

Council – 2 March 2021

Responses to Members' Questions

Question 1

Cllr James Frecknall to ask Cllr Eric Buckmaster, Executive Member for Wellbeing:

In a recent publication by The Lancet, 1 in 6 young people reported mental health problems - an increase from 1 in 10 in 2017. This figure, based on results from England's Mental Health of Children and Young People Survey (MHCYP), brings into stark reality the often unseen impact of the pandemic on the youngest members of our society. Children with probable mental health problems are more than twice as likely to live in households newly falling behind with their bills, rent, or mortgage payments and that one in ten children and young people reported that during the pandemic their family did not have enough to eat or have had an increased reliance on foodbanks when compared with before the pandemic. While much of the responsibility of Child Mental Health commissioning rests with HCC, what help or support networks are available from East Hertfordshire District Council to help protect the mental health of our future generations?

Response from Cllr Buckmaster

Thank you to Councillor Frecknall for the question. I am going to take that as networks open to East Herts residents since the District Council does not directly commission mental health services, and Children's services come under County. I'll try to give some background and pointers about what may be available generally and then some interactions with East Herts. 90% of the funding for mental health comes from the NHS and there is an emotional and mental health wellbeing board which is cross agency and monitors that delivery and funding.

My main message is that it is important for members to subscribe to bulletins or notifications so that we are aware of initiatives and programmes promoted by various organisations and agencies. Very often these are promoted via communications bulletins or on social media and which we can onward share among our communities.

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services in Hertfordshire and Hertfordshire Partnership Foundation Trust, CAMHS and HPFT cover services that support the emotional and mental health of children and young people like school counselling, play therapy and more specialist teams like the eating disorder service and they have strong links with Children's Social Care and Education Services with teams made up of a wide variety of professionals and specialist nurses.

Ahead of the return to school last autumn a really useful document was issued by Hertfordshire to support transition back to school following the COVID-19 outbreak and contains some useful links to support Information and Advice Helplines. This document is designed for school leaders to support the emotional wellbeing of staff and students in returning to school following Covid-19 lockdown arrangements. It's designed to help schools put in place steps to support the wellbeing needs of all staff and pupils and plan more targeted support for vulnerable students. The main concerns of school staff and parents include social aspects of school, reluctance to return to school, academic progress, and the mental health of children and young people

On the Gov.uk website there is a link to PHE's advice for parents and carers on looking after the mental health and wellbeing of children or young people during the coronavirus outbreak and has been [updated to include a section for students](#). There is also an easy read version available.

From County Council Specifically on Covid there is a new helpline for school staff and pupils. Training for schools has been delivered

through the Department of Education – Wellbeing for Education Return’ programme – linked to this Hertfordshire is funding supervision for 100 school professionals with resilience programmes for 1500 parents and an emotional regulation pilot in schools across Herts.

There are examples of other initiatives and agencies that can support young people. Youth Connections Hertfordshire-have emotional wellbeing projects and diversionary programmes’

Just Talk is a multi-agency campaign, steered by young people. Professionals from various agencies in Hertfordshire came to the conclusion that mental health services, projects and campaigns were better meeting the needs of girls than boys. It was an outcome of extensive research and consultation that took place with teenage boys across Hertfordshire.

Another initiative is Healthy Young Minds in Herts. This is an accreditation process and supporting documents have been created to help schools navigate through 11 areas which will support a whole school approach and positive steps which schools can consider taking to help students, parents, carers and school staff maintain good mental health throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Being fit and active is an important part of mental wellbeing. Herts Sports Partnership (HSP) and Herts Community Foundation (HCF) were selected as HCC partners to coordinate a programme of Holiday activities and food programme which will cover the Easter, summer and Christmas holidays in 2021. The focus of the programme is the provision of free holiday provision - including healthy food and enriching activities – for all children who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals (FSM)

The Herts Sports Partnership is also running a course on Mental Health Awareness for Sport and Physical Activity for coaches.

One of our Healthy Hub partners, Mind in Mid Herts, can also interact with schools and provides support for the over 16s.

Closer to Home Hertford Theatre has been awarded a small grant by the Royal Opera House Bridge organisation to engage in a planning and consultation exercise with primary and secondary schools in East Herts with regards to their wellbeing needs and how best the Theatre can serve them. This would lead to a year long process of creative engagement responding to their key learning and well-being priorities. And of course this evening we have on our agenda the new East Herts Cultural strategy which we aim to be of benefit to those of all ages and circumstances. Another direct way we can aid mental health and wellbeing for future generations and residents is via the planning process and masterplanning to ensure we create healthy communities, and a number of supplementary planning documents support that.

