

Council – 11 May 2022

Responses to Members' Questions

### **Question 1**

#### **Councillor Ben Crystall to ask Councillor Graham McAndrew, Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability**

It is clear East Herts Council needs to promote active travel.

It is also clear, according to HCC Highways, that in providing funds for active travel, the government looks extremely favourably on those districts and boroughs which have prepared Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs).

Several authorities in Hertfordshire, including Stevenage and Broxbourne, have had LCWIPs for 3 or 4 years and have used these to develop ambitious active travel strategies.

There is no mention of LCWIP in our EHC Sustainability Action Plan.

Why hasn't East Herts developed an LCWIP, and when will we have one?

#### **Councillor Graham McAndrew's response**

I would like to thank Councillor Crystall for his question and indeed his scrutiny of the council's Sustainability Action Plan. The action plan is a living document and I and officers are always open to observations and suggestions.

While developing an East Herts Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) is not within the council's Sustainability Action Plan, it is in the companion Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP) Strategic Action Plan for Transport

which, in fact, East Herts' Environmental Sustainability Co-ordinator led on developing for the Partnership.

The HCCSP action plan obliges all districts in Hertfordshire to work with the county council on LCWIPs, with a progress report to the Partnership required by the end of 2022 so as to build, monitor and maintain momentum.

We understand that the county council is taking a systematic area-by-area approach and following discussions with them, and in line with the Government's approach to partnership working, it has been proposed that the county council should lead on the scheme for East Herts. Officers from East Herts will be actively engaged in the work and will oversee the progress of the project. We anticipate that the LCWIP development will commence in summer this year and will be reported to the Executive on completion.

It is also worth noting that Harlow Gilston Garden Town (HGGT) has an LCWIP that includes linkages to Gilston Village and discussions regarding existing and proposed cycling and walking routes across the district are already under way.

In conclusion, I would like to reassure Councillor Crystall that the council is working towards a comprehensive cycling and walking infrastructure plan which will play a crucial role in helping promote greener travel options.

### **Supplementary question from Councillor Ben Crystall**

Councillor Crystall asked for clarification about the deadline for the government's Active Travel Funds. He understood the deadline to be the end of summer 2022 so asked if the council would meet next year's deadline.

### **Response from Councillor Graham McAndrew**

Councillor McAndrew confirmed that was correct.

## **Question 2**

### **Councillor Ben Crystall to ask Councillor Graham McAndrew, Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability**

The excellent East Herts Sustainability Action Plan states that action 3.10: *"Incentivise the public to make more use of the council e-car pool"* has been completed.

It states: *"The scheme has now been fully re-opened to the public and promotion is now in place on our website."*

The link to the e-car page on our website is buried at the bottom of the Highways and Parking page.

Can you tell us the change in the numbers of sign ups that this promotion has led to, and whether you feel action 3.10 should be repeated, given that we are now coming out of COVID?

### **Response from Councillor Graham McAndrew**

I would like to thank Councillor Crystall for his question.

The council's e-car club pilot scheme has been running for almost three years with five e-vehicles. It has been entirely funded with a grant from Defra.

While remaining popular with staff, unfortunately for much of the time, Covid guidelines required closure of the scheme to the public. Since the relaxation in Covid regulations, we have been able to publicise the scheme in a number of ways. Public use at weekends has been limited, however, there have been an average of around 10 bookings a month.

Last month we reduced the e-car pool from five to two cars in order to stretch the Defra pilot monies, however, the funding will completely run out by the end of May. To continue the scheme

would cost the council £42,000 a year. Given the financial pressures the council is facing, I asked officers to develop a replacement, permanent scheme *within the council's means*.

To this end, officers have calculated that it is cost-effective to switch the council's diesel vans to five e-vehicles. The order for these vehicles will be placed by the end of this month although the level of demand for e-vehicles means we are facing delivery times of at least four months. We will look at whether it's possible to keep at least one of the remaining two e-cars on a week-to-week lease for a little longer.

While the council's new e-vehicles will be used primarily by the council's environmental services officers and parking officer currently using diesel vehicles, whenever the vehicles are not in use by these officers, they will be available for other members of staff to use throughout the working week, thus replicating the Defra-funded e-car pool in many ways.

