

Council – 27 July 2022

Responses to Members' Questions

Question 1

Councillor Andrew Huggins to ask Councillor Jonathan Kaye, Executive Member for Communities

As East Herts' champion for the Armed Forces I joined the Deputy Chairman and others, at County Hall to mark Armed Forces Day, which is a time to celebrate the incredible commitment and sacrifices made by our Armed Forces personnel and their families. Does the Executive Member for Communities agree with me that we in local government have a duty to these extraordinary people to uphold the Covenant and the newly enshrined Armed Forces Bill 2021?

Response from Councillor Jonathan Kaye

"I would like to thank Councillor Huggins for his question.

As the Executive Member for Communities, I was particularly pleased to see observation of the Armed Forces Covenant enshrined into law by the Armed Forces Act which gained Royal Assent in December last year. That said, however, the council has already voluntarily signed up to the covenant, having done so shortly after its introduction by the Armed Forces Act 2011.

The main aspect of the covenant that relates to a district council is the requirement to afford Forces personnel and their families additional priority for social housing, when they have a need and that need is urgent. I feel sure members will be pleased to know that our housing policies fully incorporate this.

Although the number of Forces personnel approaching us are small, the Housing team works hard to assist them into suitable housing.

Last year, the family of someone the Housing team awarded higher priority because of their service within the previous five years was accommodated far more quickly than they would have been otherwise, just as the covenant would expect. The Housing team is currently working with two former Armed Forces personnel.

The council's commitment is further underlined by our voluntary participation in the national Defence Employer Recognition Scheme. While the scheme has been designed primarily to recognise *private sector* support, we feel its aim to publicly demonstrate an organisation's support for the Armed Forces community is closely aligned with our outlook and so we have already pledged our support at the bronze award level.

We don't wish to stop there, however, and so tonight I would like to invite Cllr Huggins to work with myself and officers in applying for a silver award under the scheme as a means of emphasising our continued commitment to assisting the current and former Forces personnel in our district."

Supplementary question from Councillor Andrew Huggins

Councillor Huggins accepted the invitation from Councillor Kaye and said he would be honoured to be involved in obtaining the silver award. He said that the Armed Forces Bill also put an emphasis on councils to have due regard to the Armed Forces community when implementing any policy. He asked if this was the case at East Herts?

Response from Councillor Jonathan Kaye

Councillor Kaye said this was the case and within a district council, housing tended to be the key area. He said this was relevant across all departments of the council.

Question 2

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

This council has committed to be sustainable in all that we do. This, of course, includes the promotion of sustainable transport and modal shift. Can Cllr McAndrew detail why there has been such an extensive delay to the long-proposed and long-delayed cycle route from Rye Street through to Grange Paddocks, and what East Herts role has been in this delay. Can he commit to a date when this long-awaited cycle path will be constructed and in place as a much-needed alternative to the use of the car for existing and new residents of Bishop's Stortford and surrounding areas?

The Chairman responded to Councillor Wilson and said that the Executive would not be able to answer the question as the project was being led by Hertfordshire County Council and politely and respectfully asked Councillor Wilson to approach his county councillor.

Question 3

Councillor Norma Symonds to ask Councillor Jonathan Kaye, the Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability

The general cost of living has seen a large rise in recent times brought on by a number of circumstances, and inflation is now moving up from the low level that had been maintained for many years.

Can the Executive Member please explain what the council is doing to help our residents who are struggling to pay their bills?

Response from Councillor Kaye

“In conjunction with the County Council and other councils in Hertfordshire we are signposting residents on our website and through social media to where they can get help, advice and support. This information is broken down into different demographic groups such as older people, families with young children and those on lower incomes. This information includes the government’s recently launched “Help for Households” scheme which offers assistance at the checkout with retailers such as Amazon, Asda and Morrisons.

Members may recall earlier in the year when asked a similar question I mentioned the money we had received via the Department for Work and Pensions on the Household Support Fund. We received £30,000 for food support and a further £40,000 for energy support. Funds were administered via the CVS and went into supporting food banks and fuel poverty. This was mostly a targeted approach by focusing on people in receipt of discretionary housing payments instead of inviting applications from all. In the initial reporting period, an estimated 1,835 residents were supported via

foodbanks and 42 residents accessed fuel support. Revised, final numbers for the first round of support are expected shortly. We expect to see both figures increase.

We are also pleased to announce there will be another round of this funding with £30,000 for food support and £20,000 for energy support. We are working with the CVS to ensure this money reaches those most in need and will be collaborating with housing associations regarding the fuel support funding.”

There was no supplementary question.