

RUGBY BOROUGH COUNCIL

QUESTION PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 10

COUNCIL – 21 JULY 2020

QUESTION A

Councillor Brader to ask the Leader of the Council (in the absence of the Communities and Homes Portfolio Holder, Councillor Mrs Crane):

“Would the portfolio holder for Communities and Homes update the council on the effect the coronavirus crisis has had on the number of council tenants in rent arrears and give assurance that tenants who have fallen behind on rent due to the crisis will not face losing their homes when the government’s ban on evictions comes to an end on August 23rd?”

Councillor Lowe (in the absence of Mrs Crane, Communities and Homes Portfolio Holder), to reply as follows:

“The Portfolio Holder for Communities and Homes is able to give assurance to those tenants in arrears who have fallen behind with their rent due to the crisis that they will not face losing their homes when the government’s ban on evictions come to an end and assures members that officers will work with those tenants in arrears by providing the tenants with the necessary support, advice and guidance until the rent arrears are cleared.

Only as a last resort do we ever seek to evict tenants from their homes. It is in the Council’s interest not to evict tenants unless absolutely necessary and where we have exhausted all other options, not only because those individuals/families are likely to present themselves as Homeless to our Community Support and Advice Team, who are already dealing with an unprecedented number of homeless cases due to the pandemic and who are working tirelessly to assist our most vulnerable, but also because of the added expense incurred when preparing properties for reletting which creates a further loss of income.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the Housing Services Team contacted all council tenants as part of a safe and well exercise. To date, 2% (79) tenants have told us that the pandemic has affected them financially and we are working with those tenants to ensure that they are able to access the means available to them so that they can pay their rent and entering into affordable payment arrangements with them where there are arrears. We would encourage any tenant facing financial hardship because of Covid-19 to contact the Housing Services Team as early as possible to access available support and advice.

The Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick MP made clear in the government’s announcement in March “at the end of the suspension period, landlords and tenants will be expected to work together to establish an affordable repayment plan, taking into account tenants’ individual circumstances”. It also announced that it would be

working with the courts to widen the 'pre-action protocol' on possession proceedings, landlords already have to satisfy the court that they conducted themselves and followed the steps set out within the protocol before commencing with proceedings. The Housing Sector welcomed the government's announcement and officers are very mindful of these difficult times, their main goal is to work collaboratively with tenants and to ensure that tenants are getting the support that they need to pay their rent.

It is also important for me to emphasise, it is inevitable that there will always be those tenants who despite our best efforts to work with and engage with them, will refuse to adhere to their terms and conditions of their tenancy, this could be a refusal to pay their rent or because of persistent and unacceptable anti-social behaviour which in turn has a negative impact not only on neighbours but the wider community and where there is no alternative or solution but to carry out an eviction.

Tenancy Sustainment Officers have during the crisis continued to contact tenants facing court action regardless of the reason why, to encourage those tenants to work with them to help them sustain and keep their tenancies. No officer wants to see anyone lose their home because of experiencing financial hardship since the outbreak of COVID-19. Eviction is and will always be the last resort for officers after all other options and alternatives have been explored."