Our Grant funding has also been key in supporting many local organisations to help young people keep physically and mentally active. I'll provide a fuller response for the website in which I'll list as a few examples

Grant Support for local groups

I'd like to mention that since the pandemic hit, we have funded a considerable number of local groups and activities with the express aim of helping people retain their mental health and remain as active as possible. Our monitoring shows that over the last year, schemes funded with community grants have directly supported 338 young people and carers with the knock-on effect likely to be much larger. Just a few such schemes include:

- Grove Cottage Mencap in Bishop's Stortford who are running of weekly social clubs for adults and children, a Saturday club and holiday clubs for children

- Courtyard Arts who are delivering an Art Reach programme linked to Hertford Foodbank. This uses art to reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness, increase feelings of self-worth and improve mental health and wellbeing
- Children's Integrated Play Schemes in each market town.

Sport and keeping active are key ways to promote and maintain mental health and so I'm pleased to say that with our Leisure Services have been promoting sport options for young people to boost their health and wellbeing, including learn-to-swim schemes, teen gym sessions, works with various sporting partners for football coaching we aim to use sport and activity as a positive vehicle for engaging young people.

In addition, we fund a group called Active in the Community to run sports development activity in the district. They have provided online classes throughout the pandemic and lockdowns. In the first lockdown, 140 online classes were available per week. By the third lockdown 216 classes per week were on offer. The majority of classes are open to all ages, although many are particularly popular with younger people include physical exercise classes and dance classes. These classes have been attended by over 2,000 different people from East Herts.

We are very keen to build on this level of engagement as we come out of lockdown because we realise that some young people will need help with maintaining or regaining their mental health at this challenging time. For example, post-pandemic, our Leisure Services are looking at options for things like Street Games and Football Fives. Also, a focus of the coming year's community grants will be on Covid recovering, including promoting mental wellbeing.

I think my final message to members is to ensure any queries received from residents are quickly referred on to the appropriate officers at East Herts or County or they can be directed to the Herts Help web page or help line.

I hope that in some way addresses the question.

Supplementary question from Cllr Frecknall

I hope, if possible, that some of these links could be posted on the website under the Health and Wellbeing section. There is a lot of information about male mental health, which is great but there needs to be information and resources for female mental health, children's mental health etc.

Response from Cllr Buckmaster

These are all good points raised and we are thinking about how to improve the use of the Healthy Hub and also linking social prescribing and mental wellbeing into the Cultural Strategy. Thank you for the question as it has challenged and focussed my thinking into how to address it.

Question 2

Cllr Ben Crystall to ask Cllr Graham McAndrew, Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability:

According to figures in the latest East Herts Council analysis: "2020 Air Quality Annual Status Report for East Herts", in 2019 nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) levels breached the annual UK legal limit at numerous locations in and near to current AQMAs, namely: Hockerill Junction, Northgate End, Station Road and London Road in Bishop's Stortford; at Bell Street and London Road in Sawbridgeworth; and at Ware Road, Old Cross, North Road and West Street in Hertford. Some sites in Bishop's Stortford were more than 50% above the UK limit and at

about half of the locations tested, the year-on-year trend in NO₂ concentrations is rising.

Although the 2020 figures are likely to be lower due to COVID, the latest DfT data shows that during September 2020, UK traffic levels reached pre-lockdown levels, so it is likely that we will return to usual traffic levels by summer. In addition our towns are seeing large numbers of new developments, bringing more gas boilers and more combustion engines.

Given these facts, what evidence do we have that council actions to reduce NO₂ air pollution within AQMAs are effective? And is it time for the council to investigate innovative ideas to help reduce air pollution at targeted sites?

Cllr Cutting responded to the question on behalf of Cllr

McAndrew:

I welcome Cllr Crystall's analysis of the statistics and share his concern that levels of NO₂ have not yet fallen below the 40 microgrammes per cubic metre target at all monitoring sites within each of the AQMAs.

I believe the statistics do, however, point to some degree of success in tackling air pollution. Notably NO₂ levels at four of the six monitoring locations within the Hertford AQMA are below the target with the other two only just above the target.

That said however, the picture is more mixed in the Sawbridgeworth and Hockerill junction AQMAs.

