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Meeting	<b>COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>
Time/Day/Date	6.30 pm on Wednesday, 23 November 2022
Location	Council Chamber, Council Offices, Coalville
Officer to contact	Democratic Services (01530 454512)

## AGENDA

Item		Pages
<b>1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b>		
<b>2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS</b>		
	Under the Code of Conduct members are reminded that in declaring interests you should make clear the nature of that interest and whether it is a disclosable pecuniary interest, registerable interest or other interest.	
<b>3. PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION</b>		
	To receive questions from members of the public under rule no.10 of the Council Procedure Rules. The procedure rule provides that members of the public may ask any question on any matter in relation to which the Council has powers or duties which affect the District, provided that three clear days' notice in writing has been given to the Head of Legal and Support Services.	
<b>4. MINUTES</b>		
	To approve and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2022 and 21 September 2022	<b>3 - 12</b>
<b>5. ITEMS FOR INCLUSION IN THE FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME</b>		
	To consider any items to be included in the work programme. The plan of forthcoming Cabinet decisions and the current work programme are attached for information.	<b>13 - 26</b>
<b>6. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE FUEL POVERTY TASK AND FINISH GROUP</b>		
	Report of the Fuel Poverty Task and Finish Group	<b>27 - 40</b>

Circulation:

Councillor J Houlton (Chairman)  
Councillor R L Morris (Deputy Chairman)  
Councillor C C Benfield  
Councillor A J Bridgen  
Councillor T Eynon  
Councillor J Geary  
Councillor M D Hay  
Councillor G Houlton  
Councillor J G Simmons  
Councillor M B Wyatt

MINUTES of a meeting of the COMMUNITY Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Coalville on WEDNESDAY, 7 September 2022

Present: Councillor J Houlton (Chairman)

Councillors R L Morris, C C Benfield, J Clarke (Substitute for Councillor A J Bridgen), T Eynon, J Geary, M D Hay, G Houlton, J G Simmons and M B Wyatt

In Attendance: Councillors J Legrys and S Sheahan

Officers: Mr J Arnold, Mr A Barton, Ms R Haynes, Mr J Knight, Stevens, Mrs R Wallace, Miss E Warhurst and Mr P Wheatley

## **52. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor A Bridgen.

## **53. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

Councillors C Benfield, T Eynon, J Geary, Hay and Morris declared that they had entered conversations with public organisations and residents in relation to item 3 – Former Hermitage Leisure Centre Building Future Direction, however maintained an open mind.

Councillor M B Wyatt declared a registerable interest in item 3 - Former Hermitage Leisure Centre Building Future Direction as member of Whitwick Parish Council.

## **54. FORMER HERMITAGE LEISURE CENTRE BUILDING FUTURE DIRECTION**

The Chair welcomed Members to the meeting and due to the complex nature of the item, explained the process to be followed. Reference was made to the petition received as detailed within the report and it was noted that in accordance with the petition scheme, as the lead petitioner was not in attendance, the matter would not be considered at the meeting.

The Chair invited Ms S Colledge, Whitwick Parish Councillor, to address the committee in relation to the Parish Council's submission detailed within the report and additional papers. She expressed concerns that as a significant stakeholder, Whitwick Parish Council were not involved early enough in the consultation process. The Committee were reminded that the Hermitage Leisure Centre was designated as an Asset of Community Value following the applications from Whitwick Parish Council and it was concerning to see the proposed demolition of the site coming forward. Members were referred to the additional papers which detailed alternative proposals from Whitwick Parish Council for community ownership of the building. Members were asked to give this alternative proposal a chance and if it was not viable after two years, the Council could take the asset back and nothing would be lost. The Committee were urged to support and recommend Whitwick Parish Council's proposals to Cabinet.

The Chair invited the Committee to ask any questions of Ms Colledge and the following responses were received:

- It was estimated that it would take approximately two years to establish the Community Ownership Fund and to have the building successfully operational.
- Whitwick Parish Council understood that it was the structural building that had been listed as an Asset of Community Value rather than the land as detailed within the report.

- The £2million costs proposed by CBRE within the report were concerning when compared to the lower £80,000 costs proposed by Whitwick Parish Council. Both proposals were prepared by highly respected local companies.
- The accuracy of the report was questionable as Whitwick Parish Council claimed to have evidence that the building construction dates were incorrect.
- In relation to the suggested lack of consultation with Whitwick Parish Council, Ms Colledge explained that officers were regularly asked for updates as it was a standing item on the parish monthly meeting agenda and was told that there were no updates or progress. The parish council were not involved in the consultation until the community feedback event.

The Chair invited Mr R Woodward, representative of the Whitwick Action Group, to address the Committee. He highlighted the work of the group in recent years to protect the green wedge in Whitwick from development, this included campaigning, lobbying, planning appeals and judicial reviews which had all been successful. He reminded Members that the development of the new leisure centre meant the loss of some of the green wedge and therefore the Whitwick Action Group were opposed to any development on the former Hermitage Leisure Centre site and requested that the land be retained as part of the green wedge and protected for leisure use only. He felt that any development would set a dangerous precedent and urged the Committee to not make the mistake of supporting the draft Cabinet recommendations to demolish a much-needed community asset.

The Chair invited the Committee to ask any questions of Mr Woodward and the following responses were received:

- The Whitwick Action Group understood that it was the structural building that had been listed as an Asset of Community Value rather than the land as detailed within the report. Mr Woodward felt that community should be given the option to use the building.
- In relation to the site access, it was Mr Woodward's opinion that the current access would make it easier to develop the rest of the green wedge.
- It was Mr Woodward's opinion that importance was not being placed on protecting the green wedge but rather on building houses.
- Mr Woodward defended his statement that the situation had changed dramatically as it had been agreed to not develop the green wedge and the proposal was now to build housing.

The Head of Property and Regeneration presented the report to Members.

Members asked several questions of clarity and received answers on the following matters:

- There was not an original design brief which stated the lifespan of the building but it was confirmed that 30-years was the usual lifespan for a leisure building such as the former Hermitage Leisure centre.
- Separating the leases for the building and the land so that the building could be gifted to the Parish Council was problematic due to the legalities involved. It also meant the loss of control of a Council asset.
- Members were referred to the breakdown of costings as detailed within the additional papers and a full explanation was given on options of both full and partial demolition, and the difficulties involved in partial demolition.

- An explanation was given on the process taken to get to the current position in accordance with the Asset Management Policy. Members were informed that the Asset of Community Value would not be triggered as the land was not being disposed of.
- In relation to the covenant on the site to protect the land for leisure use only, officers confirmed that this only included the land surrounding the building and a small part of the building footprint. Therefore, this would be retained for leisure use.
- There was no legal reason why the costs for demolition and clearing of the site could not be funded by the Coalville Regeneration budget provision. It was also deemed appropriate as the service to be delivered on the site would benefit residents across the district.

During discussion on the current state of the building, reference was made to the recent site visit with several Members believing that the dry side of the building was still structurally sound and watertight. The poor condition of the wet pool side was acknowledged however, therefore some Members were of the opinion that the best option would be partial demolition to retain a building that could be used by the community.

At the request of a Member, the Head of Property and Regeneration agreed to provide the full cost to the council for the structural report provided by CBRE, outside of the meeting to all Committee Members.

