

**MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL
HELD ON**

19 September 2024

7.00 - 8.24 pm

PRESENT

COUNCILLORS

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

Danielle Brown	Mark Ingall
David Carter	James Leppard
Joel Charles	Kay Morrison
Jodi Dunne	Stefan Mullard-Toal
Tony Durcan	Aiden O'Dell
Tony Edwards	Russell Perrin
Michael Garnett	Nicky Purse
Emma Ghaffari	Matthew Saggars
James Griggs	Stacy Seales
Alastair Gunn	Lanie Shears
Michael Hardware	Jake Shepherd
Michael Houlihan	Dan Swords
Maggie Hulcoop	

OFFICERS

Yvonne Rees, Interim Chief
Executive
Niel Churchill,
Communications Manager
Julie Galvin, Legal Services
Manager and Monitoring
Officer
Hannah Marriott, Governance
Support Officer
Paul Keen, Communications
Officer

33. **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.

34. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hannah Ellis, Luke Howard, Daniella Pritchard, Clive Souter and Nancy Watson.

35. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

36. **MEMBERS' ALLOWANCE SCHEME 2024/25**

Full Council received a report on the Members Allowance Scheme for 2024/25.

Under standing order 12.1h, Councillor Dan Swords proposed (seconded by Councillor Joel Charles) that the question be now put.

Councillor Stefan Mullard-Toal requested (seconded by five supporting Councillors) a recorded vote on the recommendations in the report. The recorded vote is appended to the minutes.

Upon being put to the vote and the Chair of the Council making the casting vote, it was:

RESOLVED that Full Council:

- A** Adopts the Members' Allowance Scheme, (attached as Appendix C to the report) with effect from 2 May 2024.
- B** Member Allowances are updated annually in line with the annual percentage pay increase given to Harlow Council employees (and rounded to the nearest £) as agreed for each year by the National Joint Council for Local Government Staff.

37. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2024 are agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

38. **COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR**

The Chair noted that ex-Councillor John Hobbs, who was Chair of the Council from 1984-1985, had sadly passed away. The Chair sent condolences to John's family and the Labour Party.

The Chair also presented all Councillors with a Councillor Badge which can be worn.

39. **PETITIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

None.

40. **QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

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

41. **QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS**

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

42. **MATTERS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

- a) Urgent Motion - Proposed Government Reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework

Full Council received an urgent motion under Standing Order 17.2.

Proposed by Councillor Alastair Gunn (seconded by Councillor Dan Swords):

“Harlow Council (the Council) recognises that His Majesty’s Government has proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and to the planning system with the intention of significantly increasing the speed of housing growth, and to reintroduce the duty to cooperate with neighbouring local planning authorities. As proposed, the new mandatory targets will impose a significant increase to the required number of homes being built in the Harlow District year on year (26%) and further on neighbouring authorities namely Epping Forest (67%) and East Hertfordshire (11%).

It acknowledges the Harlow Local Development Plan, adopted by Full Council in December 2020 and in place until 2033, and the Council’s role as a leading partner within the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT) initiative since 2017.

The Council resolves to engage with the NPPF consultation, in doing so recognising it is in both the national and Harlow’s own interest to deliver economic growth and address housing needs, including improving housing quality, availability and affordability for Harlow residents and their families, while protecting our vital green spaces.

It additionally resolves to work constructively with its neighbouring authorities to ensure any new housing developments in Harlow and the wider Garden Town area are designed to integrate with and deliver benefits for Harlow’s current estates, residents, and businesses.

The Council maintains its commitment to ensuring transport, educational and health infrastructure improvements such the relocation of the Princess Alexandra Hospital as well as regenerative benefits are delivered alongside new housing. It resolves to make its land available, only where it has been satisfied these benefits can be demonstrated.

It notes that requirements are in place through the Local Plan to meet the challenge of climate change and respond to the climate emergency, to be supplemented by the Council’s Climate Change Strategy and underpinned by HGGT’s 2021 Sustainability Guidance and Checklist that apply to new housing developments.

Further, the Council embraces Harlow’s unique status as a Sculpture Town and the contribution that partnership of the HGGT initiative is already making to the regeneration of the

town centre, including the development of its new Arts and Cultural Quarter. It reasserts its commitment to securing investment in Harlow's cultural assets and economy.

