

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

COUNCIL: 25 NOVEMBER 2020

QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER OR THE CHAIR OF A COMMITTEE SUBMITTED UNDER PART 4 COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES, PARAGRAPH 10.4 OF THE CONSTITUTION

Questions for the Leader

1. **Question from Councillor Hunt** “Can we do something to help those who are desperate for a food voucher to be able to get one from the Council? At present the front desks are closed and people are struggling to get vouchers.”

Leader’s response: “You are right Cllr Julie Hunt in drawing this to our attention as the number of people struggling financially is rising. In Devon as a whole one in eight people of working age – from 16 to 64 – are now on Universal Credit. In North Devon it is about one in seven or 14% and has doubled since March and the threat of homelessness, hunger and debt is very real for many people at this time. I know that you and the North Devon food banks have been doing a great job in responding to those in genuine need and the public have been generous in their donations of food. The challenge we have is that as many of our staff as possible are working from home rather than coming into their offices. Exactly what we will be able to do depends partly on what Tier we will be in from next week and whether we can open our front desks. We also have the problem that some of our staff are self-isolating because of Covid. We will look into what can be done and discuss it with you as a matter of urgency.”

2. **Question from Councillor Hunt** “What is happening about the homeless this winter as I am concerned about their safety during the cold weather? Last year we had ‘Safe sleep’. What are we replacing it with?”

Leader’s response: “Thank you for this question Cllr Julie Hunt. It is a very important one and the Housing Team is working on a variety of solutions as we are in a very unusual scenario this year. Dormitory type accommodation is virtually impossible this year because of the coronavirus situation and regulations. What we are working on includes the following : -

- a. Licensing Beaufort flats from North Devon Homes. This will provide eight units of accommodation for rough sleepers and will hopefully provide a stepping stone to move at least some on to supported accommodation.

- b. We have two self contained pods on the way and so with the Salvation Army one will have three available this winter.
- c. We are planning to lease a shared house property which will provide accommodation for several of those in need.
- d. We have secured two units of supported accommodation at Alabare Christian Care in Bideford.
- e. For our statutory demand we will be using Boyton House (the old women's refuge) in Barnstaple.
- f. A proposal to lease Victoria House from the Pickwell Foundation will be coming to committee shortly.

The Housing Team are conscious that demand is increasing and it isn't going to be easy monitoring all the provisions which we are putting in place but I can assure you that they are working extremely hard to make it all work during this difficult time."