

Meeting of the Council

17 July 2014

Agenda Item No 9 - Written Questions from Councillors

Answers to the written questions received from Councillor Dean

A1 There is no “affordable housing scheme” for Lewes to determine the cost of renting accommodation. The cost of each affordable dwelling is set by the relevant registered housing provider, usually at the point the homes are built, and in line with the financial viability of the scheme and Government policy.

Affordable homes for rent can be any of three different tenure types:

1. Social rent, used historically for Council housing tenancies and is approximately 40% of market rent levels. Registered housing providers no longer build new homes for social rent, as it conflicts with national housing policy set by the Homes and Communities Agency. The typical cost of a 1-bedroom flat at social rent in Lewes is £65 per week.
2. Affordable rent, which can be set by the housing provider at any amount up to 80% of the local market rent (including service charges). There have been only a handful of homes re-let at affordable rent levels within Lewes and so it is not possible to provide a typical cost. The limited supply of private rented homes locally make it difficult to reliably estimate the likely cost, however a recent assessment carried out internally has shown that a 1-bedroom flat could cost £133 per week.
3. Intermediate rents, defined as a rent level above social rent levels but below market rent levels. We are not aware of any affordable homes being rented out at intermediate levels in Lewes.

A2 The ‘Living Wage’ is an hourly pay rate designed to reflect the average amount of money needed to meet the basic costs of living. It is promoted by the Living Wage Foundation to encourage employers to meet this level and is re-calculated each year by the Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University. The ‘Living Wage’ has been separated out between those in London and those in the rest of the UK to recognise the high cost of living in the Capital, but does not reflect the vast difference in housing costs between the South East and many others areas of the UK. The ‘Living Wage’ for the rest of the UK (that includes Lewes) is currently £7.65 per hour and an individual would earn £14,917 per year at this rate if they worked 37.5 hours per week, which is the standard calculation used by the Living Wage Foundation.

There is currently no standard maximum percentage of income that households should be able to afford to spend on their accommodation, but

Central Government agencies have in the past recommended using 25% of gross income for rented housing. Using the above assumptions, a single person with no children on a 'living wage' would be able to afford an 'Affordable Property' at social rent levels but would not be able to afford to pay 80% of the market rent through an affordable rent level. A couple without children who were both on a living wage would be able to get a home at affordable rent levels, using the above assumptions. This is an example of just two specific types of household, but there are a number of different factors which could change the affordability of housing for others.

A3(a) Cashless parking will be introduced in addition to the ticket machines and is not designed to replace them. Cashless parking will provide flexibility for motorists, but no-one will be forced to use it. This means that motorists will still be able to pay through usual means if they are unable to use a mobile phone for whatever reason

Pay on exit parking is a very expensive option to manage as it requires ANPR (automatic number plate recognition) for enforcement purposes and barriers which need to be repaired and maintained.

A3(b) There is no increase in the cost of car parking. Cashless parking is an optional service for motorists and there is no obligation to use it. Motorists can continue to pay cash using the machines which will remain in place. The fees that apply are:

1. Cost of the local call (where applicable)
2. 20p (+VAT) transaction charge to pay for parking
3. 20p (+VAT) transaction charge to extend a parking session (optional)
4. 10p (+VAT) transaction charge to receive a confirmation text (optional)
5. 10p (+VAT) transaction charge to receive a reminder that a parking session is about to expire (optional)

A4(a) Yes – it includes the spaces at County Hall which are available to the public to park.

A4(b) The figures were provided in the report to Cabinet in November 2012 and can be found at <http://cmis.lewes.gov.uk/CmisWebPublic/Binary.ashx?CmisDoc=1000511> item 9.4).

A5 £288,000 surplus in 2013/14. The surplus supports Council priorities as stated in the report to Scrutiny (26th June 2014) (<http://cmis.lewes.gov.uk/CmisWebPublic/Binary.ashx?CmisDoc=1000622> item 11), the report to Cabinet (7th July) (<http://cmis.lewes.gov.uk/CmisWebPublic/Binary.ashx?CmisDoc=1000623> item 9.3) and the report to Council on 17th July enclosed in the Council papers issued to members.

Closing remarks The Scrutiny Committee has already started the important work of looking into off street parking, both fees and service improvements, and officers will be reporting back later in the year to the committee, to provide more information as required. These reports are available to committee members, all councillors and the public.