

COUNCIL – 7TH NOVEMBER 2022

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

10.1 Councillor Draycott – Gas Checks on Council Properties

Could the Leader inform Council of the process for gaining access to properties and the legal requirement to do so?

The Leader or his nominee will respond:

The Council, in undertaking its landlord function, has a legal obligation under the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 (as amended) to carry out an annual gas safety check. The Council has a clause in its Conditions of Tenancy which states that access must be provided.

In line with the law and the approved code of practice and guidance, the Council takes reasonable steps to undertake the service, including a series of communications to the tenant providing both written notice, and explaining why the safety check is necessary. Where access is not provided there is no power under the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 to force entry. The Council therefore uses Schedule 3, paragraph 2 (3) (4) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 for applications for a warrant of entry where a forced entry is necessary.

To support compliance, the Council uses the flexibility within the regulations to schedule safety checks up to two months before the expiry of the 12-month period.

10.2 Councillor Draycott – Housing Register

Could the Leader inform Council the number of people currently on the Housing Register?

The Leader or his nominee will respond:

The below table sets out the number of applications on the housing register on 26.10.22.

Application Category	Number
<i>Permitted to bid</i>	1264
<i>Change of circumstances to be re-assessed (not currently permitted to bid).</i>	32

<i>Suspended (e.g., due to rent arrears / non-compliance with an agreed payment pattern)</i>	114
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10.3 Councillor A Gray – Consolidating Charnwood Borough Council Income and Making Provision for Residents

Given the current financial situation in which every penny counts, can the Leader please confirm the amount of rental revenue lost on a monthly basis because of empty housing and garages, and what measures are being taken to make them all fit for purpose to provide facilities for residents and income for CBC?

The Leader or his nominee will respond:

Average weekly void loss is set out in the below table.

Stock Type	Average Weekly Void Loss in 2022/23 Year to Date
<i>General Needs Housing</i>	<i>£13,404.36</i>
<i>Sheltered Housing</i>	<i>£10,407.15</i>
<i>Garages</i>	<i>£3,388.93</i>

Void Housing

Void performance has been impacted by several factors over the past 18 months resulting in a backlog of voids in repair, and properties awaiting allocation. Factors negatively affecting performance include:

- Void operative resources being used to undertake backlog repairs arising because of the pandemic.*
- A competitive labour market making recruitment to operative positions challenging.*
- Void energy supply issues preventing works.*
- Supply chain issues.*
- Insufficient allocations capacity.*
- Sheltered accommodation no longer meeting the housing needs and aspirations of older people.*

A range of actions have been completed to improve performance, including:

- *Procured and mobilised Energy Angels - void energy agency, to support the faster resolution of void energy supply issues - e.g., debts on meters, meter swaps, problems, etc.*
- *Procured and mobilised T&S Heating to increase capacity for general repair works.*
- *Procured and mobilised the Newey Group to increase capacity for void electrical works.*
- *Procured and mobilised a new Energy Performance Certificate supplier.*
- *Approved overtime for void operatives to increase capacity.*
- *Reduced the use of voids operatives on responsive repairs works.*
- *Moved an operative resource from responsive repairs to void works.*
- *Introduced weekly monitoring of recruitment processes for repairs operatives.*
- *Equipped the Voids Team Leader and Charge-Hand with the means for making payment in shops to enable meter debts to be cleared and topped up to enable works to commence.*
- *Trained additional temporary officers to undertake the allocations function.*

These actions have started to reduce the backlog of properties in void repair. On 2nd October 2022 there were 148 properties in repair, and on 23rd October 2022 this has reduced to 130. Whilst this is positive the recent increase in allocations capacity has not yet had time to make a difference, however it is expected the overall position in respect of the number of voids will improve over the coming weeks and months

Other actions in progress are:

- *An increase in the number of permanent allocations officers - to increase capacity and resilience.*
- *Increased pay rate offers to support recruitment of agency staff.*
- *Consideration of market premia for trades that have been difficult to recruit to.*
- *A review of age designated properties (accessible by people aged 45+) that have been hard to let, with consideration being given to re-designation.*
- *Outsourcing of several major voids to the Council's newly appointed contractor J Tomlinson Ltd.*
- *The review of sheltered accommodation will have the likely outcome of reducing voids.*

An action plan is in place, and performance is monitored on a weekly basis at a cross service voids meeting. This will continue to take place until performance is back on track.

