

MINUTES of a meeting of the COUNCIL held in the Forest Room, Stenson House, London Road, Coalville, LE67 3FN on TUESDAY, 10 SEPTEMBER 2024

Present: Councillor K Horn (Chair)

Councillors R L Morris, M Ball, A Barker, C Beck, D Bigby, M Blair-Park, R Blunt, R Boam, M Burke, R Canny, D Cooper, D Everitt, T Eynon, M French, J Geary, T Gillard, R Johnson, S Lambeth, P Lees, J Legrys, K Merrie MBE, A Morley, P Moulton, E Parle, G Rogers, N J Rushton, R Sutton, A C Saffell, C A Sewell, S Sheahan, J G Simmons, N Smith, A Wilson, J Windram, L Windram, A C Woodman and M B Wyatt

Officers: Mr J Arnold, Mrs A Crouch, Mrs C Hammond, Mr M Murphy, Mrs A Thomas, Mrs R Wallace, Miss E Warhurst and Mr P Wheatley

33. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

34. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The following Members declared an interest in item 7 – Motions, as they were in receipt of the winter fuel allowance:

Councillors M Ball, A Barker, D Bigby, D Cooper, D Everitt, J Geary, R Johnson, J Legrys, R Morris, E Parle, G Rogers, N Rushton, A Saffell, C Sewell, J Simmons, N Smith, R Sutton and A Wilson.

35. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair announced the recent passing of Ron Adams who was a Labour district councillor for the Greenhill and Broom Leys Wards between 2011 and 2019. The Chair invited Members to join him in a minute silence in his memory.

The celebration events for the 50-year anniversary of North West Leicestershire District Council had now commenced including:

- The Chair thanked the Members that had submitted nominations for the Legacy Award, it was noted that shortlisting would be taking place in the coming months and all nominees would be invited to the thank you event in February.
- Officers have been capturing video footage of people and organisations across the district to talk about their impact over the last 50 years. They would be premiered at the thank you event.
- Officers have been asked to volunteer their own time to raise funds for good causes. The final amount raised will be announced at the thank you event.

Other achievements to celebrate in the 50th year was the completion of Kegworth Market Place and the opening of Marlborough Square, the restoration of the mother and child statue in Belvoir Shopping Centre and a time capsule placed to mark the 125th anniversary of Coalville Park. Still to come was the improvement works to Moira Furnace and Hermitage Recreation Ground, the creation of a new 3G sports provision in Castle Donington and a new volunteer centre within the National Forest. The Council had also awarded over £250,000 of community grants through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and nearly £500,000 of capital grants to rural businesses through the Rural England Prosperity Fund.

36. LEADER'S AND PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' ANNOUNCEMENTS

Councillor R Blunt, the Leader of the Council made the following announcements:

Following the General Election, he was looking forward to creating a positive relationship with North West Leicestershire's two Members of Parliament and to work together for the good of the people in the District.

It was announced that the Boundary Commission had revised the proposed new ward boundaries following the work undertaken by officers and Members earlier in the year, it was noted that it was now out for public consultation for a period of 10 weeks. The Leader of the Council explained that the working group would be called to consider the Council's response and Members were also encouraged to submit an individual response should they wish to. A further report would be considered by Council at its next meeting in November.

Further to the Corporate Peer Review conducted earlier in the year, the Leader of the Council thanked officers, Members and partners that took part in intensive interviews as part of the process. It was noted that the final report with recommendations was expected soon, after which plans and actions would be put in place to make improvements. A report would be taken to Scrutiny and Council in the coming months.

Councillor M Wyatt, Community Services and Climate Change Portfolio Holder updated Members following the launch of the Community Lottery. It was noted that it was on target to raise £50,000 this financial year to good local causes.

37. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

There were no questions received.

38. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

There were 10 questions asked which are set out below together with the responses. Each Member who asked a question was invited by the Chair to ask a supplementary question which is also set out together with the response.

Question from Councillor N Smith

"I am disappointed that the recent decisions made by the Labour Government as stated by Deputy Prime Minister to amend the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) will increase house building figures across NWL.

Our Local Plan review house building figures have gone from a starting point of 357 houses per year to 621 per year as discussed at the last local plan committee. This does not take in to account any extra houses from the Labour Leicester City Council's unmet needs which the Council may need to provide for. We could also potentially see an increase in solar panel farms and wind turbine numbers across NWL and this is not what the residents want.

