

Council 24 May 2012 Written Questions

1. Councillor Johnson to the Executive Councillor for Housing

Can she please provide information on the following?

- a) The number of Cambridge families with children who are currently housed in emergency accommodation provided by the City Council as legally defined by the 1996 Housing Act;**
- b) How many of these families are housed in emergency accommodation outside the city boundaries of Cambridge;**
- c) What steps are to be undertaken by the City Council to ensure there will exist the ability to provide emergency accommodation to all Cambridge families with children within the city boundary?**

Response:

- a) There are 82 households in temporary accommodation as at 22nd May 2012. Numbers housed and the household profile varies on a daily basis but, in the last two years around 90% of households occupying temporary accommodation are families with dependent children.
- b) As at 22nd May 7 households with dependent children were temporarily housed in bed and breakfast accommodation in Peterborough
- c) The Council has taken some steps to address this already. Last year the council added 7 Cambridge-based units of emergency accommodation to our stock. These units were intended to reduce the need to seek emergency provision outside of the district and were intended as direct replacements for bed and breakfast accommodation outside of the city. However, movement through the temporary accommodation system has been stifled by a sharp decline in lettings through the Home-Link system in 2011-12. Lettings dropped by around 30% from 798 in 2010-11 to 558 in 2011-12. This is mainly due to lower numbers of new build completions.

At the same time the Council has sought to find alternative bed and breakfast suppliers in the city to allow for occasions when all of our existing temporary accommodation is full. Bed and breakfast establishments, which are used to discharge the Council's interim homelessness duties, need to meet a set of specific standards criteria as set out in the Homelessness Act 2002, Code of Guidance, Annex 17. In 2009 the Housing Options and Advice Team approached 14 bed and breakfast proprietors in the city to ask if they would like to provide a service to the Council in this area. None of the providers approached have been able or willing to provide a service for the Council. Aside from the need to meet Homelessness Code of Guidance standards, the main reasons why attracting Cambridge-based bed and breakfast proprietors is difficult are that many are small with good business and tourist trade and demand in the city seems to be high all year round.

2. Councillor Dryden to the Executive Councillor for Community Development and Health

Can he explain in detail, stage by stage, how his party (including any input from local Councillors) approved in March 2012 a Council grant for the publication and distribution in April 2012 during the Romsey and Petersfield council elections, of the first edition of the 'Mill Road Bridges' magazine' and how it was compiled and organised involving a council officer given that

- **one of the most prominent articles promoted the Liberal Democrat candidate Councillor Catherine Smart at the very time she was standing for election and was written by Kilian Bourke without any tag that he was Romsey County Councillor**
- **this magazine was distributed to homes and via businesses in her Romsey ward throughout April the month before the election that Councillor Catherine Smart stood in.**

Will he support a detailed Internal Audit investigation into what happened?

Response:

Mill Road Bridges is a recently formed community group whose aims are to create better links across the Mill Road railway bridge to bring residents, businesses and community groups together.

In February 2012 Mill Road Bridges applied for a Community Development Community Initiatives Grant of £1,500 as a contribution towards a programme of quarterly newsletters. The grant was awarded in March by officers under delegated powers which give officers delegated authority to award grants of up to a maximum of £2,000. The powers were delegated by the Executive Councillor for Community Development and Leisure in July 2003 (Ref: SU/CD&L/01). The decision to award the grant to Mill Road Bridges did not include input from any councillors. The Grant Agreement was signed by their treasurer, Julia Evans.

A Community Development Officer (CDO) based at Ross Street Community Centre has been giving some support to the group. In particular, in terms of planning community activities for the Olympic Torch Relay on 7th July where officers have been encouraging Mill Road Bridges to co-ordinate ideas and activities and help build local enthusiasm and excitement for the event. The CDO has also helped Mill Road Bridges through their many existing contacts to encourage groups and individuals to come forward and submit articles for the newsletter which is edited by a member of the community group. The intention is that the CDO will reduce their support as the group progresses and grows stronger.

Members of Mill Road Bridges were very keen to get the newsletter distributed in April because it promoted a number of meetings and activities in early May including planning meetings for the Olympic Torch relay. The Head of Community Development was made aware of this on 11th April and on the advice of the Council's Legal service he fed back to the group via the CDO that delivery should be completed as soon as possible because of the election.

Editorial and printing of the newsletter was arranged and carried out by the group. The CDO allocated £500 of their community budget to pay for distribution to approximately 5,000 properties in the Romsey and Petersfield areas with around 1,000 copies available to shops and other premises along Mill Road.

On the evening of 30th April the Head of Community Development was made aware that copies of the newsletter were still being distributed. The next morning the CDO contacted the distributor and told them to stop delivering any more until after the election. The CDO also visited shops and businesses along Mill Road to remove any newsletters that were on display.

The Director of Community Services and the Head of Community Development have agreed to review grant conditions to make sure instructions are clear when grants are awarded for community newsletters or publicity. If you feel that further precautions are required, they would be happy to meet with you. This would seem to be more appropriate than committing audit staff resources to an internal investigation.