

Council 20th June 2022

Item 6 refers

Questions submitted by Members

6.a QUESTION TO THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HOUSING AND WELLBEING

Submitted by Councillor Nunn

Question:

Can you provide me with an update on the situation within the Harborough District regarding sponsorship and ongoing support for Ukrainian people? Specifically, I would like to know the following information:

1. Numbers of those who have registered an interest to sponsor
2. Numbers of those who have applied for visas
3. Numbers of those who have already welcomed families/people into their homes.
4. How well we are meeting targets to complete home checks?
5. Have there been any homes who have not passed, if so, what were the reasons why and how are we supporting them to achieve the required standards?
6. What support are we offering to both sponsors and families/people going forward?
7. How many hours have been spent by officers completing home checks and supporting families?
8. Has funding been received from Leicestershire County Council? If not;
 - (i) When is it due?
 - (ii) How much are we expecting to date

Response

1. *456 people have registered on the government website to sponsor a Ukrainian/ family in Harborough District. (this number includes the families who have now matched with a family which is 103).*
2. *111 sponsors have matched with a family/individual and have applied for Visas to support Ukrainian families travelling to Harborough district, Which will equate to 307 Ukraine guests. 122 guests will be under the age of 18 years.*

3. *48 sponsors have guests arrived here in Harborough District as of the 06/06/2022 – that equates to 109 Ukrainian guests.*

4. *As of the 06/06/2022 - 92 property inspections have been completed - we have another 11 to do that came in today and just before the bank holiday. which will be completed over the coming week.*

5. *Only one property inspection was failed - but this was not due to the conditions of the property. More a communication error between the son and mother where he had suggested someone could live.*

6.
 - *Administrating the property inspection part of the process.*
 - *We have a SPOC - for all contact and liaison with sponsors -*
 - *We are supporting the families that have guests with information, offers of help/support*
 - *Supporting two families more intensively with possible rehosting arrangements.*
 - *Customer services have had 4 requests for food parcels -*
 - *Economic development - have run a job club in Harborough & support the Lutterworth job club that is monthly.*
 - *We are looking at hosting a sponsors and guest event in July to help with next steps such as housing.*
 - *We have been linking people to support groups, and officers have attended these groups.*
 - *Free membership to the Gyms*
 - *We are looking at what summer holiday support there is for children, to prepare them for the start of school in September. Could be open, to all children where English is there second language.*
 - *Have dedicated web pages for support on HDC website*
 - *Posters at local stations.*

7.
 - *The scheme started on the 06.04.2022 and this was when we received our first list for inspections. -*
 - *So far 78 hours has been given to just completing property inspections.*
 - *We have a dedicated SPOC as stated above, who on average is dedicating around 2 days a week. However, this is expected to increase as potential relationship breakdowns may occur and preventative services are aligned to reduce this.*

 - *We also have other officers who are contributing towards the Harborough District Council offer for the guests and sponsors and this is from a range of officers, Economic Development, Equality and Diversity Officer, Regulatory Service, Communications and Housing.*

8. *There are on-going discussions between the County and all of the districts on the spilt of the funding to ensure that all councils are re-imbursed for their work to date.*

- *No funding has been received from DLUHC at present.*
- *This is likely to be based on fixed costs and on the number of Ukraine guests each district has received.*

6.b QUESTION TO THE LEADER

Submitted by Councillor Knowles

Question:

On Wednesday March 2nd 2022 Members of this Authority who were attending the Audit and Standards and who were seated in the gallery in order to listen to the debate on Report 6 were ordered from the Chamber.

This when a Recommendation for Exclusion of All Members other than Members of the Audit and Standards Committee was carried by a majority not unanimous vote. I believe that exclusion of members in this way may be unprecedented or at the very least very exceptional.

Could the Leader tell me please, on how many occasions, since the formation of HDC, have members who are attending to hear a debate been excluded from the chamber in this way ?.

Response:

Specific records are not kept relating as to when and if this has occurred in the past. It can however be confirmed on this occasion legal advice was sought and due process was followed in accordance with the Council's Constitution prior to making the decision to exclude.

6.c QUESTION TO THE LEADER

Submitted by Councillor Graves

Question:

A Settlement Agreement, also known as a Compromise Agreement, is defined by the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) as:

Settlement agreements (previously known as compromise agreements) are legally binding contracts used to end employment on agreed terms that include the employee making binding promises not to sue the employer, in return for a payment.

The rules governing settlement agreements are contained in the Employment Rights Act 1996, especially section 203.

