

Councillor O'Neill's (Cabinet member for Health and Wellbeing) to Question from Sharon Ghouila

Sharon Ghouila submitted the following question to be answered by Councillor O'Neill:

Referring to the significant rise in both COVID-19 infections and unemployment Sharon Ghouila requested Councillor O'Neill to provide details of what plans the Council was making to support access and distribution of free, or subsidised, Personal Protective Equipment for BAME, low income and vulnerable groups, as it had been identified that these groups were most at risk.

Councillor O'Neil indicated that the Council had distributed over 7,000 reusable face coverings in targeted areas where there were higher incidences of BAME, low income and vulnerable groups. There were also plans to distribute another 8,000 masks across Milton Keynes. The Council had also distributed Personal Protective Equipment, including reusable face coverings to faith groups across the city and was taking its commitments to local communities very seriously. The Council had ensured that there was properly procured Personal Protective Equipment supply chains should the Council need to step in and support any community.

Councillor O'Neill, in her response, stressed that the key messages remained that hand washing, maintaining social distancing and wearing face coverings when required were the most effective ways of preventing the spread of Covid-19.

Sharon Ghouila also submitted a supplementary question asking Councillor O'Neill what measures the Council was taking to educate and support its citizens to start using washable/reusable masks in order to reduce COVID-19 waste and meet its climate emergency targets.

Councillor O'Neil indicated that it was really important that the Council's message was clear about wearing a face covering, and it was important not to dilute that message.

Councillor O'Neill outlined that the Council had been sharing instructions on how to make a reusable face mask in its Covid-19 special resident magazine, which went to all homes in Milton Keynes in September, and on social media and giving out the instructions in food bank parcels. The Council would keep encouraging people to use reusable face coverings as part of its sustainability agenda.

Councillor Darlington's (Cabinet Member for Public Realm and Housing Services) written question from Adam Rolfe.

Given the recent discovery that Mellish Courts flats are unsafe to be living in, after 60 years, what steps are the council taking to ensure that families and residents can live safely now? Whilst I understand that they have been offered help to move, shouldn't the baseline standard be to move everyone regardless so that everyone is safe?

Councillor Darlington's response:

We are taking the continued safety of residents and visitors to both Mellish Court and The Gables very seriously and it is our number one priority. Working alongside Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service, we are being proactive and have appointed 24/7 wardens together with a range of other precautionary measures that include:

- Installing and upgrading smoke/heat detectors in each flat
- Upgrading communal and individual flat fire doors
- Introducing a simultaneous evacuation procedure
- Developed Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEPs) as necessary
- Increased Anti-Social Behaviour and Neighbourhood team presence
- Increased Caretaking attendance to both blocks 7 days a week

In relation to the safety, Phill Mould, Group Commander responsible for Fire Safety at Bucks Fire & Rescue Service, said:

'The risk of a fire breaking out has not increased, and of course this risk can be reduced by everyone continuing to take sensible fire safety precautions, such as being careful when cooking, smoking, using candles and cooperating with any fire safety measures introduced.

We will continue to work with Milton Keynes Council to ensure the continued safety of all residents.'

In addition, the Council has written to all residents in these two buildings stating that if they want to consider requesting a move now, and if they are a council tenant, our housing team will be happy to talk to them about this.