

## Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council - 30 September 2010

### Position Statement from the Leader of the Council

Madam Mayor, Fellow Councillors, Officers, members of the public and of the media

It is some time since I last made a statement to the Council and so there is much to report. I will try to keep comments on individual issues brief, so that I can cover everything within the allotted time.

In July, Hinckley Leisure Centre was awarded 'best fitness facility' by Oak FM, as voted for by listeners and customers, and SLM were awarded 'Leisure Operator of the Year (2010)' by the Fitness Industry Association. Both these were excellent for the town and an example of the work undertaken with our partners.

You will recall at the last Council that I said I would write to Eric Pickles' office to seek clarification on a number of key Planning issues arising from recent Government announcements. I am pleased to report I have now received a response from the Rt Hon Greg Clarke on behalf of Eric Pickles and CLG, which I will summarise:

- \* **Review of Housing Targets** - I asked if it was possible for the Council to undertake a full or partial review of the Core Strategy by Council resolution. The firm advice back is that any such review would have to be taken through a formal review of the Plan. In establishing the right level of housing provision, we should have full regard to PPS3 (Housing) and all available evidence to justify our housing supply policies. Significantly, we would be required to defend these during an LDF Examination. Quite clearly, this would not be an easy process and I am advised such an approach would not only have a significant resource impact in respect of staffing and costs for the production and commissioning of revised evidence bases, but there would also be significant costs for the formal examination process. This would also have a major impact on the progress of other LDF documents.

I must give a clear health warning over the risks on embarking on a formal review of the Core Strategy. This will require us to update our evidence base and set new targets based on the outcomes of this work. As we know from the approach taken in the Markfield Inquiry by developers, as well as the argument put forward by competing developers in Stoke Golding on housing need and growth, there is a real likelihood that our housing targets will go up. I'm disappointed that the Inspector on the Markfield Appeal did not appear to address the 'localism' agenda and community views and concerns. I have therefore written to Eric Pickles on this point and asked him to intervene to "recover" the decision.

- \* **Setting minimum and maximum targets** - On this issue, we are advised that we can determine this through our Site Allocations Development Plan documents, but we must prepare a robust evidence base for any decision so that it can be justified if challenged by developers.

- \* **Gypsies and Travellers** - CLG have advised that the abolition of regional strategies means that local authorities will be responsible for determining the right level of site provision reflecting local need and demand, whilst pointing us to national guidance on Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments. We are advised that we are not bound by existing Needs Assessments. This supports the position I set out at the last Council meeting and my desire to review the Gypsy and Traveller needs against locally determined methodology rather than the previous criteria which I have long argued is flawed. I hope that we can undertake this review as soon as possible.

The Executive has met also (on 8 September) and I am delighted to highlight the endorsement it has given to the Leicestershire and Rutland Sport Annual Report, which has been circulated to all Members. It demonstrates the impact that this Council is having in promoting sport and physical activity throughout the Borough. Of particular note is that for every pound invested by the Council in the LRS, we have had a minimum return of £26. Put into context, for the £7.5k we invest annually, we have drawn down just under £900k over the last six years and £231,281 in 2009/10. We continue to be one of the best performing Districts in Leicestershire for drawing in investment in Sport for the benefit of our communities. I would like to thank my colleague and Executive Lead for Cultural Services, Wendy Moore, the Deputy Chief Executive (Community Direction) and the Cultural Services Team for their efforts in securing our sporting success. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all those young people and volunteers who have participated this summer in the Leicestershire and Rutland Annual Youth Games, which were a tremendous success.

In addition, the Executive has welcomed a report demonstrating that our Waste Collection, Street Cleansing and Grounds Maintenance services provide excellent value for money and will be improved still further by the implementation of plans for further synchronised working, the development of our communal operators and the review of refuse collection rounds. All three will make very positive contributions, both to the customer service and to our Medium Term Financial Strategy.

