

Minutes of the MEETING of MILTON KEYNES CITY COUNCIL held on WEDNESDAY
18 JANUARY 2022 at 7.30 pm

Present: Councillor Marlow (Mayor)

Councillors Andrews, Balazs, Bowyer, M Bradburn, R Bradburn, Cannon, A Carr, J Carr, Clarke, Crooks, Darlington, Exon, Ferrans, Fuller, Geary, Hall, D Hopkins, Hosking, Hume, Imran, M Khan, N Khan, Lancaster, Legg, Long, Mahendran, Marland, McPake, Middleton, Montague, Muzammil, Nazir, B Nolan, Z Nolan, Oguntola, Priestley, Raja, Rolfe, Smith, Taylor, Trendall, Verma, Walker, Wallis, Wardle and Wilson-Marklew.

Alderman Miles and Alderwoman Saunders and 2 members of the public.

Apologies: Councillors K Bradburn, Cryer-Whitehead, De Villiers, Hearnshaw, V Hopkins, Hussain, Jenkins, McLean, McQuillan and Townsend.

Aldermen Bartlett, Beeley, Bristow, Connor, Coventry, Geary, Henderson, Lewis, McCall, McKenzie and Tallack and Alderwomen Henderson, Irons and Lloyd.

CL88 MINUTES

RESOLVED -

That the Minutes of the Special Meeting of Council held on 23 November 2022 and the meeting of Council held on 23 November 2022 be approved and signed by the Mayor as correct records.

CL89 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

None.

CL90 ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor made announcements in respect of: Oracle Red Bull Racing Home Run event; New Year's Honours; the death of Pat Wicker and Brad Bradstock, the safe arrival of Councillor Jenkins's daughter and a reminder to submit Ward Based Budgets.

CL91 PETITIONS

None.

CL92 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

- (a) Question from Sophie Bell to Councillor Trendall (Cabinet Member for Customer Services)

Sophie Bell, asked Councillor Trendall, if he would advise how many times the City Council were contacted after the error that saw direct debits being taken early?

Councillor Trendall indicated that as of the 12 January 2023 there had been 903 phone calls and 200 emails on this issue.

As a supplementary question Sophie Bell, asked Councillor Trendall, how many households had received emergency financial support as a result of the direct debits being taken early?

Councillor Trendall advised that fourteen households had received emergency financial support.

- (b) Question from Alderman Bartlett to Councillor Darlington (Cabinet member for Adults, Housing and Health Communities)

Alderman Bartlett was unable to attend the meeting and their question and the response is attached as an Annex to the minutes.

CL93 BUSINESS REMAINING FROM THE LAST MEETING

None

CL94 REPORTS FROM CABINET & COMMITTEES – CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL – 4 JANUARY 2023 – DISSOLUTION OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL AS A COMMITTEE OF COUNCIL

Councillor M Bradburn (Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel) moved the following recommendation from the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 4 January 2023, which was seconded by Councillor Balazs:

“That Council be asked to agree to dissolve the Corporate Parenting Panel as an advisory Committee of Council.

The Council heard from one member of the public.

The recommendation was agreed by acclamation.

RESOLVED:

That the Corporate Parenting Panel be dissolved as an advisory Committee of Council.

CL95

COUNCILLORS' QUESTIONS

- (a) Question from Councillor Smith to Councillor Wilson-Marklew (Cabinet member for Climate and Sustainability)

Councillor Smith, referring to the month of action against violence and having the Knife Angel based at Stadium MK in December, asked Councillor Wilson-Marklew, would she provide the Council with an update on the impact this month of action had?

Councillor Wilson-Marklew indicated that over December the Council had worked with partners including Thames Valley Police, MK Dons Sports and Education Trust, the Safety Centre, Police and Crime Commissioner and local volunteers to deliver 50 events, 100 education sessions and 25,000 conversations between volunteers and members of the public. This was a small amount of the work that was taking place against violence and the Council would continue to work with partners to tackle violence and help keep local people safe.

- (b) Question from Councillor D Hopkins to Councillor Marland (Leader of the Council)

Councillor D Hopkins, referring to the decision by officers not to extend the deadline for member requests that an application for 103 dwellings in Woburn Sands be referred to Planning Committee, asked Councillor Marland, did he support this decision or would he overrule officers to allow this significant, detailed planning application to come before Planning Committee or Planning Panel?