Void Garages

Garages that are void are in poor condition having reached the end of their lifespan and cannot be let on that basis. A review of garages was started pre-pandemic and will now re-commence following the recent appointment of a new Housing Strategy and Support Manager. The review will inform decision making on a site-by-site basis around whether to invest in new garages or use the site

for other purposes. Many of the sites are relatively small and have constraints around access, so opportunities for housing development are likely to be very limited, the larger sites having been redeveloped some years ago.

10.4 Councillor J Bradshaw – The Store Future Planning

Could the Leader inform Council about The Store's forward planning regarding the effect of the Cost-of-Living Crisis on them, something which is already affecting so many people and families across the Borough?

The Leader or his nominee will respond:

To be clear, the Council does not operate Your Store. It does sit on the Strategic Board as a partner along with John Storer House.

Due to increased demand, self-referrals have recently been suspended to target resources at those in the greatest need.

The issue around demand and capacity will be considered at the next Strategic Board meeting in November.

The Council will continue to support Your Store where possible, for example through supporting the marketing of the service.

10.5 Councillor J Bradshaw – Food Bank Co-ordination

Would the Leader inform Council please how all the food banks in the Borough are being co-ordinated and how that information is made available to those without IT access?

The Leader or his nominee will respond:

Food banks operate independently of the Council. The Council does not therefore co-ordinate food bank activity.

The Council is however a partner in Charnwood Community Action and Charnwood Food Poverty Group and will support the promotion of food banks where possible, online, through printed materials, and through making professional referrals into the service following face to face contact with residents.

10.6 Councillor Ward– Plastic-Free Market

2021 marked the 800th anniversary of the Royal charter granting Loughborough permission to hold a market something the Council was rightly very proud of and celebrated. I was recently sent photographs by a resident of the sorry state of Loughborough marketplace on a Thursday

afternoon before the council's cleaning team had been deployed to clear up, and the sheer volume of discarded single-use plastic bags, punnets and trays on the floor was frankly shocking. What steps is Charnwood Borough Council planning on taking to encourage market traders to ditch single use plastics in favour of more sustainable packaging solutions? Are there plans for Charnwood to become a plastic-free market?

The Leader or his nominee will respond:

The Council is taking a two-pronged approach to reduce the use of single use plastics, in a bid to add the accolade of being a green market as well as an award-winning market celebrating over 800 years of its existence. We plan to launch a "green" appeal in December to people who shop in Loughborough as well as our market traders.

As part of the Councils Christmas Marketing campaign in partnership with the BID "Wishing you a Beautiful Christmas" Shoppers will be encouraged to use bags for life when they shop in Loughborough and on Loughborough market to avoid having to pay for single use plastic bags while at the same time helping with the environment and to keep the town looking good.

Market Traders have been informed and will be reminded that it is a requirement for all businesses, regardless of size, to charge a minimum of 10p for single use carrier bags. There are some exemptions e.g., for flowers, uncooked fish, meat or unwrapped food for animal or human consumption. This information will be made available to shoppers and traders and can be found on. www.gov.uk/guidance/carrier-bag-charges-retailers-responsibilities

Traders will also be reminded of the plastics that can be accepted as part of the Councils recycling programme for example;

- Carrier bags and packaging film, cling film and bubble wrap (clean)
- Egg cartons
- Clear food trays, fruit punnets including the lids

Traders will also be encouraged to take away hard plastics.

10.7 Councillor Miah– Cost of Living Funding

The Labour group notes the decision of Cabinet members based on the officer report put before it at its last Cabinet meeting regarding the cost-of-living position statement referred to at the previous Full council meeting.

Although I welcome the spend of £180,000 outlined in the report, concerns have been raised on the amount and around the wording of 'internal' use of the funds. Can the Leader specify how the funds will be used?

Also, can the Leader disclose the total amount of reserves held by the council to give a clearer indication of how much the £180,000 is in relation to the total reserves held by the council? This is to give residents and members of the public a clearer idea as to the level of help being offered them.

The Leader or his nominee will respond:

The funds will be used in line with the themes set out within the Cabinet report. A project team is currently engaged with external providers such as Age UK and CAB, but also local providers identified through a mapping exercise across the Borough, to determine where they need additional funding. It is also recognised that additional support to our communities will be required which may be provided through existing Council teams.

Whilst the Council understand that cost of living issues will arise, the precise nature of this requirement is yet unknown and will therefore require a flexible approach to assisting our communities.

