

Chichester District Council

Cabinet

6 June 2023

Public Questions and Answers Sheet

Question from Joseph O'Sullivan:

What are the Council doing about the growing housing crisis in the local private rented sector?

Rents are increasing but the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) is frozen at 2019 levels.

In the year up to March 2023 there were only 5 properties in this area advertised with Rightmove where the rent was covered by LHA.

Freezing LHA will lead to more rent arrears, evictions and homelessness.

Answer from Cllr Betts:

Thank you for your question. I agree with you this is a real problem not only for Chichester but nationally.

The government's Renters Reform Bill is currently in development but unfortunately makes no reference to rent setting

Local Housing Allowance rates are set by the Valuation Agency Office (VOA). LHA rates are reviewed annually by them but do not necessarily increase annually and as you rightly say have been frozen since 2019. I can confirm that private rent levels are not regulated, and landlords can choose to charge whatever amount of rent they decide. It is also important for me to emphasise that as a local authority, whilst we have no control over this, we do understand the enormity of this issue.

As such we are committed to the delivery of affordable housing and are on track to have delivered 1,000 affordable homes by 2025 over the life of our Housing Strategy. We also provide funding to support Community Land Trusts who can deliver affordable housing for local people. As a local authority we provide support to residents moving through rent in advance and deposit schemes. We also administer a Discretionary Housing Payment scheme to support residents in the short-term with rent shortfalls. Whilst Discretionary Housing Payments cannot be long-term, we do support residents as much as we can, and the Council put an additional £100,000 in 2023/24 to support the budget provided to us by the Department of Work & Pensions.

Question from Tom Broughton:

The current Climate Emergency Action Plan is unlikely to meet its objectives of "10% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions year-on-year until 2025", excepting the extraordinary consequence of the COVID lockdown. Will the action plan be

reviewed, including a comprehensive engagement with the population of the Chichester District?

Also, will a Local Area Energy Plan be developed for the Chichester District?

Answer from Cllr Brown:

Thank you Tom, for your question. It is an enormous challenge and the short and plain-speaking answer is that I agree with you that we are not on course to meet the targets within the action plan – certainly at least as far as the area-wide target goes. But yes, the action plan will be reviewed and yes, we need greater engagement with the population of the District.

We are a new Cabinet and a new Council, so we will be looking at our options for addressing the Climate Emergency. We will look at how our action plan can help us as an organisation and all of us in the district reduce our carbon emissions and work toward a net zero future as rapidly as possible. We recognise how important it is to get everyone - residents, businesses, parish councils and other community organisations working together to fight climate change.

There are a number of ways we might do this effectively, each with their own pros and cons, so I do not think we can commit to a specific approach today, but it is vital that we do this and vital that we get it right.

I personally am not – yet – very familiar with Local Area Energy Plans, but they look very interesting and we will consider the merits of putting time and money into facilitating one. We would want to see how it might meet the needs of the businesses and other public sector organisations who would deliver the plan alongside us. I suspect you are already aware, but I should flag up the constrained capacity of the national grid to accept new connections for larger scale energy generators in this area, over the short to medium term, which could be a major factor in weighing up the effectiveness of such a Plan. Thank you for suggesting it as a way forward – I really appreciate it and will study it further.