Councillor Marland indicated that it was not in his gift to overrule officers on a delegated matter as the delegation came from the Planning Committee and not the Executive.

- (c) Question from Councillor Oguntola to Councillor Trendall (Cabinet member for Customer Services)

Councillor Oguntola asked Councillor Trendall, if he could provide an update as to what the City Council are doing to increase community activity in Campbell Park and Old Woughton?

Councillor Trendall indicated that there were two free book exchanges that had been established in decommissioned and renovated bus shelters. He thanked the Council and local volunteers and he hoped that these would be the first of many.

- (d) Question from Councillor Geary to Councillor Mahendran (Chair of Planning Committee)

Councillor Geary, referring to the Planning Committee receiving reports on appeal decisions and award of costs, asked Councillor Mahendran, could she advise when the appeal decision on the 'Bletchley Landfill' site would be reported to the committee?

Councillor Mahendran indicated that she would ask officers for an update as to when this appeal would be reported to the Planning Committee.

As a supplementary question, Councillor Geary asked Councillor Mahendran, was the fact that the Council was facing a costs bill of over £900,000 one of the reasons that this was being held up from being reported to the committee?

Councillor Mahendran advised that as indicated above she would ask officers for an update on this matter.

- (e) Question from Councillor Rolfe to Councillor Darlington (Cabinet member for Adults, Housing and Healthy Communities)

Councillor Rolfe, asked Councillor Darlington, if she could provide an update on the Mellish Court demolition?

Councillor Darlington indicated that the tender had been awarded to demolish both Mellish Court and The Gables. Work was progressing floor by floor at The Gables and once this was completed the contractor would start work at Mellish Court.

As a supplementary question, Councillor Rolfe asked Councillor Darlington, did she agree with him, that it was important that Ward members were kept up to date on the major issues happening in their wards and if she did agree could she investigate why he had not been kept up to date with briefings

or why officers had not responded to his emails?

Councillor Darlington advised that she would follow up with officers as to why he was not being kept up to date.

- (f) Question from Councillor Mahendran to Councillor J Carr (Cabinet member for Tackling Social Inequalities)

Councillor Mahendran, referring to the importance of youth democracy and the recent motion to Council on this matter, asked Councillor J Carr, if she would provide an update on how the Youth Council will be shaped and any progress with electing a youth mayor?

Councillor J Carr indicated that MK Youth Cabinet would now be known as MK Youth Council and elections for this would be held in February. There would be 50 places on the Youth Council with the aim that this was a diverse representation of the youth population of Milton Keynes. The Council was committed to introducing a youth mayor and deputy mayor and elections for these roles would take place after the main set of elections.

- (g) Question from Councillor Muzammil to Councillor Darlington (Cabinet member for Adults, Housing and Healthy Communities)

Councillor Muzammil, referring to the recent announcement of £4.2 million in funding from the government for homelessness, asked Councillor Darlington, would she join with her in thanking our two local MP's for lobbying for this funding?

Councillor Darlington indicated that she was not aware of any lobbying that our MP's had done but she was aware of the hard work of officers to submit the bids and that Milton Keynes which for so long had been known as a tent city was now in the situation that nobody who needed and wanted a safe place to sleep was denied one. Councillor Darlington indicated that if either of the MP's would like to find out more about this work they just needed to contact her.

- (h) Question from Councillor B Nolan to Councillor Wilson-Marklew (Cabinet member for Climate and Sustainability)

Councillor B Nolan, referring to works that were taking place to improve Grafton Park, asked Councillor Wilson-Marklew, if she could provide an update on the work that was happening at the park?

Councillor Wilson-Marklew indicated that the Council was working in conjunction with My Milton Keynes to carry out improvements in the park including landscaping, flood prevention and refurbishment of the public art. The park was on its way to being an open and attractive space in the central city.

- (i) Question from Councillor Balazs to Councillor Middleton (Cabinet member for Resources)

Councillor Balazs, referring to the rollout of fibre broadband in Tickford Street, Newport Pagnell, asked Councillor Middleton, if he could provide residents with an update as to when this would be connected and go live?

