

Uttlesford District Council

7 December 2021

Written Questions to Members of the Executive and Committee Chairs

Answers published on 6 December 2021

1. By Councillor Barker to Councillor Lees, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Health

“Members will be aware that it looks increasingly likely that Private Landlords will need to have their properties reaching an EPC level C or above for any new lettings from 2025 and existing lettings by 2028. With around 3000 privately let properties in Uttlesford what work is being undertaken to understand the impact that this could have on vulnerable residents in the District?”

Reply from Councillor Lees:

“Members may be aware that Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) are needed whenever a property is built, sold or rented. EPCs contain information about the energy efficiency of the property, typical energy costs and recommendations on how to reduce these costs. Energy ratings go from A (most efficient) to G (least efficient).

Since 1 April 2018 the Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) (England and Wales) Regulations 2015 (the PRS Regulations) set a minimum energy efficiency standard (MEES) of EPC E for private rented properties. This meant that it was unlawful for landlords to grant a new tenancy with an EPC rating of ‘F’ or ‘G’ (the two lowest grades of energy efficiency), this applied to both new leases and renewals. From 1 April 2020 these regulations apply to all tenancies, including those issued before 1 April 2018, (unless an exemption applies, and the landlord has formally registered that exemption).

There are various exemptions that apply to these regulations including a cost cap, and landlords are not currently required to spend more than £3500 on energy efficiency improvements.

The government has identified that homes across the UK contribute to approx. 1/5 of all carbon emissions and are considering measures to improve the energy efficiency of homes. In September 2020, the government consulted on proposals that would see amendments to the MEES regulations to further improve the energy performance of private rented sector homes. It is thought that the government intends to raise the minimum EPC to C by 2025 for new tenancies and by 2028 for all tenancies, it is also considering raising the cost cap to £10,000.

The government believes that these amendments would deliver a range of benefits including significant emission reductions, decreased bills for low income and vulnerable tenants, and improvements to the quality, value and desirability of landlords' assets.

The amendments to the regulations have yet to be made, and whilst there are clear benefits from energy efficiency measures, the government has a statutory duty to understand the effects from these changes and is considering the effects on vulnerable households.

At this time the Council is not aware of the outcome from the impact assessment carried out by the government. There are also no details on further exemptions and grants that are likely to be made available that will assist landlords, however it is thought that there may be changes to the Green Homes Grant Local Delivery Scheme (LAD scheme) that currently includes two thirds subsidy on the cost of energy efficiency measures for private landlords up to £5000.

I have been assured that the Environmental Health service is keeping abreast of the situation and will consider the implications of any changes impacting on those most vulnerable. In addition to working with partners, such as the CAB and the National Residential Landlords Association (NRLA), the service will work with landlords to promote grants that are available. Furthermore, consideration can be given to vary the councils Home Repairs Assistance Policy that seeks to offer assistance to better meet the needs of low income and vulnerable households."

2. By Councillor Smith to Councillor Pepper, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Green Issues; Equalities:

"The latest bulletin from the Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC) has highlighted that Essex County Council have launched a litter picking campaign that our neighbouring authorities including Braintree and Chelmsford, have signed up too. What steps are the Portfolio Holder and the Administration taking to engage positively with ECC and sign up to this scheme to support the communities represented by our Town and Parish Councils in keeping our towns and villages tidy?"

Reply from Councillor Pepper;

"Thank you Cllr Smith for your query.

UDC are positively engaging with ECC and all Litter Authorities (district, borough and city councils) across the County. Uttlesford is part of the Cleaner Essex Group which aims to reduce litter related issues and is supported by local authorities and some industry representatives such as fast food retailers. The Cleaner Essex Group co-ordinates all public information campaigns on litter issues across the County and we will continue to participate in the group and support its aims.

UDC took part in the campaign referred to by Cllr Smith and distributed litter picking kits to a number of community litter pick organisations. Kits were also made

available through libraries across the county including Uttlesford. This supports the Councils' ongoing efforts to help support groups that want to take greater care of their local areas by providing resources such as litter picking kits, gloves, bags and removal of waste collected.