The Council holds a number of reserves, the majority of which are earmarked for specific expenditure and contingencies. The two principal reserves that may be used to fund this cost-of-living initiative are the General Fund Working Balance which is held to cover non-specific contingencies (such as the COVID pandemic) and also ensure the ongoing delivery of services, and the Reinvestment Reserve to fund specific projects and one-off initiatives.

At 31 March 2022, the General Fund Working Balance was £6.6m and the Reinvestment Reserve was £0.5m.

The Cabinet Report stated that £180,000 was to be funded from the Reinvestment Reserve.

10.8 Councillor Forrest– Cost of Living – Warm Rooms

Throughout the Borough organisations such as Parish Councils, Faith Groups, Community Centres, Churches of all denominations and other groups are planning Warm Rooms to which Charnwood residents, who are struggling through the present cost of living crisis, can go to enjoy some hours of warmth and companionship during this oncoming cold, even, bitter winter. Some are offering hot drinks, mugs of soup etc and others are making collections of warm clothing that can be donated to our Borough Residents to help them through the cold weather. Therefore, I ask

- a) What arrangements are Charnwood Borough Council putting in place to provide Warm Rooms within their own buildings?
- b) What support will there be from CBC for organisations setting up these humanitarian facilities?
- c) Are CBC prepared to promote these facilities across our Borough to ensure that they can be made available to everyone?

The Leader or his nominee will respond:

There are no plans to provide warm rooms at Council offices, however through the Charnwood Community Action campaign we are collecting information about planned warm rooms across the Borough. The £180,000 funding made available by the Council to respond to the increased cost of living, provides the opportunity for payments to be made to organisations planning this activity to extend or enhance their provision.

The Council will promote facilities and other activities delivered by the voluntary and community sector which aim to support communities to deal with the rising cost of living.

10.9 Councillor Draycott – Town Centre Empty Properties

Could the Leader explain the high number of vacant shops on Bedford Square? There are 10 at present and another large business announcing its closure.

Could the Leader also explain to Council how the spending of recent highway works, now exceeding £4.2M, has helped those local businesses?

The Leader or his nominee will respond:

There were five vacant premises in the Bedford Square Gateway area prior to the start of the project. Since the project started the pandemic and international economic conditions have placed severe pressures on retailing and other businesses. There are currently 10 vacant premises, accounted for as follows:

- *1 business relocating within the project area to new premises that had been vacated by a business that had recently relocated to larger premises elsewhere within the town centre.*
- *1 business relocating to other premises elsewhere within the town centre.*
- *1 business owner retiring.*
- *3 premises that were vacant before the start of the project and still remaining vacant*
- *4 businesses that have ceased trading.*

In addition, two premises that were vacant before the project started are now occupied. This includes one new business created in the area and one existing business that has expanded into adjacent premises.

The Bedford Square Gateway Project was driven by the concerns and priorities voiced by local businesses in the Bedford Square Gateway area to the Council in 2016. Funding for the project has been secured from a variety of sources; this Council has contributed just under £1.6 million of the total spend. The project has been delivered through a transparent, democratic process set against Cabinet decisions, the objectives of the 2018 Town Centre Masterplan and funding decisions through the Town Deal and the LLEP. The development of the project was taken forward in collaboration with the Loughborough Town Team. The project has helped local businesses by delivering on their key priorities, which were

- *To widen the pavements on Ward's End.*
- *To improve the quality of the public realm in Devonshire Square.*
- *To make the area more attractive for pedestrian and shoppers.*
- *To create a "destination" that would encourage shoppers to venture into Devonshire Square, Ward's End and Bedford Square.*
- *To improve connectivity between the Cattle Market and Devonshire Square to encourage footfall across the Granby Street junction.*
- *To retain as much free on-street parking as possible, particularly in Bedford Square.*
- *To designate a loading bay along Ward's End.*

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE TO COUNCIL – PROCEDURE

- Councillors are required to submit a question on notice in writing by 12noon on the eighth working day prior to Council, the title of the question is published on the Council Agenda.
- Questions and responses will be published at the end of the previous working day (usually the Friday prior to a Council meeting on a Monday) and will be available at the Council meeting for Councillors, the press, and the public.
- After the questions and responses are published **Councillors may indicate that they wish to ask a supplementary question by noon on the day of the Council meeting.**
- The Mayor will invite those Councillors who have indicated that they wish to do so to ask a supplementary question.
- The Leader (or relevant Lead Member on behalf of the Leader) or Chair of the Committee is able to respond.
- The total time each person can speak on a single question is time limited.