Councillor Middleton indicated that the broadband rollout was done by City Fibre which was a private company but that he would ask officers if they could provide a response

- (j) Question from Councillor Clarke to Councillor Darlington (Cabinet member for Adults, Housing and Healthy Communities)

Councillor Clarke, referring to the colder weather that we were experiencing, asked Councillor Darlington, what steps was the Council putting in place to support rough sleepers?

Councillor Darlington indicated that there was a bed available for anyone who wanted a safe warm space to sleep at either the night shelter or the winter shelter. Those rough sleepers who were not yet willing to engage with the Council were visited every morning.

- (k) Question from Councillor Hosking to Councillor Middleton (Cabinet member for Resources)

Councillor Hosking, asked Councillor Middleton, could he confirm the current and projected cost overruns on the Milton Keynes East Development and crucially any associated

liabilities on this Council?

Councillor Middleton indicated that as he had not had advance notice of the question he did not have the details available and he would therefore clarify what the question was and provide a written response.

- (l) Question from Councillor A Carr to Councillor Z Nolan (Cabinet member for Children and Families)

Councillor A Carr asked Councillor Z Nolan, if she could provide an update on the recent Ofsted Inspection on children in care?

Councillor Z Nolan indicated that Ofsted had recently published their report and had praised the Council for improving its practices for supporting children in care and recognised the positive impact that these improvements have had on children's lives. Our social workers were commended for their understanding of the needs of the individual children and the strong family support ethos. There was more to do and actions had already been identified and work was taking place on these.

- (m) Question from Councillor Raja to Councillor J Carr (Cabinet member for Tackling Social Inequalities)

Councillor Raja, referring to the community cost of living event that had been held today, asked Councillor J Carr, could the event be held again on the weekend so that those residents that work during the week could attend?

Councillor J Carr indicated that that the event had not been organised by the Council but she would ask officers to follow up with those that had organised it to see if it could be run again on a weekend.

- (n) Question from Councillor D Hopkins to Councillor Marland (Leader of the Council)

Councillor D Hopkins, referring to the fact that Woburn Sands was losing its last remaining high street bank, asked Councillor Marland, would he work with local members and the town council to find ways to retain a cashpoint for the town or a weekly mobile banking service?

Councillor Marland indicated that there were a number of campaigns to ensure that free to use cashpoints were provided particularly in areas of deprivation. This criteria may not apply to Woburn Sands but that he was prepared to see what he could do on this matter.

- (o) Question from Councillor Hume to Councillor Wilson-Marklew (Cabinet member for Climate and Sustainability)

Councillor Hume, referring to the aim of the Council to be net zero by 2030, asked Councillor Wilson-Marklew, what support would be available for town, parish and community councils to help them reduce their carbon footprints?

Councillor Wilson-Marklew indicated that there would be guidance available soon for how these groups can access the carbon off-set fund. This fund was paid for by developers to ensure that carbon saving measures could be supported and delivered locally. Councillor Wilson-Marklew indicated that she would welcome providing more information to groups that were interested and there would be a briefing and support available.

CL96

TAKING BACK CONTROL OF PLANNING

Councillor D Hopkins moved the following motion which was seconded by Councillor Bowyer:

- “1. That this Council notes plans to build a significant number of new homes in the next twenty-seven years as part of its MKFutures 2050 ambitions, and the impact this will have an upon our existing residents, particularly while the development is taking place.
2. That this Council recognises its responsibility to minimise and mitigate impacts of construction, such as increased traffic disruption, noise pollution and pressure on our already stretched infrastructure.
3. That the Director of Planning and Placemaking be asked to ensure that the Council’s approach to the assessment of construction management plans is sufficiently robust to offer enforceable protection for existing residents and to ensure that Milton Keynes remains a great place to live and work.

4. That Cabinet be asked to reiterate their commitment that Milton Keynes City Council will take back control of planning by placing MK residents, their communities and MK business first in each and every decision relating to draft policies and other strategic work, relating to the new City Plan.
5. That Planning Cabinet Advisory Group be asked to ensure their work programme is sufficient to scrutinise and assess the relevant studies that will form part of the evidence base for the new City Plan in a way that deliver on the Cabinet's commitment to take back control of planning."

