

MINUTES of a meeting of the COUNCIL held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Coalville on TUESDAY, 20 MARCH 2018

Present: Councillor V Richichi (Chairman)

Councillors R Adams, G A Allman, R Ashman, R D Bayliss, R Blunt, R Boam, J Bridges, R Canny, J Clarke, N Clarke, J Cotterill, J G Coxon, D Everitt, T Eynon, F Fenning, S Gillard, T Gillard, L Goacher, D Harrison, G Houlton, J Houlton, R Johnson, G Jones, J Legrys, S McKendrick, K Merrie MBE, T J Pendleton, N J Rushton, S Sheahan, N Smith, A V Smith MBE, M Specht, D J Stevenson and M B Wyatt

Officers: J Arnold, Ms T Ashe, Mr G Jones, Mrs M Long, Mrs M Meredith, Mrs B Smith and Miss E Warhurst

67. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Geary, P Purver and A C Saffell.

68. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor T Eynon declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 10 - Outcomes of the Planning Peer Challenge, as the Leicestershire County Councillor for Coalville North.

69. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman emphasised the need for trust in working together and the ability of power to destroy friendships and relationships. He reiterated the responsibility of councillors and the authority as public servants.

The Chairman thanked all members who were attending his charity dinner on 6 April.

The Chairman announced that Dame Vera Lynn had reached 101 years old today.

70. LEADER'S AND PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' ANNOUNCEMENTS

No announcements were made.

71. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

There were no questions received.

72. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

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

“Can I be informed when the Council last counted the number of rough sleepers residing in North West Leicestershire and what were the results please?”

Councillor R D Bayliss gave the following response:

“All Councils are required to carry out an annual estimate of rough sleeping within their district in keeping with the approved Government methodology. The most recent count for North West Leicestershire related to the night of 7 November 2017 when a zero estimate was returned. This return was based on local intelligence and consultation with local partner agencies who work with rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping. Neither the Council nor any of these agencies were aware of anyone sleeping rough in the

Chairman's initials

district on that night. The estimate was subsequently validated on 5th December 2017 by the national charity Homeless Link, as required by Government guidance”.

Councillor J Legrys stated that as a volunteer at Hermitage FM he was very aware of rough sleepers in Coalville who may not necessarily be counted. As a supplementary question, he asked what advice was given to rough sleeper in the district and where were they accommodated.

Councillor R D Bayliss responded temporary bed and breakfast accommodation was arranged for any rough sleepers that were referred to the Council and subsequently the housing team would provide advice and signposting. He encouraged members to refer any rough sleepers to the Council.

Councillor T Eynon put the following question to Councillor A V Smith:

“Boards at the entrance to the Nature Alive wildlife area behind the Aldi supermarket on Thornborough Road suggest that it is managed by this Council in association with the Leicestershire Wildlife Trust.

Which organisation is responsible for maintaining the boardwalk around the lake?

Which organisation is responsible for responding to and removing litter and fly-tipping on the site?

When can residents expect to see the site brought back up to standard?”

Councillor A V Smith gave the following response:

“The council owns the freehold of the site and is responsible for managing and maintaining the blue hatched area on the attached plan.

The boardwalk is the responsibility of the council and officers inspect this visually at least twice weekly and then this is supplemented by a monthly more rigorous assessment. All boardwalks are cleaned annually in the spring and officers have scheduled this work to take place before the end of May.

The council is responsible for the removal of litter within the blue hatched area. Litter collections are undertaken at least twice weekly and fly-tipping would be addressed through the normal council procedure. Most of the litter issues occur on the banks adjacent to the railway line to the east of the site on the map. These are difficult to access and are not the responsibility of the council, although officers cannot identify through land registry records who the owner is. The assumption is that the owner may be Network Rail given the proximity to the railway line and officers will endeavour to confirm this as soon as possible. In the meantime the Grounds Maintenance team have attempted to remove litter from this area but they are extremely difficult circumstances to work in.

There are implications to the way the area is maintained with it being a nature site and a habitat for protected and other species, hence the close liaison with and guidance from the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust. Officers within the Grounds Maintenance team would welcome an on-site meeting with Cllr Eynon to fully understand the concerns that she has, to discuss any potential improvements, and to highlight any specific issues that the Wildlife Trust may have”.

