

CHARNWOOD BOROUGH COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE CHARNWOOD BOROUGH COUNCIL HELD IN THE PRESTON ROOM, WOODGATE CHAMBERS, LOUGHBOROUGH ON 9TH JANUARY 2012

PRESENT

The Mayor (Councillor B. Burr)

The Deputy Mayor (Councillor D. Wise)

Councillor T. Barkley	Councillor J. Morgan
Councillor L. Bebbington	Councillor B. Newton
Councillor M. Blain	Councillor P. Osborne
Councillor J. Bokor	Councillor K. Pacey
Councillor J. Bradshaw	Councillor C. Poole
Councillor R. Campsall	Councillor C. Radford
Councillor J. Capleton	Councillor P. Ranson
Councillor C. Carter	Councillor B. Seaton
Councillor J. Choudhury	Councillor R. Sharp
Councillor P. Day	Councillor R. Shepherd
Councillor S. Forrest	Councillor S. Shergill
Councillor H. Fryer	Councillor D. Slater
Councillor D. Gaskell	Councillor M. Smidowicz
Councillor D. Grimley	Councillor G. Smith
Councillor S. Hampson	Councillor M. Smith
Councillor P. Harley	Councillor S. Smith
Councillor L. Harper-Davies	Councillor D. Snartt
Councillor C. Harris	Councillor N. Stork
Councillor J. Hunt	Councillor J. Sutherland
Councillor M. Hunt	Councillor E. Vardy
Councillor R. Jukes	Councillor A. Williams
Councillor M. Lowe	Councillor P. Youell
Councillor J. Miah	

Honorary Aldermen J. Bush, B. Dodd, F. Hurst and J. Tormey.

55. OPENING PRAYERS

The Reverend Cynthia Hebden opened the meeting with prayers and remembered the life and work of Stephen Campbell, Councillor for Thurmaston from 1987 to 1995 and again from 1999 to 2011 and Mayor of the Borough 2008/2009, who had recently passed away. Council Members observed a short silence as a mark of respect.

56. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors R. Brown, C. Duffy, S. Jones and A. Paling and Honorary Alderman T. Stott.

57. DISCLOSURES OF PERSONAL INTEREST

The following disclosures of interest were made:

- (i) by Councillor J. Hunt – Personal Interest, as an employee of Parliament for Nicky Morgan MP, in Item 5.1 on the agenda – Question on Notice – Vacant Homes;
- (ii) by Councillor M. Hunt – Personal Interest, as a member of Leicestershire County Council, in Item 5.5 on the agenda – Question on Notice – Progress of the LDF between 2007 and 2011 and in Item 5.6 on the agenda – Assessment of Highways and Transport Implications of possible SUE's;
- (iii) by Councillor Osborne – Personal Interest, as a member of Leicestershire County Council, in all items on the agenda relating to Leicestershire County Council; and
- (iv) by Councillors Day, Jukes, Ranson and Stork – Personal Interest, as members of Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing Board, in all items on the agenda relating to Charnwood Neighbourhood Housing.

58. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Council held on 7th November 2011 were confirmed and signed.

59. ANNOUNCEMENTS

59.1 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor made the following announcement:

Charnwood Wins Three National Awards

“I'm pleased to announce that during November and December, Charnwood received recognition in three different national awards:

- The Single Access Point service, a partnership between the Council and The Bridge, has been awarded the best Third Sector Engagement Award. The service's all-round approach to tackling problems, working with both young people and their families, has resulted in a dramatic drop in the number of young people staying in bed and breakfast accommodation.
- The Council's flagship envirocrime crackdown, Don't Muck Around, was also highly commended at the How Do Public Service Awards in Manchester. The Council's summer campaign was recognised in the Best

Local Community Initiative category at the national awards on November 15th.

- The Council has also won a national award for the way it records information about land and property in the Borough. We received the Gold Standard Award at the 2011 NLPG Exemplar Awards held at The Albert Hall Conference Centre in Nottingham.

