

COUNCIL – 22 OCTOBER 2025

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Question 1	Cllr Tom Deffley to ask Cllr Carl Brittain, the Executive Member for Financial Sustainability
<p>In the Finance Papers presented to Audit & Governance and then to the Executive earlier this month, the total aged debt still totals over £1million. Whilst this has reduced from the even greater figure of £1.8million since March, this is due significantly to the write off of over £300k which was owed to this Council. Does the Executive Member admit to the serious impact of this situation on the Council's cashflow, and can he please explain what measures are being taken to collect the remaining debt and get the situation under control?</p>	
Response from Cllr Carl Brittain	
<p>Thank you Cllr Deffley for the question. Yes, the Executive acknowledges the serious impact that aged debt has on the Council's cashflow.</p> <p>At 31 March 2025, the total outstanding debt over 3 months stood at £1.94 million, which included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• £1.76 million aged over 6 months• £0.18 million aged between 3 and 6 months <p>Since then, £300k has been written off following a thorough review and in line with financial regulations, where debts were deemed irrecoverable after all reasonable recovery efforts had been exhausted.</p> <p>This leaves £1.64 million as the adjusted aged debt position. By the end of July 2025, the aged debt had reduced to £1.052 million, meaning that £588,000 has been successfully recovered over that period.</p> <p>Whilst aged debt is clearly problematic members are reminded that in June 2023 debts over 120 days were £1.878 million, so the recent improvement represents a huge improvement over the position this administration inherited. I would like to thank officers for all their efforts in achieving this success.</p>	

To continue improving this position and reduce the impact on cashflow, the Council has implemented the following measures:

1. Earlier and more proactive engagement with debtors, including automated reminders and direct contact.
2. Improved internal processes to ensure timely and accurate invoicing across all service areas.
3. Use of external recovery agents where appropriate to pursue outstanding debts more effectively.
4. Regular monitoring and reporting to Audit & Governance and Executive as well as monthly reports to CFO, with the aim to send our regular reports to services and directors to maintain oversight and accountability.

Further improvements are being explored to strengthen our financial resilience and ensure aged debt is kept under control.

Supplementary question from Cllr Tom Deffley

Do you have a figure on how much debt you expect to recover between now and the end of the financial period being March 2026 and could that money be used to reduce council tax bills?

Response from Cllr Carl Brittain

Cllr Brittain advised that he did not have a figure as to how much would be recovered. He acknowledged that many of the debts were complicated and often went back several years, with the Council actively investigating many of these large old debts.

In terms of the debt recovery, Cllr Brittain advised that he did not believe that it would have an impact on council tax bills. He noted that council tax bills were set by the budget, in terms of revenue and expenditure and that the settling of the debt would not have a significant impact on those figures.

Question 2

Cllr John Wyllie to ask Cllr Tim Hoskin, the Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability

Now that the recent changes to the refuse collection have been in place for some weeks and the initial issues of the correct bins not being delivered have hopefully been resolved. Can the Executive Member advise the Council how many residents are still awaiting the correct bins to be delivered?

Response from Cllr Tim Hoskin

Thank you, John, for your question. I think it is sensible if I preface my answer with a general caveat of 'as far as our records show',

to reflect the reality that the waste team and myself are only aware of what we are told.

We have got 66,452 households in East Herts, according to a monitoring report in 2023. Each household needed three containers. A 23-litre brown outside food caddy, a 5-litre green under the sink caddy, and a 180-litre purple lidded bin, with some variance on that with larger bins, but they're all in that same number. In addition, each household needed a small starter of food caddy liners, a set of two stickers, and a briefing note summarising the new service. So, a staggering 200,000 items and it will not surprise you to know that we had not delivered all and every single one of those, however as of earlier today, the waste team report that they have delivered all the bins necessary for the new residual waste and recycling process to each household. Now, is that the same as saying that every household has exactly what they need and potentially not, however the situation can only be rectified if those residents highlight that either through yourself or other ward councillors or raise it directly with customer services. So, we urge everybody in the Chamber, if you have got residents who are still without, to urge them to get in touch and we can remedy that situation.

Supplementary question from Cllr John Wyllie

Can the Executive Member assure the Chamber that these logistical problems were not caused by East Herts not providing correct databases to the actual contractors?

Response from Cllr Tim Hoskin

Cllr Hoskin confirmed this was correct and invited Members to attend Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 4 November 2025, where this would be further explored.

