

# COUNCIL

Monday 17 July 2017

## Agenda Item 6

### Questions from Members

#### Unanswered Questions – Responses sent subsequent to Meeting

**10. Question from Councillor Ms J Wassell to the Cabinet Member for Housing.**

How many empty houses have been subject to an Empty Dwelling Maintenance Order in the last year and do Councillors have a role in reporting these empty dwellings?

No empty homes have been subject to an Empty Dwelling Management Order by this Council.

The reporting of empty properties comes via scrutiny of the Council Tax database, requests from members of the public, Councillors and Officer observations. We welcome the reporting of void houses from any source.

This Authority has an effective Empty Homes Protocol which addresses long term void houses with the manpower and resources available.

**11. Question from Councillor M Knight to the Cabinet Member for Planning.**

I am interested in understanding of the role of our planning department in identifying wider issues connected to over development of residential properties in our district.

These issues may include modern slavery, exploitation and immigration contraventions.

Could you outline to what extent our planning department encounters these issues and how they respond to them in partnership with other agencies?

**Reply given by Councillor Mrs J Langley (Cabinet Member for Housing).**

Internal housing conditions are controlled through appropriate “Housing” rather than “Planning” legislation. When the planning enforcement team inspect a premises and find the living conditions to be well below what they would expect they would refer this matter the housing team in Environmental Services. There is a reciprocal arrangement where Environmental Services would advise Planning colleagues of suspected unauthorised structures.

Separately all staff across the Council receive training to recognise potential modern slavery and exploitation and would report any suspicions they have to the police service. We also work closely with the Police and immigration services in such cases.

If we find that we have concerns about the safety of a property, we will carry out an inspection under the health and safety rating system (HHSRS) with enforcement action taken if required, such as in the case Cllr Knight has been aware of.

**12. Question from Councillor M Knight to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Regeneration**

Across High Wycombe town, and quite possibly the District, there are commercial properties owned by Wycombe District Council which are run down and having a detrimental impact on local communities.

There has been much focus on major town centre regeneration in recent years.

Is it time for the Council to begin investing in some of these smaller pockets of property with a view to engaging in community regeneration?

Thank you for your question and acknowledgment of the continuing program of important regeneration work in High Wycombe town centre. The council only has ownership of very few commercial properties out of the town centre, all of which are let on long ground leases. The council previously divested a number of local, neighbourhood shops, for example in Totteridge and Castlefield as part of the Red Kite transfer.

In the case of Micklefield, your own ward, the Council's Estates team has sought periodically to engage with three tenants without success. One tenant was unwilling to sub-let the retail ground floor for uses involving alcohol or betting. The last proactive attempt to discuss potential redevelopment options took place between February and April this year. In light of the unsuccessful engagement if, as a local ward member, you are able to broker a meeting between the tenants and our estates team then that might be helpful.