I'm sure that you'll all join with me in congratulating those involved in these initiatives and placing on record our thanks for these achievements”.

59.2 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader made no announcements.

59.3 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chief Executive made no announcements.

60. QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

60.1 VACANT HOMES

Councillor Carter had given notice under Council Procedure Rule 5(i) of the following question:

“According to the charity 'Shelter' in 2011 there were 1,773 vacant homes in Charnwood Borough. Could the Leader please inform members of how many of these properties have been vacant for over 6 months? Can the Leader also say how many times the Council has used its power under existing 'empty homes' regulations in 2011 to bring these properties back in to use?”

The Lead Member, Councillor J. Hunt, responded:

“The number of properties unoccupied and unfurnished for over 6 months at 31st December 2011 was 740. The Council did not serve any empty dwelling management orders in 2011. Since the introduction of management orders under the Housing Act 2004, there have only been around 40 orders made by local authorities across the country. We focus our efforts on longer term empty properties (3 years +) and have used a range of tools including; a Tenant Finder Service, Fresh Start and, Partnership Grants to assist owners. In 2011, 3 previously long term empty properties were brought back into use as a direct result of our actions”.

Councillor Carter made a statement, in which he added that there did not seem to be firm hold on the issue of vacant homes, there had only been three refurbishments out of 740. At the current rate it would take over 200 years for the houses to be filled. There have been 40 order made across the Country and there was a necessity to use the power to bring these vacant

homes back into use. Councillor Carter asked a supplementary question concerning how many of 740 homes were owned by the Council and could be refurbished?

In response, the Lead Member, Councillor J. Hunt, thanked Councillor Carter for highlighting the Shelter report, the data stated that the figures were similar in 2005, 2006 and 2007. The Council had 185 void properties of which 62 were bedsits, there was currently a sheltered housing refurbishment project. Councillor J. Hunt disagreed that the Council had no firm hold on this issue, initiatives were in place to assist tenants with finding accommodation, such as the Tenant Finder Service, which was in its second year. Another programme called Fresh Start, where help was given to private renters, advertise properties and there were also partnership grants. The local MP, Nicky Morgan was working hard to ensure ex-student housing was converted and brought back into use as family dwellings.

60.2 CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS

Councillor Ranson had given notice under Council Procedure Rule 5(i) of the following question:

“In view of the recent national reports highlighting poor Customer Service within the NHS, could the Council confirm its progress in this Area and its progress in delivering excellent Customer Service across all its services during the next year?”

The Lead Member, Councillor Bokor, responded:

“The Council is committed to delivering Quality Customer Service across all its Services”.

“The Customer Service Excellence award was achieved by a number of services in 2011 and the Council took part in National Customer Service week in October 2011”.

“This national event proved to be a catalyst for many teams across the Council to become more involved and to take a fresh look at how customers perceived their service. Directors, Heads of Service and Councillors all spent some time with our Customer Services or Contact Centre teams. The feedback from those who took part was very positive and we have engaged with a number of services to improve quality of service provision. These improvements include services providing duty officers to ensure service provision is always available when we are open to the public and new comprehensive lists of services and contact numbers available from customer services”.

“As part of National Customer Services week we also involved local schoolchildren in understanding the diverse range of services we provide.

The week culminated in staff nominating colleagues who had 'gone the extra mile' for an 'Unsung Hero' award".

"8 members of staff received certificates from the Mayor".

"Having committed to having the Contact Centre taking their repairs calls CNH have embraced 'customer excellence' and have actively encouraged all their managers, team leaders and board members to 'listen in' on calls to understand their Customers needs at first point of contact. By us all working together I am sure we will ensure that all our tenants in Charnwood will receive quality housing".

"The new Choice Based lettings area in Customer Services has provided an easily accessible feature for customers wishing to 'bid' for available properties. This is a mainly 'self serve' area which we have expanded to include a payment facility for those wishing to pay council tax or other council services".