Councillor Ferrans moved the following amendment which was seconded by Councillor Trendall:

The motion, if amended would read:

- "1. That this Council notes plans to build a significant number of new homes in the next twenty-seven years as part of its MKFutures 2050 ambitions, and the impact this will have an upon our existing residents, particularly while the development is taking place.
2. That this Council recognises its responsibility to minimise and mitigate impacts of construction, such as increased traffic disruption, noise pollution and pressure on our already stretched infrastructure, **and shall work towards minimisation of these within the constraints set by the government.**
3. That the Director of Planning and Placemaking be asked to ensure that **where the law currently allows**, the Council's approach to the assessment of construction management plans is sufficiently robust to offer enforceable protection or existing residents, ~~and~~ to ensure that Milton Keynes remains a great place to live and work.
4. That Cabinet be asked to reiterate their commitment that Milton Keynes City Council ~~will take back control of planning by placing~~ **will, in so far as they have the power to do so, prioritise the needs of** MK residents, their communities and MK businesses first, **deconflicting or prioritising these needs where necessary**, ~~in each and every decision relating to draft~~ **when formulating** policies and other strategic work, relating to the new City Plan.

5. That the Cabinet member for Planning be asked to ensure that the work of the Planning Cabinet Advisory Group is sufficient to advise development of the new City Plan, ~~be asked to ensure their work programme is sufficient to scrutinise and assess~~ using knowledge of the relevant studies that will form part of the evidence base, ~~for the new City Plan~~ in a way that delivers on the Cabinet's commitment to take back control of planning.
6. That Cabinet and the members of the City Council continue to lobby the government, and support the call for the amendment and repatriation of planning powers back to local authorities including but not limited to, the power to make locally appropriate decisions which digress from the National Planning Policy Framework, the power to make general local development management policies that override the national Development Management policies, and to restrict the right of appeal to the government's Planning Inspectorate so that planning appeals cease to be just another step in the planning application process."

The amendment was accepted.

The motion was declared carried by acclamation.

RESOLVED –

1. That this Council notes plans to build a significant number of new homes in the next twenty-seven years as part of its MKFutures 2050 ambitions, and the impact this will have on our existing residents, particularly while the development is taking place.
2. That this Council recognises its responsibility to minimise and mitigate impacts of construction, such as increased traffic disruption, noise pollution and pressure on our already stretched infrastructure, and shall work towards minimisation of these within the constraints set by the government.
3. That the Director of Planning and Placemaking be asked to ensure that where the law currently allows, the Council's approach to the assessment of construction management plans is sufficiently robust to offer enforceable protection to existing residents, to ensure that Milton Keynes remains a great place to live and work.

4. That Cabinet be asked to reiterate their commitment that Milton Keynes City Council will, in so far as they have the power to do so, prioritise the needs of MK residents, their communities and MK businesses first, deconflicting or prioritising these needs where necessary, when formulating policies and other strategic work, relating to the new City Plan.
5. That the Cabinet member for Planning be asked to ensure that the work of the Planning Cabinet Advisory Group is sufficient to advise development of the new City Plan, using knowledge of the relevant studies that will form part of the evidence base, in a way that delivers on the Cabinet's commitment to take back control of planning.
6. That Cabinet and the members of the City Council continue to lobby the government, and support the call for the amendment and repatriation of planning powers back to local authorities including but not limited to, the power to make locally appropriate decisions which digress from the National Planning Policy Framework, the power to make general local development management policies that override the national Development Management policies, and to restrict the right of appeal to the government's Planning Inspectorate so that planning appeals cease to be just another step in the planning application process.

CL97

BAITING THE SEWERS

Councillor Trendall moved the following motion which was seconded by Councillor McPake:

- "1. That this Council believes that:
- a) in common with all large cities Milton Keynes has a rodent population which is problematic to control in some areas;
 - b) control of the rodent population is a complex problem, which requires a multi-track approach, for which there is no one solution; and
 - c) whilst the efforts of the City Council have had some success, a concerted efforts by all the parties involved is essential for a permanent reduction of the rodent population.

