

MINUTES of a meeting of the COUNCIL held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Coalville on TUESDAY, 24 MARCH 2015

Present: Councillor G A Allman (Chairman)

Councillors R Adams, R D Bayliss, R Blunt, N Clarke, J Cotterill, J G Coxon, D Everitt, J Geary, T Gillard, J Houlst, P Hyde, R Johnson, G Jones, C Large, J Legrys, L Massey, C Meynell, T Neilson, T J Pendleton, V Richichi, J Ruff, N J Rushton, A C Saffell, S Sheahan, N Smith, A V Smith MBE, M Specht, D J Stevenson, R Woodward and M B Wyatt

Officers: Mr S Bambrick, Mr R Bowmer, Ms C E Fisher, Mr G Jones, Mrs M Meredith, Mrs M Phillips and Miss E Warhurst

Guests: Dr A Higson (Chairman of the Independent Remuneration Panel)

61. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Bridges, J Bridges, P Clayfield, R Holland, D Howe and L Spence.

62. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor M B Wyatt declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 9 – Proposed Council Delivery Plan 2015/16, on any matters relating to Coalville as a local business owner.

Councillor J Legrys declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 9 – Proposed Council Delivery Plan 2015/16, on any matters relating to Coalville as a volunteer at Hermitage FM.

Councillor S Sheahan declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 10 – Minutes of Local Plan Advisory Committee, as a member of the Local Plan Advisory Committee.

63. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

With great sadness, the Chairman announced the recent passing of Councillor D De Lacy. A one minute's silence was observed in remembrance of Councillor D De Lacy.

Councillor T Neilson spoke in memory of Councillor D De Lacy. He remembered him as a good friend, a huge source of inspiration and a tireless campaigner with a true moral compass. He stated that the work that he had done would continue.

Councillor J Ruff spoke in memory of Councillor D De Lacy. She spoke of his gift of speaking up for ordinary citizens, his passion for local issues and his effusive speeches in the Chamber. She stated that he was a giant of a character and this was a great loss.

Councillor S Sheahan spoke in memory of Councillor D De Lacy. He spoke of his natural ability and his tenacity in campaigning. He stated that his legacy was not simply about the battles that he fought, but the people and principles he fought for.

Councillor T J Pendleton spoke in memory of Councillor D De Lacy. He spoke of his drive for fairness, his liking of factual analysis and his quiet, firm and determined style. He commented that when Councillor D De Lacy spoke, you knew you had to be on top of your game, and the Council Chamber would miss him very much.

Councillor J Legrys spoke in memory of Councillor D De Lacy. He spoke of his tireless campaigning and his ability to put across a straightforward argument. He stated that in his

Chairman's initials

opinion this was Councillor D De Lacy's election and he would be working extra hard to ensure his policies lived on.

Councillor N Clarke spoke in memory of Councillor D De Lacy. He referred to his speaking and mediation skills, and his ability to ensure that common sense prevailed in a debate. He stated that he would be much missed and had contributed a great deal in the short time he had been a Councillor.

Councillor R Blunt spoke in memory of Councillor D De Lacy. He stated that he was the best of old Labour and would be missed by all members.

Councillor V Richichi spoke in memory of Councillor D De Lacy. He spoke of the times they had worked together and stated that he was an incredibly honourable man who would be missed.

The Chairman thanked the Councillors and officers who had supported him, and particularly his family, during his convalescence.

The Chairman announced that the Ashby 20 mile road race had taken place on Sunday, 22 March. There were 1200 participants and the event was well attended by onlookers.

The Chairman stated that the King Richard III exhibition was proving to be a worldwide success. He was truly honoured to be attending the reinterment service on behalf of the Council on Thursday, 26 March.

The Chairman announced that his civic dinner would take place on Thursday, 23 April, and over 100 tickets had already been sold. He encouraged members to attend.