With regard to public access, we are of course eager to promote this and officers are exploring the practicalities of how our new e-fleet could be made available outside of office hours. Until arrangements are put in place, I'm pleased to see that the market is responding to demand. Of note, a commercial operator now provides a hybrid car for hourly rental in Hertford and officers are already in discussion with a small number of private companies about developing more such schemes across the district.

As we switch from our diesel fleet to e-vehicles, I'd like to point out that in many respects we are already ahead-of-the-game. A national study by Smart Cities Connections conducted in February found that as many as one-in-five (19%) of the 295 councils responding to their survey had no e-vehicle strategy planned whatsoever, with a further 37% having made plans but taken no action. I am thus very pleased

that in a matter of a few months, our own, albeit small, fleet will be all electric and added to this we have already attended demonstrations of e-waste collection vehicles to inform future decision-making.

So, may I assure Councillor Crystall that once we have a new operating model for our e-fleet in place, as well as cutting the council's carbon footprint, we will most definitely be looking at how best to enable the e-vehicles' wider availability to help our residents do the same.

There was no supplementary question.

### **Question 3**

#### **Councillor Rishi Fernando to ask Councillor Jonathan Kaye, Executive Member for Communities**

As we welcome arrivals from Ukraine to East Herts through both the Family Visa Scheme and the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, how can our constituents most appropriately support these new arrivals in settling into Hertfordshire?

#### **Response from Councillor Jonathan Kaye**

Thank you for your question. We have indeed seen an outpouring of support from our local constituents who wish to welcome and assist those arriving from Ukraine into East Herts.

In Hertfordshire a collaborative county response to the crisis in Ukraine has been stood up for several weeks now, and is being led by the Hertfordshire Strategic Migration Steering Group. This Group draws representation from a wide range of local partners including the County Council, District and Borough Councils, the NHS and the voluntary sector, and supports not only arrivals from Ukraine but also small boat arrivals of asylum seekers and the mass migration waves from Afghanistan we experienced last summer.

A dedicated webpage has been created with key information for arrivals from Ukraine and Hertfordshire residents who are hosting Ukrainian nationals as part of the Homes for Ukraine scheme. This can be found on Hertfordshire County Council's website or by searching 'Ukraine support in Hertfordshire'. Information has been translated into both Ukrainian and Russian for ease.

On behalf of the Strategic Migration Steering Group, Hertfordshire County Council are triaging all Ukraine related enquiries via the email address [ukrainesupport@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:ukrainesupport@hertfordshire.gov.uk) and are in direct

contact with residents who have signed up to the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. Constituents who wish to offer support of any kind or have any queries relating to our support for arrivals can contact a County Council officer directly via that address.

The voluntary and community sector in East Hertfordshire and community mutual aid groups are also developing local responses to support sponsors and Ukrainian arrivals. I am pleased to see that VPAC (Volunteer and People Assistance Cell) are working across the county with these types of groups to help coordinate and provide information, and ensure the voluntary and community sectors views are feed into the Strategic Migration Steering Group.

There was no supplementary question.



## **Question 4**

### **Councillor Norma Symonds to ask Councillor Peter Boylan, Executive Member for Neighbourhoods**

We are all very aware of the significant impact Covid-19 has had upon individuals and families across the world. Can the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods please explain how the pandemic has impacted on the numbers turning to the council for help with housing and how our performance compares with other councils in Hertfordshire?

### **Response from Councillor Peter Boylan**

The Covid pandemic has placed both new and intensified demands on the council's Housing service.

Back in March 2020 the government called on all councils to bring rough sleepers in from the streets. The council assisted 24 people in this way, of whom 17 were helped into settled accommodation. As the focus on rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping continues, the council has accommodated a further 23 individuals into settled accommodation since April 2021 who wouldn't otherwise be housed under the existing national homelessness legislation.

The numbers approaching the council when homeless or threatened with homelessness is increasing each quarter, with some 324 households turning to the council between January and March this year. The council works very hard to avert homelessness by providing tailored advice and interventions such as rent deposits. Whilst the 37 East Herts households in temporary accommodation, under statutory homeless duties at the end of March can be considered too many, we in fact have the lowest number of households in temporary accommodation by far across

Hertfordshire both in terms of absolute numbers and numbers per 100,000 households.

