question from Alan Leverett to Councillor David Carter (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing):

I find it sad that these are not well attended and the fact that officers currently outnumber the members of the public. What steps, if any, are the Council going to take to try to increase the numbers of residents attending these meetings?

Supplementary reply from Councillor David Carter (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing):

Thank you Mr Leverett. Yes, we are putting this in the Harlow Times. It has gone in the Harlow Times for the last few periods. We have actually increased by one the number of people attending the Housing Standards Board, that's from three now to four and on the Leasehold Standards Panel we have five people who regularly attend although some of them are not around on their holidays. This is not really what we are looking for. These leaseholders and Housing Standards Boards members are very committed, it's a shame we can't get more but we are doing our best to advertise this and get more people on both of these panels. This year I've attended eight Housing Standards Panels and eleven Leasehold Standards Panels. They were all of the meetings and I attended every one.

5 Colin Thorpe to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

Within the Town and Planning (General Permitted Development)(England)Order 2015 as amended Part 12 section A it states the following.

Part 12
Development by Local Authorities
Class A

Permitted development

A The erection or construction maintenance,improvement or other alteration by local authority or by an urban development corporation of-
(a) Any small ancillary buildings works or equipment on land belonging or maintained by them required for the purpose of any function exercised by them on that land otherwise as statutory undertakers

A2 The reference in Class A to any small ancillary building, works or equipment not exceeding 4 metres in height or 200 cubic metres in capacity

Does the Councilor acknowledge as a legal document the wording cannot be altered and the word "ancillary" in particular must be used in its proper context.

Which is as follows:

"Ancillary"

"providing necessary support to the primary activities of an organization, system, etc and cannot be interchanged with the word "incidental"?"

Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

Thank you for your question. The Council takes a proper and robust approach when applying legislation and provides details of available routes of appeal. The Council has confirmed that it will work with you and the Potter Street Community Hub to look at options available on a statutory allotment using the formal planning pre-application route which remains open to you.

I recognise that you continue to have a different view to the Local Planning Authority and therefore, a number of options are available to you – you can enter into planning pre-application to find a suggested way forward, or alternatively you can submit an application in the form you determine suitable and if the application were rejected, you could appeal this decision to the independent inspectorate.

I hope that you will enter into pre-application so that a solution can be found and your fantastic ambitions be realised.

Supplementary question from Colin Thorpe to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

In answering my question, in actual fact he hasn't because I asked for him to acknowledge it was a legal document and it clearly states its development by local authorities. Its not a development by the Potter Street Health and Wellbeing Hub. It is within the remit of the Council to put a building on an allotment and what we are asking is solely that the Council exercise their powers in that and that the order is applied correctly and, at the moment, that is not being done by suggesting that we should get planning permission when it clearly states it is the authority who can put the building on that land.

Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

I presumed your question related to the application that you had submitted and hence the response that I gave. However, as I said at the last Cabinet meeting as we've exchanged emails on many many times over many months

as have a number of planning officers, there is a clear difference between your view and the local planning authority which is perfectly respectable. As such I've outlined to you the routes available. I did suggest to you that I would be more than happy to meet with you and you quite rightly said that there was the caveat that I would need to be re-elected to do that but, as I said, the Council is more than happy to continue to talk to you to see this through.

6 Steve Barnes to Councillor David Carter (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing):

After reading the report on the fire safety of the flats in Sycamore Field, I concluded that most of the work needed to make them safe is as a consequence of the poor maintenance and repair work done over many years.

Has every resident now been interviewed to ascertain what they will need in the future and will the Council offer those residents holding a lease the full current market value and compensate every resident for the move and stress they are going through?

Reply from Councillor David Carter (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing):

The council firmly disagrees with your assessment - the Fire Risk Assessment identified that as a direct result of the original construction, the building did not attain the required levels of fire protection. Therefore, the works identified were not as result of the failure to maintain or repair the properties. If it had been down to a matter of maintenance, then works could have been instructed to resolve that. They were not because it was not a failing of maintenance that was the issue, but instead fundamental issues with the construction.

Key components of failure identified within the surveying process concluded that the original construction did not have the required levels of compartmentation between the floors and the properties both within the individual dwellings and the communal areas. Further fire safety works were required in order to ensure compliance with the newly updated requirements of the Building Safety Act and therefore again not as a result of the failure to maintain or repair the properties.

The Council committed to meeting with all residents and is nearing completion of this with just five residents still to interview all of which have appointments booked. Sub tenants of leaseholders have been written to and are being interviewed by the Housing Options and Advice team as requests are made.

To support residents the Council has a compensation policy for both tenants and leaseholders which clearly sets out both the statutory and local policy requirements for compensation and housing options. At each individual meeting with residents the contents of the policy are discussed, along with support requirements.