64. LEADER'S AND PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' ANNOUNCEMENTS

Councillor R Blunt updated members on the rail study that was being jointly commissioned with Leicestershire County Council. He advised that the study would consider the potential economic and transport benefits of a passenger service linking Burton, Ashby de la Zouch, Coalville and Leicester to London. He stated that this was a small scale study but would hopefully provide evidence of whether there was a case to lobby for such a rail link. He advised that the study was expected to be completed by summer 2015.

Councillor S Sheahan commented that reappraisal was interesting. He referred to the petition in 2007 which had requested a study, which had been undertaken. He stated that the study previously undertaken had totally ignored the issue of congestion, which would need consideration. He reminded members that Leicestershire County Council would also need to subsidise the line until it was on its feet. He commented that unless this was acknowledged, no one would believe the line was viable. He asked whether Leicestershire County Council would put their hands in their pockets and fund the line properly.

Councillor R Blunt stated that he did not wish to comment on behalf of Leicestershire County Council.

Councillor T J Pendleton referred to the renaming of the A453 to Remembrance Way. He stated that he was privileged to represent the Council and his ward and assist with the publicity to bring this about.

Councillor T J Pendleton gave an update on the Community Safety Partnership. He announced that £2,500 had been donated this year to allow schools to provide free transport to pupils, and to enable pupils to attend Warning Zone safety training. He commented that he believed in ensuring that pupils were equipped to deal with the issues

Chairman's initials

explored at Warning Zone and every child in Leicestershire had been supported to experience this over the last year.

Councillor J Legrys welcomed the name of Remembrance Way as he felt it was far more appropriate. He was also aware that people had requested the planting of poppy seeds, and that this was now going ahead. He hoped that efforts would not be needed to clear litter along the route as had been necessary along the A42.

Councillor J Legrys welcomed the efforts in respect of safeguarding children, however he felt that £2,500 was not enough and he remained critical of the continuing silo working that was taking place. He commented that much more effort needed to be put into breaking down silos to ensure that children were treated as children. He added that this was an issue he felt passionate about. He commended the work being done on safeguarding, however he felt that more effort was needed to break down barriers.

Councillor R D Bayliss gave an update on the Decent Homes Improvement Programme. He advised that 97% of respondents to the survey undertaken were satisfied or very satisfied with the outcome of the works. He felt that the Council could take pride in the outcome, as the Housing Revenue Account and the housing policies had been put in order. He commended the senior management team and particularly the staff in the Housing team. He stated that the Decent Homes Improvement Programme would continue and this would involve a £5.3 million investment in the next year from the Council's own resources in addition to the revenue works undertaken by the Council. He stated that the Council would be entering the new year and the new Council with decent homes, more affordable homes, and those homes being occupied by families with secure tenancies. He added that this was something to be proud of and the future could be approached with relish.

Councillor J Ruff welcomed any investment in housing, however she felt assessments needed to improve as repeat visits wasted money. She added that she had received numerous complaints about the standard of works undertaken by contractors, and this also needed to improve. She stated that perhaps the works should have commenced sooner as there were tenants who had refused the work which could have been completed under the Decent Homes Improvement Programme.

Councillor R D Bayliss stated that he was fully aware of the number of complaints received. He added that realistically, the works were going to cause disruption and discomfort for tenants whilst they were ongoing, which would cause complaints. He added that some homes had had no improvement works undertaken in 40 years. He acknowledged that there had been failures in the performance of contractors, and they had been taken to task and made to improve. He advised that the option of moving people out of their homes whilst the works was undertaken had been available from the beginning; however there had been a lack of enthusiasm for this option. In terms of incentives, he commented that he would have considered a new kitchen and bathroom to be incentive enough. He stated that he was glad the opposition members welcomed the works and that tenants' lives were being improved.

65. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

There were no questions received.

66. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

Councillor J Geary put the following question to Councillor R D Bayliss:

“When the right to buy scheme was re-launched by David Cameron in 2012, Grant Schapps promised that “every additional home that is sold under right to buy will be replaced by a new affordable home on a one-to-one basis”.

However, to date the actual replacement figure is only one in 10. Therefore could you please provide figures for new affordable/social homes built in our district compared to those that have been sold over the same period and at what current price would a two bedroom house be considered affordable?”