The Council further commits to the following: protecting the district's Green Belt, Wedges and Fingers from housing development in accordance with its adopted policy; maintaining and strengthening the Conservation Area protections that cover areas of special architectural or historic interest; and, identifying ways to make the planning system as accessible as possible through a review of its Statement of Community Involvement.

Throughout, the Council resolves to be guided by its 2024-2028 Corporate Plan and its six missions with particular focus on those of Renewing our Neighbourhoods, Rebuilding our Town and Securing Investment for Harlow's Future."

Councillor Dan Swords declared a non-pecuniary interest as Chair of the Harlow Gilston and Garden Town Joint Committee. Councillor Jake Shepherd declared a non-pecuniary interest as a committee member of the Harlow Civic Society.

RESOLVED that the motion be agreed.

43. **MOTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS**

- a) Changes to the Winter Fuel Allowance and Protecting Pensioners from Fuel Poverty

Proposed by Councillor Russell Perrin (seconded by Councillor Matthew Saggars):

"This council notes:

- i) The Labour Government's recent decision to restrict the Winter Fuel Payment to only pensioners in receipt of means-tested benefits like Pension Credit, as announced by Chancellor Rachel Reeves.
- ii) The estimated impact of this decision, which Age UK says will mean 2 million pensioners who badly need the money to stay warm this winter will not receive it. It is estimated that up to 11 thousand pensioners in Harlow will be affected by these changes.
- iii) The significant role that Winter Fuel Payments play in helping older residents of Harlow and across the UK afford heating during the coldest months, thereby preventing 'heat or eat' dilemmas and safeguarding health.

- iv) The criticism from Age UK, the Countryside Alliance and other charities, highlighting the social injustice and potential health risks posed by this sudden policy change.
- v) The additional strain this decision will place on vulnerable pensioners in Harlow, many of whom do not claim Pension Credit despite being eligible, further exacerbating their financial hardship.

This council believes:

- i) That the Winter Fuel Payment has been a lifeline for many older people across the UK and that restricting its availability solely to those on Pension Credit risks leaving many pensioners in financial hardship.
- ii) While some pensioners currently in receipt of the Winter Fuel Payment may not require it, many thousands across Harlow sit just above the cut-off for Pension Credit and will now lose their allowance.
- iii) The decision to means-test Winter Fuel Payments, especially with such short notice and without adequate compensatory measures, is deeply unfair and will disproportionately affect the health and well-being of our poorest older residents.
- iv) The government's approach fails to consider the administrative barriers and stigma that prevent eligible pensioners from claiming Pension Credit, leaving many without the support they desperately need.

This council resolves to:

- i) Bring forward a Council-led local awareness campaign to alert those eligible of Pension Credit which in some respects will help access to the Winter Fuel Payment for those most in need.
- ii) Request that the Council Leader and the MP for Harlow write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, urging a review of the decision to means-test the Winter Fuel Payment and asking the government to ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who do not claim Pension Credit, are protected from fuel poverty.
- iii) Commit the Council to signing the 'whatlaboursaid.com/winter-fuel-payment' petition and the 'Save the Winter Fuel Payment for Struggling Pensioners' petition being run by Age UK and write to

all members offering them the opportunity to sign the petition themselves.

- iv) Encourage local efforts to promote Pension Credit uptake through council services and partnerships with local charities and community organisations to ensure that all eligible pensioners in Harlow are supported in claiming their entitlement.”

Under Standing Order 15.7, the following amended motion was tabled and became the substantive motion:

“This council notes:

- i) The Labour Government’s recent decision to restrict the Winter Fuel Payment to only pensioners in receipt of means-tested benefits like Pension Credit, as announced by Chancellor Rachel Reeves.
- ii) The estimated impact of this decision, which Age UK says will mean 2 million pensioners who badly need the money to stay warm this winter will not receive it. It is estimated that up to 11 thousand pensioners in Harlow will be affected by these changes.
- iii) The significant role that Winter Fuel Payments play in helping older residents of Harlow and across the UK afford heating during the coldest months, thereby preventing 'heat or eat' dilemmas and safeguarding health.
- iv) The criticism from Age UK, the Countryside Alliance and other charities, highlighting the social injustice and potential health risks posed by this sudden policy change.
- v) The additional strain this decision will place on vulnerable pensioners in Harlow, many of whom do not claim Pension Credit despite being eligible, further exacerbating their financial hardship.

