

Your Community, Your Voice

Record of Meeting and Actions

5:30 pm, Tuesday, 16 October 2012

**Held at: Cort Crescent Community Centre, Cort Crescent,
Leicester LE3 1QJ**

Who was there:

Councillor Michael Cooke

Councillor Wayne Naylor

INFORMATION SHARING – ‘INFORMATION FAIR’ SESSION

Information on the following topics was available in the room:-

- Connecting Leicester
- Welfare Reforms
- Housing Allocations Consultation
- Riverside Development
- City Warden Service
- Police Issues
- Ward Councillors and general enquiries

At the conclusion of this informal session members of the public were invited to take their seats and take part in the formal session of the meeting.

24. ELECTION OF CHAIR

Councillor Cooke was elected as Chair for the meeting.

He then welcomed all present to the meeting.

25. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Glover.

26. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

27. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minute of the meeting held on 14 August 2012 were agreed as a correct record.

28. DISCUSSION WITH CITY MAYOR

Sir Peter Soulsby, the City Mayor, advised the Meeting that agreement on the future use of Braunstone Hall was close, but had not been finalised. He reminded the

Meeting that a potential purchaser was proposing to provide hotel and conference facilities at the Hall. The draft site plan included the provision of a new cafe in the park and toilet facilities and initial estimates had been made for cost of the necessary road works.

Draft legal documents were with both parties' solicitors and the City Mayor had been told he would receive a report to approve the contract in November 2012.

It was likely that a planning application for the proposals would be submitted in January 2013. Ecology and environmental surveys would need to be completed and other details finalised, but as they could be done after the formal planning application had been considered, it was likely that work on them would start in the Spring of 2013.

In the meantime, the Council was maintaining the property as best it could. For example, unsealed asbestos had been discovered in the basement and removed and dry rot in the main hall had been treated. The City Mayor stated that he was very confident that the Hall could be brought back in to use.

The City Mayor then explained that a consultation was underway on proposals for the Connecting Leicester programme, which had been initiated to reconnect the various parts of the City. For example, the underpass on the inner ring road, (which had been dug through a Roman forum), split the centre. Ways therefore were being sought to reconnect with buildings and places such as Saint Nicholas Church and Castle Park. So far, there had been a very positive response to the programme.

In response to questions and comments from the community, the City Mayor responded as follows:-

- It was proposed to move the meat and fish market, possibly to the current Market Corner area, and rebuild it on the scale of the old meat and fish market;
- An archaeological excavation had been carried out in the area below new part of the current market building when it had been built. In view of this, and as there currently were storage areas below the building, it was unlikely that further excavations would be carried out there;
- Some buildings from the 1960s were worth preserving, such as Vaughn College and some buildings previously associated with Leicester University;
- The City Mayor undertook to look in to a concern that Highcross had been built on top of a Roman mosaic floor;
- More should be being done to light the facades of some of the buildings in the City centre, as there were some beautiful buildings there. Such lighting needed to be done sensitively;
- The City Council could not, in general, control shop window displays, but it was working with local businesses to try and improve shop fronts;

- It was unfortunate that the open top bus tours of the City centre had stopped, but they had been a commercial operation, so the Council had not been involved in the decision to stop them;
- Unfortunately, the City Mayor had very little control over buses in the City, so could not stop services being cut, or influence which services operated from which bus stops. Efforts were being made to encourage the government to grant additional powers to the City Mayor in respect of bus services, but in the meantime, the Deputy City Mayor had established a Bus Users Panel and was in regular contact with the bus companies;
- There were five Medieval churches in the City Centre, but the Cathedral was the only one that was known well;
- One problem with the envisaged Connecting Leicester programme was that there were many things that needed doing and the Council had limited resources;
- The view that pedestrianisation in the City centre had provided some places that could be accessed safely and were good to sit in was welcomed;
- There already were more people living in the City centre than there had been for many years and it was recognised that using areas above shops as flats would bring more life to the City centre;
- The walled garden was open to the public and would remain so. A lot of people did not know that it was there, but it was hoped that this could be remedied;
- When Braunstone Hall was redeveloped, parking would be available for people visiting it. Fortunately, there was sufficient space around the Hall for people to be able to park without encroaching on the green areas. When the planning application for this development was received, care would be taken to ensure that the proposals would not lead to visitors to the Hall parking in local streets; and
- Although it was possible that work on Braunstone Hall could start before the required environmental surveys had been carried out, it was felt that this was unlikely to happen in practice.

