

# Full Council – 27 February 2025

## Questions from Councillors

### **1 Councillor Mark Ingall to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):**

There is clearly disagreement between Councillor Swords and I on the matter of the previous Conservative Party internal investigation into Islamophobic posts made by James Leppard. I contend that the material provided in the Council meeting of November the 7th was new additional material and therefore warranted further investigation. Councillor Swords in his answers to me on 12th of December said that the Conservative Party investigation had included this additional material. To shed light on this and provide clarity will Councillor Swords please make the report, that he must have seen in order to make his comments, available for all Councillors to read?

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

No.

### **2 Councillor Lanie Shears to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):**

When Councillor Leppard was reinstated following his suspension for racist and Islamophobic comments made on social media, it was stated that he would undergo equality and diversity training. Will the Leader of the Council please confirm that Councillor Leppard completed this training along with the details of the training provided and the name of the provider of that training?

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

Yes, he has.

### **3 Councillor Jodi Dunne to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):**

Harlow homes for Harlow people is a noble aim, however, does the slogan have any legal basis?

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

Thank you for reminding me that the Harlow Labour group opposed the reforms we made last year to the council's Housing Allocations Policy which

prioritised Harlow homes for Harlow families and not for London Councils as had been the case when they ran the council.

The Localism Act 2011 gives us the legal powers to determine how Harlow homes are allocated and who qualifies for them. It is on that legal basis that we introduced Harlow homes for Harlow people, and on their foolish ideology that the Harlow Labour group opposed that change.

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

Harlow Homes for Harlow People has been the mantra of the administration since the purchase of Burnt Mills Tower.

Would you please explain why it has taken almost a year to hand keys to the first residents and confirm what instructions the letting agents have been given to ensure that all 172 properties are let only to Harlow people?

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

Thank you for the question on the remarkable action this council took when faced with the prospect of this brand-new 172-apartment development falling into the hands of Newham Council for temporary accommodation of Newham families. We acted at extreme pace to stop this, and I recall the criticism I received at the time from him and his group for not moving faster.

Since buying the development, the council has been working through the requirements to occupy the building, including the completion of construction work and registration with the Building Safety Regulator. During this time, the council has not lost any money against the long-term financing as the requirements do not commence until occupation.

The development has been advertised for market rent with fantastic interest and is imminently to be advertised to those on the council's Housing Needs Register with units now being let.

All 172-apartments are available for Harlow people with clear instructions to our operating agent to prevent any such property being let to another council or the like.

I am proud of our record in standing up for our town and ensuring Harlow homes for Harlow people. I only wish they had done the same to prevent so many London authorities dumping their residents here in the many years that they ran the council.

**5 Councillor Alastair Gunn to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):**

On 12 February, Harlow College took part in Mathematics Education Innovation's Further Education Maths Challenge, helping its students develop the skills and confidence in maths they will need to excel in their exams and future careers.

The winners and runners up will now be representing Harlow at the regional stage of the competition, which will be held at Harlow College next month.

As well as joining me in wishing them luck, can the Leader set out what Harlow Council is doing to support Harlow College in developing the STEM skills our town and its next generation will need to grow, especially on green skills as we transform Harlow's housing, rebuild our town and respond to the climate crisis?

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

We are on a mission to secure investment for Harlow's future to grow our local economy, give Harlow residents the skills they need and create high-wage high-skilled jobs for the future.

To that end, we work closely with Harlow College to support the development of STEM skills locally. Some of the activity that has taken place over the past couple of years include:

- a) Provided £0.5m funding (via the Towns Fund) to support the delivery of Harlow College's Institute of Technology which has provided inspiring facilities to support the delivery of engineering, health and social care and science skills on the college campus.
- b) Worked in partnership with the college and local employers to deliver a "Let's build a satellite" enrichment programme that has supported students studying STEM subjects to run a project developing practical engineering skills.
- c) Through Section 106 employment and skills planning conditions linked local developers with Harlow College to provide work experience opportunities for students studying construction related courses as well as deliver careers activities.
- d) Through year 3 of the UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF) provided funding to enable Harlow College to offer bursaries to adults that would otherwise had to self-fund training courses. The bursaries were taken up by local residents to study a range of courses including several STEM and

green skill related courses, such as Electric vehicle maintenance, electrical installation, accountancy and nursing courses.

- e) It is proposed that Year 4 UKSPF funding will be used to support Harlow College to relocate and reopen its Construction Hub and as a result deliver a range of skills required by local developers and construction companies to support them to deliver the housing and regeneration schemes across the town.
- f) The Economic Development team have attended several careers events at Harlow College, where they have highlighted the importance of STEM skills in order to access the high value jobs available locally.

We will continue to do all we can to secure investment for Harlow's future, giving our young people the skills they need to access high-wage high-skilled jobs, and I wish every one of them the very best of luck as they move forward to the regional competition.

**6 Councillor James Griggs to Councillor David Carter (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing):**

Does the Portfolio Holder for Housing recommend that residents in flat blocks follow the advice offered in their fire evacuation plans?

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

Fire Safety Plans for individual high-risk blocks are developed in line with the Fire Risk Assessments and where required in consultation with Essex Fire and Rescue Service. For the remainder of flat blocks Fire Risk Assessments undertaken on the block will determine an evacuation plan. All residents should follow such plans.

**7 Councillor James Griggs to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):**

I have been contacted by a number of residents of all ages from 14 - 82 regarding their safety concerns in relation to the temporary bus station. They feel that the lighting is inadequate and creates shadowy areas which make them feel unsafe.

Will you agree to urgently undertake a review of the lighting not only at the bus station itself but also around the heras fencing maze that passengers are

required to navigate to gain access to and from Broadwalk and Market Square?

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

A survey of the temporary facility was undertaken by our external lighting contractors and covered both the journey from Market Square to Post Office Road, and the temporary bus station.

The council has already installed comprehensive lighting and CCTV across the site and undercroft of Market House, improving the provision from what was previously provided when in operation as a car park.

However, there has been issues in completing the lighting plan due to Essex County Council's road works at Post Office Road, which affected the electrical infrastructure. I am pleased to report that Essex County Council have now completed the works allowing the council to install further lighting as planned.

I can also report that the council has recently engaged the support of accessibility and inclusion consultants, who as part of their role in reviewing our town centre schemes, will be undertaking a review of the journey and spaces whilst we deliver our once in a generation programme of town centre regeneration.