

## COUNCIL – 6TH NOVEMBER 2017

### ITEM 11 QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

#### 11.1 Councillor Tillotson – Families Living in One-Bedroom Accommodation

At Council on 4th September 2017, in response to Councillor Bradshaw's Motion on Notice, Councillor Mercer stated 'one-bedroom flats are not appropriate (living accommodation) for a family'. I wholeheartedly support this statement and ask how many families with one or more children are currently living in one-bedroom Council accommodation?

Given that we are agreed that one family having to live this way is one family too many, what is being done to re-house these tenants into more suitable accommodation?

*The Leader, or his nominee, will respond:*

*The Council's records show that there are currently thirty Council tenants who live in a one bedroom property who have one or more children below the age of eighteen residing with them.*

*Out of the thirty Council tenants twenty six of the tenants are on the transfer list (twenty one tenants had no children when they were accommodated by the Council) and are looking for alternative accommodation.*

*It should be noted that existing Council tenants do not always notify the Landlord Services team of changes in their household make-up.*

#### 11.2 Councillor Campsall – Use of Glyphosate Herbicides by the Council

Councillors will be aware of current debates about the safety of glyphosate herbicides. Along with other local authorities, the Council uses glyphosate herbicides as part of its grounds maintenance operations. In order to ensure that it is doing all that it can to protect local residents and the environment, could the Lead Member inform councillors about what steps it has taken or will be taking in the future to reduce or eliminate the use of glyphosate in and around children's play areas and areas that are being managed with nature conservation in mind?

*The Leader, or his nominee, will respond:*

*The use of glyphosate is regulated by the EU. The EU is currently considering the renewal of the license for the continued use of glyphosate which expires on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2017. The European Chemicals Agency sent its opinion to the European Commission relating to Glyphosate on 15 June 2017 which concluded that available scientific evidence did not meet the criteria for Glyphosate to be classified as a carcinogen. However, not all member states are in agreement with this advice and the debate is continuing in regard to the length of time which*

*should be agreed for the renewed licence. The Council is monitoring this issue and will carry out a further appraisal of the use of Glyphosate based on advice received from the Government or in light of any revised environmental regulations.*

*Glyphosate is only used when absolutely necessary and is typically used across the Borough to control weed growth along fence/wall lines, paved areas, around trees, shrub beds and car parks. This is generally to make operations more efficient with grass cutting and maintenance of parks and public open spaces. The use of Glyphosate by the Council is carefully monitored and subject to strict environmental regulations.*

*Within areas of nature conservation interest, Glyphosate is rarely used with the exception specific noxious or invasive weed control. In the past 3 years this has primarily been to control invasive stands of Japanese Knotweed whereby the preferred methodology is to inject the herbicide directly into the stem of the plant to ensure targeted use.*

*Use of the herbicide in or around play areas is limited to the external boundary fences and path approaches.*

*The Council is committed to examining the practicality of using alternative weed control measures, such as increased use of mulches, manual removal or thermal methods in the future and continues to explore potential new methodologies and technologies.*

11.3 Councillor Hachem – Involvement of Councillors in Decisions Affecting Loughborough

I have become concerned over recent months that Loughborough Councillors do not seem to be having sufficient involvement in decisions by the Council that particularly affect Loughborough. Whilst the consultations that take place with Loughborough Councillors regarding the Loughborough Special Expenses are welcome, would the Leader undertake to investigate what further measures could be taken to enhance the Council's governance arrangements regarding Loughborough related matters?

*The Leader, or his nominee, will respond:*

*I am grateful for the question and can inform the Council that the Monitoring Officer has been asked to consider what measures could be introduced to give a greater and more formal governance role to Loughborough Councillors in respect of Loughborough related matters.*

*This might involve changes to the Council's Constitution and, if so, a report will be submitted to Council at its next meeting, if possible, to introduce those arrangements.*

11.4 Councillor Jones – Meeting participation by Video Conference

Will the Council commit to looking further into the facilitation of meeting participation via video conference, for those physically unable to attend meetings?

Video link participation is widely today used in business meetings, to overcome various hurdles of geography. Adopting this could enable participation and representation by those:

- taken physically out of the area for their career
- housebound or hospital bound due to illness or disability
- reduce carbon footprint.