Councillor T Eynon made reference to her recent experience of visiting the site. As a supplementary question, Councillor T Eynon asked when the substantial hole in the boardwalk would be repaired, when the shopping trolley in the pond would be removed

and when the areas would be litter-picked that could not be reached by the cadets on the slopes down to the pond.

Councillor A V Smith thanked Councillor T Eynon for bringing this issue to her attention and advised that she would provide a written response.

Councillor M Specht put the following question to Councillor A V Smith:

“In view of the fact that more car manufacturers are pushing for cleaner emission vehicles, and having seen the explosive rise in registration of all electric vehicles, what does the council intend to do regarding rapid charging stations for all hybrid and electric vehicles and has this council made any enquiries regarding central government funding specifically set aside for this purpose?”

Councillor A V Smith gave the following response:

“One of the Council’s key tasks in the Green Footprints section of the 2018/19 Council Delivery Plan is to – “Look at the feasibility of installing electric charging bays in council-owned car parks”

The feasibility study will include identifying and evaluating the various sources of funding available and the numerous options for the installation of electric charging points.

As part of the design for the Ashby North Street Car Park extension, providing 52 new short stay parking spaces, the infrastructure has been put in place to enable electric charging points to be installed. The number of points will be determined through the work of the feasibility study”.

As a supplementary question, Councillor M Specht asked at what point in the future the feasibility study would be taking place.

Councillor A V Smith responded that work was well underway on the North Street car park, and the feasibility study would also be undertaken fairly rapidly, however an exact date could not be provided.

73. MOTIONS

Councillor R Adams moved the following motion:

“This Council acknowledges Prime Minister Theresa May’s recognition of a national crisis in housing, in her speech to the Royal Town Planning Institute conference earlier this month. The Council also notes with interest the comments by the (Tory) Chairman of the Local Government Association, Sir Gary Porter, in response to the Prime Minister’s speech, saying that nothing will change unless more council houses are built.

This Council is intent on playing its part in tackling the national housing crisis to the fullest extent and pledges to do everything possible to close the gap in the amount of suitable social housing available in North West Leicestershire. We will -

Commit our current £16 million borrowing headroom to fund an accelerated programme of new-build council housing

Utilize compulsory purchase powers to maximum effect to bring sites or properties that are in disrepair and empty houses back into use

Lobby Government to reform the Right to Buy, lift restrictions on the re-investment of the Council’s £5 million housing Capital Receipts and relax HM Treasury rules on borrowing

Chairman’s initials

to fund new council house schemes so that in the future, Councils will be able to respond in a timely manner to identified local housing needs”.

The motion was seconded by Councillor S Sheahan who stated that what really mattered was the housing crisis and what the Council could do for the 750 people on the waiting list. It was proposed that the government be lobbied as the Right to Buy scheme was responsible for the net loss. He added that the Labour group believed the Council could do a lot more.

Councillor M B Wyatt expressed support for the Right to Buy scheme and providing people the opportunity to access the housing market. He added that the Labour Party had not taken the opportunity to change the Right to Buy scheme. He expressed his views on the previous condition of the housing stock and felt that the motion was highly hypocritical. He applauded the Conservative group for retaining the housing stock.

Councillor R D Bayliss moved the following amendment:

“This Council acknowledges Prime Minister Theresa May’s recognition of a national crisis in housing, in her speech to the Royal Town Planning Institute conference earlier this month. The Council also notes that the Chairman of the Local Government Association, Lord Porter, is a keen exponent of more council houses being built.

This Council is intent on playing its part in tackling the national housing crisis to the fullest extent and pledges to do everything possible to close the gap in the amount of suitable social housing available in North West Leicestershire. We have started building council homes for the first time in three decades and in this very month we will accept the first completions at Linford and Verdon Crescent, Coalville of the 24 homes in the first phase of our programme. A contract to build a further 24 council homes at Ashby Road, Coalville as part of our second phase programme has just been signed. This Council has also increased housing supply through accepting 21 new homes from developers as part of planning agreements in 2017/18, with a further 19 new homes to come through this means in 2018/19. In addition to these ongoing initiatives we will -

- Utilise compulsory purchase powers to maximum effect to bring sites or properties that are in disrepair, and empty houses, back into use
- Carry out a review of all existing initiatives to increase housing supply (including support for local housing associations) and use this cost benefit analysis to guide the Council in adopting the most economic and effective way forward in delivering new homes. This review will examine all existing funding mechanisms and investigate all available options going forward, including the option to access the borrowing headroom within the Housing Revenue Account. This Council is therefore fully committed to supporting new council housing schemes so that in the future, this Council will be able to respond in a timely manner to meet identified local housing needs”.