The council has benefitted from its acquisition of The Rectory in Stanstead Abbots around a year ago as this has doubled our direct provision of temporary accommodation. At the same time, the council gained government funding to create an additional six self-contained flats at the site specifically for those moving on from or at risk of rough sleeping.

Allied to this, the Housing service has taken on additional officers who work in partnership with a range of other statutory services, who provide drug and alcohol support and recovery services, mental health support, as well as Job Centre Plus.

I would also like to mention the council's work to assist people into tenancies provided by registered providers, also known as housing associations. We have a statutory duty to take applications and nominate households to vacant homes. To fulfil these duties, housing officers work with many other agencies, for example SADA, that is the Survivors Against Domestic Abuse team operated by Stevenage Borough Council, who support those fleeing domestic violence into a safe new home. Also, the council provides funding for specialist debt advice for housing applicants from the East Herts Citizens Advice Service.

Citizens Advice share the council's drive to assist those in housing need and recently noted that East Herts has the third largest housing register of any district in Hertfordshire. The figure stands at just over 2,200 households, although this number is relatively stable year-to-year and is not growing.

East Herts has the second highest population of all districts and boroughs in Hertfordshire, after Dacorum, and so relatively high

levels of housing need are to be expected. That said, when the number of households on the housing register is expressed per 100,000 households, we in fact have only the sixth largest list out of the ten districts.

Interestingly, all nine other Hertfordshire districts have chosen to apply a length of residency qualification such that someone has to have lived in that district for at least 2 years, and up to 10 years in the case of one district, before they can even *apply* for social housing, except in the case of homelessness, domestic abuse or Armed Forces personnel. East Herts Council puts no such barrier in the way of applying and yet we are still in the lower half of Hertfordshire districts in terms of numbers on the housing register per 100,000 households.

And let me share one final interesting demonstration of how the council is addressing housing need. In the financial year, 2021/22, the Housing service made nominations to some 514 registered provider properties, over half of which, 260, were let at *social rents*.

So, in conclusion, I believe the council's approach to working with partners and housing people with a wide range of housing needs continues to be exemplary and is something about which this council should be rightly proud.

## **Question 5**

### **Councillor Chris Wilson to ask Councillor Graham McAndrew, Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability**

In the council meeting of 1 March 2022, the papers provided contained an error with respect to whether consultation was a legal requirement before imposing increases to the price of Resident Permits. I have, since the meeting, been informed that this was not a legal requirement. The effect of this error was to make it seem to members as if consultation would be undertaken and that therefore residents' views would be taken into account at some point in time. As this is the case, would the Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability agree that it is a matter of regret that members were not in a position to consider the views of residents before imposing such an increase? Would they also agree that in all circumstances we should strive to obtain views of residents and consult them on increases to services such as the one the council imposed on the RPZ users on 1 March?

### **Response from Councillor Graham McAndrew**

The increase to permit charges was implemented as part of the budget setting papers via "Notice of Variation", as opposed to Traffic Regulation Order.

Notices of Variation are provided for under sections 35C and 46A of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, informing stakeholders of a price rise and providing the legal authority to increase charges.

There is no opportunity or mechanism or invitation for stakeholders to formally object, unlike a Traffic Regulation Order which provides for a statutory consultation period of 21 days and opportunity for individuals to comment.

With regards to the line in the committee papers referencing “formal consultation via Traffic Regulation Order”, unfortunately this was included in error. Members will be aware that we engaged with permit holders in January informing them of potential changes. The feedback from residents was captured and responded to in a further correspondence following the decision being made in March.

## **Question 6**

### **Councillor Wilson to ask Councillor Jonathan Kaye, Executive Member for Communities**

There have been, as many members will be aware, recent homophobic incidents in East Herts, with the most recently publicised one involving a former Mayor of Sawbridgeworth being threatened in the street. In addition, when I attended Stort Pride last year, it was impressed on me by many members of the LGBTQ+ community that they feel invisible and neglected in the District. Given this issue, can the Executive Member for Communities inform me of how many LGBTQ+ events and meetings he and the Chair of the council have attended during their tenures and also what plans there are to reach out to this often invisible community in the District. Can I also ask if the council intends to support and promote any Pride festivals that take place in the District in 2022?

### **Response from Councillor Jonathan Kaye**

May I thank Councillor Wilson for his question.