This change in the NPPF appears to be punishing those Councils who have met their previous Local Plan requirements whilst rewarding those who have failed. Can I ask what actions the portfolio holder and the council intend to take."

Response from Councillor K Merrie

“Members will be aware that the matter raised by Cllr Smith was fully debated at Local Plan Committee on 14th August last month. At the meeting, a number of members expressed concern about the potential increase in the numbers of houses that this Council would have to provide for per year under the government’s new standard method.

At the meeting, the officer report advised to continue to plan for now for 686 dwellings each year, and a minimum of 13,720 dwellings over the plan period of 2020-2040 as set out in the Statement of Common Ground for the Leicester and Leicestershire Housing Market Area agreed in June 2022, but that the matter would be kept under review.

However, Members also resolved that North West Leicestershire District Council condemns the government’s decision to increase the allocation of housing and request the Member of Parliament to make urgent representation to the housing minister expressing our grave concerns. As such, a letter on behalf of the committee, has now been sent to the MPs representing North West Leicestershire residents requesting that they make representations to the government expressing their grave concerns about the significant impacts that this level of growth would have on our local communities.

I’m aware that the Chancellor announced that footnotes 57 and 58 to paragraph 163 of the existing NPPF, which placed additional tests on onshore wind schemes, including demonstrating proven community support, would no longer apply to decisions. The government is of the view that in effect, this created a very high bar for consent to be granted and led to very significant under-delivery of onshore wind schemes. This may result in some proposals in NWL which, if acceptable in planning terms, could help with the climate emergency. However, if the Council is faced with a number of new applications for renewable energy proposals, these will be dealt on their planning merits and the Planning Committee would still have the ability to refuse applications where proposals are not considered appropriate, for example where there might be an unacceptable visual impact or where residents amenity might be affected.”

Supplementary question and response

Councillor N Smith asked if the proposed changes to the NPPF were fully costed by the government. Councillor K Merrie confirmed that it was a matter of waiting to see how the new government would move forward on this issue.

Question from Councillor R Morris

“As many local people are, I am disappointed that the Labour Government as announced by the Chancellor has scrapped the ‘Restoring Your Railway Programme’ which has effectively brought to a halt the restoration of the Ivanhoe Line after many years of hard work by all stakeholders.

The reopening of the Ivanhoe line would have provided a valuable commuting route especially given that this Council may have to provide for some of the unmet housing need from the Labour council in Leicester.

Can I please ask what the Portfolio holder is doing to address this situation?”

Response from Councillor K Merrie

“In July, Councillor Richard Blunt said in a press release to the Coalville Times that he was very disappointed to learn of the Chancellor’s decision to cancel the Restoring Your Railway Programme, particularly as North West Leicestershire District Council has been

Chair’s initials

supportive of the huge amount of work done by partners, including the Campaign to Reopen the Ivanhoe Line (CRIL), Network Rail and other local councils, to reinstate this historically significant branch line.

I fully endorse those comments and as this is a major setback for this long-awaited project, I will be writing to the new MP to ask her to lobby Government to review its position. I will also ask for her support for the reopening of Ivanhoe Line as an individual Restoring Your Railway project when the Transport Secretary undertakes her transport infrastructure review in the autumn to identify any projects where the benefits may justify replacement funding being made available.

As we all know, reopening the Ivanhoe line would be hugely beneficial for local residents, making it easier to travel across the district for work or leisure, and increasing investment from tourism in the area.”

Supplementary question and response

Councillor R Morris asked if the Portfolio Holder was aware if NWLDC Member of Parliament (MP) had had any communication with ministers or stakeholders regarding the Ivanhoe Line. Councillor K Merrie stated that following discussion with the MP, he could confirm that she had discussed the matter with ministers both by letter and in person, and would continue to keep all stakeholders informed moving forward.

Question from Councillor R Johnson

“Could the Portfolio Holder please update Council on what engagement this Council’s representative, Councillor Lee Windram, has had with the volunteers of Coalville Town Football Club since its reforming of the club?”