2. That this Council resolves to ask the Chief Executive of the Council to write to the Chief Executive of Anglian Water to request:
 - a) that the baiting of the sewers which they are responsible for be reinstated; and
 - b) that data concerning where baiting is taking place, and the outcomes resulting from that, be shared with the City Council's Environmental Health function in order that a co-ordinated approach to the matter can be taken."

The motion was declared carried by acclamation.

RESOLVED –

1. That this Council believes that:
 - a) in common with all large cities Milton Keynes has a rodent population which is problematic to control in some areas;
 - b) control of the rodent population is a complex problem, which requires a multi-track approach, for which there is no one solution; and
 - c) whilst the efforts of the City Council have had some success, a concerted efforts by all the parties involved is essential for a permanent reduction of the rodent population.
2. That this Council resolves to ask the Chief Executive of the Council to write to the Chief Executive of Anglian Water to request:
 - a) that the baiting of the sewers which they are responsible for be reinstated; and
 - b) that data concerning where baiting is taking place, and the outcomes resulting from that, be shared with the City Council's Environmental Health function in order that a co-ordinated approach to the matter can be taken.

CL98

VOTER ID

Councillor Crooks moved the following motion which was seconded by Councillor R Bradburn:

- "1. That this Council, mindful of its previous opposition to Voter ID which it still believes discriminatory and unnecessary in Britain, notes:

- a) how many people were turned away from voting when first it was required in Northern Ireland in 1985; and
 - b) that regulations and associated guidance is still being laid and drafted less than six months prior to the elections, which is in contravention of the established and accepted Gould Principle.
2. That this Council resolves to ask the Chief Executive to write to the Government Minister responsible, to:
- a) support the call of the Chair of the Local Government Association for new requirements to be introduced after elections in May 2023 so as to allow time for more publicity and staff training; and
 - b) call for a wider range of Photo ID to be permitted.
3. That this Council:
- a) notes that a significant national communications campaign run by the Electoral Commission which will support key changes being introduced in May 2023, will commence from around the 9 January 2023, but that resources to support local campaigns were made available just days before Christmas 2022;
 - b) notes that the national application portal for residents to apply for Voter Authority Certificates will not be available until the 16 January 2023 at the earliest; and
 - c) requests that the Council's Returning Officer arrange for a comprehensive and proactive communication and resources programme, to supplement the national communications campaign as soon as is possible."

The motion was declared carried by acclamation.

RESOLVED –

- "1. That this Council, mindful of its previous opposition to Voter ID which it still believes discriminatory and unnecessary in Britain, notes:
- a) how many people were turned away from voting when first it was required in Northern Ireland in 1985; and
 - b) that regulations and associated guidance is still being laid and drafted less than six months prior to the elections,

which is in contravention of the established and accepted Gould Principle.

4. That this Council resolves to ask the Chief Executive to write to the Government Minister responsible, to:
 - a) support the call of the Chair of the Local Government Association for new requirements to be introduced after elections in May 2023 so as to allow time for more publicity and staff training; and
 - b) call for a wider range of Photo ID to be permitted.
5. That this Council:
 - a) notes that a significant national communications campaign run by the Electoral Commission which will support key changes being introduced in May 2023, will commence from around the 9 January 2023, but that resources to support local campaigns were made available just days before Christmas 2022;
 - b) notes that the national application portal for residents to apply for Voter Authority Certificates will not be available until the 16 January 2023 at the earliest; and
 - c) requests that the Council's Returning Officer arrange for a comprehensive and proactive communication and resources programme, to supplement the national communications campaign as soon as is possible."

CL99

SCHEME OF COUNCILLOR ALLOWANCES FOR 2023-24

The Mayor moved the following recommendations which were formerly seconded by the Deputy Mayor:

- i. That the Scheme of Councillors' Allowances attached at Annex A to the report be agreed to take effect from 1 April 2023.
- ii. Should Corporate Parenting Panel be dissolved as a Committee of Council, the SRA for Chair of that Committee should cease immediately and once a successor body has been constituted the Independent Remuneration Panel be asked to make a further recommendation as to whether the payment of an SRA to the Chair would be appropriate, and if so at what level.
- iii. That the recommendations of the IRP to index allowances by 4.69% be noted and agreed for 2023/24 only.