This council believes:

- i) That the Winter Fuel Payment has been a lifeline for many older people across the UK and that restricting its availability solely to those on Pension Credit risks leaving many pensioners in financial hardship.
- ii) While some pensioners currently in receipt of the Winter Fuel Payment may not require it, many thousands across Harlow sit just above the cut-off for Pension Credit and will now lose their allowance.

- iii) The decision to means-test Winter Fuel Payments, especially with such short notice and without adequate compensatory measures, is deeply unfair and will disproportionately affect the health and well-being of our poorest older residents.
- iv) The government's approach fails to consider the administrative barriers and stigma that prevent eligible pensioners from claiming Pension Credit, leaving many without the support they desperately need.

This council resolves to:

- i) Bring forward a Council-led local awareness campaign to alert those eligible of Pension Credit which in some respects will help access to the Winter Fuel Payment for those most in need.
- ii) Request that the Council Leader and the MP for Harlow write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, urging a review of the decision to means-test the Winter Fuel Payment and asking the government to ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who do not claim Pension Credit, are protected from fuel poverty.
- iii) Write to all members giving details of relevant petitions.
- iv) Encourage local efforts to promote Pension Credit uptake through council services and partnerships with local charities and community organisations to ensure that all eligible pensioners in Harlow are supported in claiming their entitlement."

Councillor Dan Swords requested (seconded by five supporting Councillors) a recorded vote on the motion. The recorded vote is appended to the minutes.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED that the motion was agreed.

44. **NEXT STEPS IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF HARLOW COUNCIL**

With the consent of Full Council, this item was withdrawn.

45. **APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES**

RESOLVED that Councillor Mark Ingall was appointed to the Young Concern Trust following the resignation of Chris Vince MP as Councillor.

46. **REFERENCES FROM CABINET AND COMMITTEES**

a) Referral from Licensing Committee - Gambling Act Policy

Full Council received a referral from the Licensing Committee on the Gambling Act Policy.

Proposed by Councillor Andrew Johnson (seconded by Councillor Alastair Gunn) it was:

RESOLVED that the Gambling Licensing Policy Statement, attached at Appendix A to the report, was adopted.

b) Referral from Licensing Committee - Pavement Licensing Procedure

Full Council received a referral from Licensing Committee on the Pavement Licensing Procedure.

Proposed by Councillor Andrew Johnson (seconded by Councillor Alastair Gunn) it was:

RESOLVED that:

- i) The new pavement procedure in Appendix A to the report be adopted.
- ii) The relevant fees be adopted, in accordance with the maximum cap of £500.00 for new applications and £350.00 for renewal applications, and to extend the issue of a pavement licence to 2-years, unless specified for a shorter duration.
- iii) The relevant responsibilities under the BPA2020 be delegated as set out in the Pavement Procedure and Appendix B to the report.
- iv) Where an application is refused, that there be an internal option to appeal that decision to the Regulatory Sub-Committee as set out in the Pavement Procedure.

c) Referral from Cabinet - Performance, Finance and Risk - June and July

Full Council received a referral from Cabinet on the Performance, Finance and Risk for June and July report.

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

RESOLVED that Full Council approve the Budget allocations identified for 2024/25 within the Housing Capital Programmes included within Appendix F to the report.

47. **REPORTS FROM OFFICERS**

None.

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

RESOLVED that the minutes of the following meetings be noted.

- a) Minutes of meeting Tuesday, 9 July 2024 of Scrutiny Committee
- b) Minutes of meeting Wednesday, 10 July 2024 of Development Management Committee
- c) Minutes of meeting Thursday, 11 July 2024 of Cabinet
- d) Minutes of meeting Wednesday, 7 August 2024 of Development Management Committee

