

COUNCIL – 7TH SEPTEMBER 2020

ITEM 10 QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

10.1 Councillor Tillotson – Twinning Town - Zamosc

Loughborough is twinned with Zamosc in Poland and Zamosc is among a number of Polish areas that have declared themselves unwelcoming of LGBT ideology. As of January 2020, around 80 such zones have been declared in Poland, even though this action has been condemned by the European Parliament and is in opposition to the Polish constitution, which guarantees equality and freedom from discrimination. Many LGBT community members in Poland have now stated that they feel unsafe in their own country.

Will the Cabinet lead confirm that Charnwood Borough Council condemns this action of our twin town and ask the Loughborough Twinning Association to do the same, as tolerance for all citizens, whatever their sexual orientation is essential?

The Leader or his nominee will respond:

Charnwood Borough Council's support and commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion is beyond doubt.

Earlier this year, the Council was successful in achieving the Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual and Transgender (LGBT) + Inclusion Award. This award, which was administered and verified by the Leicester LGBT+ Centre, aims to provide visible recognition for organisations across the region for their commitment to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender inclusive practices.

We fly the rainbow pride flag at Loughborough Town Hall to support LGBT+ events, including for this year's Leicester Digital Pride (September 5, 2020).

The Council also has an Equality Strategy which sets out our commitment for progressing equality and inclusion within Charnwood.

We were informed earlier this year by a member of the public that Loughborough's twin town of Zamosc had adopted a policy which was anti-LGBT+.

We wrote to Zamosc Town Council who confirmed they had not adopted any such resolution.

However, we have since been made aware of local government documents which still raise concerns.

The documents use language which indicate a view that Charnwood Borough Council would in no way condone.

We are therefore writing to the authorities in Zamosc to seek further clarification and also ask them to publicly support the fundamental rights relating to non-discrimination based on the protected characteristics set out in the UK's Equality Act 2010

Charnwood Borough Council will also be asking Loughborough Twinning Association to also support and reconfirm the requirements of the Act and call on its counterparts in Zamosc to do likewise.

The Council will also seek further advice from those who represent, support and advocate for LGBT+ rights.

Furthermore, the Council will ask the authorities in Zamosc to send us any policies and documentation relating to the fair and equal treatment of their citizens.

Charnwood Borough Council is committed to delivering meaningful and lasting improvements for local people, by adopting and developing good equality and inclusion practice. We aim to create a place where people treat each other with dignity and respect.

We ensure all our partners are aware of this principal and expect them to do the same.

We accept that there are different views in this world and if we disagree with them it would be easy to walk away. However, sometimes the best way to encourage change is to maintain a dialogue and continue to highlight and promote the benefits of inclusion.

10.2 Councillor Gerrard – Flooding

Will Charnwood Borough Council allow any development on the flood plains in the borough in the near and mid future, and if so, what measures will be taken to alleviate for future floods?

The Leader or his nominee will respond:

Any development proposed in the flood plain will be considered by the Local Planning Authority in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise, including the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The NPPF makes it clear that inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding should be avoided by directing development away from areas at highest risk (whether existing or future) following a sequential, risk-based approach. Where development is necessary in such areas, the development should demonstrate it can be made safe for its lifetime without increasing flood risk elsewhere.

10.3 Councillor Draycott – Moratorium on Housing Evictions due to the Pandemic

Those homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, which the Council housed in temporary accommodation during lockdown, what is the Council's intention re their future housing needs? and how many individuals are affected? What is the intention of the Council as a Landlord regarding those tenants with rent arrears? How many of the Council's households are now at risk of proceedings for rent arrears being actioned? How many individual tenants, how many families and how many children are involved? With the probability of an increase in people being evicted from private housing what extra resources has the Council put in place?

The Leader or his nominee will respond:

On the 26th March 2020, the Government instructed all Councils to arrange accommodation for anyone sleeping rough or at imminent risk of sleeping rough to help reduce the spread of coronavirus.

The primary aim was to ensure anyone who was homeless within the Borough was offered somewhere safe to stay. Many people who are homeless in Charnwood have complex needs and vulnerabilities, and it can be challenging to identify, contact and encourage them to access accommodation and ensure that they remain in the accommodation provided.

The Council's Housing Needs Team were active from the outset with the CBC Lettings Team reserving spaces in bed and breakfast accommodation and the Housing Options Team working in partnership with voluntary and statutory agencies to identify people in need of assistance.

Since the 23rd March, 85 people have been placed in accommodation, and as at 2nd September 2020, 15 rough sleepers or those at imminent risk of rough sleeping remained in Bed and Breakfast/emergency accommodation, and 7 in interim accommodation in the Council's housing stock. We would usually expect to be dealing with around 2 to 3 rough sleepers in normal circumstances.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government asked Councils to start planning the next steps for accommodating and supporting people to move on from the emergency accommodation that has been provided.

The Council has followed government guidance relating to Covid-19, and did not serve any notices of seeking possession, instigate possession proceedings, or evict any tenants over the three-month period prescribed by Government. The Government has recently announced that the ban on evictions will continue until at least the 20th

September 2020, and new 6-month notice periods to be in place until at least 31 March 2021.

On the 2nd September 2020 there were:

- *221 tenants owing twelve weeks' rent or more. These tenants are at risk of possession proceedings or enforcement of an existing possession order for non-payment of rent.*
- *Out of those 221 tenants, 156 do not have an existing possession order.*
- *Of the 221 tenants, 98 of them are households with children; 83 are single-person households and 40 are households with more than one adult (no children).*

The Council views eviction as a last resort in the majority of cases and will make all reasonable efforts to help prevent tenants being evicted from their homes through rent arrears by offering appropriate support from within the Council and through outside agencies at the earliest appropriate opportunity.