During the discussion, concern was expressed about the condition of Gilroes Cemetery and the poor standards of maintenance there. In response, the City Mayor, advised that serious discussions had been held about this and he had been advised that there had been particular problems there this year due to staffing issues and the weather. However, it was recognised that the Cemetery needed to be better maintained.

Concern also was expressed that the covers of boxes installed by suppliers of cable services, such as television, often went missing, which could be dangerous when the boxes were on footways. The City Mayor undertook to look into this.

In summary, the City Mayor reminded the Meeting that views on the proposed Connecting Leicester programme were welcome, including ideas for how further connections could be made.

29. WELFARE REFORM

Karen Wenlock, Revenues and Benefits Manager with Leicester City Council, gave a presentation on forthcoming changes to benefits. A copy of this is attached at the end of these minutes for information.

During the presentation, particular attention was drawn to the following:-

- Significant changes were being made to the Shared Accommodation Rate. These only affected single people under the age of 35, but could result in the financial loss to some people;
- Each Council had to reduce its current expenditure on Council Tax Benefit, (which would become Council Tax Support in April 2013), by 10%. Pensioners could not be affected by changes made in support, so the biggest impact would be on working age people.

The Council currently was holding a public consultation on how it proposed to make these savings. To participate, people could complete a questionnaire. This was available either on-line or in leaflets, copies of which were available at the meeting. The consultation was due to end on 30 October 2012.

- Benefit income would be capped at £500 per week for families or lone parents and £350 for single people. This included an allowance for housing, so could result in a significant reduction in benefits paid to some people. However, there were various exemptions;
- New restrictions on Housing Benefit would only be applied to working age customers in social housing. Pensioners would not be affected;
- Tenants in local authority and housing association properties could face a cut in their Housing Benefit if they were considered to be in a property that was too big for them. For example, children under 10 would be expected to share a room. However, an allowance was made for non-resident carers;
- Discretionary Housing Payments would be increased to cover some of the losses being experienced by customers, but the government had not increased the grant to the Council by enough to enable all losses to be covered. Each case therefore would have to be considered on its merits;
- Various changes to other benefits also were being made. For example, Disability Living Allowance would no longer be a life-time award, as it was being replaced by Personal Independence Payments. To receive these, people would have to meet tougher criteria and the payments would be reviewed periodically;

- Universal Credit would be a new benefit for claimants, whether in or out of work. Payments for housing costs would be included in this, as would tax credits;
- The Council currently was considering the implications of these changes, as many customers would be affected by multiple changes to their benefits; and
- Further information on these changes was available on the Council's website;
- The Money Advice Service was an external agency that could provide further information on these changes. People could make an appointment to see someone from the service either by contacting the Service direct or through the Council.

During discussion on this, it was noted that:-

- To make an enquiry in relation to someone's personal circumstances, it would be best to contact the City Council's Revenues and Benefits section by telephone (0116 252 7006), on-line (www.leicester.gov.uk/housingbenefits), or in person at Wellington House, 22-32 Wellington Street;
- Staff in the Revenues and Benefits service were working with staff in other services, (for example, Housing Options and Housing Management), to try to help those affected; and
- A project team currently was considering how people would be advised of the forthcoming changes and help available to ensure they got what they were entitled to.

30. CITY WARDEN SERVICE

Noel Cazely, City Warden for the Braunstone Park and Rowley Fields Ward, advised the meeting that the Bins on Streets initiative had started on 28 August 2012. This encouraged people not to leave their bins out, particularly in view of a spate of bin fires and the mobility problems caused if the bins blocked pavements.

At the start of the initiative, approximately 100 bins were noted in the streets, but during the week beginning 8 October 2012 this number had reduced to 12.

