

Cabinet – 24 April 2025

Questions from the Public

1 Zo Spalding to Councillor David Carter (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing):

Given the repeated failures of local support services and the documented negative impact of prolonged unsuitable housing on the mental and physical health of individuals, what specific measures will the council implement to ensure that vulnerable individuals with clearly evidenced medical needs are prioritised for suitable accommodation without undue delay, and what accountability mechanisms will be put in place to prevent the weaponisation of local policies that currently act as barriers to accessing stable housing?

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

There is a limited supply of social housing available for allocation together with the high number of households that require accommodation. The Housing Allocations Scheme (Allocations policy) is framed with a strong focus on local housing for local people most in need. This policy offers a criteria for those individuals that have a local connection to Harlow based on their housing circumstances, and centres around those most in housing need. Unfortunately demand far outweighs availability of accommodation. Local policies are monitored and kept under review.

Availability of accommodation does not deter the council from its statutory homeless duties where individuals are considered vulnerable and in priority need under the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 and have a duty to secure temporary accommodation together with a duty to find suitable longer-term accommodation. Longer term accommodation is not specific to social housing and will include the private rented sector, or other housing solutions that are suitable to individuals.

2 Zo Spalding to Councillor David Carter (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing):

Considering the severe and escalating mental and physical health consequences resulting from prolonged homelessness and the ineffectiveness of current referral pathways to support services, what urgent changes will be made to the council's approach to providing immediate and appropriate housing solutions for individuals with significant medical needs, and how will the council ensure effective collaboration between housing, health, and social care services

to break the detrimental cycle of crisis and prevent further traumatization of vulnerable residents?

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

Essex County Council are the commissioning service for supported housing in Harlow, with the exception of Sheltered accommodation that is provided by Harlow Council.

Harlow Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025 identifies one of the three key priorities 'Access to suitable accommodation and support, including temporary accommodation, accessing the private rented sector, supported housing and home ownership. Harlow Council will work with stakeholders including health and social care to make sure that the formal process for agencies to refer people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness is fully understood and easy to use. We will liaise with other organisations in the identification and provision of opportunities to help people facing housing issues, to explore and generate ideas for potential projects and monitor potential sources of funding such as community funds and government initiatives, along with maintaining housing options for households in housing need.