"The Council continues to consider options around delivering a quality service for its customers. In 2012 we will seek to expand the number of services using the Contact Centre and consider the possibility of amalgamating this team with the Customer Services team. This would deliver a consistent, more resilient one-stop approach for all enquiries, increase levels of customer satisfaction and improve the quality of how the Council treats its residents".

"We are currently engaged with Leisure Services in relation to Wildcard Bookings, Planning in relation to a number of issues identified to improve Customer Services and Housing Services around the new Right to Buy Legislation".

"The latest levels of Customer satisfaction through the GovMetric benchmarking software show 96% of customer responses rated the service they received from the Contact Centre as good while 94% rated the Customer Services centre as good".

"In 2012 we hope to encourage other services to use GovMetric in order to implement Customer Excellence across the Council to ensure this is not just a strapline but is embedded in everything we do".

"Finally I would like to thank all the staff in Customer Services and the Contact Centre for all their hard work in 2011 in engaging with our customers on a continuous basis and making Charnwood Borough Council one of the highest achieving authorities for customer satisfaction in their front line services".

"If anyone has any ideas where we could make further improvements in any service please let myself or David Platts know".

Councillor Ranson, made a statement, in which she thanked Councillor Bokor for her in-depth answer and looked forward to the initiatives and improvements highlighted continuing.

60.3 BUDGET SETTING

Councillor Gaskell had given notice under Council Procedure Rule 5(i) of the following question:

“As a new-comer to the Council can the Leader explain to me why it is that neighbouring local authorities appear to be involved in panic management when it comes to setting their budgets, whilst here at Charnwood there appears an atmosphere of quiet confidence, which seems to reflect the praise contained in the recent outside auditor's report”.

“And does the Leader agree with me that all those involved in setting our budgets are worthy of the highest acclaim for their efforts during the present period of austerity?”

The Lead Member, Councillor Barkley, responded:

“It is not appropriate to comment on the financial situation of our neighbouring authorities but I can confirm that I am confident in our budget setting process. Whilst there is never any room for complacency, we are on track to deliver a credible budget that protects front line services, allows us to make a major investment in our housing stock and maintains the Council in robust financial health. I do think that this reflects very positively on the members and officers involved in this difficult and complex process”.

Councillor Gaskell asked a supplementary question to confirm whether the Council had sufficient contingencies in an emergency, given the global financial situation and the continuing pressures on local government finances.

In response, the Lead Member, Councillor Barkley, stated that there were pressures on the Council given the reduction in grant funding, substantial borrowing to buy the Council out of negative subsidy on Housing, coupled with the possibility of changes in interest rates. Nevertheless, he confirmed that given the current knowledge of the situation and reasonable projections, the current reserves were adequate.

60.4 COMMUNITY FACILITIES GRANT FOR THE PERIOD 2014/15

Councillor Williams had given notice under Council Procedure Rule 5(i) of the following question:

“In the Capital Plan there has been no allocation for Community Facilities Grant for the period 2014/15, can the Leader please explain why there is no money allocated to this vital community fund? Please can he inform Council

if there are any proposals to allocate any money to the fund in 2014/15 and if so how much?”

The Lead Member, Councillor Snartt, responded:

“The allocation of £150,000 for Community Facilities Grants is designed to cover the three year period of the Capital Plan. The detailed allocation envisages that funding will be ‘front loaded’ to the first years of the Capital Plan in order that attractive schemes can be brought to fruition earlier rather than later. However, any unspent amounts of this capital allocation at the end of 2013/14 may be carried forward into the final year of the plan if required”.

“It is worth noting that while the Capital Plan covers a three year period, a new Capital Plan is prepared on a bi-annual basis. In the case of Community Facilities Grants this would allow the Council to consider amending the capital allocation in the light of the number and quality of community facility schemes proposed, and competing demands for funding”.