31. POLICE ISSUES UPDATE

Sergeant Cara Guest advised that:-

- There had been some vehicle crime, especially in the southern part of the Ward. People were reminded to not leave valuable items in their cars;
- A 19 year old had been arrested locally for burglary and had received a sentence of three years. Another person had received a sentence of four years for

burglary and handling of stolen goods and a third person had received a sentence of three years for burglary;

- A target was to reduce burglaries in the Ward by 8%. This had been exceeded;
- Feedback had been received that not enough police were being seen on the streets. This was due to resource problems caused by having to police events through the year such as the Queen's visit to Leicester, the Olympic Torch relay and the Olympic Games. Now that these had finished, the situation should improve;
- The areas covered by Neighbourhood Policing units and the structure of these units were being changed. It was hoped through this to increase the visibility of the Police; and
- Police officers could be contacted through Twitter or at Braunstone Police Station.

In response to a question, Sergeant Guest advised that witnesses to crimes did not always receive feedback on the outcome of that crime. However, feedback was always given to the victims.

32. WARD COMMUNITY BUDGET 2012/13

Feedback from Grant Recipients

i) B Inspired

Anne Short of B Inspired reminded the meeting that funding had been awarded towards two events in the Ward. The first was a clean-up in the park and other community areas, for which a grant of £1,500 had been approved. It was hoped that one of the clean-ups could be done over the half term holiday, to encourage children to join in, but all local residents were encouraged to participate in all clean-ups.

A grant of £498.28 also had been approved for two Jubilee Parties. The Residents' Network had donated to these as well. One of the parties had been an Indoor Street Party, at which a local 13 year-old had entertained people with an excellent magic show. Various children's activities also had offered, including crown and badge making. Immediately after that, an event was held at Audley End with a Secret Garden theme. There also was a DJ and dancing.

It had been hoped to hold a general event in the Ward Garden the day after the Secret Garden event, but it had to be cancelled due to very wet weather. The only food being provided was cake and drink, so this was donated to another event being held a few days later.

ii) Fullhurst Community College

The Chair reminded the meeting that Fullhurst College had applied to a number of Community Meetings for funding to start a Hardship Fund for students at the College. This Meeting had given a grant of £1,200.

No-one from the College was available to attend this meeting, but an update had been provided, which the Chair presented. From this, it was noted that the Fund had been used to support some of the College's most vulnerable students. For example, PE kit and school uniform items had been provided, enabling students to "fit in" and feel engaged with their learning. This had made making friends and settling in to school life much easier and more positive for those students.

Access to the Fund had been individualised, each case being decided on its own merits. However, to ensure rigour and consistency, all spending had to be authorised by a member of the senior leadership team. In general, funding for uniform had gone to students who did not live with either biological parent but were not receiving support as looked after children, students who had medical conditions that meant they needed multiple sets of uniform for each week, and students who regularly came to school unwashed and not having eaten since the school meal the previous day. Funding to support the minibus was given for students who were carers for members of their families.

The school expressed its thanks for the funding, as it had enabled support to be provided for students who did not receive other help.

33. COUNCILLOR UPDATE

a) Braunstone Park and Rowley Fields Health Strategy

The Chair advised that:-

- The first meeting to discuss the Braunstone Park and Rowley Fields Health Strategy had been held and an outline for the Strategy had been developed. Further work would be done with the consultant on 18 October;
- One of the key issues to emerge so far had been the lack of co-ordination between health professionals;
- It was hoped that an event could be held to launch the Strategy; and
- A residents' meeting would be held early in 2013 to discuss the Strategy further.

b) Riverside

A planning application had been submitted for the move of Ellesmere College on to part of the Riverside site. It was hoped that the school would move there in approximately two years' time.

As there currently were no proposals to use a large piece of land facing Harefield Avenue, discussions were being held on how residents could use that area.

c) Election of Police and Crime Commissioner

The Meeting was reminded that elections for the new post of Police and Crime Commissioner would take place on 15 November 2012. At present, the Police Authority was responsible for directing the way Police services were provided, but this role would be taken over by the Commissioner.

There currently was some concern that there would be a low turnout for this election, so everyone was encouraged to vote.

34. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

a) Naming of Footpath

A resident suggested that one of the footpaths to the Health Centre should be named after a resident, who had worked hard for the community until her recent death.

AGREED:

That suggestions for names for these routes should be passed to the Ward Members.

b) Gating Orders

Louise Lavelle, Community Safety Development Officer, advised that a Gating Order was being processed for the path connecting Gaddesby Avenue with Winton Avenue. It was hoped that the gate would be locked daily from 7.00 pm to 7.00 am. Chosen residents would hold the keys to the gates.

The formal advertisement for the Order would be in the Leicester Mercury on 19 October 2012.

c) Art Exhibition

Anita Robinson, Parks Officer with Leicester City Council, advised the Meeting that between 10.00 am and 12.30 pm on Wednesday 24 October there would be an exhibition on the history of Braunstone in the stable block in Braunstone Park. In addition, the Art Club would be exhibiting pictures of Braunstone.

d) Braunstone Park Clean-Up

Anita Robinson, Parks Officer with Leicester City Council, advised the Meeting that a clean-up would be held in Braunstone Park between 10.00 am and 12.30 pm on Tuesday 6 November 2012. Those participating would meet at the stable block in Braunstone Park.

e) Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday 18 December 2012

35. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7.32 pm

Welfare Reform Changes to Come
Karen Wenlock
Revenues & Benefits Manager

Welfare Reform

- Save £20 billion on welfare benefits bill
- Simplify the benefits system
- Make work pay – better incentives
- Streamline in/out of work support
- Develop 'claimant commitment'
- Increase conditionality and sanctions
- Aimed at 'working age' claimants
- Better use of technology to reduce error

Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR)
from January 2012

Affects single people aged between 25 – 34 living in property, other than shared accommodation

- Exemptions – MAPPA level 2, Severe Disability Premium, Hostel resident 3 months

Example
1 bed rate before the change £ 91.15 pwk
After change will get SAR £ 58.00 pwk
Loss £ 33.15 pwk

**Additional change from April 2012 –
LHA Rate Frozen will now be an annual increase**

CHANGES TO COME

- Council Tax Support
- Benefit capping
- Reductions to HB for social housing*
(*The Bedroom Tax)
- Discretionary Housing Payments
- Welfare Assistance
- Income related benefits
- Universal Credit

Council Tax Support

Council Tax Benefit will be abolished from April 2013

- Replaced with Council Tax Support
- 10% reduction (Loss of at least £3m for Leicester)
- Pensioners will be protected
- Biggest impact felt in working age population

Likely that most households will pay around £200 per year towards Council tax bill

**Consultation is in progress – have your say until
30th October 2012**

Benefit Income Capping
April 2013

- **Benefit income for working age benefit claimants will be restricted**
- **£500 pwk week for families/ lone parents**
- **£350 pwk for singles.**
- Any 'benefit income' above £500 will not be paid.
- Housing benefit is included in this but NOT Council Tax Benefit which will not be paid in the same way from April 2013.

Impact – The change will affect mainly families with 4+ children

Benefit Income Capping continued

The DWP are providing LA's with the details of those claimants they think will be affected by this cap.

These claimants are being sent a letter from the DWP stating they are likely to be affected by the change. Direct.Gov web site have a telephone Helpline & online available for people to check if they will be affected by these changes :-

Helpline number 0845 6057064/ textphone 0845 6088551

On line:- www.direct.gov.uk/benefitcap.

The LA will also be contacting these customers before the change occurs.

Benefit Income Capping continued

Exemptions will apply if the claimant is in receipt of

- Disabled Living Allowance/PIP/AA,
- War widow/widower,
- Support element of ESA (& UC when in) and
- Working Tax Credit.
- "Grace Period"

Cap not applied for 39 weeks for people who have worked continuously for previous 12 months and have lost their job through no fault of their own.

HB Restriction – April 2013

This is being referred to as **The Bedroom Tax**

- Working Age customers in **social housing**
(Housing Association and Local Authority Tenancies)

14% reduction for 1 extra bedroom*
25% reduction for 2 or more extra

This % amount is a reduction from the eligible rent then the HB award is calculated on the lower amount.