CHAIR OF THE COUNCIL

Recorded Vote- Full Council

Date: 19 September 2024

Item: Members Allowances Scheme 2024/25

Name	Vote
Danielle Brown	For
David Carter	For
Joel Charles	For
Jodi Dunne	Against
Tony Durcan	Against
Tony Edwards	Against
Hannah Ellis	Absent
Mike Garnett	For
Emma Ghaffari	For
James Griggs	Against
Alastair Gunn	For
Michael Hardware	For
Michael Houlihan	Against
Luke Howard	Absent
Maggie Hulcoop	Against
Mark Ingall	Against
Andrew Johnson	Abstain
James Leppard	For
Sue Livings	For
Kay Morrison	Against
Stefan Mullard-Toal	Against
Aiden O'Dell	Against
Russell Perrin	Abstain
Daniella Pritchard	Absent
Nicky Purse	Abstain
Matthew Saggars	For
Stacy Seales	For
Lanie Shears	Against
Jake Shepherd	Against
Clive Souter	Absent
Dan Swords	For
Nancy Watson	Absent
Result	Tied

Full Council – 19 September 2024

Questions from the Public

1 James Humphreys to Councillor Danielle Brown (Portfolio Holder for Community and Wellbeing):

In 2017 a report was produced for Harlow Council assessing Sport Facilities and Playing Pitches - <https://www.harlow.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/HEBSL1C%20%20Sports%20Facilities%20Study%202017%20Part%203%20Playing%20Pitch%20Strategy.pdf>. The report contained a number of findings about the state and capacity of the town's pitches and recommendations and actions to be taken. These recommendations included a sports strategy for greater Harlow and effective delivery of playing fields and pitch provision at two locations in Harlow. Can the council please update where they are with these actions and their assessment of other findings in the report?

Reply from Councillor Danielle Brown (Portfolio Holder for Community and Wellbeing):

Currently there is no formal cross-boundary strategy, but existing plans do include cross boundary considerations such as import and export of demand. The local plan evidence base, covers cross boundary considerations. The planning authority has regular discussions regarding strategic issues in conjunction with wider Harlow Gilston Garden Town partners. Collaboration across boundaries is essential and fundamental between local authority partners as well as governing bodies of sport, Active Essex, and Sport England on strategic matters. Officers are planning to refresh the playing pitch strategy and are working with all partners to determine the scope.

To assist some specific updates:

- Strategy Implementation: there is regular communication between the Council and strategic partners such as Essex County Football Association, Essex County Cricket Club, Active Essex, and Sport England. More formal groups will be utilised as the playing pitch strategy is refreshed.
- Housing Developments: the three football pitches at Gilden Park were part of action the Council took last year to ensure delivery. It was agreed with them that the pitches would be formed and seeded by the end of 2023, so they would be established by the end of 2024. These

pitches have been seeded and should take up to 12 months to become established.

- At Newhall Phase 2, planning was granted permission in 2020 for open space provision, including nine football/cricket pitches of various sizes. These will be delivered as the phase is built out. The organisation have been meeting with Harlow Cricket Club and Newhall about further plans.
- Former Passmores site - this was provided at the same site as part the Sir Frederick Gibberd College
- School sites - the Council is not the freeholder of these sites and therefore cannot impose a community use agreement
- Football Hub sites - the Council has several pitches with the capacity to be a football hub and manages these sites based on demand. For example, Nichols Field completed a refurbishment in 2017 and has the capacity for a mixture of football pitch sizes along with changing rooms and a car park.

2 James Humphreys to Councillor Danielle Brown (Portfolio Holder for Community and Wellbeing):

With the impact of climate change being felt more with increased rainfall, a number of current pitches in Harlow become unusable in the winter months with many games being cancelled. Will the council consider increasing the number of facilities for both children's and adult's football in the town, and provide expanded access to all weather astro turf pitches? Importantly, can these pitches be for community use for all as many of the current facilities are either block booked by one single club monopolising the facilities just for their use, a practice also highlighted in the 2017 report? This practice severely limits the diversity of teams in Harlow and option for both players and parents of players too.

Reply from Councillor Danielle Brown (Portfolio Holder for Community and Wellbeing):

As you will appreciate the Council manages pitches based on demand. Pitches are rented to leagues or community-based sports clubs. Council playing pitches are either allocated in partnership with the local leagues, or community-based teams and organisations. There are no restrictions that limit diversity of teams. The council seeks to support community organisations to improve facilities that are leased or privately owned, often advocating for investment from Governing Bodies such as Essex County FA. Since the year

2000 the Football Foundation has invested £1.1m by awarding 47 grants and supporting 91 individual teams and 31 facilities in Harlow.

If you have any specific concerns, we are happy to discuss and please link directly with Justin Hopwood or indeed the CEO Yvonne Rees.