Councillor R D Bayliss gave the following response:

“Under the Governments one for one replacement scheme we have been able to retain £122k of right to buy receipts for 2013/14, and £46k of receipts up to the end of Quarter 3 this financial year. These funds need to be spent on replacement homes before 1 August 2017, and have been included in our capital programme for 2015/16, together with our own resources as required by the scheme.

The figures below represent the number of homes sold under the right to buy scheme and the number of new build affordable homes (rented and low cost home ownership) delivered by housing associations each year.

2011/12 - 2 sold under the right to buy and 58 new affordable homes provided.
 2012/13 - 15 sold under the right to buy and 86 new affordable homes provided.
 2013/14 - 36 sold under the right to buy and 156 new affordable homes provided.
 2014/15 (to end Dec) – 17 sold under the right to buy and 93 new affordable homes provided.

The current average price of a 2 bedroom house within NWL is £123,800. However, there will be variances between settlements e.g. Ashby prices are higher than Coalville.

The cost of buying an average 2 bed property in North West Leicestershire (District) with an 85% mortgage is currently £113 per week assuming a 2.89% mortgage rate.
 (Source - Hometrack Housing Intelligence system 12 March 2015)

Of the last 100 housing association lettings in the district, average affordable weekly rents (i.e. 80% of the market rent) have been £83.88 for a 1 bed, £90.17 for a 2 bed and £104.34 for a 3 bed. Of the last 100 lettings by NWLDC, average weekly rents have been £78.53 for a 1 bed, £88.75 for a 2 bed and £94.76 for a 3 bed”.

Councillor J Geary thanked Councillor R D Bayliss for a full and substantial reply. He stated that he had realised how many council houses had been sold in the last two decades, particularly in villages. He referred to a recent article in the press about replacement rates of council houses, which had prompted his question; however he noted that since 2011, 70 council houses had been sold, and had been replaced by 393, which was an outstanding performance. He questioned whether the replacement council houses were like for like, and whether homes in rural communities had also been replaced. He expressed the importance of families being able to stay together. As a supplementary question, he requested a full report to the next Policy Development Group to enable the figures to be fully scrutinised.

Councillor R D Bayliss stated that there was a complicated formula which determined the replacement ratio. He reminded members that housing capital had been set aside to build new council houses, and together with the retentions from the right to buy scheme, this

Chairman's initials

would fund a programme which would be reported to Cabinet in early summer. He stated that there were many options for the provision of social housing, and all would be considered. He commented that building stable societies would help keep families together, but of course requirements had changed and there was not the same demand now for larger houses. He added that this was an issue which needed proper investigation.

Councillor J Ruff put the following question to Councillor R D Bayliss:

“Can the portfolio holder please explain the procedure for residents enquiring about adaptations and the information that is given to residents when coming into the council or ringing?”

Is it correct that the council are deliberately avoiding adaptations to certain properties and if so why?”

Councillor R D Bayliss gave the following response:

“All applications by tenants to have their homes adapted to meet their individual or household medical needs are assessed by the County Council's Occupational Therapy Team.

Tenants have to apply to be assessed directly to the County Council, but if they approach the Council (NWLDC) in the first instance, they are signposted accordingly.

Once an application has been submitted to the County, an Occupational Therapist will undertake a home visit and assess the current and future needs of the tenant and/or their household, and where applicable make a recommendation for an adaptation to the Council (NWLDC).

These referrals are given an urgent or routine priority by the OT based on the medical merits of each case.

Upon receipt by the Council's Planned Investment Team each referral is then assessed from a housing perspective, within the Council's policy that was most recently revised and approved by Cabinet on 18 November 2014.