I would like to start by making clear that, like Councillor Wilson, I and the Executive believe that there can be no place for homophobia in our District. I was shocked to read in the newspaper that the Mayor of Sawbridgeworth was subject to this kind of hate in the street. It does serve, unfortunately, as a timely reminder that our LGBTQ+ residents can still face prejudice and discrimination in 2022. With this in mind, Members may be pleased to learn that earlier this year, the council put itself forward as a Hate Crime Reporting Centre; residents can now report incidents to us if they have any qualms about reporting the matter to another agency. We then work with our partners across the Community Safety Partnership as appropriate.

The importance of ensuring all our residents are respected and feel part of our community is underlined in our 'East and Equal' Strategy for Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion approved by Full Council on 28<sup>th</sup> July last year. Indeed, in my year spent at East Herts' Chairman, I set up a group called Living Together in East Herts which reaches out to a variety of community groups including religious and ethnic communities in East Herts. A number of my fellow members, including Councillor Symonds, Councillor Ruth Buckmaster and Councillor Beckett are also involved. I would be very pleased to invite LGBTQ+ groups to join the group and would ask members to let me know of any potential participants.

I'm sure many of us are aware of a growing number of events celebrating LGBTQ+ people and issues in the district and I am particularly pleased that I was able to attend last year's Pride event in Hertford, with the Chairman attending the Bishop's Stortford Pride event. I would urge my member colleagues to participate in this year's events if at all possible.

I am very pleased to report that the council is working hard to increase our support for LGBTQ+ residents. For example, as part of the delivery of the council's Cultural Strategy, which Councillor Eric Buckmaster is overseeing, the council is promoting and supporting the Bishop's Stortford Pride event this year. At the same time, officers are also working with the Stort Pride community group, including helping them apply for funding.

We also recognise that LGBTQ+ residents can sometimes feel especially isolated and so I think it is worth noting that the Dementia Friendly Action Group facilitated by the council, and promoted by Cllr Eric Buckmaster, is benefiting from one of its members having developed a Dementia Friends training module for care professionals on sexual identity. Furthermore, the council has

recently started working with Re-engage, the charity which provides social connections for older people, to bring their Rainbow Call Companion service to East Herts. This will see volunteers building supportive and friendly relationships with older residents from our LGBTQ+ communities who may be feeling particularly lonely.

I hope I have been able to demonstrate that the council takes seriously its community leadership role when it comes to ensuring our LGBTQ+ residents feel safe and at home in our district and that their contributions to East Herts' rich cultural and social life is valued and celebrated.



## **Question 7**

### **Councillor Carolyn Redfern to ask Councillor Jan Goodeve, Executive Member for Planning and Growth**

When was EHDC informed of the intention of Chase New Homes to withdraw all properties for sale in the Bircherley Green Development? What consultations have been done to determine the best course of action now? Could any condition have been inserted in the planning permission to have prevented this extremely disappointing development?

### **Response from Councillor Jan Goodeve**

Thank you for your question Councillor Redfern. You may recall that when the most recent planning application for Bircherley Green was given planning permission in 2020 the scheme was not viable based on the viability evidence submitted part of the planning application and as a result no affordable housing was provided. DMC carefully considered this position and took into account a number of planning benefits of the proposals including improvements to the site and town centre.

The Council is disappointed in the decision taken by Chase New Homes, chiefly in how let down people feel by them. The change to rent rather than sell the new homes is not a breach of planning permission, and a planning condition restricting this would not have been justified, and as you know from sitting on DMC, there are strict tests relating to applying conditions to planning permissions.

Unfortunately, Chase New Homes did not contact us about this change and I wrote to them to express concern on behalf of residents and to seek assurances of their future plans. I did this in my role as Executive Member for Planning and Growth as well as in my role as the Local Ward Member.

In response to this, we are pleased to hear of their intentions to provide residents with the highest standards of accommodation and service, with fully staffed customer care and maintenance teams ensuring Lea Wharf will be a desirable and pleasant place to live. This is in line with the aspiration for the high standards in the private rented sector as laid out in our Housing Strategy to be considered later on this evening's agenda. It is also great to see how well the commercial part of the scheme is progressing and attracting a varied mix of retail, hospitality and leisure to boost the vitality of Hertford town centre.

We monitor the mix of housing tenure across the district and will always endeavour to ensure the right types of property are built where they are needed.