

**FULL COUNCIL – 9 DECEMBER 2019 – QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDERS  
UNDER STANDING ORDER 22A**

**Question 1**

**From Cllr Jan Duke to the Portfolio Holder for Housing Services, Cllr Jill Cleary**

I have noticed in past years the increasing costs associated with this Council's use of bed and breakfast. Can the Portfolio Holder tell me how she intends to reduce this?

Answer:

*The provision of Bed & Breakfast accommodation for homeless households has been a long standing emergency and temporary housing solution in response to a crisis situation. Whilst the use of this accommodation is intended for emergency placements and for short periods only, the number of households presenting to the Council in crisis situations have increased over the last few years.*

*This Council recognises that there needs to be better alternatives to the use of B&B accommodation for homeless households. That is why, in our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (which we adopted in April this year), we have made it one of our top objectives, to end the use of external B&B accommodation.*

*To achieve this aim the Council is currently investing in and developing its own emergency temporary accommodation in all of our major population areas, with access to clean bedding, en-suite bathrooms and a shared or dedicated kitchen. Our first such building, at Pentagon Court in Blackfield, has provided housing for 16 households, across 6 rooms, since the 25th of May this year. The annual reduction in B&B expenditure from this building alone, is around £130,000 per year. Our 2nd new building, at Ocknell Grove in Hythe, will, with effect from this week, welcome some of our most vulnerable ex-rough sleepers who have embarked upon a programme to turn their lives around. Getting the right accommodation and support is absolutely fundamental and I am delighted that we are now delivering on both these fronts. It has helped enormously that we have now in place, for the very first time, 4 of our own Housing Support Workers who provide intensive support to those with complex needs in order to prevent homelessness, sustain accommodation as well as helping rough sleepers access accommodation, access benefits and linking up with other services for vulnerable people.*

*We have also purchased Blease Court in Lymington, another property in Ashley Road in New Milton and another in Christchurch Road, Ringwood, which will bring forward a further 16-18 rooms over the next year. We are also in current negotiations to acquire another 6 room building, and I hope to announce a positive outcome shortly, plus development plans for another 25 rooms over the next few years.*

*I am sure you will agree that this is a significant achievement. The provision of more suitable temporary accommodation is not the only key objective we are working on. We have a clear direction of delivery in a number of key areas that will transform the lives of those in housing need in our communities. We are changing the way we allocate social housing in the District so that people get housing based on need, and not how long they have been waiting on the Housing Register. We are building and acquiring more council housing; we are developing our own Shared Ownership Scheme (which will be coming to fruition in Spring next year) and we are currently developing a new Private Sector Housing Strategy which will bring a whole suite of benefits for those that rely on the private rented sector.*

*I'm sure you will all agree that our proactive and targeted response on a significant number of new initiatives will help transform the lives of so many in our community.*

## **Question 2**

**From Cllr Andrew Gossage to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Cllr Michael Harris**

At the last Cabinet meeting you told us that there are 8000 businesses in the New Forest and you now want to “target engagement” with them. What can the very small businesses in my Ward of Pennington look forward to in the future and how will they be able to access information relevant to their specific business area?

*Answer:*

*New Forest District Council recognises the significance of the 89% of businesses within Pennington and the wider New Forest District which are micro businesses (those with fewer than 10 employees) as well as the value these businesses and entrepreneurs add to our local economy in terms of employment, local spend and community benefit.*

*The Economic Development Team is currently exploring a range of initiatives to ensure that there is improved engagement between NFDC and businesses in the district. One of the options includes the development of a ‘one stop shop’ website and associated support. This will provide all businesses with important information on business services (including those offered by NFDC) and sources of advice and funding to help them to start, grow and sustain their businesses. Economic Development staff have and will continue to add value to the Council’s website by working with businesses to help them to navigate the often-complex business support and grant environment to address the relatively poor uptake of such opportunities by New Forest businesses.*

*Where applicable, the business support offer will be tailor-made to meet the needs of New Forest businesses in specific sectors or locations.*

*We will continue to work with partners to support micro businesses. This includes but is not limited to provision of free 1-1 start-up advice, a wide range of business seminars and training organised in conjunction with New Forest Business Partnership and others, as well as engagement with Solent Apprenticeship Hub to provide support and information to micro businesses who are unaware or unsure of how provide apprenticeship places within the business.*

## **Question 3**

**From Cllr Neville Penman to the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Wellbeing, Cllr Mark Steele**

In the Corporate Plan 'Community Matters 2020 – 2024, how will you develop and deliver a Health and Wellbeing Strategy focusing on Physical Health, Mental Health, Tackling Health Inequalities and Creating Healthier Communities.