Councillor R D Bayliss commented that houses were not being lost under the Right to Buy scheme, they were simply in different ownership. He made reference to the waiting list and reminded members that around 350 tenancy changes were completed each year and many of the remainder of people on the waiting list were low priority as they already had a home. He added that the Council was on course to deliver 88 houses and this had been accomplished without borrowing. He urged members to accept the amendment.

The motion was seconded by Councillor R Blunt who stated that the administration had shown its willingness to invest in housing. He expressed pride in the poll undertaken on the retention of the housing stock and thanked members for their support.

Councillor T Eynon felt that the electorate were keen to have a debate on housing and did not understand why the £5 million in capital receipts from Right to Buy could not be reinvested in council housing stock.

Councillor R Ashman stated that he was proud to be part of an authority that was building council houses for the first time in 26 years.

Councillor N Clarke stated that both the key points to the motion had been removed and so he would not support the amendment.

Councillor R Adams exercised his right of reply and stated that he could not support the amendment as it did not refer to the Right to Buy. He felt that it was necessary to lobby the government to reform the Right to Buy.

The Chairman then put the amendment to the vote. The motion was declared CARRIED.

The Chairman then put the substantive motion, as amended, to the vote. The motion was declared CARRIED.

It was therefore

RESOLVED THAT:

“This Council acknowledges Prime Minister Theresa May’s recognition of a national crisis in housing, in her speech to the Royal Town Planning Institute conference earlier this month. The Council also notes that the Chairman of the Local Government Association, Lord Porter, is a keen exponent of more council houses being built.

This Council is intent on playing its part in tackling the national housing crisis to the fullest extent and pledges to do everything possible to close the gap in the amount of suitable social housing available in North West Leicestershire. We have started building council homes for the first time in three decades and in this very month we will accept the first completions at Linford and Verdon Crescent, Coalville of the 24 homes in the first phase of our programme. A contract to build a further 24 council homes at Ashby Road, Coalville as part of our second phase programme has just been signed. This Council has also increased housing supply through accepting 21 new homes from developers as part of planning agreements in 2017/18, with a further 19 new homes to come through this means in 2018/19. In addition to these ongoing initiatives we will -

- Utilise compulsory purchase powers to maximum effect to bring sites or properties that are in disrepair, and empty houses, back into use

Carry out a review of all existing initiatives to increase housing supply (including support for local housing associations) and use this cost benefit analysis to guide the Council in adopting the most economic and effective way forward in delivering new homes. This review will examine all existing funding mechanisms and investigate all available options going forward, including the option to access the borrowing headroom within the Housing Revenue Account. This Council is therefore fully committed to supporting new council housing schemes so that in the future, this Council will be able to respond in a timely manner to meet identified local housing needs”.

74. PETITIONS

No petitions were received.

75. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2018.

Councillor R Adams sought to provide an update on the response to a question he raised at the previous meeting. The Chairman reminded Councillor R Adams to confine his comments to the accuracy of the minutes only.

It was moved by Councillor V Richichi, seconded by Councillor J Clarke and

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2018 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

76. OUTCOMES OF THE PLANNING PEER CHALLENGE

The Chief Executive presented the report to members, setting out the recommendations and proposed actions following the Peer Challenge which had taken place in February. She explained that the review had been requested following consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Leader of the Labour group as a result of a number of issues that had been brought to her attention. She stated that the Council was on a journey of continuous improvement, it was healthy to invite independent review, and a peer challenge provided that opportunity. She added that the peer review team had interviewed a wide cross-section of people and the clear message from all parties was that the status quo was not sustainable.

The Chief Executive highlighted that the peer review had recognised the good performance in achieving the house building target, the innovative work that was being undertaken with other Leicestershire authorities on the strategic growth plan and the fact that the Local Plan was in place.

The Chief Executive outlined the key issues identified by the peer review team, including customer service, engagement and transparency, enhancing pre-application advice and supporting the development of neighbourhood plans. There were also a number of recommendations regarding the quality of reports and minutes, the call-in procedure, and best practice dictated that the size of the Planning Committee should be reduced.