A Member raised concerns that the cost estimations within the report could be too low due to the cladding on the building. It was also queried as to why the Whitwick Parish Council should take ownership when it was a wider community asset.

Some Members felt that the economic case was a strong one and it was difficult to agree any other remediation. It was felt that it would be better financially to build a new community building that would meet all regulations, carbon targets and community needs, rather than retaining an uneconomical building.

Members acknowledged the views of the speakers in attendance at the meeting and appreciated their objections as they agreed there was a need for a leisure building in Whitwick. The Head of Property and Regeneration concurred with the need for a leisure facility as this was something he was working on in relation to the regeneration of the area, however it was important to look at the long-term future and that was not with an old building that was unfit for purpose.

Reference was made to the monthly costs to the council to maintain the building in its current state, as it calculated as approximately £450 per day. A request was made to receive a more detailed breakdown of these costs. The Head of Property and Regeneration summarized that the headline costs were for security, maintenance/repairs and business rates provision, however he would provide a detailed breakdown to Members outside of the meeting.

A discussion was had on the site in relation to how it fit into the green wedge and the Council's Local Plan. It was noted that the footprint of the building did not form part of the green wedge and was not included under Local Plan Policy.

It was commented that although the points in relation to the leisure covenant on the land and the appropriation of the asset were technically correct, it did not make it any easier for the public to agree and caused frustration. A Member challenged the opinion that the partial demolition was unviable when the Council would still have an asset worth an estimated £750,000 once completed. It was suggested that there were other ways to hand over the building to the community, such as a partial demolition and then rather than gifting the building, a peppercorn rent be offered for a specific amount of time to allow funds to be raised before establishing a formal lease agreement. It was felt that too much

emphasis had been placed on receiving as much money as possible for this asset and it would be a shame for the community to miss out due to financial reasons. The Strategic Director for Housing and Customer Services reminded Members that it was a statutory responsibility to achieve the highest funds available from a council asset.

In relation to the draft recommendations to Cabinet, a Member felt that it was hard to support recommendation 4 due to the appropriation of the site from the General Fund to the Housing Revenue Account, this was deemed inappropriate.

At the request of a Member further clarification was provided on the accounting and appropriation process, in particular how the debt involved was balanced. There was concern that it could mean less money for maintaining the housing stock, but the Strategic Director assured Members that was not the case as the income stream from developing the site would offset the debt.

A Member raised concerns that two major stakeholder groups within the community seemed to have been ignored during the consultation process and it was clear that the public believed that decisions had already been made regardless of the outcome of the consultations. The business case for the proposed option of demolition was also questioned as the draft recommendations to Cabinet were asking for approval before business cases had been received. The Strategic Director for Housing and Customer Services assured Members that the correct procedure had been followed and a preliminary business case had been produced to show that the proposals were viable. It was the finer details that would now be worked through and included in the full business case, as was usual practice.

Councillor J Geary proposed that the committee recommend to Cabinet that the former leisure centre building be retained and leased out to be used as a community asset. It was seconded by Councillor M B Wyatt.

At the request of a Member the meeting was adjourned at 8.13pm and reconvened at 8.20pm.

Further discussion was had on the motion in front of Members, and some comments were made in reference to the difficulty in separating the land and the building for leasing.

A Member reminded the Committee that they were considering a building that was no longer fit for purpose which was a drain on council funds, it was his opinion that retaining the building was not the right action to take as it was the Members duty to protect the public funds.

The following amended motion, agreed by Councillor J Geary as proposer and Councillor M B Wyatt as seconder was put to the vote:

‘Along with the comments made by the Committee, a recommendation be made to Cabinet that phase 3 of the former Hermitage Leisure Centre building be retained as a community asset and gifted with the lease of the land to a charitable group.’

A recorded vote being requested, voting was as detailed below:

<b>Along with the comments made by the Committee, a recommendation be made to Cabinet that phase 3 of the former Hermitage Leisure Centre building be retained as a community asset and gifted with the lease of the land to a charitable group. (Motion)</b>	
Councillor Jim Houlton	Against
Councillor Ray Morris	Against
Councillor Carl Benfield	For
Councillor John Clarke	Against
Councillor Dr Terri Eynon	For
Councillor John Geary	For
Councillor Michael Hay	For
Councillor Gill Houlton	Against
Councillor Jenny Simmons	Against
Councillor Michael Wyatt	For
Councillor Jim Houlton	Against (Casting Vote)
<b>Rejected</b>	

Following a discussion on the voting procedure, the Head of Legal and Commercial Services confirmed that as the officers' recommendations were to provide comments on the report and draft Cabinet recommendations, the Committee did not have to come to a consensus, all comments would be noted and presented to Cabinet.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.33 pm

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MINUTES of a meeting of the COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Coalville on WEDNESDAY, 21 SEPTEMBER 2022

Present: Councillor J Houlton (Chairman)

Councillors T Eynon, J Geary, M D Hay, J G Simmons and M B Wyatt

In Attendance: Councillors R Johnson, J Legrys and S Sheahan

Portfolio Holders: Councillors

Officers: Mr J Arnold, Mr C Elston, Mr J Knight, Mr P Sanders, Mrs R Wallace and Miss E Warhurst

## **55. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Bridgen, C Benfield, G Houlton and R Morris.

## **56. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **57. PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

No questions were received.

## **58. ITEMS FOR INCLUSION IN THE FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME**

Consideration was given to the inclusion of any items on the work programme. The plan of forthcoming Cabinet decisions were set out in the agenda for information.

By affirmation of the meeting the work programme was noted.

## **59. MINUTES**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2022.

It was moved by Councillor J Geary, seconded by Councillor J Simmons and

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2022 be approved as a correct record.

## **60. LEISURE CENTRES ANNUAL REVIEW**

The Head of Community Services spoke to the report and handed over to the Contract Manager for Everyone Active to give a presentation providing an overview of the performance of the leisure partnership between May 2021 to April 2022.

In response to a question in relation to the free activity provision, it was confirmed that this was included in the Activ8 programme and provided a range of activities for children which included swimming.

A Member raised several concerns that had been received from residents including the entrance system which seemed poor, the tired squash courts and the unfinished sauna.

Officers confirmed that there were some teething problems when the new leisure centre was opened, and these had now been rectified. In relation to the entrance system, it was a card swiping system which was being abused by some of those with membership cards, therefore work has been carried out to tackle the problem and improvements should be seen in the coming months. In relation to the squash courts, officers reported that this was a multi-use space which was used for clubs during school holidays, which initially was not being covered correctly and resulted in some markings, and this has now also been rectified. In relation to the sauna, it was reported that it was opened slightly later than the full centre opening but had been operational for some time.

A Member questioned the need for the public to pay to fund a facility such as the new leisure centre, especially as there was no data available to indicate how far it reached. It was proposed that in future, information such as: what was being done to reach people that needed to use the facility, whether GP referrals worked and do those referred attend sessions. It was also noted that there were no longer dedicated swimming sessions for those with disabilities or children on the spectrum as there were at Hermitage Leisure Centre. Officers responded that the facilities offered across the district were essential to achieve the Council's health and wellbeing priorities, and that the leisure offer available was one of the best in the region. Members were informed that following the recovery from lockdown, the service was now moving onto the next stages of the plan which was to measure the impact on the community and the shaping of the service moving forward to include specific sessions for those groups of people that needed them. More measurable information would be available in future updates. Members were also reminded that the new leisure centre was only one part of the health and wellbeing offer to residents and the role of the NWLDC Health and Wellbeing team was to help the residents that needed access to sport and physical activity opportunities the most to be able to access them, either within the community or the leisure centre, with the support of Everyone Active where appropriate.