The Executive has approved an updated Environmental Policy and endorsed the further work on the Barwell/Earl Shilton Masterplan, involving further engagement with the public and key stakeholders on the Preferred Masterplan Option. If we are serious about the regeneration of Barwell and Earl Shilton we must make these SUE's work. They are a once in a generation chance for investment in these two areas which has been talked about for many years

The Executive has agreed also the adoption of the Housing Strategy 2010-13, based on the three key elements:

- \* Better balanced housing markets
- \* Improved housing conditions
- \* Community cohesion

I understand the Scrutiny Commission has endorsed this Strategy for implementation.

I must express my deep dismay at the recent publication of a report by 'The Local Data Company' – (note: registered office in London – not local at all!) who wrongly reported on the vacancy rates of Hinckley Town Centre. Our own recent survey shows a vacancy rate in Hinckley as of September at 13%. This compares with the national average of 13%. This is a decrease from February 2010 and compares favourably with other East Midlands towns, some experiencing over 20% vacancy

rates. Hinckley is one of the few towns in the East Midlands showing a decrease in vacancies over the last year which is good news for the town.

I am extremely pleased to report great progress on tackling the backlog on disabled facilities grants. You may recall this Council agreeing to a budget increase of £110,000 for the financial year 2010/11/ As a result of this investment, certain specialist adaptations (lifts, stair lifts and specialist equipment) have been issued immediately on receipt of referrals from Social Services; together with all minor adaptation works (handrails, grab rails, key safe etc). An accelerated programme has been agreed and is almost complete which will eliminate the backlog. This is great news for our customers and I would like to express my thanks to Officers for securing this progress.

With the full support of the Executive, we have been party to a joint submission to the Minister for Housing and Local Government, Grant Shapps, from the seven Leicestershire Districts in respect of the future arrangements for Concessionary Fares, in response to recent consultation. We have argued strongly that the baseline for each District authority be reduced by no more than their current spending on fares and that no class of authority should collectively gain or lose when the transfer to county authorities is made. This reflects the position being taken by the District Councils' Network which, I understand, has put the case in even stronger, but more succinct terms!

Whilst I know that the substantive item tonight is on the Revenues and Benefits partnership, can I just highlight for Members the exceptional performance of our own Benefits team, as shown by recent data from the Department for Work and Pensions itself. Full details are attached to the circulated copy of my statement and they show clearly a level of achievement of which this Council should be proud and on your behalf I wish to thank all the staff involved for what they have achieved. I understand that the Revenues performance is similarly strong.

At this point, Madam Mayor, it is appropriate that I ask Members of all Groups to join me in expressing sincere thanks and appreciation to Belle Imison for her tremendous contribution to the work of this Council over more years than she would wish me to mention. The emerging Revenues and Benefits partnership is simply her most recent achievement. The current levels of performance have been driven by her quiet drive and commitment and her corporate contribution to transformation, to flexible working and to the relocation arrangements has been outstanding. She is an example to all of excellent customer service and efficiency; local government working at its very best! Even on her last evening with this Council she is still working to ensure that we introduce an effective service for our taxpayers. Belle, we extend our thanks to you and our very best wishes for the future.

Finally, the Executive has endorsed the submission made by this Council, in partnership with Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough and North Warwickshire District Councils, for support from CLG and BIS for a 'Cross-Border Delivery Partnership' to boost the broader economic regeneration of the area either side of the A5. This bid has received support from fifteen major businesses and related partners and aims to ensure there is a focus on this area from the two neighbouring Local Economic Partnership (LEPs), (Coventry/Warwickshire and Leicester/Leicestershire), if they are successful in their bids. We consider that the cross-border bid is particularly innovative, complimenting the two LEP bids, and await what we hope will be a positive initial response from government departments in due course. We will remain a partner in the Leicester/Leicestershire LEP, whatever the outcome. Contrary to ill-

informed comments from the County Council Leader, we have supported that initiative and have not sought to compete with it in any way!

Can I advise Members also that the Atkins Building was formally opened on Tuesday. It is an excellent refurbishment and has attracted huge interest from potential and actual tenants. The Hinckley Club for Young People also will formally open on 9 October and our new exemplary Greenfields industrial units will be completed tomorrow. All three of these projects are proof of our effective partnership working and the confidence shown in this Council by external funding agencies. These projects are the first of several key regeneration schemes which will transform the Borough over the next few years.