On occasion referrals/applications may not be progressed, with an alternative solution put forward to the applicant. Where this applies, it will usually be for one of three reasons:

- because we already have suitably adapted properties within our housing stock that meet the applicants needs and the cost of adapting another similar property cannot be justified; or because the tenants housing need is not appropriate for the property they are currently occupying e.g. an elderly single occupant of a three bedroom house;
- because the adaptation requested is not appropriate e.g. a level access shower to a first floor flat (in such a situation, this implies a stairlift will also be required at some point, and the most appropriate solution to meet the applicant's needs would be for them to move to an existing adapted, ground floor property);
- because the request was cancelled by Social Services due to, bereavement, going into residential care etc;

During the current financial year we have received 164 referrals by the County Council's OT Service of which 126 have been approved for adaptation works and 38 have not been progressed.

Of the 38 referrals that have not been progressed, the breakdown based on the three reasons highlighted above is 22, 5 and 11 respectively”.

Chairman's initials

As a supplementary question, Councillor J Ruff asked if Councillor R D Bayliss could guarantee that in future, residents would definitely be signposted to the occupational therapy team at Leicestershire County Council. She also requested a full report on the present situation in respect of adaptations at the next Policy Development Group, as she understood these were 6 months behind schedule.

Councillor R D Bayliss responded that all requests for adaptations were not able to be dealt with unless they were referred via the occupational therapy team.

67. PETITIONS

No petitions were received.

68. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 24 February 2015.

It was moved by Councillor T Gillard, seconded by Councillor R Blunt and

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 February 2015 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

69. PROPOSED COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2015/16

Councillor R Blunt presented the report to members, highlighting the Council's priorities and particularly the investment in Coalville. He hoped that the Delivery Plan would be unanimously supported.

Councillor T Neilson commented that this was the same document as last year, which did not give a great impression of moving forwards. He added that he found it shocking that there was no mention of the loss of the museum in the town. He congratulated staff who had been doing a marvellous job and commended in particular the progress made by the customer services team on the ICE programme. He felt that the Council Delivery Plan was not ambitious enough, and to suggest that the regeneration of Coalville had been a great success was an attempt to pull the wool over people's eyes.

Councillor M Specht referred to the Green Footprints programme and thanked officers, especially the Chief Executive, for the excellent event at the Radisson Blu hotel. He added that a number of volunteers had said that the event had made them feel valued.

Councillor J Legrys referred to the hundreds of volunteer litter pickers and felt that they needed to be given more assistance. He added that more work needed to be done to educate people to stop littering. He stated that the Council Delivery Plan was grossly unambitious and there was no mention of the loss of Snibston Discovery Museum.

Councillor D J Stevenson took exception to the inference that it was youngsters who threw litter. He added that until people started reporting littering, the problem would never be solved. He commented on the limited availability of the facilities at Coalville Market as they were constantly out of order.

Councillor D Everitt supported the comments made by Councillor D J Stevenson and added that closing toilets was a retrograde step.

Councillor N J Rushton commented that the priorities were not unambitious, as tough decisions had been necessary, and the long term economic plan was in line with that of the government. He added that you could only spend what was available, and in his view the Council was doing the best it could for the residents of the district. He commented that Council Tax had been frozen for the past 6 years, and this would continue for as long as possible. He added that front line services had been protected, and every council property had been renovated. He stated that North West Leicestershire had one of the fastest growing economies in the country, and the lowest unemployment rate in the county, and he felt it was disrespectful to say this was unambitious.

It was moved by Councillor R Blunt, seconded by Councillor N J Rushton and

RESOLVED THAT:

- a) The proposed Council Delivery Plan 2015/16 be approved.
- b) The Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, be authorised to make any final technical amendments to the plan prior to publication.

70. MINUTES OF LOCAL PLAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Councillor T J Pendleton presented the report to members, highlighting the progress made to date and the next steps.

Councillor T Neilson commended the work being undertaken by the Local Plan Advisory Committee.

Councillor J Legrys thanked Councillor C Large for stepping in and chairing the last meeting of the Local Plan Advisory Committee, which had been very rewarding. He stated that he was disappointed that the minutes of the March meeting had not been included in the report, however he was aware that they had not yet been formally agreed. He expressed concerns regarding the wording of recommendation 3. He felt that work needed to be done to encourage more neighbourhood plans to come forward.

