

Questions to Portfolio Holders / Committee Chairs

(A) Question from Councillor Claire Parris

‘Can I ask if the Council has any updates on the proposed radiotherapy facility and its location?’

Answer (Councillor Jackie Hollywell):

NHS England are currently reviewing cancer services as provided at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre with a proposal that a new Cancer Centre will be developed at Watford General Hospital. There is also ongoing consultation regarding an additional networked radiotherapy unit at the Lister Hospital. This would obviously be the preferred option for Stevenage as it would cut down on travel and inconvenience for people needing this vital treatment. Consultation is still ongoing and more information can be gained by accessing the website www.mvccreview.nhs.uk

I hope that the NHS will continue to listen to patients’ experiences and ensure that services are delivered as locally as possible.

(B) Question from Councillor Andy McGuinness

‘What assessment will be undertaken by officers of the negative consequences on the Council of a “lame duck Government” caused by the resignation of Boris Johnson?’

Answer (Councillor Sharon Taylor):

[ANSWER TO FOLLOW]

(C) Question from Councillor Stephen Booth

‘What steps have the Council undertaken to work with partner agencies to ensure that the empty homes in Tabor Close are occupied as soon as possible?’

Answer (Councillor Jeannette Thomas):

The scheme at Tabor Close is a private development concerning Keepmoat and Origin Housing Association, delivering 13 new build houses and, as such, the Council has no contractual authority in the matter.

However, being a partner agency with nomination rights to the completed homes, we were very much concerned at the length of time taken to complete the highways works. This has partially been due to the pandemic and the

knock-on resourcing issues at the Highways Authority who have experienced a high intensity of work. Given our concern, and at the invitation of Keepmoat, the Council's Housing Development Team has offered to provide support and liaison with the Highways Authority.

This has enabled works to be carried out as follows:

- Works close to the junction with Ferrier Road are programmed to take place between 4th July – 15th July.*
- Works close to the junctions of Bernhardt Crescent are programmed to take place between 25th July – 5th August.*

The works could not be carried out sooner as the Highways Authority require that works should take place during the summer break, due to the close proximity with Chells Way junction and the local school. Following completion, the Council will seek to facilitate a "lessons learnt" exercise with all parties, to help benefit future schemes.

The Council's Housing Team have maintained contact with residents wishing to move into these homes so that they can make informed decisions on their choices, such as whether to wait or alternatively bid on different properties.

(D) Question from Councillor Robin Parker CC

'What is being done, in conjunction with the County Council as the Highways Authority, to solve the traffic congestion issues at the exit from Swingate onto Lytton Way, which continue to be a regular problem at busy times and which started following the remodelling of Lytton Way?'

Answer (Councillor Lloyd Briscoe):

The works carried out to Lytton Way were required by Hertfordshire County Council, who are responsible for the junction and road in question. Officers are aware of the challenges experienced at times at the Swingate/Lytton Road junction, and we have asked Officers at Hertfordshire County Council to monitor the situation and take remedial action if required. Further investigations by HCC are underway.

(E) Question from Councillor Alex Farquharson

'Will you guarantee that a community centre will be built to replace the previously demolished building at the Hertford Road/Kenilworth Close shops?'

Answer (Councillor Sandra Barr):

I can confirm that the scheme at Kenilworth Close is well underway delivering new housing, new shops, new independent living accommodation and will then focus on a community centre.

Specifically, in respect to the question asked. Yes, as part of this scheme, the later phases include the provision of community facilities to replace the demolished community building that was located at Hertford Road. Any

deviation from these proposals would require a new planning approval that would be subject to scrutiny and consultation.

(F) Question from Bret Facey

'Does the Council have any plans to close or reduce the size of the indoor market in the foreseeable future?'

Answer (Councillor Mrs Joan Lloyd):

The Council has committed significant amounts of resources to support and keep the indoor market open. We support the traders to grow their businesses with advice and guidance. We have events and activities to promote visitors to the market, but footfall remains down on pre-pandemic levels. We have no plans to close or reduced the size of it.

(G) Question from Councillor Tom Wren

'What does the Council consider to be an acceptable time for residents to wait for telephone call enquiries to be answered?'

Answer (Councillor Mrs Joan Lloyd):

Performance has been impacted by a reduced headcount in the Customer Service team due to efficiency savings, high levels of staff turnover in a very challenging recruitment market. Taken together with some steep increases for services, following the Covid-19 pandemic, and the ongoing impacts of factors such as outbreaks of Covid-19 in the team, there has been almost a perfect storm of contributing factors. Clearly, we are deeply committed to improving our call handling time, addressing service backlogs following the pandemic, and extending the range of services available online.

Actions are in place to address these points, including a rolling recruitment campaign to fill existing vacancies. We are working on the implementation of new phone options and digital services, as well as tackling ongoing issues which have led to high volumes of contact such as fencing repairs.

From summer 2022 we will be prioritising emergency/ urgent calls (e.g. homeless on the day, domestic violence or emergency repairs) via a separate phone option to ensue these vital calls come through as a priority. Where customers can go online e.g. to make a payment, report a fly tip or a missed bin, we will be asking them to do so. For those who cannot self-serve non urgent issues, we will still take the call but customers may have to wait longer.

Our longer term our goal is through the transformation programme to reduce the need for customers to contact us e.g. through proactive communication, as well as to improve our web services so that customers choose to use them over calling us. Alongside the measures above, we are considering recruiting some medium-term additional capacity (subject to being able to recruit in a challenging market) to help address performance and also to support customer services to help more customers transition to digital options.