

People Scrutiny Committee – 20 July 2020

Agenda item 4 - Public Participation

Questions from Karen James

- 1) Why did the Council not seek advice from local Police when deciding to place so many problematic, drug dealers, those with criminal behaviour together? Did the Council fail to understand that housing these individuals together would be a massive issue and the Police may have warned against certain individuals being housed together.**
- 2) Why has the Council not taken a proactive stance and placed a closure notice on hotels when it has shown to be the cause of major antisocial behaviour?**

Response from the Corporate Director for Housing

- 1)** In replying to this question it is important to provide the wider context regarding the housing of rough sleepers and homeless households during the Covid-19 pandemic, as this response will be seen by members of the public who may not be aware of the situation. As part of the response to the covid-19 pandemic the government required councils to take urgent action to accommodate homeless people as they would otherwise be at particular risk of Covid-19.

On the 26th March Dorset Council along with all other local authorities in England were e-mailed by Dame Louise Casey with the heading “Everyone In” asking housing teams to focus on getting every rough sleeper an offer of somewhere they can stay safely by the weekend of the 29th March.

At the same time the government was advising people to stay at home, and told providers of holiday accommodation that they must close. The guidance was later revised in the same week allowing exceptions for B&B's, hotels and caravan parks to remain open if they were accommodating key workers or homeless persons. However, by this point many smaller guest houses and hotels had closed and furloughed their staff. The Council approached many businesses in Dorset asking for their support in accommodating rough sleepers as well as an increasing number of homeless persons, who in the main were in shared accommodation and were being asked to leave their accommodation for a number of reasons. Only a small number of hotels were prepared to support the Council in providing accommodation in a very short timescale.

Each person that was placed in accommodation had a suitably assessment form completed by a housing officer that asks a number of key questions about the individual, their vulnerability and support

needs. All rough sleepers who were placed had a support worker allocated to them. The Council has worked closely with the Police and other partners such as the probation service, community safety, homelessness support charities, REACH drug and alcohol support and the health services throughout this pandemic and shared information on all those accommodated. On the 7 April the 1st of what continues to be a weekly meeting with all the partners took place. At these meetings intelligence is shared about specific individuals that were and are supported by the Council through accommodation and if specific action was required by any agency, that has been followed up.

- 2) The Council is aware that the anti-social behaviour caused by a small number of people accommodated in the Seafront hotels experienced by local residents over recent weeks has been very upsetting and difficult. The Council has worked closely with the Police and Probation Service through weekly meetings to identify the key perpetrators of ASB and take the appropriate action and has taken a proactive stance to reduce the levels of ASB.

On 26 March 2020 Luke Hall MP, Minister for Local Government and Homelessness wrote to local leaders thanking us for the continuing work in response to the COVID-19 crisis. He emphasised the unprecedented scale of the challenge we all faced and our joint responsibility to safeguard as many homeless people as we can from COVID-19. He wrote that our strategy must be to bring in those on the streets to protect their health and stop wider transmission of Covid-19.

For the Council then to have taken steps to attempt to close hotels or to encourage the police to use their powers would have risked making residents homeless and would have run counter to the requirement to take homeless people off the streets.

Instead of closure we have, as a result of the ongoing partnership working, been able to achieve a number of key outcomes which are as follows;

- The rehousing of several key ASB perpetrators outside of the Weymouth area.
- Provision of security services at the hotel
- The discharging of statutory homeless duties by the Council to those individuals confirmed causing ASB and the individuals being asked to leave the premises
- Several arrests for public order offences and breaches of Section 35 dispersal notices.
- A male arrested for breach of court conditions and remanded to prison.
- A female arrested for breach of Criminal Behaviour Order (CBO) and remanded to prison.
- A significant county line disrupted for dealing drugs in the area and reports are that drug availability is low.

- Numerous drug possession and supply offences detected including a male that was caught dealing drugs as a direct result of information provided to police from local residents.
- 8 individuals in the last 2 weeks have been subject to Community Protection Notice (CPN) / Community Protection Warnings (CPW) and 3 individuals pending CBO's. This will restrict the movement of these individuals

It should be noted that of 8 key individuals of interest to the Police at the present moment in time only 1 is being accommodated by the Council in the Seafront Hotel and a warning has been issued by the Housing Service about his behaviour in relation to his housing application. The Police have advised that levels of ASB in the vicinity of the hotel have improved over the past few weeks and levels of ASB currently are lower compared to this time last year.

Questions from Cllr Ken Whatley

- 1) **Why have Dorset Council not taken any action regarding the breaches by the landlady not controlling the behaviour of her guests. I.e. noise, outside drinking, drug dealing and sexual acts.**
- 2) **Is it true Dorset Council are paying to have rooms restored at the council tax payer's expense?**

Response from the Corporate Director for Housing

- 1) Please see the answer already given regarding the steps taken by the council in partnership with others and the outcomes achieved.
- 2) It is unfortunate that small number of those accommodated have caused damage to their rooms. As part of the agreement with the landlady of the hotel the Council has agreed to repair any damage caused by someone accommodated at the premises. However, where possible the Council will seek to recover the costs from the individual causing the damage.