Councillor Williams, made a statement, in which she added that the voluntary sector had faced a cut in grant funding of 10% (not including cuts made by Leicestershire County Council) and there was continuing pressures on the sector. Councillor Williams asked a supplementary question seeking confirmation that funding for the voluntary sector would be maintained beyond 2014.

In response, the Lead Member, Councillor Snartt, stated that he wanted to help as many organisations as possible, however, there was a limited budget. It takes time to get the schemes up and running and over the last few years, the Council had done a lot to support the voluntary sector and wished to continue to support initiatives. There was a chance to review funding and if it was possible, Councillor Snartt stated that they would look favourably on voluntary sector schemes.

60.5 PROGRESS OF THE LDF BETWEEN 2007 AND 2011

Councillor M. Hunt had given notice under Council Procedure Rule 5(i) of the following question:

- (a) “The Borough Council Labour Group recently received a presentation which included the material produced for the Core Options Consultation from October 2008. Could the Leader, who I believe was then the Planning Lead Member, explain why the plans to progress the LDF Core Options, informed by that consultation, were not further progressed at that time?”
- (b) “Is he aware of a letter sent by Caroline Spelman, then Shadow Communities Secretary of State, in August 2009 advising Conservative Council Leaders that little would be at risk by delaying the process?”

- (c) “I feel sure he is aware of the planning risks we now face on a daily basis by the failure to have an up to date local plan and the Coalition Government’s stance in that respect; when does he now estimate that Charnwood will have an up to date local plan?”

The Lead Member, Councillor Blain, responded:

- (a) “The last Public Consultation on the Core Strategy closed on 5th December 2008. Officers received over 1,500 representations covering around 3,000 separate issues - a significant volume of representation and far higher than was envisaged when the timetable for the LDF was planned. As a consequence, the Report of Consultation was not published until December 2009. Despite this, progress on the Core Strategy policy options continued after the close of consultation and included active discussion with stakeholders and promoters of SUE options and further work to gather evidence, respond to new government policy and finally to address the issues highlighted in representations. A significant volume of time was given to the investigation of the transport implications of growth and to this end consultants were commissioned to undertake more detailed transport assessments of each of the SUE options. This work was completed in two parts in March 2009 and August 2009 although further technical reports followed up to December 2009”.

“The scale of growth facing Charnwood is significant and communities are clearly concerned that all the evidence is in place and has been properly considered before a decision is taken about its location. The transport evidence is seen by many as being crucial to the decision about the future development strategy for Charnwood and the project milestones have been deferred to ensure that their implications are fully understood”.

- (b) “The Leader is aware of the letter. Along with a caution not to rush ahead with implementing Regional Spatial Strategies, the letter explains that officers should be asked to prepare both for a continuation of government policy or a radical change in the event of a conservative win at the May 2010 General Election and to “serve the best interests of their residents while operating within the law...”. Since the transport evidence was not complete until December 2009, and further work on policy development was still progressing in light of this and the 2008 representations, Caroline Spelman’s letter did not in itself significantly delay the progress of the Core Strategy”.
- (c) “The Leader and Cabinet are aware of the importance of an up to date local plan. There is slippage in the project milestones set out in the approved Local Development Scheme (August 2011). This is due to problems with Leicestershire County Council’s new integrated transport model (LLITM). Officers of the County Council, Charnwood Borough Council and the consultants MVA and AECOM are working closely to resolve the problems and to minimise slippage but regrettably it currently amounts to a 3 month delay”.

“Cabinet has agreed to review the Local Development Scheme annually and will receive a report in March updating the Scheme. This is the appropriate time to announce the revised project milestones”.

Councillor M. Hunt, made a statement, in which he stated that he had heard various reasons for the delay between the consultation on the Core Strategy and its further development, if it took a year to analyse 1500 representations then there were further problems ahead with the timing of the Core Strategy. Councillor M. Hunt asked a supplementary question seeking reassurance that the two to three months timetabled to analyse the results from the forthcoming consultation would be sufficient, given it took twelve months last time.

