

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Council Meeting – 22nd October 2015

Question 1 from Mr Webb to the Executive Councilor for Housing, Planning and Regulatory Services

Question

If the recommendation is 50% of Southend homes to be affordable but Southend Council policy is only 20% of homes on developments 10 to 49 to be affordable. Increases to 30% for developments of more than 50. Does the portfolio holder think the Council policy will make an impact in the shortage of homes over the next 20 years whilst giving homes to residents outside Southend?

Answer

I'm unsure of where the 50% has been quoted from but the Core Strategy target to which the question refers to is in Policy CP8 Housing. The figure is 20% for proposals of 10 – 49 dwellings and 30% for proposals of 50 or more dwellings.

The Core Strategy was found sound at examination by an independent planning inspector. She accepted, from the evidence provided during the examination, that this figure was reasonable.

Of course there are other factors that influence delivery of housing such as the prevailing economic climate and Government policy.

The affordable housing policy in the Core Strategy will be reviewed as part of the scheduled local plan review as detailed in the Local Development Scheme, which is available on the Council's website, this will provide the opportunity to review the percentage figure and consider new evidence as well as changes to Government legislation and policy.

Question 2 from Mr Webb to the Executive Councillor for Community and Organisational Development

Question

The Assistant Chief Constable wrote to Essex Council's in August 2015 to tell them the force would no longer be able to deal with most incidents of anti-social behaviour, with the responsibility falling to the Council. Does the portfolio holder agree with this statement and what agencies, powers will the Council use to tackle antisocial crime on their own in Southend?

Answer

The Police have advised that the recent incident in Eastwood, where a man suffered knife injuries in Mansell Close, was not linked to anti-social behaviour, so should not be used as a reference point in relation to the consequences of police taking a different approach to calls for low-level anti-social behaviour.

The change to the Police's approach to low-level incidents must be framed by the significant cuts to policing and the changes to local policing that were widely reported in the media on Tuesday 6th October. Essex Police is quite simply unable to do everything for everyone when required to save £63 million over the next 5 years.

The changed approach to tackling anti-social behaviour should not be interpreted as a withdrawal from that area of business. The Police will be supported by data provided by Police headquarters, to identify repeat and vulnerable victims and will continue to work with partners to identify those situations where there is potential for serious harm, to people and communities. I have some reservations about the way that the announcement on ASB was handled by the Police, which I intend to follow up with the PCC and Chief Constable, as mentioned in my Police & Crime Panel report.

As has been the case in relation to recent problems in Sherwood Way, we will continue to work in partnership with the Police to utilise the full range of powers available to us in tackling anti-social behaviour wherever we can.

Question from Mr Thomas to the Executive Councillor for Health & Adult Social Care

Question

Does the cabinet holder agree that there is a need for a dual diagnosis worker here in Southend to plug a gap and to bring us in line with the rest of Essex and does he support my campaign for Southend to have one?

Answer

Dual diagnosis and the challenges it presents has been the subject of many of my own enquiries. I have personally championed the need for a full review of the mental health needs of the local population and a review of the current service provision. I would not want to pre-empt a study that we have invested in.

The Health and Well-being Board for Southend-on-Sea has recognised the importance of mental health and a number of key pieces of work are underway. This work includes an in depth mental health needs assessment which has been commissioned by the Council to gain an understanding of the number of people with a mental health problem in Southend, which will also look at those with a dual diagnosis.

Locally the Clinical Commissioning Group has just held a well-attended mental health summit on crisis care.

In addition all seven Essex Clinical Commissioning Groups with Essex County Council, Thurrock Council and Southend-on-Sea Borough Council, together with the mental health service providers have been involved in a strategic review of mental health services across Essex.

We have also reviewed the mental health and wellbeing of children in our area along with Essex and Thurrock. We will also be looking further at prevention strategies and recovery plans.

The health system in Southend will be discussing all of this information about mental health and mental health services in early December, and a fully connected strategy will start to be put in place in 2016.

These pieces of work will identify the key issues relating to people with a dual diagnosis, and the services available. Once the findings of this work are understood we will be better informed about the needs of people with a dual diagnosis and what further support is required.

We must remember that we are operating in an environment which means the Council needs to cut its expenditure by £32m over the next three years, the hospital and our local CCG also have financial challenges. Nevertheless, mental health has never been higher on the agenda than it is now.