Supplementary question from James Humphreys to Councillor Danielle Brown (Portfolio Holder for Community and Wellbeing):

Yes, if I could possibly have the contact details for them and their capacity that would be much appreciated, thank you.

Supplementary reply from Councillor Danielle Brown (Portfolio Holder for Community and Wellbeing):

Yes, we will get those to you, thank you.

3 Steve Barnes to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

Having purchased the new flat block built on the former Motorsales site back in January, I am very surprised to note that to date no-one appears to have moved in yet.

Can you advise me if Building Regulation Completion Certificates have been issued on this block bearing in mind the situation at Sycamore Fields and whether as part of the Councils contract the Design Fire Safety Engineers have been engaged on a continuing post completion contract?

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

Thank you for your question. As you will recall, the council moved at extraordinary pace to be able to buy this development for the benefit of Harlow residents.

As part of the purchase process for Millbrook Studios, extensive due diligence was undertaken by professional consultants including assurance review that the building complies with requirements under The Fire Safety Act 2021 (FSA) and the Building Safety Act 2022 (BSA).

As I am sure you would expect both during the purchase process and as we are moving through the required activity to bring the property to market ongoing compliance of the FSA and BSA are fundamental, and we are complying in every way necessary with those requirements.

Supplementary question from Steve Barnes to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

Can you advise on how much it has cost the Council so far without any income from rent?

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

As I referenced in my question, as we are continuing through the process at some pace to move people in and I draw your attention to just how quickly we moved in a pretty unusual fashion to defend this town from a London borough dumping 172 families in temporary accommodation here, we are continuing through that process at the proper time. All of the available information will of course come into the public domain in the proper way.

4 Alan Leverett to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

I have met many residents who complain that they can never see council officers face to face and days or weeks go by before telephone calls or emails are responded to. With this in mind, will Harlow Council move to provide a better relationship with residents, where they can expect to meet with officers who provide an actual service rather than dealing with someone on the telephone who is often taking a call at home.

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

Thank you for your question. The council is committed to providing excellent customer service for each and every resident which is why one of our corporate missions is to deliver high-performing council services.

For this reason, in June of this year we published our service standards setting out what residents can expect from us, including response times for contact with us by email or letter.

It is true that the council deploys a hybrid working policy meaning that staff work in the office based on the operational needs of the service they deliver as just about every council in the country does.

However, I can say this very clearly: the needs of our residents drive the operation of this council – so if residents wish to meet with officer's face to face then that will be offered.

As you may also be aware, we also monitor our customer service performance every single day and I am proud to highlight our extremely well-performing Contact Harlow team. Their work means that call waiting times have been lower than target across the year to date, with residents waiting

just under 2 minutes on average, well below what the private sector can achieve and abandoned call rates for Harlow Council are amongst the lowest of North Essex authorities.

If there are any specific examples that you wish to raise where you feel this service has not been met, please do raise them with us directly to ensure that these can be looked into.

Supplementary question from Alan Leverett to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

It's the last paragraph that you have just replied to in terms of specific examples, does the Portfolio Holder think that it would be useful to have a mystery shopper or panel of residents that can give you feedback on this? Because experience from me is that you can say what you like about the systems that you've got but it doesn't mean to say that there will be an answer.

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

I thank Mr Leverett, I am more than happy to meet you and discuss the ideas that you have put forward. As I said we are absolutely committed which is why we have got a dedicated corporate mission to deliver high performing council services. Council services are improving month on month but as I said I am very happy to meet with you and look at this in more detail.

5 Nicholas Taylor to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

Your administration has often said that 103 council homes will be built this year. We are now in September and yet there seems to be little if any evidence of works starting on sites such as at Arkwrights, Elm Hatch, Sherards House and Tye Green village.

I am aware that dozens of amendments to original Planning Applications have had to be made, but when can residents expect work to begin on each of these sites?

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

Thank you for your question. I note that you omit to mention the rapid progress being made at Staple Tye on the three schemes at the former Lister House Medical Centre Site, the old Council Depot and the parcel of land at Parnell Road as well as the site at Woodleys. In those schemes alone, the council is building more council homes than this council has in the last two decades combined.

All other sites within the programme are progressing through the required pre-construction phase and will move into main construction over the coming weeks. The time frame for delivery of all schemes remains unchanged.

