

Meeting on 20th October 2021

Agenda Item No 8

Questions by Members to Full Council under Procedure rule 9.2

Question 1: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Finance from Councillor Paul Millar

To ask the Portfolio Holder for Finance, what was the total cost the Council has paid to

- (a) private landlords and
- (b) private B&B owners and hoteliers,

to fulfil our legal duty to provide emergency temporary accommodation to homeless families in line with our statutory duties in the financial year 2020-21.

Answer:

Total expenditure for the financial year 2020-21 was £400,977.13. Unfortunately these costs are not broken down by type a) or b) in the ledger.

Question 2: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Finance from Councillor Paul Millar

To ask the Portfolio Holder for Finance, what has the total cost in this financial year to date the Council has paid to (a) private landlords and (b) private B&B owners and hoteliers, to fulfil our legal duty to provide emergency temporary accommodation to homeless families in line with our statutory duties in the financial year 2020-21.

Answer:

Total expenditure covering period 1 – 6 Financial year 2021/22 is £155,396.72. Unfortunately these costs are not broken down by type a) or b) in the ledger.

Question 3: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes & Communities from Councillor Paul Millar

To ask the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes & Communities, what is the total number of private landlords, B&B owners and hoteliers that the Council works with and pays in order to discharge our duties to provide emergency accommodation.

Answer:

Over the past 12 months (up to 30th September 2021) 18 different suppliers of emergency accommodation have been used.

Question 4: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes & Communities from Councillor Paul Millar

To ask the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes & Communities, how many units of temporary accommodation does the Council own.

Answer:

The Council uses accommodation in our own housing stock if suitable and available at the time of need, 8 properties are currently being used this way including one specifically set up as a place of safety for victims of domestic abuse. In addition there is an 8 bedroom HMO property specifically for use as temporary accommodation.

Question 5: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes & Communities from Councillor Paul Millar

To ask the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes & Communities how many people living in the District are currently residing in temporary accommodation

Answer:

As of 15.10.21 a total of 41 households are in temporary accommodation, 16 of which are spot purchase arrangements (ie holiday lets/B&B's)

Question 6: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes & Communities from Cllr Paul Millar

To ask the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes & Communities, of the number of people currently placed by the Council in temporary accommodation, which towns/villages within the District live prior to contacting the Council about their homelessness situation.

Answer:

This information is not collected or reported on, mainly due to the fact that temporary accommodation is provided depending on overriding factors including the support needs of the applicant and their circumstances. For example, people needing to flee domestic abuse or threats of violence will not be accommodated in the town they are

fleeing from. Availability is also a key factor, as all spot purchase accommodation is in great demand, especially over holiday periods.

Question 7: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes & Communities from Cllr Paul Millar

To ask the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes & Communities, how many people in the last two years have had their stay in emergency accommodation ended by the Council without finding or being offered permanent accommodation within the District

Answer:

We have records for the last 19 months, from March 2020 to the end of September 2021, and within that period 259 households have been provided with emergency accommodation. This includes some repeat placements. Emergency accommodation has been ended without the council providing additional accommodation on 34 occasions, this again includes some repeat placements, although under such circumstances efforts will still be made to ensure accommodation is secured in cases where applicants engage. 12 of these cases involve applicants who failed to stay at the emergency accommodation placements that had been provided.

Question 8: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes & Communities from Cllr Paul Millar

To ask the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes & Communities, how many local residents of the District have been refused emergency accommodation on the basis that they were not considered a 'priority need' under the Housing Act in the last two years.

Answer:

There have been 37 cases where a relief duty has been triggered but emergency accommodation has not been offered as there has been no reason to believe that the applicant was considered to be in priority need under homelessness legislation. In such cases, assistance will still be provided in attempting to provide accommodation for them, depending on their circumstances ie supported accommodation or accommodation in the private sector. The Council would still owe the applicants a relief duty and as such would continue to work with them to find a positive outcome.

Question 9: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes & Communities from Cllr Paul Millar

To ask the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes & Communities, when did she last convene a meeting of the Gypsies and Travellers Forum, and will a subsequent meeting be arranged?

Answer:

The last meeting (which was also the first) of the East Devon Gypsy and Traveller Forum was held on 26 February 2020. This meeting was extremely well received and we had intended to meet again in April 2020. Unfortunately this was delayed due to the first lockdown and we have been unable to hold a further face-to-face meeting during the pandemic. Accessibility limitations (in terms of technology and/or user ability) have made it impractical to hold a remote meeting. We envisage relaunching the Forum in the New Year.

We have however worked extremely closely to meet the needs of Gypsies and Travellers, many of whom we identified at a very early stage as being extremely vulnerable. We issued guidance to assist with Gypsies and Travellers needing to self-isolate whilst travelling and a protocol to ensure that they were safe during this time. In addition, educational material relating to COVID, and other, vaccination programmes has been circulated by hand to the sites where Gypsies and Travellers are living and they have been encouraged to participate.

