

Council – 29 January 2020

Public Questions

1. From Mr Rylands to Councillor David Godfrey, Cabinet Member for Housing, Transport and Special Projects

How much money has been recovered from P & R Installation Company Ltd or its parent Company Bilby Plc for the overcharging to Folkestone & Hythe District Council, bearing in mind that there appeared to be a pattern of charging which was a systemic fraud by P & R?

AS MR RYLANDS WAS NOT PRESENT IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, THIS QUESTION FELL.

2. From Dr Burrell to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

Could the Leader please advise which part of the District Council instructed the barrister to act on its behalf to defend the current Judicial Review claim for Princes Parade? Was this the Council's Head of Planning or was it the Council in its role as Land Owner/Developer?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question. The Chief Planning Officer instructed the Legal Department to defend the Judicial Review claim in respect of Princes Parade.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Are you comfortable that the Chinese Wall principle is not being applied to the Princes Parade Project?

ANSWER:

We take great pains to make sure the Chinese Wall is operated at all times.

3. From Mrs Lawes to Councillor David Godfrey, Cabinet Member for Housing, Transport and Special Projects

Numbers are increasing of Houses in Multi Occupation or HMO's. This type of housing is of poor quality with shared kitchen and other facilities. These types of housing create overcrowding, noise nuisance to neighbours and brings an area down. There is no proof that this type of housing is needed in Folkestone.

Why is this council allowing so many Housing in Multi Occupation or HMO's to be licensed and approved in Folkestone?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question Cllr Mrs Lawes.

Your question seems to imply that all people in HMOs are antisocial which I am sure is not your intention.

When I was in my early 20s I was happy to share accommodation in order to make it affordable. About 22 years later one of my sons, whilst at Uni in Canterbury shared a home quite happily and jump forward to today where I have a granddaughter recently graduated who continues to share accommodation. Friendships were formed and whilst the exuberance of youth may create some noise disturbance from time to time, I would not agree that all HMOs create problems.

HMO licensing is a mandatory scheme set down by central government and all LAs have a duty to license HMOs which are occupied by five or more people who form two or more households and are sharing facilities such as bathrooms and /or kitchens. The purpose of licensing is to ensure that the properties are not overcrowded and there are clauses within the licence that the licence holder must adhere to regarding dealing with anti-social behaviour and general management of the property.

If members have concerns about specific properties where antisocial behaviour, poor condition or overcrowding is evident, please report these to the PSH team and we will investigate and enforce licence conditions where necessary. Or if we discover that they are not licensed when they should be, we can take appropriate action.

There is definitely a need for this type of accommodation in the district as there are lots of single people who cannot afford to rent a one bedroom flat or a house and therefore opt for sharing, which is more cost effective. There are many examples of good quality accommodation amongst our licensed HMOs and any properties found to be hazardous are dealt with through the Housing Act 2004 and working with the licence holder to improve them.

There has only been a slight increase in the number of licensed HMOs since 2018 due to the change in legislation which widened the criteria for an HMO to be licensable (in essence the government took away the "3 storeys" part of the criteria so that a property is licensable regardless of how many storeys high it is). In 2018 we had 7 new applications and in 2019 we had 6 new applications, however these were offset by 5 properties in 2018 and 4 in 2019 that no longer operate as HMOs and thus their licences were not renewed.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Is it not a reality that not only is this Council not doing anything to improve deprivation in the district, but is increasing deprivation with these HMO's? In fact, doesn't this let the council off the hook from delivering quality homes for people?

ANSWER:

Absolutely not, I've made it quite clear why we need HMO's and we are quite happy to support properly run HMO's. We just announced that we are going to increase our new build of council houses from 300 to 1200 over the next few years, and only yesterday the government announced more funding to help homeless people, and some of that will come our way, so I don't think we can be accused of not doing enough.