

## County Council

23 October 2024

### Questions and Responses

#### Question from Mr M Tough

On the 09-10-2024 the Members, our Town Councils and the Public were presented with a document which shows that the Council has the power to apply Article 4 directions to limit any potential proliferation. The document also provided robust evidence as to why Council should apply article 4 directions across East Durham, for example to prevent any further increases in crime in East Durham. Will the Council apply immediate article 4 directions? If not specifically in detail, why not?

#### Response:

We recognise the role that HMOs can play in providing accommodation and the council also acknowledge that some communities are expressing concerns about the introduction of HMOs in some areas.

We are aware that an Article 4 Direction, in specific circumstances, can be made to extend the need for planning permission to smaller HMOs. It is important to note however that under national guidance, the tests to implement an Article 4 Direction would require a level of impact that is not currently evidenced for the area proposed. It should also be noted that an Article 4 direction would apply to a specific area.

Council should also note that the need for planning permission does not mean that HMO's will not be supported - they will simply be subject to planning approval. Members of this council will also be aware that we are under pressure to meet the housing needs of all of our residents, which may be exacerbated by the recent proposals from government to deliver on higher housing targets going forward.

However, as a proactive step, and following concerns raised by some residents in relation to HMO's, the council has submitted comments in response to the recent consultation on changes to the National Planning Policy Framework, and have written separately to Angela Rayner MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government regarding the process for Article 4 directions being granted.

HMO's are also subject to licencing requirements, which remain the key mechanism that local authorities have to ensure that HMO's operate appropriately. If members of the public have any specific concerns regarding any issues they should be reported through to the Council for further investigation.

### **Question from Mr S Williamson**

In 2015 DCC harmonised all swimming prices across all its pools. At this time, we honored the previous district council membership terms set for existing members, and as a result there is a small group of long term customers who have been paying £93.00 per year to use Freemans Quay pool from that time.

### **Response:**

In November 2023 we removed the swim only membership, introducing an inclusive swim, gym and class membership, offering the same membership price across all 14 leisure centres for the first time.

At this time we had 1,680 concessionary swim members at Freemans Quay, with 88 members benefiting from the legacy pricing. It was not feasible to maintain these legacy memberships as they were not reflective of the current cost or market value of our services.

This has meant that a small group of people have seen a larger jump in fees, however this group has benefitted from an extremely subsidised rate over several years. Leisure provision is a significant cost to the council, and its important in these times of diminishing resources that we offer value for money to its residents through equitable and accessible pricing; at the same time as ensuring that we carefully manage the public purse. We continue to offer a 35% concessionary discount to support those of pensionable age, the unemployed or low-income households. For regular users the concessionary member rate equates to less than £1 per visit.

### **Freeman's Quay repairs**

Freeman's Quay is an extremely popular centre with just over 3,000 members. Naturally this leads to inevitable wear and tear, especially in high traffic areas across the facility. Officers across the Council and the facility staff do everything possible to prevent maintenance issues arising and when they do happen to rectify them as quickly as possible.

The pool has been set at a fixed depth since December 2022 as there has been an issue with the mechanics on the floating floor. This allowed the pool to remain open to the public and ensured that our swimming activities were not affected.

The sauna has been subject to considerable investment in repairs over the last 6 months, including the installation of a new generator, however there has been new issues identified which have delayed plans to re-open it to the public.

Our gym equipment is serviced annually, it is checked daily by staff and a contractor is employed to undertake responsive repairs. Although there maybe occasional times when an individual piece of equipment is out of use, this would not result in a disruption to the gym experience.