In response, the Lead Member, Councillor Blain, stated that the twelve months taken previously was not just to analyse the consultation results but was also to analyse the evidence base. Councillor Blain added that it had been appropriate to factor in changes which were occurring at national level in order to ensure that there was certainty on the future direction of the Planning Policy framework. He stated that the Councils view was that it was better to have a short delay and build a plan that was sound, evidenced, researched and in line with current policy as opposed to moving ahead and producing an unsound plan. Now that there was clarification, the Council was moving to deliver a Core Strategy, which was sound, evidenced and would stand up to examination in public.

60.6 ASSESSMENT OF HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT IMPLICATIONS OF POSSIBLE SUES

Councillor M. Hunt had given notice under Council Procedure Rule 5(i) of the following question:

“Since 2007 the Borough Council has commissioned a number of studies in addition to work done by Leicestershire County Council including reports by MVA Consultants: Delivering Strategies (2008); Setting Strategic Direction (2009) and Transport for Development (2009)”.

- (a) “Could the Lead Member tell Council what payments the Borough Council has made to MVA, other consultants, and the County Council respectively (i) for transport modelling and assessment work in each financial year since 2007/8 and (ii) that currently estimated for 2011/12?”
- (b) “Could the Lead Member tell the Council (a) which of potential SUEs in Charnwood have been contracted for current assessment with MVA and/or the County’s LLITM modelling system and (b) for what number of dwellings in each case?”

The Lead Member, Councillor Blain, responded:

“(a)

Year	MVA	County Council	Total	Notes
2007/8	0	0	0	
2008/9	£68,108	£305	£68,413	
2009/10	£59,190	0	£59,190	Less grant funding of £17,950
2010/11	£600	0	£600	
2011/12*	0	£45,136	£45,136	Commissioning of LLITM is undertaken by the County Council and the Borough Council is subject to recharge. Figure does not include developer contributions of £24,000
total			£173,339	

Taking account of grants and developer contributions, the total estimated cost to CBC 2007-12 is £131,389

* includes cost to 31st December and estimated cost to 31st March 2012”

(b) “All of the actively promoted SUEs are being assessed in the County’s LLITM transport model. This includes all the growth locations identified in the consultation published in 2008 as well as others and at different scales. It is not possible to make public the number of dwellings in each case as this would reveal commercially sensitive information at a time when policy is still being developed”.

Councillor M. Hunt asked a supplementary question concerning the response that it was not possible to make public the number of dwellings in each case as this would reveal commercially sensitive information, Councillor M. Hunt asked the Lead Member to explain why this information was commercially sensitive and could not be released given it would eventually become available.

In response, the Lead Member, Councillor Blain, stated that the information was commercially sensitive, sites were being suggested but work was still being undertaken collecting the evidence and it was important to ensure that there were not any planning blights as a result of incomplete information being released into the public domain, which would not, having been analysed, be pursued. Given the plan was still in its drafting stages, it was subject to consultation, and therefore subject to further changes, the transport

modelling was concluding and the information would be made public for consultation.

61. BUSINESS RESERVED TO COUNCIL

61.1 CAPITAL PLAN AMENDMENT REPORT

A report to Cabinet was submitted, concerning changes to the 2011/12 to 2012/13 Capital Plan, and its financing, including changes up to 5th December 2011 (item 6.1 on the Agenda filed with these minutes).

It was proposed by Councillor Barkley and seconded by Councillor Morgan and

RESOLVED that the current Capital Plan for 2011/12 – 2012/13 in the sum of £14,301.9K be approved.

Reason

To enable the Capital Plan to be the basis for capital spending by the Council and so that the schemes may proceed.

61.2 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY, ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY AND MRP POLICY – MID-YEAR REVIEW FOR THE 6 MONTHS TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2011

A report to the Cabinet was submitted, reviewing the Treasury Management Strategy and the Annual Investment Strategy, plus the various Prudential Borrowing and Treasury Indicators for the first six months of the 2011/12 (item 6.2 on the Agenda filed with these minutes).