*Answer:*

*To develop the New Forest District’s Health and Wellbeing Strategy we will be using the insight and information that is available from a variety of sources to identify the key themes that are of concern and focus resources to tackle these issues. These areas will focus on the physical and mental health of our residents.*

*A wealth of information exists and we will use this to shape our strategy. We will use resources such as Public Health England's annual report on the Wider Determinants of Health for each local authority.*

*The Hampshire Health and Wellbeing Board has developed a strategy for the County. This too will be taken into account as part of the District Council's strategy development. The County's strategy has identified the key areas that should be a focus and these will be relevant to the District, with different weightings for our area against these County priorities depending on the results of local insight.*

*We will continue to work with our national, regional and local partners, to help deliver a joined up approach to better ensure that the health wellbeing of our residents is advanced. The strategy will identify areas that we can deliver as a District Council and also areas where we will work in partnership.*

*To work with me, I will be asking the Community and Leisure Panel for a Task and Finish Group who will help me develop the strategy over the next 12 months.*

#### **Question 4**

##### **From Cllr Malcolm Wade to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Barry Rickman**

Can the Leader of the Council advise the Council Members, what are their responsibilities as a Corporate Parent for Looked After Children?

*Answer:*

*This is a role which we perform for every child in our community and not just those in the County Council's care.*

*When I say every child, I mean every child that enters our Health & Leisure Centres, every child that lives in our Council Housing, every child that is part of a homeless family and in need of housing, every child that uses our local taxis safely, every child that is leaving care to embark upon life's journey or every child that just needs our local support and that of our partners.*

*At the District Council we recognise that we need all councillors and staff to be looking out for the best interests of all our young people including the most vulnerable children.*

*We recognise the importance of providing a housing pathway for care leavers once they are ready to leave care. Our new Homesearch Allocation Policy, approved in April 2019, provides both care leavers and young people living in Supported Accommodation with an urgent Band 2 priority, where they are ready for independent living. This enables care leavers to access social housing in the District which is absolutely vital.*

*Alongside this new Policy, we work closely with the Hampshire County Council's Care Leavers' Team, who are represented at our Homelessness Multi-Agency Forum, to support young care leavers obtain housing advice and accommodation. Our Housing Team has provided housing training to HCC in order for them to better support care leavers.*

*This Council has signed up to a Joint protocol with HCC to work together to help resolve situations where 16-17-year olds (including care leavers of that age), are at risk of homelessness, providing them with advice, accommodation, care and support, whilst a long term solution is achieved.*

*Our commitment to care leavers has also been demonstrated earlier this evening when we approved a Council Tax exemption for this important group.*

*We also recognise and value the important role each employee and Councillor has in identifying and addressing the needs of vulnerable children. To undertake and support the effective delivery of this function, the Council has dedicated safeguarding lead officers who provide training and advice to staff and members. 295 Council employees have attended and completed level 2 safeguarding training since October 2018 with a similar number scheduled for next year. Over the past 12 months, 27 individual cases of concern relating to neglect, psychological abuse and homelessness affecting children were raised to our partners in Children Services. In doing so, this enabled children and families to access services provided by this Council and our partners.*

*In 2012 the Council took on the additional responsibilities for delivering the Supporting Families programme, assisting vulnerable and 'at risk' families who reside in the New Forest District area. Since commencing this programme, officers of the Council have worked with over 700 children and families, acting in the best interests of the child, getting them back into education, assisting parents with obtaining employment, helping to break the generational dependence on the welfare system.*

*We will continue to take our Corporate Parenting responsibilities very seriously and recognise that every child in our community, including care leavers deserve our support and positive action to access the same opportunities and fulfil their ambitions.*

*I have asked the Chief Executive to arrange a training session to ensure that all Members fully understand and are aware of their Corporate Parenting responsibilities.*