

Uttlesford District Council

20 April 2022

Written Questions to Members of the Executive and Committee Chairs

Answers to be published on 19 April 2022

1. By Councillor Khan to the Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Uttlesford NORSE

“The arrangement with Uttlesford NORSE brokered under the previous Conservative administration which commenced in 2020 to provide Uttlesford District Council with maintenance services of its Council Housing stock as well as repairs and cleaning services, has been subject to scrutiny by the incoming CEO following a failure by NORSE to complete services on time as well as report progress.

- Can the Lead Member who sits on the NORSE Partnership Board as a representative of Uttlesford District Council provide an explanation of why the matters of concern were not raised at earlier meetings.
- Can the Lead Member provide Council with information on value for money and quality of service delivered through the arrangement with Uttlesford NORSE.”

2. By Councillor Dean to the Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Housing

“I invite the Leader of Council, Cllr Petrina Lees, to fully and accurately inform this Council Meeting about the following observations by answering the single question below.

1. OBSERVATION: In February 2020 (*) – now over two years ago – Cllr Lees personally committed to deliver 183 council homes during the lifetime of this Council ending in May 2023. Little has been done to date to deliver that two-year old commitment both before and since she became Council Leader. Little progress has been made towards delivering that commitment by May 2023. Cllr Lees’ administration has not even created a policy and delivery plan for increasing the stock of Council-owned homes to meet or exceed Cllr Lees’ published target to achieve 183 new homes and to further “aspire to build more”.

2. OBSERVATION: There is evidence that Cllr Lees’ administration does not intend to deliver 14 council homes already agreed by the Housing Board and contained within the 2021/26 Housing Strategy on land that Uttlesford District Council owns at Auton Croft in Saffron Walden. There is further evidence that Cllr Lees and her R4U

colleagues have attempted to bypass proper Council processes to achieve their apparent negative objective of undermining the Housing Board's agreed objective.

3. OBSERVATION: Cllr Lees' R4U administration has not adopted the policy followed by the South Cambridgeshire District Council's Lib Dem administration to deliver 346 homes into Council ownership during the same 4-year period by bidding to buy affordable homes on development sites across its district.

NOTE: (*) The minute C67 from the Council Meeting of 25 February 2020 sets out that: "Councillor Lees said she would commit to building 183 council houses over the next four years. She said the Administration would aspire to build more".

4. QUESTION: Are these observations true statements and, if so, what does Cllr Lees intend to change in the next 13 months to recover her administration's reputation by improving the Council's delivery of council housing for people living in Uttlesford who cannot afford to buy a home on the open market?"

3. By Councillor Caton to the Cabinet Member for Economy, Investment and Corporate Strategy

"Can Councillor Reeve please provide the Council with an update on progress of the development of the former Banana factory into the Little Canfield Business Park? Please include detailed information on:

- Timings regarding the Refuse service moving onto the site.
- Any tenancy agreements completed with businesses for the Business Park unit(s).
- Details on any plans to let out surplus office space in light of the likely reduction in staff numbers as a result of the Blueprint Uttlesford 2022-27 transformation programme.
- The total costs of the conversion and whether the project remains in budget."

4. By Councillor Sell to the Cabinet Member for Planning

"Can Councillor Evans, in his capacity as portfolio holder for Planning, provide an update on staffing in relation to the Planning Department, including details on the following, please:

- The current full time equivalent number of staff in the Planning Department;
- The staff turnover in the current financial year in the Planning Department;
- The vacant posts which are currently unfilled."