Multi-authority Officer Forum meetings were held very regularly during 2020 to ensure that a consistent, and tolerant, approach was taken to Gypsy and Traveller matters. Working with Streetscene, Housing and Environmental Health we ensured that drinking water supplies were available in Exmouth and Axminster for those whose access to off-site water provision was cut-off at the beginning of the first lockdown. Individual site visits have been regularly undertaken and funding has been secured for further health advice and education for East Devon Gypsies and Travellers.

Question 10: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Council & Corporate Coordination from Cllr Paul Millar

To ask the Portfolio Holder for Council & Corporate Coordination, what is his policy on the outsourcing of public services which offer social value to residents to private companies motivated by profit?

Answer:

My personal position on outsourcing is that it is not generally my preferred way for services to be delivered.

The Council has not previously established a formal policy in the sense indicated by this question but has looked at services on a case by case basis. The preference has always been to retain services in house where this has been shown to be viable. The best example I can give is our Housing service where we remain a Council proud to still be a landlord and to provide an excellent service for our tenants. In other areas, for example refuse and recycling and also leisure services, the Council has chosen to enter into long term strategic partnerships. The reasons for this have been partly financial but also because it reflected the prevailing political philosophy of national Government at the time (whether Conservative or Labour) through Compulsory Competitive tendering or the Best Value regime. In either case I think it has been shown that we deliver an award winning service that matters and which is valued by our residents.

For information the Chair of the Personnel Committee and I have already asked that as part of that Committee's Forward Plan we include discussion about how we

deliver our services, not least because the labour market appears to going through a challenging time.

Question 11: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Leader of the Council from Cllr Phil Twiss

When will all EDDC meetings resume fully in person, consultative meetings, delegating decisions to Officers end, and members of the Council resume the democratic decision making process?

Answer:

I thank Cllr Twiss for this question. His question might have been more appropriately addressed to the Chair of the Council, who has led on this matter with maximum consultation seeking the widest consensus, and as this was a non-political matter it was decided by the whole council. Cllr Twiss will know that I wholly absented myself from the devising of the motion of 26th July 2021, as was appropriate and remains so in the future. However, I am happy to assist Cllr's Twiss's understanding of that extraordinary meeting, although of course the minutes are in the public domain.

That meeting followed his party's refusal (unlike all other political groups) to agree when the Chair courteously sought consensus last July that many key meetings eg Planning and Cabinet continue to be held in person at Blackdown House with wider member attendance via zoom. These had been working well for months, and members were comfortable that up to 20 people could meet safely and with social distance in the council chamber.

Therefore, effectively at his party's instigation, there was an impasse, and a gathering of Council was required at Westpoint on 26th July to try to find a way forward. Cllr Twiss will recall that, somewhat ironically, 10 Conservatives did not then manage to attend that one meeting in person, nearly half his group. Cllr Twiss himself was not present.

Nevertheless, members who were parents of young children, younger members with just one job, and members such as myself in the clinically extremely vulnerable group did manage to attend.

To remind Cllr Twiss, Council resolved that our meetings would for a short period be on a consultative basis, debated under normal terms with full rigour, and that the actual decision making would be delegated to officers until 23.59 on 17th January 2021. The barely half of Conservative members who did attend on 26th July put a proposal to review the decision every two months or when the R Rate reached a certain point, but the majority of members present did not accept this and the proposal was rejected.

So, the current position is that the resumption will be from 18th January unless the Council recommends to extend the arrangements. In a full council context, my own vote is just 1/60th of the total, but if it is of any interest, I of course personally favour

the soonest resumption of meetings in person when it is in the best interests of community, employee and member health to do so.

To the best of my knowledge this system has worked seamlessly since then, and with so many people catching Covid-19 even with two vaccinations, and the recent acceleration of infections, the decision of Council has been fully legitimised by events. Yesterday there was a daily infection rate nationally of 45,140, equivalent to around the 18th December last year moments before lockdown Christmas. There are repeated warnings of a flu epidemic, and I would remind Cllr Twiss that Stay Safe and Protect the NHS remains for the majority of our council the overwhelming priority.

For the very few members who have had IT connectivity issues I would politely advise that, as I have done in the past, they come to Blackdown House where they may have a fully connected room to themselves, and I am sure Democratic Services would assist with this simple exercise.

Of course, whether any resumption would be face to face or virtually is yet to be determined but sadly there does not appear to be any sign of the Government legislating to permit virtual meetings as an option at this time. This should be a matter of great regret that the party in power are simply not engaging with this subject to assist local government, as if virtual meetings had not been invented.