Supplementary question from Steve Barnes to Councillor David Carter (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing):

Can you advise me in your response did you contact the people that done the report for you in relation to the fire safety and did you ask them questions about the plastic cladding which has been added post construction and did you ask them about the fire doors which have been changed post construction and did you ask them questions about the enclosures to the stair case which have been changed post construction?

Supplementary reply from Councillor David Carter (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing):

Thank you Mr Barnes. Yes, the council officers have spoken to all of the tenants up to yet five still to go regarding what happened in this. We have over the last three years tried to resolve the problem. It is absolutely impossible to resolve so it has now got to the stage where we need to decamp the residents and destroy the building. All of these residents, even though some of them are not really the Council's responsibility, are being looked after by the Council.



Thank you for inviting Harlow Youth Council to the meeting. My name is Lena, and I am a Harlow Youth Councillor. Harlow Youth Council is a locally elected group of 13- to 19-year-olds who live in or attend school in Harlow. As a group, the Youth Council represents the views and opinions of young people in the town.

Harlow Youth Council is not affiliated to any political party. All young people can have their say, through their youth councillor, about issues that are important to them.

I am here to share an update on the work that Harlow Youth Council is doing. Our current priorities are –

Promoting positive physical and mental health and wellbeing for children and young people.

And

Protecting the environment and supporting the council's climate change agenda.

Harlow secondary schools have recently been invited to take part in the Make Your Mark Consultation that is run UK wide every two years. The aim of the consultation is to find out what topics and issues are important to young people. The results will help to decide the priorities for Harlow Youth Council. The topics for this year included **Education and Learning, Crime and Safety, Youth Work and Young People's Services and Health and Wellbeing.**

When the results are released for Harlow, we will be able to share our new priorities.

For the second year running Harlow Youth Council hosted an activity evening for Ward Councillors. The activity evening was delivered in the format of the BBC reality game show 'The Apprentice' and consisted of mixed teams of Youth Councillors and adult councillors.

Teams were set a fictional budget of £100,000 to produce a new and creative idea that could help to make the town a place where women and girls feel safe during the day, in the evenings and at nighttime. Violence against women and girls is a much-debated topic at government level and in the media and is currently a priority for the Safer Harlow Partnership.

Each team had 5 minutes to pitch their idea to a panel of judges explaining why their idea should be chosen, a breakdown of costs showing how they had stayed in budget, and the chosen name for their idea. Once all pitches had been heard the judges decided which teams were fired and which team was hired. The panel of

Judges included Council staff, Essex Police, and the Chair of the Independent Advisory Group. The judging panel had a difficult decision with only 1 point deciding the winner. I will share some of the feedback from the evening –

‘Really useful to hear Youth Councillors experiences and views.’

‘Informative to hear views from different people of all ages.’

‘Felt heard and able to present my ideas’.

‘Great engagement opportunity, new ideas for consideration’.

On behalf of all Youth Councillors, I would like to say a huge thank you to all the adult councillors who were able to attend the evening, and for listening to our ideas, views, and opinions. Harlow Youth Council appreciate the opportunity to build stronger relationships with ward councillors.

Youth Councillors have now been allocated to specific wards and will take the opportunity to liaise regularly with their ward councillors to build stronger relationships and keep both parties abreast of local issues that affect young people. We will share details of ward allocations after the elections in May.

Youth Councillors have participated in volunteering opportunities. On Tuesday 9 April, Youth Councillors assisted at the social supermarket run by The Michael Roberts Charitable Trust. The Bounty Club supermarket runs from the back of the old BHS building and works with food companies to recycle unwanted food back into the community, keeping costs down for Harlow families on low incomes.

During the February half term some of our Youth Councillors assisted with the Harlow School Readiness Project. Activities were run from The Discover Harlow Hub in the Harvey Centre for Harlow children and their families. Children were invited to take part in a range of activities that promote a healthy lifestyle and the importance of good oral hygiene. Information on Change for Life, Sugar Swap, and teeth brushing was shared with parents and carers. 51 children attended the session. 44% of families did not attend any other family groups in Harlow, however after attending the activities 100% said they would like to attend more activities like this.

94% of families said that the activities gave them the opportunity to talk to their child about healthy eating or good oral hygiene.

Promoting the importance of healthy lifestyles for children is one of Harlow Youth Councils Key Performance Indicators.

Harlow Youth Council will be supporting the school readiness activities during the Easter break and will be attending the Harlow Museum community fete in July.

Youth Councillors take every opportunity to attend as many community events as possible to help raise the profile of Harlow Youth Council and let young people know that we are here to listen to their views and make sure that their voices are heard.

Thank you.

Full Council – 11 April 2024

Questions from Councillors

1 Councillor Alastair Gunn to Councillor David Carter (Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Housing):

What feedback has the Council received following the allocation of Wave 2:2 from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund as to why its bid was unsuccessful?