Our Environment services team are actively looking at visiting schools to talk to children about a range of environmental issues, including resources, waste, litter and climate change. At the current time the majority of schools are cautious about the covid implications of school visits or are not yet able to consider allowing additional visits.

The following was circulated to all parish and town council in March 2021 as part of one of the Portfolio holder's updates.

Voluntary litter picking

Litter can be harmful to people, animals and the natural environment, as it can threaten their existence and evolution. Small plastic items are digested and circular plastic objects, are often found around the necks of wildlife, causing discomfort and in some cases death. Discarded masks and blue gloves are on the increase and a health risk to everyone.

Working with others in your community will harness local support for cleaning up litter. UDC can help to keep our neighbourhoods clean and tidy?

If you, your town or parish council would like to organise and carry out a voluntary litter pick in the district, Uttlesford District Council can loan you all the equipment you will require.

Our litter picking kits include:

- Litter pickers
- High visibility vests
- Gloves
- Bags

We can also arrange to collect the litter you collect and dispose of it.

<https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/6182/Voluntary-litter-picking>

Alternatively, purchase some litter pickers and organise a team of 'Litter monitors' to collect litter in key hotspot areas on a daily/weekly basis (when out walking their dog).

One of the best opportunities to coordinate a regional litter pick, would be during the British Spring Clean campaign coordinated by Keep Britain Tidy. This was held on between 28th May - 13th June 2021."

3. By Councillor Smith to Councillor Armstrong, Portfolio Holder for Sports, Leisure, Education and the Arts:

“Cllr Armstrong has a rather broad Cabinet remit with responsibilities including some areas where the Council has neither a direct involvement or even statutory responsibility. Could he provide an update in respect of the following:

- The opening of the Carver Barracks Running Track
- The faring of 1Life businesses in the district
- His accomplishments within the remit of Education
- His objectives for the remaining 18 months of his term.”

Reply from Councillor Armstrong:

“The Opening of Carver Barracks Running Track

I am delighted to be able to inform Members that works on site started 11 weeks ago. As we all know once complete this will be a fantastic facility for the district. The initial ground works is complete along with the spectator viewing mound. Currently there are lots of lorries attending site delivering stone for the track base and that process should be complete shortly. The next phase is the track kerbs being installed and the macadam surface laid, the drainage will also be finished.

I have included recent photos for information (please see below).

In terms of the opening, the facility is obviously being developed over the winter period and is therefore subject to delay due to poor weather. At present the handover date is scheduled for early April 2022.

As Members will recall, back in March 2021 we extended the Longstop (completion required) date to 31 December 2021. As can be seen from the above, completion will now be after that date, and I will therefore be asking the Leader to authorise a further extension to 30 June 2022. The revised date is to allow for the anticipated completion date plus a period of contingency for any delay due to inclement weather.

1 Life

The three Uttlesford Leisure Centres – operated by 1Life – have now reopened most services since the last lockdown. With the majority of remaining restrictions easing as of 19th July 2021, capacities in the gym, swim school and indoor group exercise classes all increased. Regardless of the requirements for social distancing ceasing, it was decided to keep remaining gym equipment socially distanced for the foreseeable future; further ensuring an added measure of safety for customers in the gym environment.

Participation & memberships have inevitably been affected by the pandemic, and comparing membership numbers from 2019 to 2021 still shows a significant decrease. We are currently working with 1Life to increase participation throughout the district where possible; ensuring popular fitness options such as group exercises and specialist specialists are expanded, and encouraging membership incentives and member engagement sessions as possible. As the landscape of the leisure industry continues to tentatively

evolve over the remainder of the 2021/22 year, it is hoped that income may return to pre-pandemic levels prior to April 2022.

Education Portfolio and Forward Plan

Due to the recent success at the Essex County Council elections R4U have two new Essex County Councillors who will be taking over the portfolio responsibilities. Following on from the great success with SWFC and County High School more discussions are being held with interested parties concerning soccer pitches and other multi sports complexes. There will be closer monitoring of developer contributions & working with other landowners and sports clubs.”