I am proud that this council is delivering new council homes for local families, and I am sure that you will welcome that too.

6 Nicholas Taylor to Councillor Nicky Purse (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability):

Like me, I expect many residents were pleased to see dozens of new litter bins being placed around the town. However, I and other residents have noted that between Staple Tye shopping centre and Katherines Way there are eight bins but between the shopping centre and Bush Fair there are only three. I have been advised that a public consultation exercise was carried out by the council in 2021 asking where residents felt new bins should be placed. The results of this consultation helped determine where the new bins would be placed. As usual I expect this consultation was tucked away somewhere on the council's website, I could for example find no record of this in the Harlow Times.

Can you advise me how many residents responded to the survey, will more money be available to install more bins and will you please note that residents would like to see a bin fitted at the junction of Paringdon Road and Southern Way, close to Woodhill.

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

The consultation period ran between 27 September to 17 October 2021 on the council's website, Your Harlow, the Harlow and Epping Guardians and on various social media outlets including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (now X).

The council received 242 formal responses and 357 suggested locations for new litter bins. In addition, we received 100 comments on our social media pages.

Thank you for your additional suggestion which we will now actively consider.

Karen James to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

I note that the Council's interim Chief Executive has been in post for some months now.

Can you advise me why this post has not been filled by now and when residents can expect a permanent Head of Paid Service to take up employment?

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

The appointment of a permanent Chief Executive and Head of Paid Services is a crucially important decision for the Council. This decision has rightly taken into account a number of key considerations 1) The priorities and needs of our local residents and communities in the achievement of our aims and objectives of our Corporate Plan, 2) the timing of the local elections, 3) the timing of the General Election and 4) the timing of our recruitment into the local government market

We have a very experienced interim Chief Executive who is enabling our organisation to continue to deliver for our local residents and communities. As always information will be made available as appropriate in such processes.

Full Council – 19 September 2024

Questions from Councillors

1 Councillor Lanie Shears to Councillor Joel Charles (Portfolio Holder for Public Protection):

Harlow has the 9th highest rate of missing children, of the 16 districts in Essex, with 133 children reported missing last year. Harlow Council hasn't used its social media accounts to circulate missing children appeals since 2016.

Will this administration consider using its social media reach to support public appeals to find missing children from Harlow?

Reply from Councillor Joel Charles (Portfolio Holder for Public Protection):

A report of a child going missing is a deep cause for concern for their family or carers, friends, local community, and individuals tasked with investigating such a disappearance. It can be an incredibly anxious time whilst uncertainty remains about the whereabouts of a child.

When a child or young person goes missing from home or a care setting, it can be for a number of reasons and very often running away is an indicator of other underlying problems, which may warrant further intervention.

The term “missing child” has a specific meaning in practice and is used when “a child is reported as missing to the police by their family or carers”, according to statutory guidance.

Anyone with concerns for a missing child, or to report a welfare issue more generally, can call the Essex County Council Children and Families Hub on 0345 603 7627.

The Essex Safeguarding Children Board states that:

“Police will lead efforts to locate children who are missing, working closely with Children’s Social Care when children are missing from care placements. This also applies to children living at home.

“When the child is located the Police will carry out an immediate vulnerability check (safe and well) to identify any indications that the young person has suffered harm; where and with whom they have been; and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by, or against, them.

“Police, Children’s Social Care and any agency involved with a child who has run away or gone missing will share information and where necessary take action to safeguard or offer support to the child and family.”

The council takes safeguarding and the wider protection of children seriously. Every effort is made to support the location of a missing child to ensure they are reunited with their family or carers as soon as possible. There can never be any complacency about making sure that all professionals involved in the safeguarding and protection of children are alert, competent to identify and then act upon concerns when someone is reported missing. That is why council officers will always contact the relevant safeguarding support function if any additional concerns arise following a child going missing.

Essex Police officers who specialise in such cases have a well-established process in place for communicating externally when a person is reported missing, this includes sharing information on official social media accounts and with the local media such as Your Harlow.

As part of the focus on public protection, the council is strengthening its community safety function, which includes looking at what more can be done to raise awareness about the need for proactive safeguarding activity. When a missing child alert is published through official external channels managed by Essex Police, the council will share the appeal on its social media accounts. In the council’s recent detailed consultation response to the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex on his four-year plan, a recommendation was included to request a more regular operational communications planning meeting to help co-ordinate activity externally.