Response from Councillor K Merie

“The appointment of a Council member to support community bodies is one that is requested by the community body. Following the change of chairmanship at Coalville Town FC, the club requested that the meetings with the member be suspended until the season started. Now the season has started and changes have been embedded within the club, officers will contact them to enquire as to whether they wish to resurrect the member liaison role and meetings”

Supplementary question and response

Councillor R Johnson asked that as the football season had started, when would contact be made and normal service resume. Councillor K Merrie responded that he would provide an update outside of the meeting once it had been discussed with officers.

Question from Councillor J Legrys

“Which community groups are currently hosted at the Moira Replan building and what social return on investment do they bring to the Ashby Wolds area?”

Response from Councillor A Woodman

“17 Ashby Road Moira has been occupied by Moira Replan Charity since 1992 with the Charity being a commercial tenant of the Council. Under the terms of the lease the Charity may use the building for purposes which further the aims and objectives of Moira Replan Charity (as set out in their constitution). Throughout

their occupation the range of uses hosted by Moira Replan Charity at the premises has varied. NWLDC, as landlord, has no information on the social value of these uses.”

Supplementary question and response

Councillor J Legrys shared his concerns for the voluntary groups that used the centre and asked what the Council was doing about finding alternative accommodation for them. Councillor A Woodman acknowledged the importance of the voluntary groups for the community and confirmed that he was in ongoing conversations with Leicestershire County Council and the local Parish Council to create options for them.

Question from Councillor E Parle

“How much did it cost to bring the EPC rating of the Moira Replan building up from a G to an F and which organisations funded these improvements?”

Response from Councillor A Woodman

“The alterations to 17 Ashby Road Moira (Moira Replan building) which we understand have improved the EPC rating from a G to an F were undertaken and paid for by Moira Replan Charity who have not shared the cost and funding information with the Council, as landlord.”

Supplementary question and response

Councillor E Parle asked if the Portfolio Holder was aware of the recent energy efficiency upgrades carried out to the building in 2023 following a grant received and that the tenants were prepared to pay for further work to reach the next energy efficiency band. Councillor A Woodman explained that it was necessary to look forward to the energy efficiency levels required by 2030 and it would be very difficult to achieve the required levels without major financial investment which was not viable.

Question from Councillor T Eynon

“Would the cost of bringing the Moira Replan building up to a lettable standard pass the government’s 7-Year Payback test and, if so, what are the barriers and enabler to funding such improvements?”

Response from Councillor A Woodman

“Energy consumption at the property and the associated cost is determined by the tenant through the way in which they use the building and the energy supply contracts they enter into. Because of this it is not possible for the landlord to determine whether improvements within the building will meet the Government’s 7 year test.

What is clear however is that future changes to the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (to achieve a rating of B by 2030) will prove challenging to achieve at this property. As landlord we have engaged with Moira Replan Charity to begin to explore the short and long term impacts of changing Energy Efficiency legislation.”

Supplementary question and response

Councillor T Eynon asked that due to the uncertainty of the Government’s plans for energy efficiency, plus it could take months to explore options for the tenant, would it be reasonable to not evict the tenant until a later date. Councillor A Woodman confirmed that

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unfortunately the Council could not legally lease the building from January 2025 onwards, therefore termination of the lease at that point was necessary.

Question from Councillor D Cooper

“Which Committee made the decision to serve Moira Replan with a Section 25 notice?”

Response from Councillor A Woodman

“Under the Constitution officers have the delegated authority to serve statutory notices. I was briefed about the matter, prior to the notice being served.”

Supplementary question and response

Councillor D Cooper asked that due to the complexity of the issues did the Portfolio Holder think the matter should be considered by a scrutiny committee before the notice was actioned. Councillor A Woodman explained that as it was a landlord/tenant matter, it would be inappropriate to be considered by a scrutiny committee.

Question from Councillor C Beck

“What are the barriers and enablers to Moira Replan taking up a grant to install EV charging in its car park?”

Response from Councillor a Woodman

“The installation of EV charging at 17 Ashby Road Moira would require submission of details of the EV proposal for landlord’s approval which may include:

That the connection of a considerable additional electrical load to the wiring network within the property did not present any risks of overloading.

That the location of EV charging points did not present any additional fire risk to the property.

That the installation of EV chargers did not lead to our insurers declining to cover the building or increasing the premium.”