In the face of these challenges, I would contend that the council is taking innovative steps to mobilise all those with a role to play in reducing air pollution, while recognising sometimes conflicting views which the council in its local leadership role must seek to address.

I would like to point out that the council is one of only a minority of authorities which operate an e-car club and that at Hockerill junction, we have worked with Hertfordshire County Council to see the installation of smart traffic light management to reduce the time vehicles spend idling. To some degree, this is likely to have directly contributed to improvements in air quality at the junction despite no discernible decrease in the amount of traffic.

Finally, I would like to draw members' attention to the Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document on this evening's agenda with a recommendation for adoption. This SPD has been based on best practice and a considerable amount of research and consultation. The document is unequivocal in its requirement that new development must not lead to the designation of a new Air Quality Management Area or worsen pollutant levels within an existing one. In addition, it clearly lays out the council's expectations regarding the installation of low emission heating systems. The SPD will require applicants to provide a detailed account of how they will mitigate any potential air quality degradation and this information will feed into the planning decision-making process.

Through the examples I have highlighted, I hope I have demonstrated the council's innovative and concerted efforts to tackle air pollution. That said, I and colleagues are happy to consider further ideas on how as a district council we can directly or through our influence work with residents and partners to continue to drive up local air quality.

Question 3

Cllr Joseph Dumont to ask Cllr Graham McAndrew, Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability

There are three air quality management areas in East Herts, in Bishop's Stortford, Sawbridgeworth and Hertford respectively. The last available pollution readings are from 2019. Given that there has recently been a great deal of congestion in one of those areas due to a new development being built, it is imperative that we get real-time data or at the very least more regular updates regarding levels of air pollutants in these pollution hotspots. Increasing public awareness of this issue can also help change behaviour but we need more up to date data to do this effectively. Can I therefore ask if the council has any plans to improve air quality monitoring in the three AQMA areas and in the District as a whole, and if not, why not?

Cllr Goodeve responded to the question on behalf of Cllr

McAndrew:

As Cllr Dumont has noted, there are three AQMAs in East Herts within which air quality is monitored. The latest findings are based on 2019 results. There is an unavoidable time delay in producing our report because the council must first submit the data to Defra for analysis and verification.

With regard to real-time monitoring, this is carried out in the Hertford AQMA with information readily available at www.airqualityengland.co.uk While we have publicised the website before, I feel it would be help to do this again.

The principal aim of air quality monitoring, of course, is to better understand the local situation so as to put in place remedial measures where necessary. In response to Cllr Crystall's question, I have already made reference to the detailed statistics the council holds on air quality in the AQMAs.

Cllr Dumont raises the crucial importance of behaviour change with which I concur. To this end, the council has over the last two year

installed a dozen e-vehicle chargers in the district and is working to install more; we have promoted pedestrian journeys into Hertford town centre by upgrading the pedestrian underpasses and we are currently working with Hertfordshire County Council to promote anti-idling messages and signage.

We are reliant upon a third party contractor to provide us with our ratified continuous monitor data which will be ready by about April, once we have this we fill out a special spreadsheet with our corresponding co located diffusion tubes on with the result for each of the 'periods' in 2020, this then gets sent back to the third party contractor, which then calculates a bias adjustment factor which we can apply to all of the tubes which then gives us accurate tube results. Once we have all of these results we can then write our ASR, which DEFRA require us to submit by the end of June (as they appreciate all of the steps involved with the data are out of our control and take a while). We don't release the report until it's been sent to DEFRA

To conclude, I would argue that given the council's limited resources, rather than invest in additional real-time monitoring to simply add to our existing body of data, it is better to continue to focus our attention on making interventions to foster behaviour change.

Question 4

Cllr Chris Wilson to ask Cllr Graham McAndrew, Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability

In October 2019, I proposed a motion that, once amended, was passed unanimously regarding the provision of an On Demand or Demand Responsive Transport service for East Herts. I understand that there has been some progress towards achieving this aim and would be grateful if Cllr McAndrew could provide an update with

regards to its progress and his opinion on why the District would benefit from it.

Cllr Eric Buckmaster responded to the question on behalf of Cllr McAndrew:

I'd like to thank Cllr Wilson for advance warning of the question and giving me the opportunity to update the council on progress.

Early last year Hertfordshire County Council put a number of bids to the DfT for funding from the Rural Mobility Fund (Demand Responsive Travel). After 75 applications across the country it was announced that the rural North East of Herts DRT bid has progressed to phase 2. There are 17 successful Local Authorities to be accepted at this stage. The County Council have been working on the second phase of this funding and have submitted that to the Department for Transport for review.

