

Council meeting freedom requests

JANUARY 1 2007 marked the second anniversary of the public's right to ask Charnwood Borough Council for information under the Freedom of Information Act.

The Council has dealt with over 150 requests from local people, businesses and the national media covering all aspects of the Authority's work.

The Council publishes documents about the work that it does and the decisions that it makes and these are available on the Council's website,

in person at Southfields offices or over the phone.

If we do not publish the information you want, you can make a request for it under the Freedom of Information Act. Requests need to be in writing and you must provide a contact address.

When the Council receives a request for information, it has 20 working days to provide the information or explain why it is covered by one of the exemptions in the Act and cannot be provided. Charnwood is proud that it has met this

target in 99 per cent of cases.

We are keen to find out whether people requesting information are satisfied with the service they receive and short customer satisfaction questionnaires are sent out with the response to requests.

If you would like more details, contact Michael Hopkins, Standards and Monitoring Support Officer, on (01509) 634785 or e-mail foi@charnwood.gov.uk

'You are at the heart of everything we do'

CUSTOMER Advisors are, to many, the face of Charnwood Borough Council.

They help hundreds of thousands of people every year on a range of issues including Housing, Homelessness, Benefits, Council Tax, Planning or Residents' Preferential Parking.

Here, we discover what the average day in the life of a Charnwood Borough Council Customer Advisor is like:



HELPING HAND: Tracy is one of Charnwood Borough Council's Customer Advisors who help hundreds of thousands of people every year.

“ My name is Tracy and I have been a Customer Advisor ever since our Customer Service Centre opened in 2005. Prior to that I'd worked in Housing for two years.

The Customer Service Centre (or CSC) is our one-stop shop for meeting our customers face-to-face and dealing with their enquiries.

We have a team of up to eight Advisors in the CSC, with most multi-skilled and able to answer queries on several of the services we provide - and we are training to increase this flexibility further.

I have mainly been dealing with Benefits queries for the last few months, as that is our busiest service with the most visitors, but I also deal with Housing enquiries and Planning customers too.

It's difficult to say what an average day is like, as no two enquiries are the same because no two people are the same.

Everyone's circumstances are different and the time required to resolve their enquiry is different. It's

this variety that makes the job so interesting.

For example, on Benefits I might deal with enquiries relating to new applications, payment queries, backdate requests or discretionary housing payments, then may move on to a Housing enquiry covering waiting list applications, homelessness or Council tenant

repairs, and then have a Planning enquiry relating to planning applications, Ordnance Survey maps or Building Regulations.

For some of the more detailed enquiries, I might need to refer to a specialist Officer from the relevant service but, on the whole, we probably manage to resolve around 80 per cent of enquiries ourselves at

first point of contact.

An average Advisor will probably each deal with 20 to 25 customers a day, with each enquiry lasting between 10 and 20 minutes, although some can be much shorter while others can take significantly longer - some can last well over an hour!

Similarly some days can be much busier than others, Mondays and Fridays in particular and especially the days after Bank Holidays.

The day after the Christmas Holidays last year we saw more than 40 per cent more customers than on an average day.

Yet no matter how many customers we've seen we always treat the person in front of us as an individual and try to put ourselves in the customer's shoes and give the best service we can.

The most enjoyable part of the job is being able to resolve a problem and to give a customer good news, such as their Benefits claim has been put into payment, or they've been allocated a property.

Sometimes, however, we can't always give people what they want, in which case we will always try to explain why that is in a sympathetic and understanding way.

Ultimately, our customers are the reason we are here and at the heart of everything we do.

We want the customers to enjoy their time with us, as this in turn makes our job much more fulfilling and enjoyable as well.

To get in touch with Charnwood Borough Council, see the contact details on Page two.



Join Citizen's Panel and make voice heard

WE need your help to improve the services we offer to every Charnwood resident.

And Your Charnwood, Your Say: The Citizen's Panel is the perfect chance to help make a difference.

The Citizen's Panel has been running since 1999 and currently has more than 800 members.

They fill in a maximum of four surveys and are asked to attend up to two focus groups a year.

Past issues that have been tackled include crime and disorder, recycling, parks and open spaces, customer access and Council priorities.

Cllr Jill Vincent, Charnwood Borough Council's Cabinet member for Partnerships and Customer Services, said: "The Citizen's Panel is all about increasing awareness of the political and democratic process.

"It's your Council and we want you to have a say on what we're striving to achieve and how we can provide an even better service for everyone in the Borough.

"People from all ages and backgrounds can join. They don't have to make a huge commitment but they will be making a big difference."

Panel member Roger Abbott said: "I have lived and worked in

Your Charnwood - Your Say:
Application form to join the Citizen's Panel

Name:.....

Address:.....

.....Postcode:.....

Telephone No:.....

Email address:.....

Gender: Male Female Age:

Ethnicity (Please tick as appropriate):

White Mixed Heritage Black

Black British Asian Chinese

Other (please specify)

If you would like more information, contact our Consultations Officer, Matt Wade, on (01509) 634 705.

Loughborough for 29 years and seen many changes, good and bad.

"Out of the respect for the people of Charnwood, I hope to have some small impact on the way the Borough is run and improved."

Fellow panel member, Margaret Whelband, added: "I wanted to join as I believe that non-Council members have a different and

valuable contribution to make."

To become a panel member, fill in the form above and return it to Charnwood Borough Council Citizen's Panel, Communications Team, Southfield Road, Loughborough, LE11 2TR.

Alternatively, call (01509) 634 705 or log on to www.charnwood.gov.uk/democracy/citizenspanel.html

Election changes in place

THURSDAY, 3rd May is the date voters in Charnwood have a chance to choose the people to represent them as all 52 seats on the Borough Council and 264 Seats on local Parish Councils will be up for re-election.

Changes to the law will mean that polling hours will be from 7am to 10pm, which is two hours longer than at previous Local Government elections.

Significant changes have also been made to improve security arrangements in respect of postal voting.

All postal voters will now be required to re-register and complete new application forms with details of their dates of birth and specimen signatures in advance of the elections.

This information will be used to verify each one of the anticipated 8,000 postal votes that are likely to be received.

There has also been changes in the qualifying age of candidates from 21 to 18.

For more information about standing for election, contact Charnwood's Electoral Services on the numbers below or a local Councillor.

There is also a longer period for people to register to vote, new ballot papers and simplified declarations of identity for postal voters.

Key dates for the elections are as follows:

- Deadline for Candidates' Nomination Papers – Noon on Wednesday 4th April
- Deadline for Registration to Vote – 5pm on Wednesday 18th April
- Deadline for Postal Voting Applications – 5pm on Wednesday 18th April
- Deadline for receipt of non-emergency Proxy Voting Applications – 5pm on Wednesday 25th April

● Polling Day – Thursday 3rd May
● Result declared – Friday 4th May

Application forms for postal and proxy votes can also be obtained from the Electoral Office or logging on to www.charnwood.gov.uk/democracy/electoral-services.html

The Register can be inspected at the Council Offices, Southfields, Loughborough or checked by contacting the Electoral Office: telephone (01509) 634 613/634 993 or email electoral.services@charnwood.gov.uk