

COUNCIL – 16 OCTOBER 2019

MEMBERS QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Questions to Portfolio Holders

A. Question from Cllr. Robin Parker, CC – “Reference the Pride of Stevenage Awards on 28.9.2019, excluding award winners and members, who received invitations and, in particular, were invitations issued to the Stevenage MP and all Stevenage parliamentary candidates?”

Answer (The Mayor) - The MP for Stevenage was invited to the Pride Awards, however Officers did not receive a reply to that invitation.

Parliamentary candidates were not invited to attend in their capacity as parliamentary candidates. We are aware that Jill Borchers was invited by the Mayor, along with several other individuals, because of her links with Cycling UK Stevenage and Sport Stevenage. The fact that she is a parliamentary candidate is purely coincidental.

B. Question from Cllr. Tom Wren – “On the 12th June, this Council passed a motion declaring a climate change emergency. What actions have been taken by the Council in the 4 months since this declaration?”

Answer (Cllr John Gardner) - Over the last four months, Officers and Executive Members have been working hard to establish a list of potential short term, medium term and long terms actions the Council and those organisations within Stevenage that contribute to carbon emissions can take. These range from supporting electric vehicles and cycle hire, to free water fountains. We have identified two potential community orchards plus discussions have been held with both the Woodland Trust and our partners the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust for the planting of 490 trees in Fairlands Park South.

There have been a number of important Council meetings including an informal Executive dedicated to the issue and an All Member briefing is planned for next month which will be supported by the Local Government Association (LGA) and which will outline how Members can best action climate change improvements. We are excited to be partnering with the LGA as the first organisation to put in place Member development activities to help build our knowledge and skills in an area that is crucial to us all.

The Council has been working equally hard on an engagement approach to reach the widest range of people, through a Citizens' Panel and People's Assembly, as we can only truly tackle climate change if we work together with our residents and businesses. The Council has prepared a draft Charter, and with input from local people and business will be drawing up a draft Action Plan over the next few months to ensure we can deliver our 2030 promise.

C. Question from Cllr. Stephen Booth – “What measures does the Council take in ensuring that the Charter Fair is set up in an orderly and safe manner and attention is given particularly to:

- due regard to Health & Safety regulations**
- access to shops and businesses is maintained**
- approaches to pedestrian crossings for the public are left clear**
- sufficient account is taken for access to those with disability and particularly those with sight disability?”**

Answer (Cllr Briscoe) – The Charter Fair is organised by the Showmen’s Guild (www.showmensguild.com) and held on the public highway. This is a historic and long-standing event in the Town. This is not a Stevenage Borough Council activity. The organisation of the use of the public highway and the relevant closure orders for the High Street are the responsibility of the Hertfordshire County Council Highways Network Management Team.

D. Question from Cllr. Andy McGuinness – “How much officer time and resources have a) already been used and b) planned to be used, on “No Deal” Brexit scenario planning?”

Answer (Leader of the Council) – The Council’s work on planning for a ‘No Deal’ Brexit follows the guidance from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. As Members are aware the Civil Contingencies Act identifies the Council as a Category 1 responder and we have a duty to address resilience and emergency planning matters for the Town. I am the lead Executive Member for Brexit and Richard Protheroe, Interim Strategic Director has been appointed as the Council’s Brexit Lead Officer.

A Brexit Working Group of relevant senior Council Officers has been established to ensure that as far as possible any risks to the delivery of council services or potential negative affects to the lives of people living and working in Stevenage, are identified and mitigated. This Group meets on a weekly basis. I am sure everyone would agree that this is an appropriate response.

The Council is currently not using a time recording system for officers involved in Brexit preparations and therefore there has been no calculation of the time spent on this work so far. To identify new burdens placed on the authority in future the Council will record officer time spent on Brexit preparations. No additional staffing resources have been sought at this time and therefore the capacity to deal with this matter has resulted in some reprioritising of work for the officers involved.

E. Question from Cllr. Graham Snell – “In view of the recent reports about some of the new paving in the Town Centre being very slippery when wet, and therefore a hazard, what actions have been taken by the Council to address this?”

Answer (Cllr John Gardner) – Officers are seeking further information from the Member to ascertain which specific area is being referred to. The engineering team have not received any complaints or concerns in the last year. The upgrade works that took place at Littlewoods and Forum Squares did include new paving, which meet required British standards for slip resistance.