

Uttlesford District Council

5 October 2021

Written Questions to Members of the Executive and Committee Chairs

Answers to be published on 4 October 2021

1. By Councillor Gregory to Councillor Pepper:

“What is the detailed timeline of when you will provide to Scrutiny, Cabinet and full Council a detailed Climate Change Action Plan that includes objectives, milestones, target dates and costs?”

Reply from Councillor Pepper, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Green Issues; Equalities:

“The Climate Change Action Plan has been timetabled for Scrutiny Committee on 18 November, Cabinet on 2 December and Full Council on 7 December. The Plan will contain objectives, milestones, target dates and costs.”

2. By Councillor Gregory to Councillor Pepper:

“Please can you provide an update in respect of the Council’s Celebrity Diversity events and related activities. In your response, please include details on:

- How much has been spent on this initiative
- When will the draft workplan be available
- What budget proposals are being made”

Reply from Councillor Pepper, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Green Issues; Equalities:

How much has been spent on this initiative?

“£5,900 - this figure includes £4,200 spent on training for all staff and councillors.”

When will the draft workplan be available?

“Work on drafting next year’s workplan is in progress and will be available in November.”

What budget proposals are being made?

“The budget proposals are currently being drawn up and will be available alongside the workplan.

They will include budgets for:
Training
Listening events
Community Events.”

3. By Councillor Sell to Councillor Hargreaves:

“Will Cllr Hargreaves give an undertaking that by 31/3/22 Uttlesford’s contribution to the Highways Panel for the years 2021/22 and 2022/23 will be deposited in Essex County Councils bank account.”

Reply from Councillor Hargreaves, Portfolio Holder for Finance and the Budget:

“This being the same question asked by Cllr Smith at the last Council I refer Cllr Sell to the detailed written response and verbal follow up.

At the September Local Highways Panel (LHP) meeting R4U councillors specifically asked the LHP to take the £200k and they refused because they have no capacity to spend it. It was reported to the LHP that ECC also don't believe they will even be able to use the funds they already have, as they are losing staff. R4U members said that ECC and the LHP must make sure the same situation doesn't happen again. The LHP has therefore set up a working group of Cllrs Gadd, Gooding and the LHP officers. The intent is that the officers will confirm that ECC has the resources to use the UDC money and then UDC will inject it.

An example from my ward is a £50k project for various safety measures in Quendon. After requesting these for a number of years the parish council finally resorted to hiring their own road design engineer who supplied detailed designs, which a community consultation approved. ECC then required their own staff to do the design, and implementation should have been this quarter. However, ECC have lost their engineer and delivery in this financial year is in doubt.

It has repeatedly been confirmed, not just at the LHP, that ECC do not have the capability to spend the UDC funds on offer this year. Cllr Sell as an LHP member must be aware of this and the problems at Highways. His demand that UDC give cash in these circumstances therefore appears foolhardy.

Does he want UDC to give cash to ECC for them not to spend and just use it to reduce their own funding?

Members might further wish to consider, had UDC deposited funds in the ECC bank account and then got nothing to show for it, what questions would have been asked?”

4. By Councillor Sell to Councillor Evans:

“Will Cllr Evans undertake to publish the list of the 16 sites, developers and topics of discussion that Uttlesford District Council has entered into “without prejudice” discussions with.”

Reply from Councillor Evans, Portfolio Holder for Planning and the Local Plan:

“A list of 17 larger parcels of land/sites containing particulars as to the gross site area and assumed capacity of each as well as identity of the promoters/landowners/agents concerned has been published and included as Appendix B to Item 3 to the Agenda brought before the Local Plan Leadership Group on 30 September 2021.

Officers have taken part in briefings by and with 11 of those parties on a without prejudice basis, at which the following topics have been discussed:

- Explanation by promoters etc of their concept plans
- Update by UDC as to status of Local Plan work programme
- Presentation by UDC of the Collaboration Agreement, Memorandum of Understanding and Model document (as presented and approved by Cabinet on 2 September 2021) its purpose and request to promoters etc to enter into same.”

5. By Councillor Dean to Councillor Pepper:

“Recent national publicity has informed the public that many councils' waste and recycling services are suffering from stress owing to changes in the public's patterns of materials that they are putting out for collections and because of increasing difficulties retaining and recruiting staff. Both vehicle drivers and staff who load the collection vehicles are said to be affected.

1. Would the Cabinet Member for the Environment and Green Issues inform Council of the situation at Uttlesford with its recycling and waste services?

Please include in your response details on the impact on both the reliability of collections and any related services; how missed collections are being addressed; any changes taking place in what the public is placing in its brown, green and black bins; and whether these issues are having an impact on Uttlesford's collection and disposal services.

2. Is Uttlesford taking action to address the concerns that will be reported in answer to the questions in the previous two paragraphs in both the case of current problems and problems in future that can be anticipated? “

Reply from Councillor Pepper, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Green Issues; Equalities:

“1. It is certainly the case that the both quantity and composition of materials that the Council collects for recycling has changed over the last 18 months. For example the amount of cardboard packaging materials has increased as a result of more online shopping. The quantity of food waste generated within the district has also grown and both changes are thought to be connected to changing consumer habits during the pandemic. We will need to carefully monitor recycling materials and waste volumes over the coming months to establish whether there are any lasting changes or if the last 18 months is a temporary change.

Like all waste collection authorities in Essex, the Council is finding it difficult to recruit LGV drivers and the national shortage has been recently well publicised. There is also a risk that higher salaries being offered by some neighbouring Council's and by companies may tempt some of our existing drivers to move on.

At present the impact of both of these issues are manageable but are putting the service under greater strain than desirable. With that in mind, in the last four months there have only been a handful of occasions where collections rounds have not been completed on the planned day or where we have insufficient resources available to deliver a service. In all of those cases any outstanding work was cleared by the weekend on the same week as collections were due. We are fortunate that our service have not yet been significantly impacted by staff shortages.

Where individual households were missed, we have where possible, been offering to take additional waste at the next scheduled collection rather than returning to clear missed collections. During the first quarter of this financial year the Council scheduled 1.01 million collections and missed a total of 119 meaning 99.97% were collected as planned.

2. Officers are monitoring retention and recruitment of front line staff and have been exploring possible options to help retain our existing workforce. It has been recently agreed to pay all staff with a current LGV drivers licence a one off payment between now and the end of this financial year. We are also training some of our loading staff to become LGV drivers as well as exploring options to put in place a structured training programme for new recruits. However even with these measures it remains a risk that any number of drivers choosing to leave could have an impact on our ability to deliver a reliable service.

In terms of changes to waste composition and as highlighted already, officers are watching to see whether these are a short or long term trends. As part of the project to centralise our two front line depots at Little Canfield, we are reviewing our current collection rounds to optimise them for the new start and end points while ensuring the two historic teams work together. This is an

important piece of work and will be the first full review of our rounds for some time and should generate some operational efficiencies.

In the longer term the Council will need to update its current recycling and waste strategy to fit with current aspirations including Climate Change objectives and in partnership with other waste collection and the disposal authorities for Essex.”