

Agenda Item 12 - Written Questions received in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 12:

Written Question to the Leader from Councillor Saunders regarding Kendal Court, Railway Road, Newhaven

There has been much disquiet generated in the local community, following the suggestion that the property at Kendal Court, Railway Road, Newhaven is to be let to the Home Office, for the housing of Asylum Seekers.

I have contacted the owners and they have confirmed that negotiations are underway and contracts are soon to be agreed, to enable a lease to be finalised.

Back in May of this year and after the issues surrounding the arrangement the owners then had in place with Brighton and Hove City Council (BHCC).

I contacted the Head of Homes first, who had been dealing with BHCC and was aware of the issues the owners were having but advised that its facilities were not sufficient for Lewes District Council's needs. I understand from the property owners, that the Head of Homes First has not directly visited the site to verify its suitability.

I have asked the Director of Service Delivery (Tim Whelan) to advise me of figures on the immediate requirement for temporary housing and where we presently house those in immediate need. I am conscious that with the current financial situation globally and more important nationally, we are likely to see a sharp increase in families and individuals approaching the Council for emergency housing. It is a sad reflection on the current state of government finances following the Covid-19 Pandemic, as well as the fall out of the war in Ukraine and their subsequent effects on interest rates, fuel, transport costs, food and prices generally.

Whilst our District needs to play its part in the Government's responsibilities over immigration, we need to ensure that our citizens are prioritised and where possible, suitable and accessible accommodation is provided in our local area, to assist in ensuring those individuals and families can maintain close access to friends, family networks, employment and schooling.

My question to the Leader is as follows:

"As Leader, can you ask the Director of Service Delivery and his team to investigate further the property at Kendal Court to see if it can provide temporary housing. If does not meet the current criteria set by our Housing Needs Department, can it be considered if there is a way to make the site work better for our community and our most vulnerable families and individuals, as we enter a period of hardship and uncertainty. Can you ask Officers to consider working with the current owners, on any changes that can be undertaken, to bring the facilities up to the required standards, in readiness for an almost inevitable need?"