A comment was made in relation to the temperature of the new leisure centre pool as some feedback received from residents to Members was that it was too cold. A Member felt that it was important to have a hot pool for those with medical needs. Officers stated that the pool temperature was just under 29 degrees, which was at the higher end of the required temperature range and no complaints had been received to date. Pools with a higher temperature for medical needs, such as a hydrotherapy pool, was not a specification for this centre and therefore was not something that could be provided. It was noted that the temperature of the pool was not something that could be altered quickly to allow different temperatures for different sessions.

A Member commented on the great facility available to residents and was pleased to see that after a recent visit, users could still book and pay for sessions at the centre as well as online. It was acknowledged that there was a number of medal winning athletes from the district and it was suggested that an honours board be erected in the leisure centre to recognise them.

A request was received for another tour of the leisure centre for members to mark the year anniversary of it opening, it was felt that it would be beneficial, especially for those that did not attend the first tour before it opened. Officers agreed and confirmed that it was the intention to continue to organise annual tours for Members.

It was moved by Councillor J Geary, seconded by Councillor J Legrys and

**RESOLVED THAT:**

The performance of the Leisure Partnership with Everyone Active for the period May 2021 to April 2022 be noted.

## 61. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PLANNING ENFORCEMENT

The Head of Planning and Infrastructure presented the report to Members.

After concerns being shared on the staffing of the team, clarity was given on the recruitment issues and the introduction of a Senior Team Leader post. It was confirmed that this post was not replacing three others as it seemed, the current three agency posts were not full-time posts and in some cases were only working a few hours a week. It was also reported that part of the review with the Planning Advisory Service was to look at staffing resource for the team.

The discussion considered the key open cases, and it was confirmed that the majority were in relation to gypsy/traveller sites. A Member felt that the harm scoring of cases was useful but seemed to be discretionary and bias in some instances. Several Members commented on the urgent need to manage gypsy/traveller sites, this would then help with the caseloads. The Head of Planning and Infrastructure recognised the need in this area and stressed the complex nature of the matter. However, he confirmed that work was currently being undertaken as part of the Local Plan review and would be taken through the Local Plan Committee in due course.

A Member referred to the types of breaches investigated as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report and commented that the numbers were misleading as he was aware of one case that was actually a high number of instances within it. However, the Member was happy with the work being done by officers on this case and the communication that was now in place. He stressed that communication between officers and Members was key, even if no action could be taken on a matter.

During discussions Members shared their frustrations of times when stricter enforcement action could have been taken and it was a shared opinion that more prosecutions and fines would deter people from building without permission. Members were hopeful that the service would be able to move forward following the service review. The officer time required to undertake thorough investigations into breaches was acknowledged and it was suggested that this time be charged for. In response to a question, the Head of Planning and Infrastructure explained that legal advice was always sought on the right action to take on each case and it was confirmed that the current enforcement policy would also be reviewed by the Planning Advisory Service.

A question of clarity was asked in relation to the status of travellers once they were settled on a site and whether the special considerations still applied. It was confirmed that there was another case locally which was considering this matter and officers were awaiting the outcomes, however it had taken several years to get to the current position.

Officers were questioned as to the use of drones by the service to assist with obtaining evidence if access to a site could not be gained. The Head of Planning and Infrastructure stated that drones had been used in the past and that legal advice was currently being sought into further permissions of use as well as obtaining access to sites. It was agreed that an update would be provided in the next quarterly report to Planning Committee.

A Member suggested that a report be considered at a future meeting in relation to finding sites for the gypsy and traveller community, as it was felt it went beyond enforcement and there could be more to do to help. However, it was agreed that this would be a matter for the Local Plan Committee.

It was moved by Councillor J Geary, seconded by Councillor T Eynon and

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1) The intention to engage the Planning Advisory Service to review the Planning Enforcement Team be noted.
- 2) The intention to take a report back to Community Scrutiny Committee in Autumn 2023 to update on progress be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 7.50 pm

**Community Scrutiny Committee – WORK PROGRAMME (as at 15/11/22)**

Date of Meeting	Item	Lead Officer	Witnesses	Agenda Item Duration
<b>8 February 2023</b>				
8 February 2023	Private Sector Housing Policies	Paul Sanders, Head of Community Services		15 minutes
8 February 2023	Disposal of Council Property Assets to Support Regeneration	Paul Wheatley, Head of Property and Regeneration	n/a	15 Minutes
8 February 2023	Bereavement Services Review	Paul Sanders, Head of Community Services		15 minutes
<b>5 April 2023</b>				
5 April 2023	Recycle More Refresh	John Bright, Waste Services Development Officer, Paul Sanders, Head of Community Services		15 minutes
<b>21 June 2023</b>				
28 June 2023	Scrutiny Annual Report	James Arnold, Strategic Director of Place		30 minutes

**Requests for Item**

Date request Received	Requested by	Summary of request	Consideration by scrutiny Y/N	Reasons
None	-	-	-	-

## Principles and Criteria used for Assessing Items Put Forward

### Identify Issues for consideration by Scrutiny

- Consulting with members of Scrutiny Committees, senior officers, Cabinet members – horizon scanning on policy development
- Looking at the corporate priorities, Council Delivery Plan and Cabinet Forward plan – identify key issues/topics for investigation/inquiry
- Considering events and decisions in the Council's calendar which could require an input/consultation via scrutiny – eg budget setting, CDP development
- Considering requests from members – eg via another forum or scoping report submitted
- Evaluating the Council's performance – eg quarterly reports, end of year reports, reviewing success of a particular scheme or initiative
- Reviewing any follow up work required after previous scrutiny work

### Prioritise the potential list of scrutiny topics based on factors including

- the resources required to deliver it (from members, offices and financially)
- the value and level of impact which could be achieved
- link to the council's priorities
- whether it is a regular recurring item which requires consideration before Cabinet/Council approval
- consideration of the guidance for selecting scrutiny topics

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Topics <b>are</b> suitable for Scrutiny when	Topics <b>are not</b> suitable for Scrutiny when
Scrutiny could have an impact and add value	The issue is already being addressed elsewhere and change is imminent
The topic is of high local importance and reflects the concerns of local people	The topic would be better addressed elsewhere (and will be referred there)
The resources are available that would be required to conduct the review – staff and budget	Scrutiny involvement would have limited or no impact on outcomes
It avoids duplication of work elsewhere	The topic would be sub-judice or prejudicial to the councils interests
The issues is one that the committee can realistically influence	The topic is too broad to make a review realistic
The issue is related to an area where the council or one of its partners is not performing well	New legislation or guidance relating to the topic is expected in the next year

## Forward Plan Scoping Actions – Community Scrutiny Committee (as at 15.11.22)

Item	Date requested	How requested	Who requested	Scoping Form Y/N	Officer responsible	Key Stakeholders	Task & Finish Group Y/N	WP Group Agreed Y/N	Meeting scheduled
<b>Development Corporation Update</b>	24 May 2022	Scrutiny Work Programming Group	Cllr Sheahan	No	James Arnold	-	No	Yes	TBC
<b>Status:</b>									
Councillor Sheahan has received an update and agreed to keep under review due to the ongoing engagement currently between partners which will inform the report for members consideration. Once it is clearer on the year 2 funding, an update can be provided.									
<b>Effectiveness of the Planning Enforcement Team – Progress Update</b>	Sep 2022	From Officers as part of report	-	-	Chris Elston	-	No	-	Autumn 2023 – Exact date TBC
<b>Status:</b>									
Update report was proposed as part of ‘The Effectiveness of Planning Enforcement’ report taken to committee in September 2022. Date TBC once meeting schedule has been agreed at Annual Council.									