*The room allowances are in line with LHA so it does not always mean there is a spare bedroom in the property. Some young children are required to share.

Room Allowance

One bedroom for each of the following:

- a couple
- a person who is not a child (aged 16 and over)
- two children of the same sex
- two children who are under 10
- any other child,
(other than a foster child or child whose main home is elsewhere).
- a carer (or group of carers) providing overnight care

The Bedroom Tax - Exemptions

They are:-

- Where the claimant is of a qualifying pension age
- The property is shared ownership
- Rental is non-mainstream e.g. mooring charges, caravan site rent
- Temporary Accommodation. (The claimant was placed in the accommodation as homeless)
- Supported "Exempt" accommodation

Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP's) - Limited Budget to help meet housing costs

- Under the changes LA's are required to consider using the DHP pot to cover some of the Welfare reform changes
- The bedroom tax could affect entitlement to foster carers and claimants where their accommodation has had significant alterations carried out due to their disabilities.

In these circumstances DHP payment will need to be considered to help make up some/all of the shortfall – again each case will be assessed on its own merits.

Welfare Assistance 2013

- o **Community Care grants** and other **Crisis loans** will be **abolished, a new award will be paid out by Local Authorities, instead of the DWP.**
- o Will be a grant
- o Administered at the discretion of the LA
- o Nationally £178m to distribute
- o It will be local schemes but funding will not be ring-fenced
- o LA's will use existing powers to administer payments

Currently the R&B Service are leading the project to implement this change.

Income Related Benefits

Incapacity Benefit/Income Support (in progress)

- being replaced by ESA.

Income Support (in progress)

- being phased out (JSA & ESA instead)

DLA (For working age people)

- From **June 2013** being replaced by PIP's (Personal Independence Payments – similar to the ESA change)

Universal Credit (UC)

- New benefit for both in/out of work claimants
- Includes **housing costs**
- From October 2013 for new claims
- More conditionality & sanctions
- Some transitional protection for transferees
- Online claims – new computer system
- Paid monthly to claimant, including rent
- Will include Tax Credits
- Will keep 35p in £1 over earnings disregard
- Lose some existing premiums (e.g. disability/carer)

Timetable for UC

- o **April 2013** - Pathfinder area used to test UC.
- o **October 2013 to April 2014** –

New Claims and Change of circumstances.

If applying for - jobseekers allowance, employment support allowance, housing benefit, working tax credit or child tax credit.

- o **April 2014** –

A claimant may be moved onto UC if it is considered that they will benefit from this – e.g. if on working tax credit and work a small number of hours a week but could work more hours with support from UC.

- o **The end of 2015 - the end of 2017** – anyone else

What help is available?

o Revenues & Benefits (R&B)Service

Telephone 0116 252 7006

On Line

www.leicester.gov.uk/housingbenefits

In person

Wellington House, 22-32 Wellington Street

- o Money Advice Service ("MA" appointments available via R&B service, telephone number as above)

What help is available?

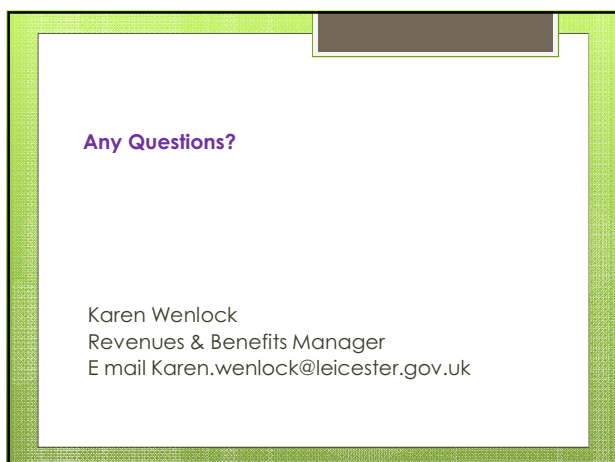
- o Customer Service Centres

- o Housing Options*

*LCC is reviewing the homelessness policy

*LCC is reviewing the allocations policy

- o Welfare Rights Service



Any Questions?

Karen Wenlock
Revenues & Benefits Manager
E mail Karen.wenlock@leicester.gov.uk