Restriction to physical attendance only limits the type of people who might want to be councillors from getting involved. Difficulties in access to meetings could be potentially deterring the disabled, or those working full time worried about making meeting times with traffic and commuting after work. Democracy should be a representation by people from all walks of life, to give insight on decisions from a range of perspectives, to be able to cater for all types of residents in our area.

Furthermore, whilst I welcome the recent move to publishing audio recordings of meetings, can the Council look into taking this further, by recording, broadcasting, and publishing video footage of meetings? This will aid our transparency, which supports openness and accountability, two of the seven Nolan principles of public life. A precedent is set for this by another council in our county.

*The Leader, or his nominee, will respond:*

*It would be possible for the Council to introduce video conferencing facilities to offer Members a limited level of remote participation in meetings. However, under the provisions of Schedule 12 of the Local Government Act 1972, councillors who are not physically present at the meeting location cannot legally be classed as in attendance, and therefore cannot vote on any matters under consideration, and do not count towards forming a quorum.*

*Whilst the Government have recently been consulting on whether to permit video conferencing for joint committees and combined authority meetings, their stated view is that the current legal rules for general local authority meetings remain appropriate (i.e. there is no intention to change the legal requirements to allow for video conferencing).*

*There would also be additional ongoing financial implications in terms of the costs of specialist IT staff required to provide technical support and cover for evening meetings.*

*Web-casting facilities could be installed in the Preston Room and other committee rooms for an initial set-up cost, but the same issue of ongoing additional costs for any technical IT staffing support to cover evening meetings as set out above would apply. For example, the County Council do webcast their meetings but these mainly take place during normal working hours and so IT technical support is available if required.*

11.5 Councillor Bradshaw –Re-purchase of Former Council Properties by the Council

In view of the fact that the response to my recent Motion on Notice indicated that those buying, or having bought, Council properties and wishing to sell them within 10 years, must give the Council the first opportunity to repurchase it, can the Leader confirm that the Council's officers should be pro-active in publicising this?

*The Leader, or his nominee, will respond:*

*At the point of sale of any Council property whether freehold or leasehold under the Right to Buy legislation (since 18<sup>th</sup> January 2005) a covenant is registered with the Land Registry which requires any owner intending to sell their property within 10 years of purchase from the Council (Charnwood Borough Council) to offer the property back to the Council.*

*A customer information sheet can be found on the Councils' website explaining the process which will be undertaken to consider the offer and what happens when an offer is rejected by the Council and the owner proceeds to sell the property.*

11.6 Councillor Bradshaw – Resident Safety When Seeking Tradespeople

Could the Lead Member confirm what the Borough Council does for residents in terms of making them feel secure when looking around to get tradespeople in their homes to carry out various jobs?

A few residents in my Ward, Loughborough Ashby, have been telling me some horror stories that have happened when getting tradespeople into their property.

*The Leader, or his nominee, will respond:*

*Residents encountering issues are advised to either seek advice through Charnwood Citizens Advice Bureau or report to Leicestershire County Council trading standards service who are the appropriate regulatory body to deal with such matters.*

*Charnwood Council provides a range of advice including co-ordinating a 'Beware Doorstop Callers' campaign which promotes the dangers of inviting uncertified / doorstep tradespeople into residents homes. The aim is to increase awareness of the threat of bogus tradespeople committing distraction burglaries and thefts from resident's homes along with pressuring residents to buy goods or services. Social media is also used with the message being: 'If In Doubt Keep Them Out.'*

*Council Officers undertake crime prevention initiatives including the provision of Door Stop Alarms, to prevent unwanted access and stickers to be placed in a resident's home prompting them to check the identity of any caller wishing to gain access to their home. Officers also promote the importance of utilising registered tradespeople and where*

*possible to seek references in respect of the quality of the work they have undertaken for previous customers.*

#### 11.7 Councillor Parton – Update on Southfields Park Renovations

Please would the Lead Member provide Council with information regarding the latest developments with the Southfields Park renovations?

*The Leader, or his nominee, will respond:*

*The Southfields Park capital project is due to be implemented during 2018/19. Officers are currently working on the project details. Draft proposals will be shared with ward members and the local community in order to gather their views as part of a consultation exercise.*

### **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.