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# DRAFT Notice of Executive Key Decisions

The attached notice lists the matters which are likely to be the subject of a key decision by the Council's executive and executive decision making bodies. This notice is produced in accordance with the Constitution adopted by North West Leicestershire District Council and will be published a minimum of 28 days before the date on which a key decision is to be made on behalf of the Council.

## Key Decisions

A key decision means a decision taken by the Cabinet, a committee of the Cabinet, an area or joint committee or an individual in connection with the discharge of a function which is the responsibility of the executive and which is likely:

- (a) to result in the Council incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the Council's budget for the service or function to which the decision relates; or
- (b) to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards in the area of the Council;
- (c) for the purposes of (a) and (b) above £100,000 shall be regarded as significant in terms of expenditure or savings, and any issue which, in the opinion of the Leader is likely to have an impact on people, shall be regarded as significant in terms of impact on communities.

## The Council's Executive

The Council's executive committee is the Cabinet. The Cabinet comprises:

Councillor R Blunt	-	Leader	Councillor A Woodman	-	Community Services
Councillor R Ashman	-	Deputy Leader and Infrastructure	Councillor N J Rushton	-	Corporate
Councillor T Gillard	-	Business and Regeneration	Councillor R D Bayliss	-	Housing, Property & Customer Services
Councillor K Merrie MBE	-	Planning			

## Confidential Items and Private Meetings of the Executive

Whilst the majority of the Cabinet's business at the meetings listed in this notice will be open to the public and media organisations to attend, there will inevitably be some business to be considered that contains, for example, confidential, commercially sensitive or personal information. This is a formal notice under the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 that part of the Cabinet meetings listed in this Forward Plan may be held in private because the agenda and reports for the meeting contain exempt information under Part 1 Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended) and that the public interest in withholding the information outweighs the public interest in disclosing it. Those Items where it is considered that they should be considered in private are identified on the Notice.

## Access to Agenda and Related Documents

Documents relating to the matters listed in this notice are available at least 5 clear working days prior to the date of decision as indicated below. Other documents relevant to the matters listed in this notice may be submitted to the decision maker.

If you wish to request or submit a document, or make representation in relation to any issue contained within this notice, please contact Democratic Services on telephone number 01530 454512 or by emailing [memberservices@nwleicestershire.gov.uk](mailto:memberservices@nwleicestershire.gov.uk)

## Executive Decisions

Decision	Decision Maker	Status of Decision	Public or Private (and reason – where private)	Date of Decision	Contacts	Documents to be submitted to the Decision Maker	Considered by Scrutiny or other Committee
<b>10 January 2023</b>							
Housing Revenue Account Acquisitions and Disposals	Cabinet	Key	Public	10 January 2023	<p>Councillor Roger Bayliss Tel: 01530 411055 roger.bayliss@nwleicestershire.gov.uk</p> <p>Housing Assets Team Manager Tel: 01530 454137 jas.singh@nwleicestershire.gov.uk</p>	Housing Revenue Account Acquisitions and Disposals	Decision being sought under approved Acquisitions & Disposal Policy.
Quarter 1 Performance Report	Cabinet	Key	Public	10 January 2023	<p>Councillor Richard Blunt Tel: 01530 454510 richard.blunt@nwleicestershire.gov.uk</p> <p>Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development Tel: 01530 454518 mike.murphy@nwleicestershire.gov.uk</p>	Quarter 1 Performance Report	31 August 2022

Decision	Decision Maker	Status of Decision	Public or Private (and reason – where private)	Date of Decision	Contacts	Documents to be submitted to the Decision Maker	Considered by Scrutiny or other Committee
Quarter 2 Performance Report	Cabinet	Key	Public	10 January 2023	<p>Councillor Richard Blunt Tel: 01530 454510 richard.blunt@nwleicester-shire.gov.uk</p> <p>Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development Tel: 01530 454518 mike.murphy@nwleicester-shire.gov.uk</p>	Quarter 2 Performance Report	7 December 2022
<p>Draft Budget and Council Tax 2023/24</p> <p>19</p>	Cabinet	Key	Public	10 January 2023	<p>Councillor Nicholas Rushton Tel: 01530 412059 nicholas.rushton@nwleicester-shire.gov.uk</p> <p>Finance Team Manager &amp; Deputy S151 Officer, Interim Finance Team Manager Tel: 01530 454492, anna.crouch@nwleicester-shire.gov.uk, sarah.thirkettle@nwleicester-shire.gov.uk</p>	Draft Budget and Council Tax 2023/24	Corporate Scrutiny - 4 January 2023

Decision	Decision Maker	Status of Decision	Public or Private  (and reason – where private)	Date of Decision	Contacts	Documents to be submitted to the Decision Maker	Considered by Scrutiny or other Committee
Council Tax Base 2023/24	Cabinet	Key	Public	10 January 2023	Councillor Nicholas Rushton Tel: 01530 412059 nicholas.rushton@nwleicester.gov.uk  Finance Team Manager & Deputy S151 Officer Tel: 01530 454492 anna.crouch@nwleicester.gov.uk	Council Tax Base 2023/24	Not to be considered by a Scrutiny Committee - The calculation of the council tax base is prescribed in statute
Former Tenant Rent Arrears, Current Tenant Rent Arrears, Council Tax, Non Domestic Rates and Sundry Debtor Write Offs	Cabinet	Key	Public	10 January 2023	Councillor Nicholas Rushton Tel: 01530 412059 nicholas.rushton@nwleicester.gov.uk  Exchequer Services Team Leader  andy.gould@nwleicestershire.gov.uk	Former Tenant Rent Arrears, Current Tenant Rent Arrears, Council Tax, Non Domestic Rates and Sundry Debtor Write Offs	Not required to be considered by a Scrutiny Committee. Under the constitution Cabinet are required to approve write-offs over £10,000.
<b>31 January 2023</b>							
Minutes of the Coalville Special Expenses Working Party	Cabinet	Key	Public	31 January 2023	Councillor Andrew Woodman Tel: 07970 520357 andrew.woodman@nwleicestershire.gov.uk  Head of Community Services Tel: 01530 454832 paul.sanders@nwleicestershire.gov.uk	Minutes of the meeting Minutes of the Coalville Special Expenses Working Party	The group is a sub group of Cabinet and therefore the report does not require scrutiny