The Chief Executive mentioned how fortunate the Council was to have a Local Plan in place. It was clear that the Local Plan needed to be better understood and the role of the Local Plan Advisory Committee was key to that and to the upcoming review of the Local Plan. Members were asked to agree to the reform of the Advisory Committee to enable it to become a formal decision-making body and to increase the membership. These changes would take effect from the Annual meeting of the Council in May.

The Chief Executive stated that the observations made on behaviours and relationships required urgent attention, and if not addressed, would undermine the Council. She added that the Planning Committee was the Council's shop front to the community and the decisions made there affected the quality of life for residents. She acknowledged that some of the report would make for difficult reading however she hoped that there would be cross-party support to make the required changes.

The Chief Executive highlighted the proposal to develop and implement the action plan through a cross-party working group. She referred to the recommendation set out in the additional papers along with the rationale for appointing to the working party.

Councillor T J Pendleton moved the recommendations set out in the report and the additional papers.

The motion was seconded by Councillor R Blunt who welcomed the report and urged members to support the recommendations. He stated that the public would like the planning service to be improved.

Councillor S Sheahan thanked the Chief Executive and all those who participated in the review process. He asked why the report was being progressed without scrutiny.

The Chief Executive stated that she felt it was important that the report be considered at the first available Council meeting to ensure that momentum was not lost. She added that members had been involved throughout the process and the cross-party working group would ensure member engagement going forwards.

Councillor J Legrys welcomed the review and thanked the Chief Executive for bringing it about. He commented that most people in North West Leicestershire believed that most members who sat on the Planning Committee were corrupt. He added that this was not the truth however he felt the whole concept and culture of planning needed to change. He expressed concerns that the outcome paper did not necessarily reflect all the recommendation made and he expressed disappointment about the lack of reflection in the report. He expressed concerns about the development and delivery of the recommendations and delivering a transparent planning service to the public. He felt that further discussions were needed.

The Chief Executive clarified that all of the formal recommendations set out in the report had been included in the action plan and some of these were still to be developed.

Councillor M Specht thanked the Chief Executive and the peer review team. He expressed concerns regarding the points raised by the review team in respect of the site visits and the rate of overturned applications.

Councillor D Everitt expressed concerns regarding public perception, the proposals that ward members should not participate in the decision making, reductions in site visits, ward member call-in and the reduction in the size of the committee.

Councillor N Clarke thanked the Chief Executive. He welcomed the independent review and urged members to support the recommendations. He commented on the issues with public perception and added that it was important to move with the times to address this. He stated that he would be supporting the recommendations.

Councillor J Bridges thanked the two party leaders for supporting the review and he thanked the Chief Executive for bringing it forward. He commented that the report gave members the opportunity to continue the cross-party work of the Local Plan Advisory Committee.

Councillor T Eynon thanked the Chief Executive for bringing about this important piece of work. She stated that she was very pleased that the problem with roles and relationships was going to be tackled. She highlighted that the report mentioned the politicisation of planning and she expressed concern that scrutiny of it was an afterthought. She added that there was a tendency in this Council to scrutinise decisions after they were made. She commented that she was pleased that there would be earlier engagement and she would welcome more clarity in the reports to committee.

Councillor D Harrison congratulated the Chief Executive and the party leaders. He welcomed the report and moving forward with the proposals. He urged members to

embrace the recommendations fully as this would enrich the authority and bring about improvements for the public.

Councillor R Canny also thanked the Chief Executive. She stated that she had thought long and hard whether it was more beneficial to be able to vote and take part in the debate on the Planning Committee, or to be able to speak passionately as a ward member and not be prejudiced in any way. She added that it was difficult as ward member not to have a preconceived idea. She sought clarity on the proportionality arrangements set out in the report.

The Democratic Services Team Manager explained that the independent group had been formed following the election at the request of those members for the purposes of voting and substitutions.

Councillor N Smith thanked the Chief Executive for bringing about the review. He pointed out that the majority of members of the Council were not members of the Planning Committee and therefore did not vote. He reiterated that ward members could speak at the Planning Committee and support local people.

Councillor T J Pendleton summarised that judging by the comments made, members supported the objectives of the review. He made reference to the recent good performance of the service in terms of the timescale for determining applications and highlighted that a rate of 100% had been achieved in the last quarter for one of the targets. He thanked the Chief Executive for bringing about this timely review. He urged members to support the report and the findings of the review.