It was proposed by Councillor Barkley and seconded by Councillor Morgan and

RESOLVED that the mid-year review of the Treasury Management Strategy Statement, Prudential Borrowing and Treasury Indicators plus the Annual Investment Strategy, as shown in Part B of the report of Cabinet, be noted.

Reason

To ensure that the Council's governance and management procedures for Treasury Management reflect best practice and comply with the Revised CIPFA Treasury Management in the Public Services Code of Practice, Guidance Notes and Treasury Management Policy Statement, and that funding of capital expenditure is taken within the totality of the Council's financial position and that borrowing and investment is only carried out with proper regard to the Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities.

61.3 2012/13 TIMETABLE FOR COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS AND MEMBER TRAINING

A report of the Chief Executive was submitted, setting out a proposed timetable for Council and Committee meetings for the next Council Year (2012/2013) and designated Member Training days (item 6.3 on the Agenda filed with these minutes).

It was proposed by Councillor Hampson and seconded by Councillor Harper-Davies and

RESOLVED

1. that the schedule of Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings for 2012/2013, attached as an Annex to the report of the Chief Executive, be approved; and
2. that the proposed dates for the Cabinet/Scrutiny Liaison Group and Member Training Days, shown in italics in the attached Annex to the report of the Chief Executive, be endorsed.

Reasons

1. To ensure that a schedule of meetings for 2012/2013 was agreed and could be published accordingly.
2. To ensure the effective operation of the Scrutiny system by ensuring that meetings between representatives of the Executive and senior Scrutiny Councillors were held to maintain a constructive dialogue. To ensure that there was a structure to Training and Development days for Councillors.

62. CALL IN REFERENCES

There were no call in references

63. MINUTE REFERENCES

There were no minute references.

64. URGENT EXECUTIVE DECISIONS EXEMPT FROM CALL-IN

64.1 COMMUNITY ENERGY SAVING PROGRAMME

A report of the Cabinet to note an urgent decision taken by Cabinet on 22nd December 2011 which was made exempt from call-in in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 14 (item 9.1 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The following issues were raised:

- (i) timing of the decision and the speed at which the decision was put forward to Cabinet;
- (ii) the fixing of the end date did not mean there would be any rush, this was in accordance with Eon's schedule;
- (iii) implementation of a Community Energy Saving programme in Shelthorpe was broadly welcomed;
- (iv) work should be programmed effectively to avoid it being rushed and to avoid substandard work; and
- (v) a suitable press release providing the facts of the scheme would be issued.

65. MOTIONS ON NOTICE

No motions on notice had been submitted.

66. NOMINATIONS OF MAYOR ELECT FOR 2012/2013

The Mayor asked Council for nominations for Mayor Elect for 2012/13, which would be subject to nomination and appointment at Annual Council, scheduled for 14th May 2012.

It was proposed by Councillor Slater and seconded by Councillor Miah and

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that Councillor Wise be nominated Mayor Elect for appointment as Mayor in the Council Year 2012/2013.

Reason

To ensure that a nomination was made for Mayor of the Borough in 2012/13.

Councillor Wise thanked the Council for the nomination.

67. NOMINATIONS OF DEPUTY MAYOR ELECT FOR 2012/2013

The Mayor asked Council for nominations for Deputy Mayor Elect for 2011/12, which would be subject to nomination and appointment at Annual Council, scheduled for 14th May 2012.

It was proposed by Councillor Miah and seconded by Councillor Slater and

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that Councillor Forrest be nominated Deputy Mayor Elect for appointment as Deputy Mayor in the Council Year 2012/2013.

Reason

To ensure that a nomination was made for Deputy Mayor of the Borough in 2012/13.

Councillor Forrest thanked the Council for the nomination.

68. APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES

There were no proposals to consider.