Decision	Decision Maker	Status of Decision	Public or Private (and reason – where private)	Date of Decision	Contacts	Documents to be submitted to the Decision Maker	Considered by Scrutiny or other Committee
Medium Term Financial Plans 2023/24-2027/28	Cabinet	Non-Key	Private	31 January 2023	Councillor Nicholas Rushton Tel: 01530 412059 nicholas.rushton@nwleicester.gov.uk  Interim Finance Team Manager  sarah.thirkettle@nwleicester.gov.uk	General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Medium Term Financial Plans Medium Term Financial Plans 2023/24-2027/28	Not required, presented to Cabinet members for awareness of the medium-term financial positions when considering the 2023/23 final budgets.
Prudential Indicators and Treasury Strategies 2023-24  21	Cabinet	Key	Public	31 January 2023	Councillor Nicholas Rushton Tel: 01530 412059 nicholas.rushton@nwleicester.gov.uk  Finance Team Manager & Deputy S151 Officer Tel: 01530 454492 anna.crouch@nwleicester.gov.uk	Capital Strategy 2023-24 Investment Strategy 2023-24 Minimum Revenue Provision Statement 2023-24 Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2023-24 Prudential Indicators and Treasury Strategies 2023-24	To be considered by Corporate Scrutiny on 4 January 2023

Decision	Decision Maker	Status of Decision	Public or Private (and reason – where private)	Date of Decision	Contacts	Documents to be submitted to the Decision Maker	Considered by Scrutiny or other Committee
Budget and Council Tax 2023/24	Cabinet	Key	Public	31 January 2023	<p>Councillor Nicholas Rushton Tel: 01530 412059 nicholas.rushton@nwleicester.gov.uk</p> <p>Finance Team Manager &amp; Deputy S151 Officer, Interim Finance Team Manager Tel: 01530 454492, anna.crouch@nwleicester.gov.uk, sarah.thirkettle@nwleicester.gov.uk</p>	Budget and Council Tax 2023/24	Considered by Corporate Scrutiny on 4 January 2023
<b>28 February 2023</b>							
Bereavement Services Review	Cabinet	Key	Public	28 February 2023	<p>Councillor Andrew Woodman Tel: 07970 520357 andrew.woodman@nwleicester.gov.uk</p> <p>Head of Community Services Tel: 01530 454832 paul.sanders@nwleicester.gov.uk</p>	Bereavement Services Review	Community Scrutiny: 8 February 2023

Decision	Decision Maker	Status of Decision	Public or Private  (and reason – where private)	Date of Decision	Contacts	Documents to be submitted to the Decision Maker	Considered by Scrutiny or other Committee
Empty Homes Compulsory Purchase Orders	Cabinet	Key	Private Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)	28 February 2023	Councillor Andrew Woodman Tel: 07970 520357 andrew.woodman@nwleicester.gov.uk  Head of Community Services Tel: 01530 454832 paul.sanders@nwleicester.gov.uk	Empty Homes Compulsory Purchase Orders	Not being considered by Scrutiny as decision being sought under approved Empty Homes Policy
<b>March 2023</b>							
Private Sector Housing Policies	Cabinet	Key	Public	28 March 2023	Councillor Andrew Woodman Tel: 07970 520357 andrew.woodman@nwleicester.gov.uk  Head of Community Services Tel: 01530 454832 paul.sanders@nwleicester.gov.uk	Private Sector Housing Policies	Community Scrutiny 8 February 2023
Minutes of the Coalville Special Expenses Working Party	Cabinet	Key	Public	28 March 2023	Councillor Andrew Woodman Tel: 07970 520357 andrew.woodman@nwleicester.gov.uk  Head of Community Services Tel: 01530 454832 paul.sanders@nwleicester.gov.uk	Minutes from the meeting Minutes of the Coalville Special Expenses Working Party	The group is a sub group of Cabinet and therefore the report does not require scrutiny

Decision	Decision Maker	Status of Decision	Public or Private  (and reason – where private)	Date of Decision	Contacts	Documents to be submitted to the Decision Maker	Considered by Scrutiny or other Committee
PROVISIONAL FINANCIAL OUTTURN 2021/22	Cabinet	Key	Public	28 March 2023	Councillor Nicholas Rushton Tel: 01530 412059 nicholas.rushton@nwleicester.gov.uk  Finance Team Manager & Deputy S151 Officer Tel: 01530 454492 anna.crouch@nwleicester.gov.uk	PROVISIONAL FINANCIAL OUTTURN 2021/22	This report is to present the provisional financial outturn prior to the publication of the draft Statement of Accounts on the 31 July. The final version of the Statement of Accounts will be presented to Audit Committee for approval.
Former Tenant Rent Arrears, Current Tenant Rent Arrears, Council Tax, Non Domestic Rates and Sundry Debtor Write Offs	Cabinet	Key	Public	28 March 2023	Councillor Nicholas Rushton Tel: 01530 412059 nicholas.rushton@nwleicester.gov.uk  Exchequer Services Team Leader  andy.gould@nwleicestershire.gov.uk	Former Tenant Rent Arrears, Current Tenant Rent Arrears, Council Tax, Non Domestic Rates and Sundry Debtor Write Offs	Not required to be considered by a Scrutiny Committee. Under the constitution Cabinet are required to approve write-offs over £10,000.
Quarter 3 Performance Report	Cabinet	Key	Public	28 March 2023	Councillor Richard Blunt Tel: 01530 454510 richard.blunt@nwleicester.gov.uk  Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development Tel: 01530 454518 mike.murphy@nwleicestershire.gov.uk	Quarter 3 Performance Report	8 March 2023



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Decision	Decision Maker	Status of Decision	Public or Private (and reason – where private)	Date of Decision	Contacts	Documents to be submitted to the Decision Maker	Considered by Scrutiny or other Committee
The Leicestershire Partnership Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee - Appointment of Members	Cabinet	Key	Public	6 June 2023	Tel: 01530 454529 claire.hammond@nwleicestershire.gov.uk	Report The Leicestershire Partnership Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee - Appointment of Members	As the report is requiring Cabinet to appoint to executive members to the Joint Committee it does not require scrutiny consideration.
Treasury Management Stewardship Report 2022/23  26	Cabinet	Non-Key	Public	6 June 2023	Councillor Nicholas Rushton Tel: 01530 412059 nicholas.rushton@nwleicestershire.gov.uk  Finance Team Manager & Deputy S151 Officer Tel: 01530 454492 anna.crouch@nwleicester-shire.gov.uk	Treasury Management Stewardship Report 2022/23	To be considered by Audit Committee on the 26 April 2023.
Former Tenant Rent Arrears, Current Tenant Rent Arrears, Council Tax, Non Domestic Rates and Sundry Debtor Write Offs	Cabinet	Key	Public	6 June 2023	Councillor Nicholas Rushton Tel: 01530 412059 nicholas.rushton@nwleicestershire.gov.uk  Exchequer Services Team Leader  andy.gould@nwleicestershire.gov.uk	Former Tenant Rent Arrears, Current Tenant Rent Arrears, Council Tax, Non Domestic Rates and Sundry Debtor Write Offs	Not required to be considered by a Scrutiny Committee. Under the constitution Cabinet are required to approve write-offs over £10,000.

## NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – WEDNESDAY, 23  
NOVEMBER 2022

Title of Report	RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE FUEL POVERTY TASK AND FINISH GROUP	
<b>Presented by</b>	Councillor T Eynon Chair of the Fuel Poverty Task and Finish Group	
<b>Background Papers</b>	Notes of the T&F Group meetings are available from Democratic Services  <a href="#">Establishment of Fuel Poverty T&amp;F Group report</a>	<b>Public Report:</b> Yes
<b>Financial Implications</b>	There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of the Fuel Poverty Task & Finish Group. However, depending upon how the Council plans to implement the recommendations there are likely to be financial considerations. The financial impact would need to be contained within approved budget resources.	
	<b>Signed off by the Section 151 Officer:</b> Yes	
<b>Legal Implications</b>	There are no legal implications arising from the report of the Task and Finish Group. There may be legal implications arising from the implementation of any recommendations and advice will be provided as necessary.	
	<b>Signed off by the Monitoring Officer:</b> Yes	
<b>Staffing and Corporate Implications</b>		
	<b>Signed off by the Head of Paid Service:</b> Yes	
<b>Reason Agenda Item Submitted to Scrutiny Committee</b>	The Task and Finish Group formed to review the subject of 'Fuel Poverty' has concluded its work and produced the final report with recommendations to be considered by the Community Scrutiny Committee.	
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>THAT THE COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE CONSIDERS THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE FUEL POVERTY TASK AND FINISH GROUP AND DETERMINES THE RECOMMENDATION IT WISHES TO MAKE TO CABINET ON THE MATTER.</b>	

## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Task and Finish Group was established by the Community Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 29 June 2022, the scope of the group is detailed within the committee report which is listed in the background papers above.
- 1.2 The Group membership was subsequently agreed as Councillors T Eynon, M Hay, G Hault, R Morris, J Simmons and M Wyatt. Councillor T Eynon was appointed Chair of the Group.
- 1.3 The Group held four meetings over the period from 15 September 2022 and 3 November 2022, which included attendance from a number of officers and external partners who were invited to give evidence. Members would like to formally thank all those that attended to offer their help and support to the Group throughout its review.

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP

- 2.1 Attached at appendix A is the final report of the Task and Finish Group which includes a series of recommendations for the Committee to consider and determine what recommendations to make to Cabinet on the matter.
- 2.2 Any recommendations made by the Committee will be presented to Cabinet in due course.

Policies and other considerations	
Council Priorities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Developing a clean and green district</li><li>- Local people live in high quality, affordable homes</li><li>- Our communities are safe, healthy and connected</li></ul>
Policy Considerations:	Zero Carbon Roadmap HRA Asset Management Plan
Safeguarding:	N/A
Equalities/Diversity:	The Fuel Poverty Task and Finish Group was established to review the work that the Council is doing to minimise fuel poverty in North West Leicestershire.
Customer Impact:	The Fuel Poverty Task and Finish Group makes recommendations to Community Scrutiny to seek to reduce fuel poverty for customers.
Economic and Social Impact:	Task and Finish Group recommendations to Community Scrutiny include considerations for reducing fuel poverty. The impacts of these recommendations will be considered in a future report to cabinet.

Environment and Climate Change:	Task and Finish Group recommendations to Community Scrutiny include considerations for the Council's housing investment programme including improvement of EPC ratings and more engagement with the private rental sector. The impacts of these recommendations will be considered in a future report to cabinet.
Consultation/Community Engagement:	Engagement with external community partners was undertaken as part of gathering evidence to inform recommendations.
Risks:	N/A
Officer Contact	James Arnold Strategic Director <a href="mailto:james.arnold@nwleicestershire.gov.uk">james.arnold@nwleicestershire.gov.uk</a>

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## **Community Scrutiny Committee**

### **Fuel Poverty Task and Finish Group**

#### **Final Report**

#### **1. Background**

- 1.1 At its meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> June 2022, the Community Scrutiny Committee recommended that a task and finish group be established to review the work that the Council is doing to minimise fuel poverty in North West Leicestershire.
- 1.2 The Fuel Poverty Task and Finish Group met for the first time on 15<sup>th</sup> September to appoint its chair, to consider and agree its terms of reference, and the principal areas for review. The agreed terms of reference are attached as Appendix 1.
- 1.3 The Task and Finish Group held 3 formal meetings on 25<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> October, and 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2022, and were supported in the consideration of matters through the attendance of Council partners, and its own officers, to give evidence. Individual briefing notes were also provided by officers against each area of review.
- 1.4 The following report includes those issues as highlighted by the Fuel Poverty Task and Finish Group that are most relevant to the agreed terms of reference and are within the influence of the Council either through its own activity, or which it is able to shape through its work with partners. To inform this work, a number of recommendations are made to the Communities Scrutiny Committee, for subsequent consideration and decision by Cabinet on how and what to implement. While acknowledging these governance processes, for ease, this report will refer to recommendations to Council.
- 1.5 Members commend the commitment and professionalism of NWLDC officers in meeting the Council's responsibilities for supporting local communities in addressing cost of living concerns, of which the rising fuel costs and subsequent fuel poverty are significant elements. In addition, Members are grateful to officers for their helpful advice and support to the Task and Finish Group throughout its review.

#### **2. What is meant by Fuel Poverty?**

- 2.1 Fuel poverty is an accumulation of low incomes, energy inefficient and poor quality housing, and rising energy costs. It is worth noting that fuel poverty in England is measured using the Low Income Low Energy Efficiency (LILEE) indicator. Under this indicator, a household is considered to be fuel poor if:
  - They are living in a property with a fuel poverty energy efficiency rating of band D or below, *and*
  - When they spend the required amount to heat their home, they are left with a residual income below the official poverty line.

- 2.2 There are 3 important elements in determining whether a household is fuel poor:
- Household income
  - Household energy requirements
  - Fuel prices
- 2.3 These 5 determinants are worthy of consideration when considering the efficacy of the Council's approach.
- 2.4 The Government publishes an Annual Fuel Poverty Statistics Report, available [here](#). Partial regional and local analysis is available [here](#). However, the local analysis lacks any real depth, and the most recent report is based on 2020 data – and this lag, not least in its failure to reflect events of the past 12 months, means the report offers little contribution to the consideration of this issue. Perhaps a more useful reference document is the House of Commons Library publication 'Fuel Poverty in the UK', dated 9<sup>th</sup> May 2022, available [here](#).
- 2.5 Of course, the wider national and international dimension to the current cost of living crisis, and its resulting fuel poverty, is outside the influence of North West Leicestershire District Council. Nevertheless, there remain a number of areas within the influence of the Council where further action may go some way to easing the pressure on local communities, and so this constructive challenge and review of these actions, and ambition, is worthwhile.
- 2.6 Notwithstanding this, Members expressed dissatisfaction with the national definition of fuel poverty, as measured using the Low Income Low Energy Efficiency (LILEE) indicator. While there was agreement as to the 3 important elements in determining whether a household is fuel poor; i.e., household income, household energy requirements and fuel prices – the qualifying criteria of households needing to be *both* 'living in a property with an EPC of band D or below', *and* 'when they spend the required amount to heat their home, they are left with a residual income below the official poverty line', was deemed to be too limiting and so risks significantly underestimating the true incidence of fuel poverty in the local area, and thereby limiting support to those in most need.
- 2.7 Accordingly, Members recommend that the Council should adopt a locally agreed measure and consider individuals or households to be in fuel poverty as solely defined by the 2<sup>nd</sup> criterion, i.e., when they spend the required amount to heat their home, they are left with a residual income below the official poverty line. A subset of this measure, those in greatest need, would include those households that reside in a property with an EPC rating of 'D' or below. The locally agreed measure would provide both a better baseline of the incidence of local fuel poverty and inform the better targeting of support services.
- 2.8 This is reliant upon the Council being able to access reliable and consistent data on income and household energy expenditure. Whether this data is easily accessible or is only available through bespoke arrangements and at additional cost will need to be considered.



