

This document includes questions asked prior to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 12 September 2023, or where a response was required to be given after the meeting.

The agenda and recording of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 12 September 2023 can be accessed here: [Agenda for Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday, 12th September, 2023, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#).

Item 11: Q1 2023-2024 Update on the Council Delivery Plan

Questions from Councillor Matt Barnes:

- (1) EV Charging – how much is the grant funding and what is the contingency plan if it is not secured?

The grant funding application was for a maximum amount of £135,000 which equates to 60% of the estimated project costs. The other 40% will need to be covered by our partner. We have now received notification that we are being offered the grant, subject to our partner agreeing to the conditions of the grant payment. Therefore, the risk of not receiving the funding has not materialised. There is a small risk that our partner may not agree to the funding obligations.

- (2) RLC Solar Thermal – seems like this project is blocked on all milestones, should it be Red?

We have been successful in getting external funding to complete a heat decarbonisation plan for our leisure centres, and have identified a provider (under a framework contract) to produce those plans. This will enable us to fully determine what measures can be put in place (covering solar PV, solar thermal and new heating systems) and bid in the next round of Decarbonisation funding (expected in the Autumn) for any eligible projects. External funding will help with the viability of these projects, and the decarbonisation plans will help us target what to focus on. So we would go through that process before making any final decision on the Solar Thermal project.

- (3) Pay on Exit – “there is uncertainty about public reaction to the changes and associated disruption”: could members be provided with details of how the proposals will work please so that we can anticipate and handle this effectively?

The Council is going out to tender for a partner to deliver the alternative methods of payment required for the pay on exit project. Part of the tender process will require a full communications plan to be put in place by the supplier, which will then be rolled out to members and the public once the successful supplier has been awarded the contract.

Questions from Councillor Ralph Muncer:

- (1) Churchgate: The due date for a consultant to be appointed was 31 August 2023. Has one now been appointed and if so, when are they expected to begin work on the project?

Yes. They have already started the initial work required and set out in their work programme.

- (2) Churchgate: The target date for the opening of the In-Person Project Hub and the launch of the Digital Hub has been changed to the 30 September, is this target on course to be achieved?

The in-person hub is on hold until further notice, due to an ongoing dispute with the previous tenant regarding utility bills. The Estates team are working hard with Legal to resolve this as soon as possible. Until then, we cannot access the property.

We are adding final touches to the digital hub, and hope to have this live by the end of September as stated.

- (3) New Ways of Delivering Housing on Council Land: The review of the report findings/recommendations was due to take place by 30 June 2023, however due to resourcing issues was pushed back to 31 August 2023. Has this target been achieved, and if not when is a realistic date for the review to take place?

Report now delivered and initial reviews have taken place. This is leading to further clarifications and more detailed focus on specifics. Anticipated timeline for further advice would be Mid November due to consultant surveyor's leave arrangements and other commitments on behalf of the Council.

- (4) Resident/Public EV Charging in our Car Parks: Originally, Council was due to receive a decision regarding a grant from the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles by 30 June 2023. This target date was changed to 31 August. Has Council now heard back from the Office of Zero Emission Vehicles as to whether our grant application is successful, and if so, are we confident the project can still be delivered on time?

The Council received an offer Letter on 4 Sept 2023 from OZEV for the full grant application of £135,000. Given the time this has taken by DfT to respond to the Grant application, this has placed 3 to 4 month delay on the project. Officers are now proceeding with finalising the contract documentation with our private sector partner (which was subject to the grant award) and working with our partner on preparing a revised implementation programme. All units are to be implemented within 12 months in accordance with the OZEV grant requirements. It is anticipated that the contract will be delivered within these timescales.

- (5) Cycling network: Hertfordshire County Council is producing the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) which is due for adoption by 31 October 2023. The LCWIP will "inform a North Herts Cycle Strategy". Could Officers provide information as to: (1) What a North Herts Cycle Strategy will entail? (2) Will it be led by North Hertfordshire District Council? (3) What is the difference between the LCWIP and the proposed North Herts Cycle Strategy? (4) What measures will be put in place to avoid the duplication/replication of work?

The LCWIP and the Hertfordshire Active Travel Strategy once adopted will provide the necessary policy guidance for progressing with cycling opportunities within North Hertfordshire. Cycle parking standards and facilities will be incorporated into the suitable development SPD under preparation by the Local Plans Team.

This means that officer effort will be better placed in seeking funding to assist with the design and delivery of the schemes outlined in the LCWIP rather than proceeding with a separate cycling strategy for North Herts. There is some outstanding work to be taken forward regarding improving cycle opportunities within rural areas and strengthening links to the towns. Given resources priority will be focused on the urban areas which is the focus of the LCWIP.

- (6) Finalise Pay on Exit Parking Review: Has the loss of income due to the works to upgrade our car parks been calculated and factored into Council budgets?

Until the final procurement process has been completed it is not possible to assess whether the installation of the new payment system will have any impact upon income.

- (7) Health Inequalities: As part of the options assessment for 2024/25, will a cost-benefit analysis take place before the award of any funding by the Council?

We are currently working with partners to deliver three projects in North Herts using health inequality funding. Each project is rigorously assessed every quarter using a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures agreed between the Council, the host agency and Herts County Council's (HCC) evaluation experts. Baseline data is taken from all participants when they are initially engaged. Further data is gathered at set points through the intervention which will vary dependant on the length of the intervention. Tested validated measures are used to ensure we can meaningfully assess the impact of the interventions and data is gathered from participants, other professionals and sometimes family members/carers. For example, an emotional wellbeing project will gather data on feelings of safety, anxiety, hopefulness and loneliness and other changes to the persons life such as being able to go back to work.

As well as assessing the effectiveness of an intervention, we also look at issues such as demand, costs and ensuring that the current model is the most effective way of meeting the identified need. A positive evaluation is likely to mean HCC will ask us to continue funding the intervention in 2024/25.

A mid point evaluation of each intervention is currently underway and will become available late Autumn.

- (8) Shared Prosperity Fund: Could detail be provided as to what a 'Active Communities Officer' and an Active Communities Assistant' does and what costs are incurred by the Council?

The Active Communities Officer and Assistant are employed by the Leisure Contractor Stevenage Leisure Limited.

The posts cost £25k per year combined and are funded up to 2025/26 from the UKSPF. Their job role is to identify and implement a range of targeted initiatives that seek to improve the health of the North Herts community, particularly focusing on raising physical activity levels.

They identify and develop opportunities within the community and leisure facilities to enable physical activity, specifically targeting those who are inactive or have barriers to activity and to help overcome them.

Their role is key to working closely with local partners to implement the Active North Herts strategy and its objectives.

- (9) Local Plan Delivery and Review: Many Councillors, including myself, raised concerns about the Local Plan and were reassured by a review taking place. When do we expect the results of the review to come before Full Council for consideration and debate by Councillors?

Under the Council's Constitution, preparation of the Council's Policy Framework, which includes the Local Plan, is a Cabinet matter. This includes the initial, formal decision on whether a review is required. This will be listed as a Key Decision to be taken by Cabinet in January 2024 on the next version of the Forward Plan which will be published shortly. More information on the (anticipated) review process is set out in Policy IMR2 and the associated supporting text of the Local Plan (pp.287-289).

Under the present planning system and Constitution, Full Council would be asked to approve any future version of the Local Plan prior to it being sent to the Government for examination and would take the decision on whether to adopt the Plan following that examination.