It was moved by Councillor T J Pendleton, seconded by Councillor R Blunt and

RESOLVED THAT:

- a) The Planning Peer Challenge team be thanked for undertaking the extensive review;
- b) The initial findings and recommendations of the Planning Peer Challenge team be noted;
- c) The action plan be approved based on the initial findings of the Peer Challenge team, as set out at Appendix 2;
- d) The reduction in size of the Planning Committee from 17 to 11 seats be agreed, with effect from Annual Council in May 2018, where appointments will be made;
- e) The reform of the Local Plan Advisory Committee be agreed to give it appropriate decision-making powers and to increase the number of seats from 7 to 11; to take effect from Annual Council in May 2018, where appointments will be made;
- f) The Monitoring Officer be authorised to make any consequential changes to the Constitution arising from this report and the action plan set out at Appendix 2;

A cross-party member/officer working group be established to oversee the development and implementation of the action plan arising from the Peer Challenge recommendations.

77. COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2018/19

Councillor R Blunt presented the report to members, highlighting the targets under each of the Council's priorities.

Chairman's initials

Councillor M B Wyatt expressed concerns as a member of the Planning Committee regarding the target of increasing the number of homes in Coalville by 950 in the next 3 years. He felt that this could put members in a difficult position.

Councillor R Blunt clarified that consent had already been granted for the 950 homes referred to.

Councillor D J Stevenson recounted his recent experience with a constituent who had had a replacement solid fuel heating system installed. He urged members to see the system in action if they had the opportunity to do so.

Councillor R Johnson welcomed the report however he commented that the photographs were all of Ashby de la Zouch rather than Coalville.

It was moved by Councillor R Blunt, seconded by Councillor A V Smith and

RESOLVED THAT:

- a) The proposed Council Delivery Plan be approved.

The Chief Executive be authorised, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to make any final technical amendments to the plan prior to publication.

78. REVIEW OF STREET TRADING POLICY

Councillor A V Smith presented the report to members, highlighting the amendments made to the draft policy following the consultation process which aimed to simplify processes and reduce bureaucracy. She advised that the most significant change was the removal of the requirement to consult on applications to renew a licence where no complaints had been received.

Councillor T Eynon agreed that the proposals had been well discussed at the Licensing Committee and she felt all members were happy with the proposals.

It was moved by Councillor A V Smith, seconded by Councillor N Smith and

RESOLVED THAT:

- a) The draft Street Trading Policy be approved

Authority be delegated to the Head of Service in consultation with the Portfolio Holder to approve changes to the Street Trading Policy.

79. GENDER PAY GAP REPORT 2018

Councillor R Blunt presented the report to members, which was a new statutory requirement. He explained that the report was based on data from March 2017 in accordance with the requirements. He emphasised that gender pay was different to equal pay. The report showed that the mean average pay for females was 5% lower and the median was 11% lower. He stressed that the Council was not complacent about this issue and policies would be reviewed with the aim of reducing the pay gap in future years.

Councillor J Bridges welcomed the report and urged members to take swift action on this issue.

Councillor S Sheahan welcomed the report and the commitment to develop an action plan.

Chairman's initials

Councillor T Eynon welcomed the report and the low gap compared with some neighbouring authorities. She was particularly pleased that it was accepted that the ideal position was no gender pay gap. She commented that the problem was undervaluing women in general.

Councillor S McKendrick welcomed the report and the acceptance that the ideal position would be to have no pay gap. In terms of future development and plans to monitor progress she would welcome a target for closing the gap.

It was moved by Councillor R Blunt, seconded by Councillor A V Smith and

RESOLVED THAT:

The report be noted.

80. PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2018/19

Councillor R Blunt presented the report to members, highlighting the decrease in the pay multiple ratio during the current year.

Councillor N Clarke highlighted a point of accuracy relating to the average and the median. He welcomed the reduction in the ratio.

Councillor F Fenning welcomed the report however commented on the modern practice of part time contracts and the amount of hours the average family would have to work. He encouraged a move to the true living wage and felt that the Council should lead the community in setting aspirational conditions for good employment.

Councillor N J Rushton commented that the economy in the district was one of the fastest growing in the country and the Council had adopted the living wage. He felt that it should be recognised that a 2% pay increase had also been accepted whilst Council Tax remained frozen.

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

RESOLVED THAT:

The Council's Pay Policy Statement 2018/19 be approved.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.24 pm