To support tenants to maximise their income and pay the rent, the Council employs 5 Tenancy Support Officers, 2 Financial Inclusion Offices, and 1 Universal Credit Officer.

In July the Government published the Next Steps Accommodation Programme guidance. Charnwood has led on a collaborative bid for the District, Boroughs and Rutland for the provision of emergency, cold weather provision and incentives for Private Sector Landlords. In addition, the Council have submitted a capital/revenue bid for Charnwood for the provision of supported accommodation.

10.4 Councillor Bolton – Financial Recovery

Bearing in mind the large financial loss being forecast by the council for the current year what proposals does the council have for meeting the shortfall between what it has received from government and what it has spent as a result of Covid-19?

Is the council looking at restructuring or reducing services and are staff redundancies being considered?

What financial preparation is the council taking for a potential second wave or another local lockdown? and is there an expectation that central government will provide further funding in such cases?

The Leader or his nominee will respond:

The financial situation of the Council remains in flux due to the impact of COVID-19 but it is highly likely that there will be a shortfall in income and

an increase in costs compared to amounts set out in the original 2020/21 budget that was approved by Council last February.

One of the planned responses will be to bring forward a revised 2020/21 budget to Council for approval at the forthcoming meeting scheduled for 9 November. It is likely that this budget will propose that the projected shortfall for this financial year is largely covered by additional use of reserves.

The Council remains committed to supporting our communities through the COVID-19 outbreak but is already looking at ways that costs can be reduced, or additional income generated to mitigate the financial issues in the short term. Whilst the Council will make every effort to avoid it, in the medium and longer term it is unfortunately not possible to completely rule out the possible need for restructurings, service reductions or redundancies that may be required to ensure that the Council is able to operate in a financially sustainable manner .

The principal preparation the Council has made towards a second lock down has been to ensure reserves have been maintained over the years to allow services to be supported in times of emergency. Whilst the current situation has resulted in reserves being depleted the Council still has a reasonable cushion to help cover the impact of a second lockdown. Additionally, as noted above, the Council is already working on cost reduction and income generation initiatives to move the Council towards financial sustainability in whatever transpires to be the new normal.

Whilst it would be hoped that central government would provide additional funding to the Council in the event of a second wave or local lockdown, in practice any receipt of additional funding is likely to depend on factors existing at the time, such as whether the lockdown restrictions were local or national, the extent of those restrictions, and their duration.

10.5 Councillor Draycott – Cancelled Events

Would the Leader of the Council inform me how many payments for cancelled events at the Town Hall have been deferred due to Covid-19 and how much does that total, to date?

Also, when will a decision be taken regards this money being repaid back to customers?

The Leader or his nominee will respond:

I can confirm that no payments associated with cancelled events at the Town Hall have been deferred, this relates to theatre shows and building event hires.

As shows have been cancelled and once customers contacted have confirmed their preference, customers have received a credit, a refund or their booking has been moved to the rescheduled date on the basis that COVID operational conditions allow the events to go ahead.

In summary a total of 4,398 bookings have been processed of which, 139 customers received an account credit, 1,606 were refunded with 2,653 moved to their rescheduled show.

For the theatre the following information relates: -

Cancelled Shows:

As of 02/09/2020...

- 15 shows have so far been cancelled at LTH due to COVID-19.*
- An additional 3 shows have also been cancelled, but are yet to be publicly announced*

Re-scheduled Shows:

- 34 shows have so far been re-scheduled in 2021 due to COVID-19. This includes this year's pantomime.*
- An additional 5 shows have also been rescheduled due to COVID-19 but are yet to be publicly announced.*

The following process has been applied providing customer with options for shows which are cancelled or rescheduled: -

Cancelled Shows:

Customers have been emailed and then called by our Box Office team and given the following options:

- 1. A credit to their account with LTH for the full ticket price including booking fee, to be used on a future ticket purchase.*
- 2. A refund for the ticket price paid, minus the venue booking fees (in line with booking policy).*

Re-scheduled shows:

Customers have been emailed and then called by our Box Office team and given the following options:

- 1. Customers are able to be transferred to the new performance date in their original seats, at no additional cost. If the show is in a run of multiple performances, they are able to be transferred to any show within the new run.*
- 2. A credit to their account with LTH for the full ticket price including booking fee, to be used on a future ticket purchase.*
- 3. A refund for the ticket price paid, minus the venue booking fees (in line with booking policy).*

10.6 Councillor J Bradshaw – Confidential Documents

Would the Leader inform Council, taking into account GDPR, how confidential information/files being removed from Southfields are being kept confidential, in staff's homes?

Also, how are any confidential documents that need shredding etc being removed or collected from staff's homes?"

The Leader or his nominee will respond:

The majority of departments have all records held electronically meaning there is limited need to remove physical files out of Southfields however where there is a need the general approach is that files are signed out and then back in again when returned. While files are held by officers they are required to be stored securely to prevent any unauthorised access. In addition, there is a requirement for any department that does take physical files off site to complete a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) to identify and remove any risks and ensure the safety of all personal data.

Where there is a requirement for any confidential data to be shredded this information is brought back into the Southfields offices by officers so the standard procedures for shredding can be followed, no officers are able to dispose of council documents at home.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE TO COUNCIL – PROCEDURE

- Councillors are required to submit a question on notice in writing by 12noon on the sixth 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 and/or make a statement 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 and/or make a statement.
- 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.