Supplementary question and response

Councillor C Beck asked if there were any enablers to take up the grant? Councillor A Woodman agreed to consult with officers and provide an answer outside of the meeting.

Question from Councillor A Morley

“Equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in the workplace is not a new concept. Indeed, it is now a given that EDI is integral to the ethos of all organisations and authorities, in an aim to ensure that those in control of decision making, are representative of the communities which they serve.

At corporate scrutiny on 29 August 2024, a report was considered which presented an EDI policy review document, the action plan which accompanied this policy evidenced how the policy would be delivered. It was recognised in this document that the current NWLDC workforce is representative of the local district population, and it also recognised the importance of the wider regional profiles being more representative by 2028.

My question relates to why the alliance member leaders of NWLDC seem to be exempt from this goal and expectation. Surely the leaders should have the aspiration to be representative of the local district population as a formal objective.

I must note objectively that all current members of the alliance administration: and specifically, the senior roles of Chair, Deputy Chair, Leader of the Council and six other cabinet members are all white male. I feel that this falls woefully short of being inclusive of the local district population and the communities we collectively serve.

I therefore ask the Portfolio Holder, in light of the current all- white Leadership of the Council, whether it is intended to introduce any new EDI targets to ensure the leadership strives to be more representative of the NWLDC community, and indeed workforce, now or in the future?"

Response from Councillor K Merrie

"I thank Councillor Morley for her question. The Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy is scheduled to go to Cabinet for decision later this month. If agreed the policy will apply to this Council's services and workforce. I cannot speak for all members, but I would hope there would be cross party support for this updated policy and action plan which is absolutely the right way forward.

The arrangements for the selection of councillors are not part of the Council's EDI policy and action plan.

Each political party has its own rules and processes for selecting individuals to run for election on to the Council.

We have also seen choices by community-minded individuals to stand as independent Councillors and this also has an influence on the demographics and make up of this chamber.

There have been efforts across political parties at all levels to make politics more representative of the communities we serve.

There is no doubt that more needs to be done by all to seek to encourage wider participation in our Council chambers across the whole of the local government sector. This is not a unique situation for this Council.

At local level, we have (or the Conservative Group) adopted a collaborative approach in building an alliance with our Liberal Democrat and independent members and this has helped to improve the representation of the different views of our communities. My party will continue to seek to further improve representation through its selection processes in the future wherever possible at a local level.

Other parties may wish to consider their own selection arrangements for candidates.

In terms of the current Cabinet, The Constitution says that The Leader shall appoint a Deputy Leader, who shall be a Cabinet Member and deputise for the Leader and carry out the functions delegated to the Leader in periods of their incapacity or absence and, Cabinet Members to cover one of the specific portfolio responsibilities (other than those reserved to the Leader). The Cabinet comprises the Leader and at least two but no more than nine other Councillors, one of whom must be the Deputy Leader. The Leader considers their executive arrangements each year following their appointment, and these are announced to Council. The current Leader has decided that the Executive responsibilities will be exercised collectively by Cabinet and has chosen his portfolio areas

Chair's initials

and Cabinet members from the Alliance based on areas of expertise, interest, and availability for the role.”

Councillor A Morley declined the opportunity to ask a supplementary question.

Question from Councillor R Sutton

“Ahead of budget setting, could the Portfolio Holder please supply figures for the years 2019 to 2024 to illustrate the income dependency of this Council on Business Rates and New Homes Bonus as compared to Council Tax, outlining against each income stream the main risks and opportunities of this dependency for the District budget as a new government approaches the matter of Local Government Funding policy and the 2025-26 Settlement?”

Response from Councillor N Rushton

“The table presented in the additional papers outlines the specifics of the Council's primary funding allocations spanning the financial years 2019/20 through to 2024/25. Additionally, the potential risks linked to these sources of funding are duly noted in the subsequent paragraphs. Changes in the finance settlement often include adjustments to the core spending power of local authorities, which is a measure of the resources available to them for service delivery.

Additionally, the settlement encompasses various grants and revenue streams, such as the New Homes Bonus, which can influence individual funding allocations.”