Councillor S Sheahan stated that the limits to development had absolutely no credibility as far as parish councils were concerned, as applications outside of them continued to be permitted.

Councillor C Large took the opportunity to say that the Local Plan Advisory Committee was an excellent example of both sides working together. She thanked the members of the group.

Councillor T J Pendleton acknowledged that there were currently only 2 neighbourhood plans in existence, however he commented that the legislation was still quite new. He stated that parish councils had the opportunity to recommend alternatives in respect of the limits to development, and the Local Plan Advisory Committee would have the opportunity to deliberate on any modifications. He explained that the limits to development were not totally binding, but would have more and more validity in planning parlance as the Local Plan reached the emerging stage. He added that the Planning Committee was apolitical, and the sooner the Local Plan could be put in place, the better.

It was moved by Councillor T J Pendleton, seconded by Councillor C Large and

RESOLVED THAT:

- a) The minutes of the Local Plan Advisory Committee of 9 September 2014, 15 October 2015, 21 November 2014 and 17 February 2015 be received.
- b) It be agreed that the new Local Plan has a plan period of 2011-2031 as recommended by the Advisory Committee.
- c) The agreement of the Advisory Committee to define limits to development for those settlements listed at paragraph 2.9 of this report be noted.
- d) The views of the Advisory Committee be noted in respect of the suggested limits to development and town centre boundaries as set out at paragraph 5.6 of this report.

71. PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2015/16

Councillor R Blunt presented the report to members.

Councillor T Neilson thanked the administration for introducing the living wage. He commented that there were still many people undertaking work via an agency or as a contractor who had not benefitted from this.

Councillor J Ruff stated that statistics showed that nearly a quarter of employees in North West Leicestershire earned less than the minimum wage, particularly women in part time work. She commented that more people might be employed, but it would not help the economy if 45% of those employees were women in part time jobs.

It was moved by Councillor R Blunt, seconded by Councillor N J Rushton and

RESOLVED THAT:

The Council's Pay Policy Statement 2015/16 be approved.

72. INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL - PROTOCOL

Councillor N J Rushton presented the report to members and invited Dr A Higson, Chairman of the Independent Remuneration Panel, to address the Committee.

Dr A Higson gave an update on the work of the Independent Remuneration Panel which had been meeting recently to review processes, receive updates and consider benchmarking data. He added that the panel would meet in July to consider any post-election implications. He advised that the protocol had been updated to include a requirement for panel members to reside within the district, and therefore he would not be putting himself forward for reappointment once his term of office had expired. He added that the Panel had also considered the number of members required following a vacancy, and it was considered that four panel members would be sufficient considering the cost of recruitment, and as such it was recommended that in the case of a tied vote, the Chairman of the panel should have a casting vote. He asked members to consider the revised protocol. He thanked the officers for their assistance with the work of the panel.

Councillor J Geary stated that with a degree of reluctance he was unable to support the recommendations as he felt that a decrease in the number of panel members, as this was reducing the democratic process. He commented that he appreciated the fact that the Council had to be run as a business, however he felt this was a step too far. He stated that he had been a member when the committee system was in place, and every member

Chairman's initials

had a role. He commented that now the Cabinet had been reduced and there was no effective scrutiny, and he felt someone should make a stand.

Councillor N J Rushton reminded members that the request to reduce the panel members had originated from the panel itself. He added that there were no elected members on the panel, which was completely independent, so it was not valid to argue that this was reducing the democratic process. He commented that if there was no effective scrutiny, this was due to the opposition. He thanked Dr A Higson and the panel members for their work.

It was moved by Councillor N J Rushton, seconded by Councillor D J Stevenson and

RESOLVED THAT:

- a) The ongoing work of the Independent Remuneration Panel be acknowledged.
- b) The reduction in membership of the Independent Remuneration Panel from five members to four be approved.
- c) The protocol setting out the consequential amended Terms of Reference of the Independent Remuneration Panel be approved.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.05 pm