Reply from Councillor David Carter (Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Housing):

The Council received the following feedback:

- Further retrofit assessments are required to get a better understanding of the measures required to improve the energy efficiency of the stock to identify what measures are appropriate and effective for each archetype. It will also enhance awareness of potential risks and plan contingencies accordingly and prove that Harlow Council can deliver energy efficiency measures. The stock condition surveys and new EPC's being undertaken on each property will greatly assist in identify and prioritising works to nontraditional builds and potential pilot projects.
- Investigate and build relationships with supply chains. A condition of the SHDF funding is that work carried out must be completed by a supplier that is PAS 2035 registered. This limits the contractors the Council can appoint for the work. Therefore, the Council has to create opportunities to encourage our current non- registered suppliers to upskill their workforce to become PAS 2035 registered. HTS will play a key role in assisting the Council with this.
- Improved Asset Management data - Harlow Council will shortly be going live with the new fit-for-purpose Asset Management software, which includes a module on energy efficiency. Once fully up and running it will be able to better scrutinise the energy efficiency data.
- Break down the administration and ancillary costs of each pilot project in more detail. This will assist with the justification for these costs in future application and to manage resources within the Energy Delivery Team. By continuing to build on our knowledge, experience and understanding of domestic retrofit, which will result in the Council being in a strong position when the next wave of funding is released.

It was noted as well at the time of the feedback the absence of a corporate strategy which is now in place of course.

Therefore, we are confident that we are taking all action necessary on each point of the feedback and will hopefully be successful in the next round.

Supplementary question from Councillor Alastair Gunn to Councillor David Carter (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing):

Thank you Councillor Carter for the very comprehensive response on this, it is extremely useful. The feedback indicates that further retrofit assessments are required, do we have any understanding at this point on when those assessments are likely to commence and will we have them completed in time for the next wave of funding?

Supplementary reply from Councillor David Carter (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing):

Thank you Councillor Gunn. Yes, those have already started.

2 Councillor Jodi Dunne to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

The West Gate site in the town centre is currently open in several places allowing entry, and looting and damage is frequently occurring in the former shopping units.

What, if any, security measures are in place to stop this from happening?

Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

Thank you for your question. The Council takes incidents of property damage, anti-social or unlawful behaviour and threat to public safety very seriously and is disappointed at the sporadic approach taken by Strawberry Star (being the landowners) to manage the site to date. A multi-agency approach (including Essex Fire Service, Building Control and the Police) along with senior officers of the Council is in train, and the landowners have requested a meeting with the Council to address the issues. The Council is committed to using all available means (including, if necessary, legal recourse) to compel Strawberry Star to secure the site and is in direct dialogue with the neighbouring businesses.

3 Councillor Tony Edwards to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

Given the recent fire at the Strawberry Star properties in the Town Centre – what action has been taken to ensure Strawberry Star secure the properties?

Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

Thank you for your question. The Council takes incidents of property damage, anti-social or unlawful behaviour and threat to public safety very seriously and is disappointed at the sporadic approach taken by Strawberry Star (being the landowners) to manage the site to date. A multi-agency approach (including Essex Fire Service, Building Control and the Police) along with senior officers of the Council is in train, and the landowners have requested a meeting with the Council to address the issues. The Council is committed to using all available means (including, if necessary, legal recourse) to compel Strawberry Star to secure the site and is in direct dialogue with the neighbouring businesses.

Supplementary question from Councillor Tony Edwards to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

I would like to just make a point, that was on Monday, the rubbish is still there today. There is a second photograph which shows the access to get into those properties. Those properties are still insecure in the back. That is a dangerous property. There have been children up into the properties throwing stuff down. I have spoken to the employees at Specsavers who have filled me in on this. This is not in any way to criticise the Administration at all but I do want to show the state of the management of Strawberry Star. In terms of my question, can we ensure that Councillors going forward have full reports from officers in terms of the discussions that they have with Strawberry Star and can we ensure that this matter is dealt with extremely seriously because we've already had a fire there, we've already had a flood there, we could very easily have an accident there.

Supplementary reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

Obviously I entirely agree with what is being said. On the specific point about further updates, most certainly I can assure you that. Indeed I visited the site yesterday and I'm meeting with the remaining tenants tomorrow about this matter and as I hope I have given you some comfort there is now a multi-agency approach to this which has not been the case previously and I am confident that this will be resolved in the very very near future given the seriousness of the matter.

4 Councillor Tony Edwards to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

Given the recent reports in Your Harlow regarding the delays and escalating costs, and the UKHSA's latest assessment that even if the programme does remain in Harlow, it will in 2036 at the earliest before it will be fully operational, can you please provide an update on their understanding of the situation and the implications for the site and the Town?

Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

Thank you for your timely question. To confirm the National Audit Office report clarified that to date over £400 million of Government funding has already been spent on the site and confirmed the view that Harlow remains the best site to meet the needs of our country and for delivery timescales.

As with many other significant infrastructure projects across the country no one could have predicted the pandemic and the war in Ukraine and the resulting impact on costs and delivery time scales.

We will continue to work closely with the UK Health Security Agency and Department for Health and Social Care to understand next steps and progress with the site. It is also important to note that the UK Health Security Agency is a very different organisation to that of Public Health England. It is far more wide-ranging and complex and in fact, thousands of jobs would be created within a few years in the scenario you suggest.

Supplementary question from Councillor Tony Edwards to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

In the report that you referred, stated that the cost estimate has risen to £3.2 billion from £2.7 billion, over 500% per cent more than the original estimate in the 2014/15 business case and given that there is now an inpass between the UKSHA, the Department for Health and the Treasury and the Treasury want to stick to a £2 billion funding, we know that the costs will likely be somewhere between £2.7 billion and £3.2 billion and given the long standing uncertainty, can at some point we have in the future a full multi-agency briefing for all councillors involving the UKSHA and the appropriate agencies so we can have a clear understanding of what the implications are for this site and for the town going forward?

Supplementary reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

Yes.

5 Councillor James Griggs to Councillor John Steer (Portfolio Holder for Community):

At the Council meeting held on 20th July 2023 a motion to locate and register defibrillators (AEDs) held by Harlow businesses and organisations was proposed and seconded by Cllr Vince and myself.

An amendment from your administration took it into the hands of the Portfolio holder for Community with a promise of a progress report to council within 6 months.

As that 6 month deadline has long since passed, would you please update council of the progress, if any, that has been made on this essential life saving matter?

Reply from Councillor John Steer (Portfolio Holder for Community):

Thank you for your question. Unusually the interim Chief Executive has requested to provide an officer response. I quote – ‘As interim Chief Executive I apologise to the chamber that the agreed actions from the motion taken to Full Council on 20 July 2023 have not been progressed. I recognise the importance of the equipment in our communities and will ensure that officers take the required action, and I will update all Councillors as soon as I am in a position to do so. Once again, I apologise for this oversight.

Supplementary question from Councillor James Griggs to Councillor John Steer (Portfolio Holder for Community):

I think all members will share my disappointment at the lack of progress on this but will recognise the very frank and clear response from the Chief Executive on this. I only hope that we can get on pretty quickly.

6 Councillor Chris Vince to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

Following repeated calls for the minutes of a meeting that the leader of the council claimed to have with Arriva in January, and the agreement these would be provided, can I ask one last time for what action has been agreed between the council and Arriva to deal with the cut in service across Harlow which has led to many residents feeling isolated?

Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

This update has been provided and I apologise that there was confusion with regards to this.

Supplementary question from Councillor Chris Vince to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

I thank Councillor Swords for providing it. I received it just before this meeting so apologies if this question is answered in that update but can I clarify that this meeting was not with Arriva but was actually with Essex County Council and, if not with Arriva, is there plans to have a meeting with Arriva or will you be fed back by Essex County Council from their meeting with Arriva?

Supplementary reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

That is covered in the update and there has been communication with both Essex and Arriva. The meeting I think we were both referencing was with Essex. I have requested a meeting with Arriva too which you will see in the update.

7 Councillor Chris Vince to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

How many joint operations have you done in the last month and how many councils are you proactively working with to check licences of private hire and hackney carriage vehicles operating in Harlow district?

Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

In the last month specifically, we have not carried out any joint operations. However, in recent months, we have carried out multiple joint operations with Wolverhampton Council. I understand that these were the first ever joint operations carried out by Harlow Council. These were successful and now as part of our proactive work with other councils, we expect to be carrying out joint operations with a number of other authorities such as Epping, Uttlesford, East Herts and TfL in the coming months.

Supplementary question from Councillor Chris Vince to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

Has the Leader of the Council got a figure of the number of joint operations which will taken place between us and other councils within the next two months?

Supplementary reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

No I don't but I'm happy to write with a further update on that.

Meeting Schedule 2024/25

	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
Full Council (6 + (a))		25		19	31		12		20 Budget	20		22 (a)
Cabinet (7)	20	18		12	24		5		13 Budget	13		
Audit and Standards (4)	26			18		20			26			
Development Management (11)	5	3	14	11	9	6	4	8	5	12	9	
Licensing (4)	18			10			11			11		
Licensing/ Regulatory Sub Committee (9)		24	13	17	17	19		21	18	18	15	
Scrutiny (6)		9		3	15		3		4	4		
Shareholder Sub Committee (3)				25		13				26		
HGGT Joint Committee (4)	11	23			22				TBC			