The proposed scheme would serve North and East Herts, focusing primarily on Buntingford and surrounding areas. Travel would be allowed anywhere within this zone, however, passengers would also be able to travel to key points (such as hospitals and high streets) within the six main towns surrounding the area: Royston, Letchworth, Hitchin, Stevenage, Bishop's Stortford and Baldock.

The objective of the DRT is to improve transport in North and East Herts and to improve connections between rural areas and town centres, as well as expand access to employment, education, healthcare, and shopping. The DRT service will help to reduce social isolation and improve accessibility for transport-disadvantaged people in the focus area, particularly people who have access to neither private cars nor public transport.

The Department for Transport are looking to make an announcement on the successful bids early March.

Accompanying this response when published on the website there will be an attached map which shows the operational zone and the six key hubs.

Question 5

Cllr Ian Devonshire to ask Cllr Graham McAndrew, Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability

Please can you give this council an update on the number of households that have signed up for the garden waste bin collections?

Does this give any early indication on the total number of households that will subscribe by April and is this in line with the initial expectations?

Written response to question:

I would like to thank Cllr Devonshire for his question in advance giving me an opportunity to update the council. The latest figure for the current sign up is 9,558 households equating to 9,883 bins.

85% of sign ups have been by direct debit.

Bin subscriptions are currently at 16% against our target of 45%.

We are pleased with sign up numbers to date. As you will appreciate sign up numbers are difficult to predict, however sign up was launched roughly 6 weeks in advance of the start-up of the service and we have about 1/3 of the expected number of households signed up in the first two weeks.

We know from experience at other councils that sign up numbers will increase sharply towards the end of the early bird offer and we

can expect anywhere between 5 -10% of sign-ups to occur after the start of the service with residents having forgotten to sign up sooner.

We would encourage all members to be sharing posts published by the Council, about sign up, on their social media and sharing information when talking to community groups and residents.

Question 6

Cllr Sophie Bell to ask Cllr Peter Boylan, Executive Member for Neighbourhoods

What is the council doing to ensure that housing associations continue to respond to the needs of their residents during the pandemic?

Written response from Cllr Boylan:

The council has worked closely with housing associations throughout the pandemic and continues to do so today. Regular one-to-one virtual meetings have continued between senior housing officers and housing associations, with supporting residents being a consistent topic for discussion.

There is much work being undertaken by housing association partners. The council has a role to promote this work and help overcome any blockages to service delivery. The council led Housing Forums provide an opportunity for sharing best practice. The most recent Forum was held on 27th January. It was attended by senior officers from eight housing associations, both large and small. Support provided to residents was amongst the issues discussed.

We ask our housing association partners to keep us informed of what they are doing to support their residents and have been

particularly keen to suggest and promote welfare calls and checks on the most vulnerable.

On 19th November 2020, I arranged for all elected members of this council to be invited to a presentation by Clarion Futures, at which the housing association outlined their emergency response funding and practical help offered with applying for Universal Credit and much more. The feedback I received from members following that presentation was extremely positive.

Network Homes send us regular updates and officers remain in regular contact. They are also in regular contact with their vulnerable residents through telephone calls and where necessary home visits. A few examples of how they have responded to the needs of their residents during this pandemic are as follows:

1. They have donated 200 tablet devices to older residents to enable them to connect with the families and other services during lockdown.
2. They have made donations to local foodbanks and have provided some residents with one off vouchers to spend at local supermarkets and to purchase essential items to set up their home, such as white goods, beds and bedding.

The council and housing associations continue to work closely to provide support particularly to more vulnerable residents.

1. the council ensures that housing association tenants found to be victims of domestic abuse are assisted by the Survivors Against Domestic Abuse service which we fund
2. the council has successfully encouraged housing associations to maintain a supply of properties for homeless people or those needing to move in an emergency

3. the council and housing associations have worked jointly to tackle anti-social behaviour. The emphasis has been on supporting residents to take up services such as mental health support, while focusing on injunctions and location bans where anti-social behaviour is most persistent.

The track record of joint working between the council and housing associations will continue as we emerge from the pandemic. All partners understand there will be much to do to support people during the recovery phase of this pandemic. There is always more we can do both individually and collectively and I am always willing to hear of further innovative solutions to improve the lives of our residents.