- iv. That the recommendations of the IRP that (where paid) Town, Parish and Community Councils, allowances should also be indexed by 4.69% for 2023/24 only, be noted.

The recommendations were declared carried by acclamation.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Scheme of Councillors' Allowances attached at Annex A to the report be agreed to take effect from 1 April 2023.
2. Should Corporate Parenting Panel be dissolved as a Committee of Council, the SRA for Chair of that Committee should cease immediately and once a successor body has been constituted the Independent Remuneration Panel be asked to make a further recommendation as to whether the payment of an SRA to the Chair would be appropriate, and if so at what level.
3. That the recommendations of the IRP to index allowances by 4.69% be noted and agreed for 2023/24 only.
4. That the recommendations of the IRP that (where paid) Town, Parish and Community Councils, allowances should also be indexed by 4.69% for 2023/24 only, be noted.

CL100

REVIEW OF COMMITTEE PROPORTIONALITY AND EXTERNAL COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS

The Mayor moved the following recommendations which were formerly seconded by the Deputy Mayor:

- i. That the Council notes that the dissolution of Corporate Parenting Panel as an advisory Committee of the Council leads to an overall reduced number of committee seats (132) comprised of the following allocations to each political group; Conservative (53), Labour (46) and Liberal Democrat (33).
- ii. That the Council notes that the revised allocation of seats continues to achieve political balance as set out in Table 1 (of the report).
- iii. That the Council notes the resignation of Councillor Peter Marland from the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority and agrees the appointment of Councillor Shanika Mahendran.
- iv. That authority be delegated to the Director of Law and Governance in consultation with the Leaders of Political Groups and in accordance with the wishes of the relevant Political

Group, to make appointments to the following bodies in the event that vacancies occur during the Council year:

- a) Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority;
- b) Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel; and
- c) Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes (BLMK) Joint Health Scrutiny Committee (or successor body)."

The recommendations were declared carried by acclamation.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Council notes that the dissolution of Corporate Parenting Panel as an advisory Committee of the Council leads to an overall reduced number of committee seats (132) comprised of the following allocations to each political group; Conservative (53), Labour (46) and Liberal Democrat (33).
2. That the Council notes that the revised allocation of seats continues to achieve political balance as set out in Table 1 (of the report).
3. That the Council notes the resignation of Councillor Peter Marland from the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority and agrees the appointment of Councillor Shanika Mahendran.
4. That authority be delegated to the Director of Law and Governance in consultation with the Leaders of Political Groups and in accordance with the wishes of the relevant Political Group, to make appointments to the following bodies in the event that vacancies occur during the Council year:
 - a) Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority;
 - b) Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel; and
 - c) Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes (BLMK) Joint Health Scrutiny Committee (or successor body)."

CL101

QUARTERLY REPORT ON SPECIAL URGENCY PROVISIONS

The Council received a quarterly report on special urgency decisions.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

CL102

WARD BASED BUDGETS 2022/23

The Council received a report on the Ward Based Budgets for 2022/23.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

THE MAYOR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 9:29 PM

[The recording of this meeting is available to view on the Council's YouTube Channel at: https://www.youtube.com/user/MiltonKeynesCouncil](https://www.youtube.com/user/MiltonKeynesCouncil)

WRITTEN RESPONSE TO PUBLIC QUESTION

Alderman Bartlett to Councillor Darlington

“Will the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Housing explain why MKC Housing has not commenced any work to develop 33/35 Ousebank Way, Stony Stratford after her promise over 12 months ago that after a then delay of five years following a fire to number 35 work would start.”

Response from Councillor Darlington

“As we are including replacement of the roofs, we also had to do additional internal upgrades to the properties in the terrace to improve the overall block. This meant we needed to revisit how the boilers vented which in turn impacted on kitchen sizes and design. This caused a delay as we had to update designs and scope of works, along with getting agreement from Building Control, which has now happened. The updated project scope has now been tendered in December 2022 and we are looking to start works this financial year, subject to contractor availability at what is always a busy time of year.”