

Council – 17 January 2018

Public questions:

1. From Ms Davison to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

What is the outcome of the council's review into the SWEP (Severe Weather emergency protocol)?

ANSWER:

At this time Shepway District Council adheres to and often exceeds the national guidelines for the operation of the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP). A verified rough sleeper count took place in November 2017, with the outcome stating that there were 16 rough sleeper verified in Shepway some of whom were here for economic reasons. At the same time we are helping to fund bed spaces for 13 rough sleepers via the winter shelter here in Folkestone.

Bearing in mind the recent reports that there were higher numbers of rough sleepers in Folkestone than have been verified, we are looking at the possibility of a review of the SWEP Policy to see if we could ask our Rough Sleepers Outreach Worker who we fund via an organisation called Porchlight to see if we could implement a system of verifying rough sleepers in Shepway on an ongoing basis over the winter, which would help ensure local resources are best targeted toward local people in need of accommodation. This is currently still under consideration and discussion with Porchlight.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Is it acceptable, that in Mid-January, rough sleepers are suffering freezing nights, and have to wait for temperatures to fall below 0 degree for three nights running before SWEP will be activated?

ANSWER:

This is the current policy, until a review is completed.

2. From Mr Rylands to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

How many staff have reported bullying and/or sexual harassment for the period April 2014 - Dec 2017.

ANSWER:

'There are a number of routes whereby a report of this kind could have been raised.

Firstly an employee could raise a formal grievance either directly to HR or via their line manager at which point an internal review by an appropriate manager supported by a representative from HR would take place. This could lead to a disciplinary investigation and a potential hearing should it be decided that there was an allegation to be addressed.

Secondly a disciplinary investigation could be started straight away should the allegation be made directly rather than starting with the grievance process. This would be led by an independent manager supported by HR and if the allegations were felt to be substantiated a formal disciplinary hearing would be arranged to review the evidence and reach an outcome on the matter.

Finally, an individual has the option of raising this type of allegation via the Council's whistleblowing procedures. This could also then lead to a disciplinary investigation and a potential hearing.

Any report, whether it be a verbal or written account, of bullying or sexual harassment would be treated seriously by the council.

During the period in question, April 2014 to December 2017, no reports have been made through any of these channels.'

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

I have been informed by some ex members of staff, who are willing to waive their right to anonymity, that they had experienced sexual harassment. Would Shepway District Council support these ex-staff in their claims?

ANSWER (GIVEN BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE):

There has been no evidence provided to the Council of any sexual harassment. Without appropriate evidence, the Council would make no further comment.

3. From Mr Southgate to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

In respect of the Empty Dwelling Management Orders legislation, can the council please state how frequently it has used these powers in the last five years, which areas of Shepway have benefited and what it has done, or plans to do, with the empty properties?

Mr Southgate was not present at the meeting, so the question was therefore not presented to the Leader.

4. From Mr Deane to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

In the report from the 'public engagement' exercise on Otterpool Garden Town held across Shepway in December 2017 thirteen pages of clear and

genuine concerns and objections are listed, along with another 243 unlisted cards stating, "Why", "No to Otterpool Town" and plain "No". The further full round of consultations held in the Summer did not publish like data but all indications showed similar level of opposition. At the public meeting in Hythe later in the year there were three in favour of the development, whereas those against numbered well over 200. Cllr Monk then refused to participate further in the consultation process.

Given that the outline planning application will soon be published can he tell us what level of public rejection of the Otterpool scheme by the people of Shepway will be necessary before he accepts reasoned arguments, changes his mind, and abandons the project?

ANSWER:

The most recent public consultation exercise indicated good levels of support for the Otterpool Park project from parts of the community. I recognise that some people have concerns about the project and I am keen to work with people to help shape the development. However, the general position is that the Council will continue to promote the project to enable the provision of much needed good quality homes, new job opportunities in an environment worthy of a 21st Century Garden Town.