Employers and employees can try to reach a settlement (either before or after a tribunal claim has started) by:

- negotiating directly and entering into the agreement, although the employee will need legal advice to make that agreement legally binding.*
- agreeing to an Acas conciliated settlement*
- using a private mediator*
- using judicial mediation by an employment judge where tribunal proceedings have been issued.*

In the last 4 years from 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2022 Harborough District Council have entered into eleven separate Settlement Agreements as follows:
(Information obtained under Freedom of Information)

Four settlements were under £10,000

Two settlements were between £10,000 and £20,000

Three settlements were between £20,000 and £30,000

Two settlements were above £30,000

A prudent estimate for the total amount of money involved would be somewhere above £200,000 over the four-year period.

The average number of Settlement Agreements for all other Districts in Leicestershire – also including Rutland CC – during the same four year period is only four each.

For a small District Council, the number of Settlement Agreements appears to be around three times the average for the rest of Leicestershire.

What does the Council Leader think about this surprising and worrying information?

Response:

Firstly, it is disappointing that to obtain publicly available information, a fellow Councillor thinks it is necessary to make a Freedom of Information request to the Council where they are a member.

Secondly, Cllr Graves states that the Council has issued 11 Settlement Agreements at an estimated cost of £200,000; compared to an average of 4 at other Leicestershire local authorities – I wonder what their total cost was? An average of £18,000 per settlement to maintain good employee and employer relations feels fair and proportionate whilst the Council follows a progressive transformation programme.

However, as we all know settlement agreements are legal documents entered into by an employee and an employer respectively in order to end employment when both parties have agreed that a term of employment must come to an end. There are a multitude of reasons why it is appropriate to enter into a settlement agreement including for example when an employee leaves their employment due to either compulsory or voluntary redundancy or when the mutual trust and confidence in the relationship has broken down or even on compassionate grounds. However, no matter what the reason is, the use of settlement agreements are both appropriate and proportionate and used by all organisations. Such agreements are always subject to both parties having taken appropriate legal advice and the Council does reimburse the employee for the cost of their independent legal advice.. The reasons and terms of settlement agreements are confidential and cannot be disclosed.

All councillors need to remember that over the past 24 months the Council has undertaken a significant budget review, and this has resulted in some employees leaving the authority due to a number of reasons including redundancy. You are well aware that the Council is facing unrelenting pressure from increasing demand and inflationary cost increases that are impacting across all services and potential capital investments. To combat this, the Council continues its transformation programme that will introduce new and a more efficient technology infrastructure and will continue to review how its delivers both its day-to-day, corporate and strategic services – as members will have seen elsewhere on the agenda. What this may mean is that as the Council continues to review its delivery model, settlement agreements will remain an option to be used as necessary to ensure that we have the workforce that we need to deliver essential services.

6.d QUESTION TO THE LEADER

Submitted by Councillor Sarfas

Question:

The negative traffic impact on surrounding homes and residents from the potential of the huge quarry development at Misterton is raising major concerns in the wider community.

Does the Leader agree that this quarry with its huge negatives on the daily lives of the community should be vigorously opposed ?'

Response

Harborough District Council have recently been made aware of this potential proposal. It is our understanding that this is not yet a formal proposal but more in the form of an informal pre-application approach from the promoters to the Waste and Minerals authority, Leicestershire County Council. It would be the County Council

that would determine any planning application relating to this matter in their role as the Waste and Minerals Planning authority.

Harborough District Council would be consulted on any planning application submitted to the County Council for consideration and HDC would have the opportunity to submit comments on any proposal, should it get as far as being a planning application.

6.e QUESTION TO THE LEADER

Submitted by Councillor Dr Bremner

Question:

Can you confirm that Councillors who have moved from their original ward address when first elected, but remain living and/or working in the Harborough District are still able to claim allowances, including travel to/from official meetings; and would this also be the same for any member that for example was no longer living or working in Harborough District - would they still be able to claim travel costs from, for example: Surrey, a round trip of 200 miles ?

Response

Councillors who have moved from their original ward address when first elected, but remain living and/or working in the Harborough District are still able to claim allowances, including travel to/from official meetings.

As the Council's current Members Allowance Scheme does not currently cover circumstances where a Member is no longer living or working in Harborough District, a reasonable and prudent approach would be for that Member to claim a travel allowance calculated via their route from the border of the Harborough District to the location of the official meeting.

Preparation for a review of the Members Allowance Scheme is being undertaken in the next few months, which will be brought to Members post-2023 local elections.