

RUGBY BOROUGH COUNCIL

QUESTION PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 10

COUNCIL – 12 JULY 2023

QUESTION G

Councillor Harrington to ask the Communities, Homes, Digital and Communities Portfolio Holder, Councillor Willis:

“How is the Rugby Borough Council addressing the decline in social housing, the prevailing cost-of-living crisis, and the growing mortgage burden? Is there a comprehensive strategy in place to effectively address these challenges and enhance housing availability.”

Councillor Willis, Communities, Homes, Digital and Communities Portfolio Holder, to reply as follows:

“Thank you for your question. I will address your points in the order that you raise them.

Firstly, I would like to suggest that we pick up a conversation so that I can better understand the specifics of your question about the ‘decline in social housing.’ Once I better understand what you are asking, I will only be too happy to provide you with an appropriate response.

In terms of cost-of-living issues, please be assured that there was a recent cross party scrutiny review Chaired by Madam Mayor Cllr O’Rourke, in respect of all things related to current cost of living issues and how the council was responding and would continue to do so. A report with recommendations was presented to the scrutiny committee on 30th January 2023 (agenda item 4), reflecting that the group had concluded that they were satisfied that *substantial reassurance* had been provided as to the broad range of activities happening and a robust action plan being in place. The group also confirmed that they were satisfied that addressing cost of living issues had been successfully integrated into business-as-usual working within the council. That same scrutiny meeting also considered a report on work in progress to manage the impact of cost of living specifically in respect of children (item 5 on the agenda) and how this fits in with the work progressing on area action plans and broader work to tackle health and well-being inequalities.

In terms of the impact of increased mortgage costs, you will be aware that from 1 April 2023, the council has renewed its contract with the BRANCAB to provide support and advice to the residents of Rugby on a whole range of issues, including financial. I would reiterate that anyone that is worried that they are struggling with their mortgage payments, or are likely to struggle, should first contact their lender to see what support may be available to them. In addition, some householders may be eligible for government assistance via the *support for mortgage interest scheme*, which is publicised on the cost-of-living advice page on our website.

The Housing Strategy 2022-24 sets out a priority to *increase the affordable housing supply available to meet needs, through new supply or making most effective use of existing housing stock.*

We continue to work closely with Registered Provider partners to ensure that we retain an influence over their investment plans and in doing so that Rugby remains a place that they will continue to invest in. Combined with the work of the development control team, this positive and valued relationship has resulted in the successful delivery of hundreds of affordable homes in the borough over the last few years, not least at Houlton where Midland Heart secured 140 homes which were completed in the last 12 months. We are also excited to see that L&Q (London and Quadrant) a registered provider new to developing in Rugby are in the process of delivering 166 affordable homes on their first scheme at Ashlawn Road.

It will be of no surprise to Members that many Registered Providers are reviewing their investment plans in response to the decarbonisation agenda and recent industry concerns about disrepair, specifically around damp and mould. As a consequence, many RP's are refocusing on improvements to existing stock and in doing so rationalising their plans for new delivery.

The exciting news is that we, as a Council, continue to lead by example and continue to build and acquire new homes and in doing so attract investment from Homes England. The high-rise regeneration schemes are set to attract in excess of 300 new affordable homes. In recent weeks we have completed on delivering 12 brand new apartments at Platinum House and a further 9 on Mill Road. We continue to pursue further opportunities as they arise."