### **Recommendation 1**

**The Council should adopt a locally agreed measure and consider individuals or households to be in fuel poverty when after they spend the required amount to heat their home, households are left with a residual income below the official poverty line. A subset of this measure would include those households that reside in a property with an EPC rating of 'D' or below.**

## **3. Demonstrating Ambition and Delivery**

- 3.1 The cost of living crisis and resulting fuel poverty is a clear concern for communities, particularly those already facing levels of socio-economic disadvantage. Local authorities of course recognise this and are able to offer support, but their ability to influence significant change may be limited and is subject to local resource priorities and decision making.
- 3.2 While this review of the Fuel Poverty Task and Finish Group is an important step towards addressing the challenges of fuel poverty, the potential to inform change is dependent upon the ambition and commitment of the Council. A first principal question for the Council is, therefore, to consider the extent to which reducing fuel poverty is an organisational priority, especially when set against the competing demands that the Council also has to balance.
- 3.3 The Decent Homes Standard is an important driver of the Council's investment programme, not necessarily warm homes and fuel efficiency. It is noted that the Council has been awarded LAD1B funding to improve 30 social housing properties to PAS2-35 (energy efficiency) compliance but a more specific focus on fuel poverty/efficiency may drive the wider housing investment programme in a different direction. This will be for a political decision and given the primacy of the existing Decent Homes Standard, may be a decision associated with organisational and political risk.
- 3.4 If demonstrating its commitment to addressing fuel poverty, the Council may be invited to develop a strategy and associated delivery plan that includes confirming its approach to housing capital expenditure, repairs and maintenance. A cross-cutting operational team should lead the strategy and delivery plan, with senior officer and oversight.
- 3.5 An effective strategy should be data led and so the development of an appropriate baseline is key – from which subsequent progress will need to be measured and against which the Council should ensure appropriate resources are in place for delivery. This links to a subsequent recommendation for ensuring a robust evidence base.
- 3.6 Alongside this, timely and consistent arrangements should be in place to support a regular reporting cycle, potentially on a bi-annual basis. The Group suggests that monitoring and political engagement may be undertaken through a Member-led group, potentially the existing Fuel Poverty Task and Finish Group.
- 3.7 Realistic expectations remain important. The Council and partners should acknowledge that the data, and so the measure of progress, may not move that quickly, and while delivery will

range in scope from the short, medium to long-term – the impact of this is likely to be more medium to long term.

### **Recommendation 2**

**The Council is invited to develop and deliver a fuel poverty reduction strategy and associated delivery plan, alongside effective performance management and monitoring arrangements.**

## **4. A 'Fabric First' Approach**

- 4.1 Members agree that a priority of the Council should be upon improving the quality of its housing stock as a means of achieving greater energy efficiency and so reducing household fuel costs. In effect, this is a 'Fabric First' approach. Improving the 'fabric' of housing is potentially the most effective lever at the Council's disposal in reducing the incidence of fuel poverty, and/or its severity, in its own stock and hence for its tenants. This includes the focus of resources on improving the insulation of housing (e.g., loft and exterior walls) and wider quality of housing stock.
- 4.2 The 'fabric first' approach is relevant to both repair/retrofitting and the active management of the Council's housing stock. In the development of options for managing the stock, Members suggest that the housing team consider options for holding voids until all improvement work is completed. This would ensure housing stock is of an appropriate standard before tenancies commence, limit subsequent disruption to the tenant of any later works and may increase the cost efficiency of the improvement works for that specific property.
- 4.3 While retained council stock is generally accepted as a positive in ensuring those in need are appropriately housed, is it axiomatic that the Council should continue to retain all its existing stock, or should the Council undertake a more active management plan disposing of those properties that are more challenging to bring up to acceptable standards once they become vacant – and investing these funds in new stock acquisition? In effect, this becomes a choice between retain and remediate, or disposal and reinvestment and is one requiring a political decision to be made by the Council.
- 4.4 This 'fabric first' approach is most relevant to properties that have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of D or below. This is not solely because EPCs are the accepted measure of the property's energy efficiency. There is also the requirement for all new tenancies started from end-December 2025, a property will need to have a minimum EPC rating of C, and all existing tenancies will require a minimum EPC rating of C from December 2028. After meeting this obligation, the Council should consider other measures to address fuel poverty for households in those properties at EPC rating of C or above.
- 4.5 In recommending this approach to Council, Members acknowledge the constraint on resources and wider implications of this medium to longer term approach. While holding voids pending the completion of improvement works may be the preferred route, the benefits of this approach should be considered against other factors that include the likelihood that it

will increase the wait time for those on the Council's housing list, at a time when housing pressures continue to increase. In addition, the random nature of void presentation will lead to an 'ad hoc' improvement programme (as voids may become the dominant driver) limiting the cost efficiencies that arise from a larger and targeted investment programme, with the resulting higher costs limiting the reach of the Council's overall programme.

- 4.6 There is no right or wrong approach. Merely the implications of the Councils' housing investment programme and approach should be fully considered, and its impact recognised.

### **Recommendation 3**

**The Council is invited to consider its approach to both its housing investment programme and its commitment to addressing fuel poverty, and specifically a 'fabric first' approach to ensure that all properties in the first instance are brought up to an EPC rating of C or above, or disposed of, if this is not practical or cost effective to deliver.**

## **5. The Delivery of an Effective Housing Repair Programme**

- 5.1 EPC 'C' rating is accepted as minimum acceptable standard, with a move towards ensuring all let properties attain this classification. Alongside this requirement, the Council's housing repairs programme is an important factor in ensuring the maintenance of decent housing standards and thereby addressing fuel poverty concerns. However, it has been confirmed that there are instances where people have moved into properties where works are required albeit with assurance that subsequent remedial works will be completed in good time. There is an inherent risk that council action, or indeed inaction, inadvertently pushes tenants into fuel poverty by its failure to repair/maintain its stock. This should be mitigated by an evaluation of the robustness of its housing stock management and investment programme.
- 5.2 An effective housing repair programme does depend upon an effective partnership between the Council and its tenants. This is in part dependent upon good engagement between the Council and its tenants.
- 5.3 In considering the range of options and measures open to the Council in undertaking work to lessen the impact of fuel poverty, Members emphasise that tenants themselves have an important role to play. A significant element of any fuel poverty/energy efficiency measures are behavioural. This can have a near immediate, short-term effect, and includes measures tenants may take as a household, e.g., turning off lights, switching off standby, shorter showers and washing clothes at 30°. Alongside this, it should also be emphasised to tenants that there is a partnership between them and the Council – and while there is an entirely reasonable expectation, for example, that repairs are completed in a timely manner; the Council may similarly expect the support of tenants in agreeing (and keeping to) the schedule and scope of improvement work.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**The Council is invited to evaluate the robustness of its housing stock management, investment and repairs programme and in the delivery of this, consider action to improve its engagement with tenants.**

### **6. The Evidence Base**

- 6.1 The importance of an Energy Performance Certificate was emphasised as a key factor in being able to determine the quality of the housing 'fabric' and the corresponding risk to residents of fuel poverty. However, this is just one indicator of the risk or incidence of fuel poverty, and the Council is encouraged to develop a robust and consistent data, evidence and intelligence base to inform policy decisions and resource allocation.
- 6.2 Members supported the potential for the EPC data to be cross-referenced with waste collection and council tax data in order to provide the Council with a better understanding of the level of need in local communities, and the resulting challenges and opportunities in addressing this. Members acknowledged that work is being undertaken to better understand the Council's asset base and investment priorities, by property type, area, levels of deprivation and demography but also highlighted the potential for this work to be further expanded upon. In doing so, however, the limitations of GDPR and data protection are acknowledged.

