

RUGBY BOROUGH COUNCIL

QUESTION PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 10

COUNCIL – 21 JULY 2020

QUESTION B

Councillor Ellis to ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor Lowe:

“Recently, Ashlawn School opened a Food Bank to support pupils living in poverty. Is the Leader of the Council aware of an increase in child poverty locally, and what does he think the Borough Council should be doing to combat this where it exists in the Borough?”

Councillor Lowe, Leader of the Council, to reply as follows:

“The efforts of Ashlawn School to assist more financially vulnerable households for the furlough period, with a temporary Foodbank are welcomed. We understand that they expect to close in September 2020, at the start of the new school year.

In 2018/19, 13% of children under 16 in Rugby were from relative low-income families. This was set against an average of 18% for Great Britain (source: DWP and HMRC data, updated 20 June 2020).

Officers have been working as part of the Warwickshire Financial Inclusion Partnership, made up of representatives from the districts, boroughs, country council and the voluntary and community sector to address issues of financial hardship. In 2019, this resulted in the Warwickshire Welfare Rights Advice Service (WWRAS) being contracted to undertake a project across the County specifically looking to increase the take-up of free school meals (FSMs)

WWRAS worked with nine schools within the Borough, receiving a total of 112 referrals. Of these, 70 families are now receiving FSMs. In addition, welfare benefit checks also identified benefit gains of £124,109 for those families.

Schools also benefit by receiving an additional pupil premium for each child in receipt of FSMs, with additional pupil premiums of £87,010 per annum having been identified. As the Pupil Premium is awarded for six years this will result in an additional £522,060 being available to local schools.

Although the funding provided by Warwickshire County Council has ended, this project secured a return on investment of £32 for every £1 of investment and represents outstanding value for money.

The Communities and Homes Service will be working with WWRAS over the Summer to investigate how we may be able to support them to continue this activity which benefits, the children through the provision of healthy meals, the schools through the increased pupil premium, the families through the identification of

additional benefits and also supports the local economy of Rugby, where increased income may be spent on goods and services.

Under normal circumstances, schools do not provide free school meals to eligible children who are not in school. But during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, the Government expects schools to continue supporting children eligible for benefits-related free school meals who are at home during term time, and in accordance with their circumstances. There is also a Summer Food Fund which will enable children who are eligible for benefit related free school meals to claim vouchers for the 6 weeks holiday. Schools were required to claim vouchers for the 6-week holiday period at least one week ahead of the end of the summer term.

It should be noted that FSMs are different to the provision of Universal Free School Meals that are provided to all in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 classes, these do not continue if the child is not in school and therefore it is important that in these cases parents apply for FSMs to ensure that they still receive support if eligible.

The Council also works closely with the more financially vulnerable in terms of advice and support – primarily through the CAST Team which deals with housing advice, homelessness, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction. The team are also able to provide additional financial support through the provision of discretionary awards which are intended to provide additional short-term financial support and help with the prevention of homelessness. They also provide information on financial issues, which is published on the Council's website.

Preventing Homelessness Improving Lives, known as p.h.i.l. is Warwickshire's homelessness early intervention project. It is funded by central government and hosted by Rugby Borough Council. The focus of the project is early intervention, homelessness prevention and maximising wellbeing. It has prevented 235 individuals and families becoming homeless. It is known through follow-up phone calls that 83% of these preventions were sustained for at least 6 months and 85% of the preventions were able to stay in their own home. It has prevented homelessness for 89 families and individuals in Rugby. In addition, £433,00 of supplementary household income was achieved for Warwickshire residents through income maximisation work. This was £143,000 for Rugby residents.

The Housing Service provides tenancy support to those living in our Council housing stock. This is underpinned by a philosophy of ensuring tenancy sustainment, where possible. In 2018/19, as a last resort, there were 8 evictions, 6 of which were for rent arrears.

The continued provision of new affordable and quality housing, through the Planning system, the Council and Registered Providers helps to ensure that the people that need to access to affordable homes can do so.

The substantial regeneration projects we have in progress at Biart Place and Rounds Gardens are also evidence of our commitment to providing new high-quality homes, which will be more affordable to heat, than the current concrete constructed homes. The new statement of intent for Rugby agreed by Cabinet in June 2020 will help

more vulnerable households to access measures to help them more affordably heat their home through Eco Flex, part of the Energy Company Obligation (ECO).

Our close work with the voluntary and community sector is also part of the wider picture, with a new 2-year contract in place with the CAB from April 2020. During 2018/2019, specific to Rugby they dealt with 4,221 clients of which 3,408 were new cases to the bureau. These clients generated 14,581 issues across their main enquiry areas. Out of the resulting 3,044 outcomes, 870 resulted in monetary gain for Rugby residents of £2,110,000 (aggregated).

The top three areas with residents raising the most issues were:

- Benn Ward
- New Bilton
- Newbold and Brownsover

These coincide with areas where there are Community Associations in receipt of Service Level Agreement funding from the Council, an indication that resource is being directed to where it is most needed.

New for this year is also the funding of an additional service level agreement for Long Lawford Community Association, utilising proceeds received by the Council from the Rugby Lotto. In addition, SLA's with New Bilton, Overslade, Brownsover, Newbold and the Benn Partnership are indicative of our support to communities to help themselves.

Whilst this does not provide commentary on all that we are doing to help our more financially vulnerable households, it does give a taste of activities in progress and being led by the Head of Communities and Homes, but more importantly how joined up this work is. It is not something that the Council alone can remedy, we are reliant on a whole range of partners to work together to deliver best outcomes for Rugby and by putting our customers first.”