It should be noted that Essex Police will only share the details of a missing child under the age of 18 on social media if consent from their immediate family or carers has been obtained, and if they are considered high risk.

There is also a commitment to work with the town’s elected Youth Councillors to discuss safeguarding concerns to ensure their voices are always heard as part of ongoing efforts locally to protect children from harm.

2 Councillor Jake Shepherd to Councillor Nicky Purse (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability):

This administration has embarked on an ambitious programme of roundabout sponsorship deals. However, as I travel around the town and as several residents can attest, the reality of these sponsorship deals seems to have fallen far short of its ambitious, with weed ridden roundabouts blighting our town.

Would you agree that this administration is failing to deliver value for money to the sponsors who in good faith, have donated money towards the maintenance and landscaping of our roundabouts?

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

Since 2023, Harlow Council has embarked on a new programme of roundabout sponsorship to restore pride in Harlow. This programme has seen a revenue generation of £35,000, 85% of roundabouts being sponsored by local businesses and substantial improvement to a number of roundabouts, for example Edinburgh Way (Queensgate Centre) roundabout. We are constantly working to improve standards of maintenance.

With this, we are confident that the partnership will deliver and enhance the landscaping of Harlow's roundabouts. It is important to note that in the absence of this scheme, the Council would be servicing the roundabouts and there would be no prospect of any revenue generation. This administration is confident the benefits of the scheme are already starting to be realised in improved maintenance.

3 Councillor Kay Morrison to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

Where possible, Harlow District Council acts to facilitate measures which encourage people away from using cars and towards sustainable transport. Previously, we acknowledged the multiple factors involved: the climate imperative, benefits to wellbeing, facilitated travel to work/shopping/hospital/school/friends and family. We won't forget the remarkable Mrs Hilda Cook who brought a petition and who pleaded for our help when her bus service was withdrawn.

Help could be at hand in the government's plans to give local authorities control of bus services.

What discussions has Harlow Council had or plans to have with Essex County Council on taking advantage of such powers, given the benefits to Harlow citizens?

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

Thank you for your question. As you know, I share your passion for affordable, reliable and sustainable bus services serving the town. That is why this administration has, as reported to council, lobbied extremely hard to improve bus services and I am delighted to say that as a result, there has been an enormous increase in routes offered and services for our residents.

As you reference, the Government have published some draft guidance on the future of local bus services, for Transport Authorities – in this case Essex County Council (ECC). As the Leader of the Council, I regularly meet with both the leader of ECC, and our other local authority partners and I am confident this will be a regular topic of conversation. As normal I will update Council as appropriate as and when there is progress to report.

Supplementary question from Councillor Kay Morrison to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

The Bus Users Group gave passengers a voice but hasn't been seen for more than two years in spite of occasional promises. Why hasn't that group been resuscitated?

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

I am very glad that Councillor Morrison recognises the significant increase in bus services there has been in the town thanks in part to her questions and the lobbying of some very passionate residents, in particular, those of Tumbler Road and indeed Hilda. I can confirm that the first meeting of the Bus Users Group in a little while is currently being arranged and I'm sure that Councillor Morrison would be delighted to attend.

Recorded Vote- Full Council

Date: 19 September 2024

Item: Motion – Change to winter fuel allowance – fuel poverty

Name	Vote
Danielle Brown	For
David Carter	For
Joel Charles	For
Jodi Dunne	Abstain
Tony Durcan	Against
Tony Edwards	Abstain
Hannah Ellis	Absent
Mike Garnett	For
Emma Ghaffari	For
James Griggs	Abstain
Alastair Gunn	For
Michael Hardware	For
Michael Houlihan	Abstain
Luke Howard	Absent
Maggie Hulcoop	Abstain
Mark Ingall	Against
Andrew Johnson	Abstain
James Leppard	For
Sue Livings	For
Kay Morrison	Abstain
Stefan Mullard-Toal	Against
Aiden O'Dell	Abstain
Russell Perrin	For
Daniella Pritchard	Absent
Nicky Purse	For
Matthew Saggars	For
Stacy Seales	For
Lanie Shears	Abstain
Jake Shepherd	Against
Clive Souter	Absent
Dan Swords	For
Nancy Watson	Absent
Result	Carried