

Scrutiny Committee Communities – Wednesday 9th August 2023

Item Public Question Time

Question 1: “Given that housing officers have to work within multiple legal frameworks and do hard and great work, making vastly important decisions, does the committee feel it would be beneficial for their housing and homelessness team to have a programme around what training each staff member should receive? A recent FOI confirmed that there was no policy or recorded data around what training they get.”

Shannon Johnstone

Question 2: “Is the Committee aware of the negative effect their housing policy is having on small communities?”

I have written to members of the Committee individually briefly explaining a situation that has arisen recently in Withycombe, a small village in West Somerset on the edge of Exmoor. West Somerset has a strong sense of identity as have the villages within it. The current housing allocation policy attaches no importance to the local connection of an applicant and is unfairly discriminating against those from small communities where housing availability is minimal, almost nonexistent. A policy which breaks up a community cannot be right.

Already many young people have to move away because of the lack of job opportunities but they shouldn't have to move out of their community because they cannot get a house particularly when they are already established in that community and making a positive contribution to that community. It is one thing when they see no house, quite another when they see it being allocated to someone with no local connection.

Without going into the reasons for it, the root cause is too many people chasing too few houses but that is unlikely to change in the immediate future meanwhile local people in small communities will be unfairly discriminated against when a local connection counts for nothing. Born, bred, living and active in the village; it doesn't get more local than that.

would ask the Committee review their housing application policy as a matter of urgency. Members of Withycombe Parish Council would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further.”

Jean Humber