

**Uttlesford District Council Meeting  
11 March 2024**

**Written Questions to Members of the Executive and Committee Chairs**

**Written responses to be published on 8 March 2024**

**1. By Councillor Gregory to Councillor Coote – Portfolio Holder for Housing:**

“To ask Cllr Coote what progress has been made on remediation of the problems discovered at Reynolds Ct, the cost to date and the extent to which those costs have been recovered?”

**Response from Councillor Coote:**

“The cost of remediation relating to electrical works, fire-stopping, repairs, maintenance and investigation of the heating system at Reynolds Court was provided to UDC by UNSL on the 27<sup>th</sup> November 2023 and totals £70,360. The total expenditure in relation to the waking watch was £68117. Lovells have advised UDC that they are not responsible for reimbursing the cost of the waking watch and this is an action that Simone Chinman-Russell will be picking up again with Lovells during April 2024.”

**2. By Councillor Barker to Councillor Evans – Portfolio Holder for Planning:**

“I note that the Council is still using Place Services at Essex County Council to provide Listed Building advice. Can I ask what progress has been made towards recruiting our own Listed Building Officer.”

**Response from Councillor Evans:**

“As I have reported previously, the council appointed an in-house and permanent Principal Conservation Officer in April 2023. Our officer has been providing input into the local plan and conservation area appraisals, responding to customer enquiries, and reviewing some major planning applications and appeals. Work is also being undertaken by our officer in relation to advice which we plan to offer and for standards to be set towards achieving greater energy efficiency in listed buildings, taking into account best practice and standing advice from Historic England. Due to the significant number of planning applications and appeals that are received (many of which require

aspects of heritage and/or listed building advice) it is not possible for our officer to review every planning application. We therefore continue to use Essex Place Services to assess a proportion of heritage related applications and appeals. The service agreement in place with Essex Place Services is under regular review.”

### **3. By Councillor Barker to Councillor Lees – Leader of the Council:**

“Can the leader confirm that the regulation 19 consultation will see the number of new housing allocations reduce by c2000 as a result of the additional permissions between April 1st 2023 and March 31st 2024.”

### **Response from Councillor Lees and Councillor Evans:**

“As we have stated before, the number of homes required to be allocated in the Regulation 19 version of the local plan will be less than in the Regulation 18 version. The Regulation 19 plan will factor-in a review of the current year’s (2023/4) “housing commitments” (homes granted planning permission or allocated in Neighbourhood Plans between April 2023 and March 2024). This will likely be somewhere in the region of 2,000 homes, but we cannot calculate this figure until after 31 March has passed. It will not then simply be a case of ‘salami-slicing’ c.2000 homes from the Regulation 18 Plan. The position is far more nuanced. For example, overall housing numbers and locations must work in terms of supporting new schools and infrastructure, and we must be able to demonstrate a constant flow of delivery over the plan period for the plan to be found ‘sound’. The Local Plan isn’t simply a numbers game. It is about delivering the best possible outcomes in terms of sustainable development and climate-change, and providing facilities, infrastructure and jobs to support our growing communities”.

### **4. By Councillor Moran to Councillor Evans – Portfolio Holder for Planning:**

“On inspection of the records it is clear that there was a large spend on agency planning officers during the period April to December 2023. Can I please ask the cabinet member responsible for planning how many of UDCs planning officers are direct employees of the council and how many are agency and relief?”

### **Response from Councillor Evans:**

“The department currently has five agency planners covering vacant posts. This is out of a total of 22 planner posts across the Development Management Team and Local Plans Team (therefore 23% of planner posts). They represent just 11% of all posts in

the Planning Portfolio (which includes Building Control, Business Support and various other roles). The department currently has a further, fixed-term, agency post (over and above establishment) funded by a government grant for a specific purpose.”

**5. By Councillor Moran to Councillor Evans – Portfolio Holder for Planning:**

“Following on from the recruitment of additional planning enforcement staff can I please ask the relevant cabinet member how many active planning enforcements there as of 1st of March 2023 and as at 31st of December 2023. How many have been closed since then and of those how many were deemed ‘not expedient’ to follow up.”

**Response from Councillor Evans:**

“At the end of March 2023 there were 266 active planning enforcement cases. At end of December 2023 this figure was 279. Over the last municipal year 204 cases have been closed. For the most part (83), no breach was found. In 65 of the cases compliance was achieved (either with or without formal notices). 31 were considered “non-expedient” to be pursued. The remainder either gained retrospective permission (21) or were combined with another case (4).”