Supplementary question and response

Councillor R Sutton pointed out that the pooling arrangements were reliant on the rates received, and the figures showed there was a difference between the increase in rates received and the national collection figure. He asked if the Portfolio Holder would be prepared to write to the pooling partners about the matter. Councillor N Rushton confirmed that the Council did not receive all of the rates that were collected and was something that would benefit from a review at a national level.

39. MOTIONS

The Chair referred Members to the motion as detailed within the agenda papers and invited Councillor M Wyatt, who made the submission, to speak.

Councillor M Wyatt spoke to and then formally moved the motion. It was seconded by Councillor A Woodman.

A discussion ensued in which Members spoke both in support and against the motion.

A recorded vote being requested, the voting was as detailed below.

The motion was put to the vote and was CARRIED.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1) The Chief Executive be instructed to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer calling for the policy on linking winter fuel payments and pension credit receipt to be immediately paused and introduce a new threshold to determine eligibility for winter fuel payments. Further, request the Chief Executive to write to all Members of

Chair's initials

Parliament covering North West Leicestershire asking them to give their formal support to halting the changes to the winter fuel payment eligibility.

- 2) A request be made to all group leaders within North West Leicestershire District Council to sign a joint letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer calling for the new winter fuel payment policy to be suspended and reviewed.
- 3) The Council urgently commence a significant awareness campaign to encourage the uptake of pension credits.

Motion on Notice - Winter Fuel Payments (Motion)	
Councillor Kenny Horn	For
Councillor Ray Morris	For
Councillor Mike Ball	For
Councillor Anthony Barker	Abstain
Councillor Catherine Beck	Abstain
Councillor Dave Bigby	Abstain
Councillor Murrae Blair-Park	Abstain
Councillor Richard Blunt	For
Councillor Russell Boam	For
Councillor Morgan Burke	For
Councillor Rachel Canny	For
Councillor Doug Cooper	Abstain
Councillor David Everitt	Abstain
Councillor Dr Terri Eynon	Abstain
Councillor Marie French	For
Councillor John Geary	Abstain
Councillor Tony Gillard	For
Councillor Russell Johnson	Abstain
Councillor Simon Lambeth	Abstain
Councillor Paul Lees	For
Councillor John Legrys	Abstain
Councillor Keith Merrie MBE	For
Councillor Alison Morley	Abstain
Councillor Peter Moutt	Abstain
Councillor Elizabeth Parle	Abstain
Councillor Guy Rogers	Abstain
Councillor Nicholas Rushton	For
Councillor Ray Sutton	For
Councillor Tony Saffell	For
Councillor Carol Sewell	Abstain
Councillor Sean Sheahan	Abstain
Councillor Jenny Simmons	For
Councillor Nigel Smith	For
Councillor Avril Wilson	Abstain
Councillor Jake Windram	For
Councillor Lee Windram	For
Councillor Andrew Woodman	For
Councillor Michael Wyatt	For
Carried	

40. PETITIONS

No petitions were received.

41. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 18 June 2024.

It was moved by Councillor K Horn, seconded by Councillor R Morris and

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 June 2024 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

42. CAPITAL PROGRAMME UPDATE REPORT

Councillor N Rushton, as Corporate Portfolio Holder, presented the report to Members and moved the recommendations. It was seconded by Councillor K Merrie.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1) The Supplementary Estimates detailed in paragraph 2.2 of the report which are above £250,000 and are externally funded be approved.
- 2) The new Capital Schemes as set out in paragraphs 3.2 and 3.3 of the report be approved.

43. SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

Councillor K Merrie, as Infrastructure Portfolio Holder, introduced the report to Members and moved the recommendations. Councillor T Eynon was invited to present the report as Community Scrutiny Committee Chair and then she seconded the recommendations.

During discussion, Members spoke about the improvements made to the scrutiny function and the success it was now having. Members of the committees and the officers who supported them were thanked for the work undertaken in the past 12 months.

RESOLVED THAT:

The Annual Scrutiny Report for 2023/24 be received and noted.

Councillor M French left the meeting at the conclusion of the item.

44. APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES

Councillor T Gillard, as Group Whip, presented the report to Members and moved the recommendations. It was seconded by Councillor J Legrys.

RESOLVED THAT:

Councillor R Johnson be appointed to the vacant seat on the Audit and Governance Committee for the remainder of the 2024/25 civic year.

Councillor M French left the meeting at 7.28pm

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 7.40 pm