

Full Council – 26 April 2017

Councillor questions:

1. From Councillor Mrs Mary Lawes to Councillor David Monk, Leader of Shepway District Council

It is known that all or some of the Cabinet members have attended meetings about Princes Parade project, which the public were not allowed to attend.

Can you please provide a full list of all meetings since 1 January 2016, where one or more Cabinet members were present and the Princes Parade project was discussed? This should include meetings of the Princes Parade advisor group, the Princes Parade working group and any informal Cabinet meeting. And where can I or the public find these minutes?

ANSWER:

The dates of the Princes Parade Advisory Panel and Princes Parade Working Group meetings are set out below:

Princes Parade Advisory Panel

11th February 2016
23rd March 2016
30th June 2016
16th August 2016
18th October 2016
6th March 2017

Princes Parade Working Group

15th November 2016
11th January 2017

Additional portfolio holder briefings have been given by officers to Cllr Godfrey, as chair of the WG, on a regular basis". No records of these meetings are kept. Similarly there are no records of informal meetings of Cabinet members. It is not a formal meeting of the Council and therefore it is not necessary for agendas or minutes to be taken or to be published.

The minutes that are available to Councillors and the public (Princes Parade Working Group) can be accessed via Modgov.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Were figures and costs discussed at the meetings of the Advisory Panel?

ANSWER:

Probably.

2. From Councillor Mrs Mary Lawes to Councillor Alan Ewart-James, Cabinet Member for Housing

How many local residents have been made homeless, b&b in the last 2 years, while

others from London and elsewhere have been housed in the district? What is this Council doing to ensure that all residents from Shepway are not made homeless? And will this Council guarantee first choice for all social and privately rented housing within the district goes to local residents?

ANSWER:

Households present to the Council as homeless, asking us to assess their housing needs and whether they are eligible for social housing. Over the past two years, the council has placed over 500 households in B&B.

Households are often made homeless as a result of their tenancy agreements coming to an end, parents or family unable to continue to provide them with accommodation, partner disputes, rent arrears, anti social behaviour, a growing family unsuitable for their existing accommodation. Where possible, the Council's Preventions Officers will work with tenants and their landlords to negotiate an extension of their contract, pay off rent arrears etc. However, this is not always possible, particularly where a tenant has ignored the terms of their tenancy agreement.

The Housing Allocations Policy, which was presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in April 2017, gives more clarity to social housing applicants, stating that priority will be given to only those people with a local connection and a housing need will be permitted to join the Shepway Housing List.

Councils do not have any legislative powers to decide who can and can't be placed in private rented accommodation per se; this is the discretion of the private landlord as a private business.

However, we do regularly contact landlords to find out if they have available accommodation to place those individuals that present as homeless into private rented accommodation. However, as Local Housing Allowance has been set (by Central Government) at £500.01 per month in Shepway, there are very few rental properties available at such a low rent in the district, which often means the Council has to place people in B&B, whilst their homeless application is assessed or until an affordable property can be secured for them. Individuals are also able to bid on social housing properties on Kent Homechoice and contact private landlords directly.

However, Shepway District Council has established a joint partnership with Ashford Borough Council to provide a Social Lettings Agency, which supports local landlords in managing their properties at the Local Housing Allowance Rate and with the Council receiving nomination rights.

A growing issue for Kent authorities is the increase in the placement of homeless families in Kent by London Boroughs. We do not have access to precise data on the number of families placed in Kent, because London Boroughs do not always notify the relevant Authority when they place families, but it is clear that numbers are rising. The transfer of homeless households from London into Kent impacts the local accommodation market (in terms of cost) and the availability of housing for local district and boroughs. With much higher temporary housing budgets, London Boroughs are able to significantly outbid local areas, raising local temporary accommodation prices and causing a ripple effect as local homeless families then also have to be housed further afield. Helen Grant MP is due to meet with Housing & Planning Minister, Gavin Barwell, on behalf of Kent MPs, to make representations and raise the highlighted concerns being discussed across Kent.

3. From Councillor Mrs Carol Sacre to Councillor David Monk, Leader of the Council

Who owns and is responsible for the public toilets (which have been closed for some considerable time), located in Folkestone bus station? I have not been given a conclusive response from those parties I felt would have the answer.

ANSWER:

The toilets are owned and are the responsibility of Bouverie Place Shopping Centre. The Council is not responsible for the toilets. The Head of Commercial and Technical Services has previously provided contact details for the centre manager and will supply those details again to Cllr Mrs Sacre this week.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

Is it Shepway District Council's responsibility to repair and redecorate the toilets, to enable them to be reopened?

ANSWER:

Shepway District Council do not own the toilets, and the owners have a right to repair or not repair as they see fit.