**6. By Councillor Gooding to Councillor Reeve – Portfolio Holder for the Environment and Climate Change :**

“Street Cleansing of pavements and footpaths in our towns, villages and rural areas is the responsibility of Uttlesford District Council not Essex Highways but I am receiving a significant growth in complaints that the footpaths are contaminated with debris that is not being cleared. Will the portfolio holder please confirm the following: -

1. Whether he has sufficient budget and other resource to properly complete this work and what the level of that budget is and whether the capital equipment required to complete this work is adequate and in a good state of repair?
2. Whether the use of any vehicles designed to sweep the gutters and gulleys has been affected by the hiatus in the vehicle operating licence and what efforts are being made to reassure the residents of Uttlesford that this function is both adequate and being properly implemented?”

### **Response from Councillor Reeve:**

1. "The council has a modest street cleansing budget and a relatively small team of 12 individuals. There are of course challenges, and in particular littering in the areas surrounding the airport, along the A120, and flytipping do create a continuous workload for the team. A review of safety considerations relating to operating on a high-speed trunk road has meant that we have not litter picked the A120 verges in recent months however that work has now restarted. In terms of our equipment, the Council has 1 large truck mounted road sweeper and 2 smaller sweepers and 1 spare. All our front-line sweepers are less than 2 years old and as such are in good condition.
2. Our smaller sweepers did continue working as they are not covered by operator licence restrictions. The large sweeper did not operate because it is listed. We have recently recruited a new street cleansing chargehand and supervisor who will lead some operational improvements over the coming months."

### **7. By Councillor Dean to Councillor Lees – Leader of the Council:**

"My recollection of the last meeting of Council on February 26th is that the Leader of Council reported enthusiastically about her experiences during the recent waste and recycling service failure.

The Leader reported that she had been well informed about absences and changes to services in her own ward, and this had enabled her to tell her constituents what service standard and service absences to expect.

Would Cllr Lees confirm that all Members of Council who wished to be similarly briefed on the impact in each of their wards of what some have called Bingate were appropriately so informed?"

### **Response from Councillor Lees:**

"My perceived enthusiasm was for the community within Elsenham that engaged, to help ensure residents were aware that their bins would be collected on the day specified in the daily bulletin. Every Councillor received a daily update via email. Updates were also provided via the website and Uttlesford District Council Facebook page. Many of my colleagues ensured that information cascaded as required, either electronically or physically."

**8. By Councillor Sell to Councillor Lees – Leader of the Council:**

“One of the consequences of Blueprint Uttlesford is an increasing reliance on fixed-term contracts for our employees. a) What is the current proportion of staff employed on such contracts? b) Is there a danger that the replacement of permanent contracts with fixed term contracts will have a negative impact upon the quality-of-service delivery?”

**Response from Councillor Lees and Councillor Hargreaves:**

“8% of council employees are on fixed term- contracts.

The figure for headcount and FTE is the same at 8%.

<b>Headcount of staff</b>	
Headcount of temp staff	26
Headcount of permanent staff	292
Total Headcount	318
Percentage of temp staff	8%

<b>FTE of staff</b>	
FTE of temp staff	23.2
FTE of permanent staff	263.19
Total FTE	286.39
Percentage of temp staff	8%

Like all employers UDC ensures that fixed-term employees get the same pay and conditions as permanent staff, the same or equivalent benefits package, information about permanent vacancies in the organization and protection against redundancy or dismissal.

<https://www.gov.uk/fixed-term-contracts/employees-rights>

This operational policy has been agreed fully with our recognised Trade Union, Unison, and is designed to minimise the unsettling prospect of shrinking team size on current permanent staff, as well as the number (and associated costs) of future compulsory redundancy rounds. Of course, Cllr Sell is correct that appointing fixed term staff may lead to a potential negative impact on service delivery through less organisational loyalty, so this really is a careful balancing act, and the reality is that we have been fortunate in recruiting highly motivated staff on fixed term contracts.”

**9. By Councillor Sell to Councillor Reeve – Portfolio Holder for the Environment and Climate Change:**

“How many complaints have been received in 2024 regarding the non-collection of waste?”

**Response from Councillor Reeve:**

“The total numbers of waste and recycling-related enquiries to Customer Services for 1 January 10 to 23 February are:

Phone calls – 3,690

LiveChat – 716

Emails – 2216

The Customer Services statistics were compiled when requested for the task and finish group so this data does not run to the last week of February, although does now include the first three weeks of January.

The task and finish group will have the opportunity to explore the details relating to enquiries and complaints and their findings will be reported back to the Scrutiny committee in due course.”