Question 3

Cllr Aubrey Holt to ask Cllr Ben Crystall, the Leader of the Council

Since his recent election, the new Leader of the Green Party, Zack Polanski, appears to have shifted his Party's focus away from environmental priorities and towards more radical social policies. This includes supporting his Party's recent conference vote to abolish landlords, advocated for a more relaxed approach to immigration and expressed support for the complete legalisation of drugs.

These policies would clearly place significant pressure on our local housing supply, alongside our essential local services across East

Herts. Will the Leader and his colleagues be seeking to implement these Green Party policies at a local level within East Herts?

Response from Cllr Ben Crystall

Thanks for your interest in the Green party and for highlighting our new leader. Since Zack Polanski was elected in September, our membership has doubled to 130,000 members - with a significant rise in East Herts. This growth – averaging a new member every minute - suggests our policies, rather than being ‘radical’, represent what many are crying out for. Policies that meaningfully address the climate crisis, as well as better social justice for all. After all, environmental justice and social justice are inextricably linked, and if we are to have a thriving and sustainable future, it is essential to address both.

On your specific points, firstly you’ve chosen to frame the vote as ‘abolish landlords’, which is not quite correct. In fact, a package of policies was agreed, collectively aiming to address the housing crisis, empower tenants and improve their wellbeing. We all know the cost of private rental is extremely high at the moment, locking many people out of home ownership entirely. Instead, they face a lifetime of insecure housing, paying for other people’s mortgages. Our policies, over time, would reduce the proportion of the housing market that is privately rented, and increase the proportion of socially rented homes. That fits with what we and our LibDem colleagues are already doing here at EHC with homes at social rents. The Greens also want a state-owned housing manufacturer to mass produce high quality housing for local authorities. I think our residents would like that. Or do you stand by your right to buy and austerity double whammy which since 1980 has seen over 2 million social homes sold off, with only 2% replaced?

Secondly, on immigration. The Green Party believes that the immigration system needs a complete rethink. We have a low birth rate, an aging population and a shrinking workforce. That’s a problem for many reasons. At the same time, an international failure to reduce greenhouse gas emissions means that many parts of the world will inevitably become uninhabitable. Denying this reality and shutting people out will not change that situation, in much the same way that a party leader like Kemi Badenoch denying the reality of climate change will only delay mitigation measures and mean the ultimate costs on taxpayers will be far higher.

So, while globally, increased migration is inevitable due to climate change, and that will include people wishing to migrate to the UK - poor quality immigration policies are not inevitable.

Nationally, we have more than 100,000 vacancies in the NHS and the same in the adult care system. We need farm workers, students, builders, nurses, planning officers, we absolutely need strategic training programmes to ensure we upskill as many people from this country as possible for all roles, but young people, families, coming here from abroad to train or work is really good for our economy. We want to speed up processing, and let those waiting get out to work, earn their own money and yes, start paying taxes. We also want safe and legal routes for asylum seekers so that they don't resort to crossing in small boats.

The sad truth is that people in East Herts have been sold a lie on immigration by your party and the right-wing press. Migration is a distraction. The real problem is the super-rich who don't pay their fair share of tax, and the years of austerity imposed by your party – austerity that has led to crises in our health services, and created insufficient, poor-quality housing, failing infrastructure, shortages of medical centres, dentists and appointments. That's not down to migrants – it's down to years of austerity, chosen by your party.

So, I stand by our policies. They're not dogma, they are evidence based, supported by experts, and backed by those most impacted by the issues. Will I be implementing them here? At local government, we do NOT have the power to abolish landlords, set immigration policy, or create drug legislation. So, your question either suggests you anticipate Greens playing a much greater role in government – in which case I am delighted that you have faith in us and our policies - or alternatively, that you don't understand what EHC has responsibility for, in which case I'd be very happy to arrange some extra training.

Supplementary question from Cllr Aubrey Holt

A recent report has shown that the number of Heroin related deaths in Hertfordshire has almost doubled over the last year. Given this shocking statistic, does the Leader of the Council support his Party Leader's position calling for the full legalisation of

all drugs including Heroin and Crack cocaine, which would have a significant impact here in East Herts?

Response from Cllr Ben Crystall

Last week the ONS revealed that the number of drug-related deaths in England and Wales has risen to its highest level since records began. Your war on drugs has failed. Many drugs are deadly, but we know people are going to take them. So, for years the Green party has been asking: why are we leaving them unregulated but controlled by the black market and by gangs who are putting them into the hands of our kids? We want to see a situation where public health professionals can dispense them in a regulated manner. It's about redefining addiction as an illness, providing extensive treatment and recovery support, moving drug users away from the judicial system and towards professional care.