#### **Recommendation 5**

**The Council is invited to develop a more robust data base to:**

- a) Support a more comprehensive understanding of the incidence and drivers of local fuel poverty.**
- b) Improve understanding of the condition of the local housing base of local authority, social and private rented sector housing.**
- c) Inform and support the monitoring of Council interventions and policy decisions.**

### **7. Local Leadership**

- 7.1 The council has both a place shaping and local leadership role. In addition to specific support programmes, the Council could look to enhance its local leadership responsibilities through effective and co-ordinated partnership management, particularly in corralling local partners in the delivery of a limited set of agreed local priorities.
- 7.2 Action to address fuel poverty will comprise action against both the *cause*, e.g., fabric and housing standards, and the *effects*, increased need for food bank support and warm hubs through the colder winter months. In particular, the effectiveness of the latter (community support activity) will be dependent upon local leadership in partnership with the community and voluntary sector, and in turn dependent upon sufficient resources (not solely financial) being in place to enable this work.
- 7.3 As part of its local leadership responsibilities, the Council may consider how it engages with the private rental sector. To limit the consideration of the incidence and effects of fuel

poverty to solely those living in local authority housing would fail to go anywhere near to addressing the challenge. Poor quality housing in the private rental sector remains a significant concern, as is the limit to the Council's ability to drive an improvement in standards.

- 7.4 The lack of a private sector housing team, or indeed an individual officer, reduces the Council's ability to effectively engage with private sector landlords (e.g., active support in improving the quality of private rented stock), monitoring developments and in holding them to account (through, for example, enforcement). It is also a notable gap in the Council's wider approach, that already and very sensibly brings together the work of its own housing officers (assets and policy), climate change programmes, and community services. Enhanced private rental sector capacity would better support this cross-team approach.

#### **Recommendation 6**

**In order to better develop capacity to drive the improvement in housing standards and energy efficiency, Members invite the Council to consider the potential to recruit a dedicated private rental sector officer/team. This may be a 'locally owned' resource, or the Council may explore the potential for securing joint arrangements with a neighbouring council(s).**

### **8. The Importance of Communication**

- 8.1 There are a number of important initiatives with associated funding, e.g., LAD, HUG2 and ECO4. It is important that there is awareness of these opportunities, not least in supporting a 'pipeline' of qualifying properties and investment programmes.
- 8.2 Work to improve the fabric of properties will reduce the incidence of fuel poverty. Other Council activity mitigates against the effects of fuel poverty. While it will be important to ensure adequate resources are in place to support local programmes (e.g., household support grants, fuel vouchers and warm hubs), vulnerable residents must both aware of this help and supported to access it.
- 8.3 Making every contact count is key, and council officers have an important role in ensuring the provision of accurate and timely information to residents. As a minimum, the Council may wish to ensure that all frontline officers and customer service contacts have access to up to date information and are able to efficiently signpost residents to additional support, advocacy or referrals.
- 8.4 The local landlords' forum offers route for engaging with private sector landlords and the Council may wish to consider how it may refresh the forum to improve levels of engagement, particularly in relation to those landlords that do not attend, or indeed, may not even be aware of the forum's existence.
- 8.5 The Council may wish to consider how it communicates the benefits of increasing investment to address local fuel poverty. Addressing fuel poverty has an important, if not fundamental, wellbeing consideration. However, alongside this, it is worth emphasising that investment in

measures to alleviate fuel poverty also in turn lessen the pressure on NHS and social care services, children that are warm and better fed will do better at school, healthier people make for better employees – and the Council being at the vanguard of these programmes will place it in an advantageous position in drawing down additional funding and support from Government.

#### **Recommendation 7**

**As part of its work in addressing fuel poverty, the Council is invited to consider the potential for improving its communication on these matters, with communication/engagement seen as a key element of any wider Council led approach. As a minimum, the Council may wish to ensure that all frontline officers and customer service contacts have access to up to date information and are able to efficiently signpost residents to additional support, advocacy or referrals.**

### **9. Summary**

9.1 The Fuel Poverty Task and Finish Group acknowledge the commitment of the Council in addressing these matters and are grateful for the opportunity to lead this review.

9.2 The context is important, and at a time when the local community is facing ever greater cost of living concerns, the pressures on Council resources have perhaps, never been greater. The Council will therefore need to carefully consider its future approach and support, and the Fuel Poverty Task Group trust that their review, with its conclusions and recommendations, is helpful in this regard.

9.3 The proposed recommendations are:

#### **Recommendation 1**

The Council should adopt a locally agreed measure and consider individuals or households to be in fuel poverty when after they spend the required amount to heat their home, households are left with a residual income below the official poverty line. A subset of this measure would include those households that reside in a property with an EPC rating of 'D' or below.

#### **Recommendation 2**

The Council is invited to develop and deliver a fuel poverty reduction strategy and associated delivery plan, alongside effective performance management and monitoring arrangements.

#### **Recommendation 3**

The Council is invited to consider its approach to both its housing investment programme and its commitment to addressing fuel poverty, and specifically a 'fabric first' approach to ensure that all properties in the first instance are brought up to an EPC rating of C or above.

#### **Recommendation 4**

The Council is invited to evaluate the robustness of its housing stock management, investment and repairs programme and in the delivery of this, consider action to improve its engagement with tenants.

#### Recommendation 5

The Council is invited to develop a more robust data base to:

- Support a more comprehensive understanding of the incidence and drivers of local fuel poverty.
- Improve understanding of the condition of the local housing base of local authority, social and private rented sector housing.
- Inform and support the monitoring of Council interventions and policy decisions.

#### Recommendation 6

In order to better develop capacity to drive the improvement in housing standards and energy efficiency, Members invites the Council to consider the potential to recruit a dedicated private rental sector officer/team. This may be a 'locally owned' resource, or the Council may explore the potential for securing joint arrangements with a neighbouring council(s).

#### Recommendation 7

As part of its work in addressing fuel poverty, the Council is invited to consider the potential for improving its communication on these matters, with communication and engagement seen as a key element of any wider Council led approach. As a minimum, the Council may wish to ensure that all frontline officers and customer service contacts have access to up to date information and are able to efficiently signpost residents to additional support, advocacy or referrals.

----- **END** -----

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