With that, Madam Mayor, I will end, and trust that this Council will give its support to another major partnership initiative, now led by this Council, on Revenues and Benefits.

Cllr Stuart Bray  
Leader of the Council  
30 September 2010

## Great Britain Benchmarking – 2009/2010 Performance

The performance of 2009-2010 has recently been released by the DWP, using data obtained from the SHBE extracts of all authorities in England, Scotland and Wales.

The 3 performances measured were :-

Number of days to process new claims

Number of days to process change of circumstances

Number of days to process new claims and changes (Right time indicator)

The performance of the 378 authorities throughout Great Britain has been compiled, and I have detailed the following for benchmarking purposes :-

### **1) Number of days to process new claims**

<b>Hinckleys and Bosworth's 2009/2010 performance.</b>	<b>Number of authorities with the same performance.</b>	<b>Number of authorities with better performance.</b>	<b>Number of authorities with worse performance.</b>
<b>15 days</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>364</b>

This table shows that during 2009-2010 only 10 authorities in Great Britain, out of 378 processed claims in a shorter time than at Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council.

### **2) Number of days to process change of circumstances**

<b>Hinckleys and Bosworth's 2009/2010 performance.</b>	<b>Number of authorities with the same performance.</b>	<b>Number of authorities with better performance.</b>	<b>Number of authorities with worse performance.</b>
<b>4 days</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>348</b>

This table shows that during 2009-2010, only 9 authorities in Great Britain, out of 378 processed change of circumstances in a shorter time than at Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council.

### **3) Number of days to process new claims and changes (Right time indicator)**

<b>Hinckleys and Bosworth's 2009/2010 performance.</b>	<b>Number of authorities with the same performance.</b>	<b>Number of authorities with better performance.</b>	<b>Number of authorities with worse performance.</b>
<b>6 days</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>355</b>

This table shows that during 2009-2010, only 7 authorities in Great Britain, out of 378 processed jointly new claims and changes of circumstances in a shorter time than at Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council.

## **Conclusion**

For the whole period 2009/10, the overall average number of days to process new claims for Great Britain was 25 days, for changes it was 8 days and for the right time indicator it was 11 days.

It is clear from the benchmarking statistics I have detailed above that not only have we been well below the average number of days for all performance measures detailed, but have in fact been one of the top performing authorities during the 2009/10 period.

**COUNCIL**  
**30 SEPTEMBER**  
**SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA**

Agenda Item 7

(a) Question asked by Mr. M.R. Lay and addressed to Mr. S.L. Bray

“As Members will be aware, the Government’s Planning Inspector has allowed the appeal by Jelson Homes to build 112 new homes on open countryside at Markfield. This is a major blow to the community at Markfield.

Can the Leader of the Council please explain why no educational provision is being made and though the Inspector has supported the provision of other community infrastructure, namely play and open space and affordable housing. Anyone with children at school in Markfield would argue there clearly is a need why has this not been demonstrated!”

Response from Mr. S.L. Bray

“I’m sure all Members will share my disappointment over learning of the recent Inspectors decision regarding the appeal by Jelson Homes, to build 112 new homes at Markfield.

Notwithstanding this decision, the Inspector agreed with the evidence and stance taken by the Borough Council in respect of the delivery of affordable housing, play and open space provision and sustainable transport initiatives. He rejected Leicestershire County Councils’ request for contributions on the basis he was not satisfied that there was adequate evidence provided to justify the requirement. In fact, the County Council only sought contributions to unspecified improvements of Coalville Civic amenity site and to the Library service. There were no requirements sought for education or highways. In the Inspectors words, ‘no analysis of the impact of the proposed development upon these services has been provided, not any description of how the contributions address those impacts contrary to guidance contained in para 335 of circa 05/2005’.”

Agenda Item 12 (Second Motion)

Amendment by Mr. M.R. Lay to Motion from Mr. S.L. Bray

To add a new final paragraph as follows:

'Further the Council will seek leave to pursue a judicial review of the decision in order to protect the interests of the residents not just of Markfield but the wider Borough'