Many families whose children have died from drug overdose support this legalisation and regulation approach. Evidence shows it can work: Portugal decriminalised the personal possession of all drugs in 2001 and data shows that Portugal's drug situation has improved significantly in key areas. HIV infections and drug-related deaths have decreased, without a dramatic rise in use feared by some. Rates of drug use have remained consistently below the EU average. But they have also seen that where funding has fallen for drug treatment programmes—an essential part of the policy – there is increased drug use. The data confirms that a joined-up approach to legalisation and regulation, properly funded and controlled, will work. I think many in East Herts would welcome that fresh approach.

Question 4

Cllr David Jacobs to ask Cllr Carl Brittain, the Executive Member for Financial Sustainability

How many of the properties owned by the District Council have energy performance certificates? Of these how many of the properties are assessed at E or below, and what actions are the council taking to improve the energy performance of these buildings?

Response from Cllr Carl Brittain

Thank you Cllr Jacobs for the question. In total, 56 properties owned by East Herts Council have Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs). Of these, the most up-to-date ratings show three (5%) to be at the E level. There are no properties with an EPC rating below E.

With regard to improving the E ratings, two of the properties form part of the shops and residential block at Elizabeth Road, Bishop's Stortford that the Council is in the process of selling. The selected bidder informed us as part of their bid they plan to carry out energy efficiency improvements once they take ownership.

The third property with an E rating is the old scout hut in Sele Farm. This property has been let to Active in the Community, a community interest company (CIC) which provides sports development and community engagement work in the district. They have recently installed an air source heat pump and so it can be expected that the next EPC rating will be higher.

Supplementary question from Cllr David Jacobs

As they were not covered in the initial response, was Water Lane Hall rated E or below?

Response from Cllr Carl Brittain

Cllr Brittain advised that Water Lane Hall and the Lemon Tree Restaurant, which were acquired as part of the Old River Lane development, do not have EPCs. Water Lane Hall had been exempt to date from requiring an EPC due to its use for religious activity by the United Reform Church and therefore, the requirement for an EPC had not fallen to the Council. If the status of either were to change, if required, the Council would obtain an EPC.

Question 5

Cllr David Jacobs to ask Cllr Carl Brittain, the Executive Member for Financial Sustainability

What assets has the council disposed of in 2024/25 and what plans does it have to dispose of further assets in 2025/26 and later years?

Response from Cllr Carl Brittain

Thank you, Cllr Jacobs, for your question. Until 2024/25, the Council had a largely reactive approach to disposals. For example, in 2024/25 there were just two small transfers to Town Councils for

£1. Then, the 2024/25 budget report to Council in February 2024 identified the potential for a revenue saving of £528k saving from 2025/26 onwards arising from the disposal of £6m of assets with the proceeds to be used to pay off debt. At the time, to illustrate that this total could be achieved, just over £10m of assets were listed. This represented a step change, with the Council taking a far proactive stance such that there are now over £16m of assets programmed for disposal over the period 2025/26 to 2027/28.

The current position regarding actual and planned disposals is as follows:

In 2025/26

Assets sold to date with total receipts achieved of £1.5m:

- 34 Queens Road, Ware
- 90 White Post Field, Sawbridgeworth, a Millstream property
- Land at 22 Great Innings North, Watton-at-Stone
- Land at Hawthorn Close, Hertford
- Land at King George Road, Ware
- Layston Court Gardens, Buntingford

Asset with an offer price agreed that are proceeding to completion:

- Elizabeth Road shops/flats block, Bishop's Stortford
- Land at Sele Road, Hertford
- Lime Kiln residential and commercial building, Bishop's Stortford
- Southern Maltings, Ware

Assets currently on the market or being prepared for market:

- 15 Bentley Close, Bishop's Stortford, a Millstream property
- Land at Park Road, Ware
- Land at Widford Road, Hunsdon

In 2026/27 to 2027/28:

- Car park leased to Waitrose, Bishop's Stortford
- Old River Lane main site, Bishop's Stortford
- Millstream properties.

The Council's Property team is continuing to review all the Council's assets. Whenever the disposal of an asset would appear to benefit the Council, a recommendation will be brought to the Executive for consideration.