

Uttlesford District Council

19 July 2022

Written Questions to Members of the Executive and Committee Chairs

Written responses to be published on 18 July 2022

1. By Councillor Pavitt to Councillor Evans - the Cabinet Member for Planning, Stansted Airport, Infrastructure Strategy and the Local Plan

'What is the Council doing to enable the Planning department to understand and accurately assess BNG (Biodiversity Net Gain) and hold developers to account for their baseline biodiversity reports and the gains they claim to achieve?

Sadly, the process is wide open to abuse and there are frequent reports of 'copy & paste' biodiversity reports produced by desk-based consultants.

For Uttlesford District Council to rely exclusively on external consultants is costly and fallible.

How far has the council advanced the appointment of a specialist Ecology officer to provide oversight and ensure targets are accurately set and achievable?

Such an officer will also provide much needed resource towards achieving the ecology aims of the Council's Climate Change & Ecological Emergency declaration.'

2. By Councillor Barker to Councillors Lees and Coote - the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Housing

'Can I please ask the Leader and the Cabinet Member for Housing what steps are being taken to amend the Housing Waiting List Scheme to ensure that exception sites in village locations, planned and carried through by Parish Councils such as High Easter, over many years, are built for and allocated to those identified in that Parish's Housing Needs survey?'

3. By Councillor Gregory to Councillor Pepper - the Cabinet Member for the Environment and Green Issues; Equalities

'Could I ask the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Green Issues and Equalities to:

1. Provide details in respect of the following: the cost differences between the procured "Green" utilities and previous standard utilities for each year of the contract period, split between gas and electricity; the due diligence undertaken in establishing the "green" nature of the utilities;

the verification process undertaken and the nature of any offsetting used to establish the "green" source of said utilities?

2. Explain the process of validation and verification undertaken to ensure any such offsetting is robust and accurate?'

4. By Councillor Khan to Councillor Sutton, the Cabinet Member for Communities, Health, Youth, Public Safety, Emergency Planning and Liaison with the Police and Fire & Rescue Service.

'Many of our residents will be impacted by the current cost of living crisis and we know that many families are under pressure, worried sick about the future and therefore seeking help with mental health services via our General Practitioners. Earlier this year Council agreed our motion to provide a one off £100 grant to nearly 1000 working households in Uttlesford to help towards their Council Tax bills in 2022/23 providing some assistance.

Can the Portfolio Holder inform us what specific action is now being taken in conjunction with the local Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to help residents with poor mental health due to financial worries?'

5. By Councillor Smith to Councillor Hargreaves - the Cabinet Member for Finance and the Budget

'In the December 2021 meeting of Council, both Cllr Sell and I asked for the Council to find ways to increase public participation in the LCTS consultation. Could you advise what additional methods of engagement are being used for the current consultation?'

6. By Councillor Smith to Councillor Freeman - the Cabinet Member for Public Services

'Could you provide an update to the Council on what progress has been made since the beginning of this year, in reopening a Saffron Walden day centre. When might the local community be able to have access to the types of facilities available in Great Dunmow, Stansted Mountfitchet and Thaxted?'

7. By Councillor Dean to Councillor LeCount - the Chair of the Standards Committee:

'It has recently come to my attention that the Standards Committee, of which I am a Member, has not met since the 16th March 2020. Moreover, I am aware that the Chief Executive Officer wrote to all Members last month that "an absolutely extraordinary number of Councillor-on-Councillor complaints" have been made.

Can the Chair of Standards please confirm the number of Councillor-on-Councillor complaints that have been made since May 2019, the number that have been upheld and a breakdown of the complainants by political grouping?

Secondly, when is the Standards Committee due to consider and publish a revised version of the Councillors Code of Conduct that has been talked about for some three years but has not yet been started?’

8. By Councillor Caton to Councillor Pepper - the Cabinet Member for the Environment and Green Issues; Equalities

‘The Corporate Plan commits the Council to deliver outstanding levels of transparency and accountability, and I note that that the Annual Report on UDC’s Greenhouse Gas emissions in the 2021/22 financial year was published in early June.

Firstly can the portfolio-holder please tell the Council why this Report was not considered by the Energy and Climate Change Working Party, the Cabinet or the Scrutiny Committee before being publicised in a party political press release and whether the data within the report was validated by external experts?

Secondly, I note that only about £80k of the £1m of revenue spending allocated towards Climate Change action has been spent to date. Can the Portfolio-holder please tell the Council what criteria are being used to assess applications from Parish Councils and other Community Groups for funding projects to tackle Climate Change at a local level within the District and who is responsible for determining any such bids for funding?’