



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Council held at Great Hall, The Guildhall, St Giles Street, Northampton, NN1 1DE on Thursday 23 March 2023 at 5.00 pm.

Present:

Councillor Andre Gonzalez De Savage (Chairman)

Councillor John Shephard (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Rufia Ashraf

Councillor Jamal Alwahabi

Councillor Anthony S. Bagot-Webb

Councillor Fiona Baker

Councillor Dermot Bambridge

Councillor Harry Barrett

Councillor William Barter

Councillor Sally Beardsworth

Councillor Phil Bignell

Councillor Rebecca Breese

Councillor Adam Brown

Councillor Michael Brown

Councillor Alan Chantler

Councillor Pinder Chauhan

Councillor Nazim Choudary

Councillor Imran Ahmed Chowdhury BEM

Councillor Paul Clark

Councillor Stephen Clarke

Councillor Fiona Cole

Councillor Raymond Connolly

Councillor Karen Cooper

Councillor Daniel Cribbin

Councillor Julie Davenport

Councillor Paul Dyball

Councillor Gareth Eales

Councillor Terrie Eales

Councillor Louisa Fowler

Councillor Rupert Frost

Councillor Jo Gilford

Councillor Terry Gilford

Councillor Matt Golby

Councillor Andrew Grant

Councillor Mike Hallam

Councillor Enam Haque

Councillor Lauryn Harrington-Carter

Councillor Jonathan Harris

Councillor Cheryl Hawes

Councillor Rosie Herring

Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Councillor Nigel Hinch
Councillor Keith Holland-Delamere
Councillor Mark Hughes
Councillor Rosie Humphreys
Councillor Cecile Irving-Swift
Councillor David James
Councillor Koulla Jolley
Councillor Andrew Kilbride
Councillor Anna King
Councillor Jamie Lane
Councillor Phil Larratt
Councillor Daniel Lister
Councillor Greg Lunn
Councillor Charles Manners
Councillor Peter Matten
Councillor Ian McCord
Councillor Dennis Meredith
Councillor Colin Morgan
Councillor Charles Morton
Councillor Jonathan Nunn
Councillor Kevin Parker
Councillor Suresh Patel
Councillor Ken Pritchard
Councillor Bob Purser
Councillor Wendy Randall
Councillor Emma Roberts
Councillor Sam Rumens
Councillor Lisa Samiotis
Councillor Brian Sargeant
Councillor Sue Sharps
Councillor David Smith
Councillor Zoe Smith
Councillor Richard Solesbury-Timms
Councillor Danielle Stone
Councillor Winston Strachan
Councillor Walter Tarasiewicz
Councillor Mike Warren

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor Ann Addison
Councillor Azizur Rahman
Councillor Lizzy Bowen
Councillor Muna Cali
Councillor Maggie Clubley
Councillor Janice Duffy
Councillor Alison Eastwood
Councillor Penelope Flavell
Councillor James Hill
Councillor Paul Joyce

Councillor Malcolm Longley
Councillor Jake Roberts
Councillor Cathrine Russell
Councillor Laura Stevenson
Councillor Nick Sturges-Alex

Officers:

Anna Earnshaw (Chief Executive)
Cath Whitehead (Director of Legal & Democratic and Monitoring Officer)
Paul Hanson (Head of Democratic and Elections)
Tracy Tiff (Deputy Democratic Services Manager)
Ed Bostock (Democratic Services Officer)

99. **Declarations of Interest**

None advised.

100. **Minutes of Council**

The minutes of the budget meeting of Council held on 22nd February 2023 were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

101. **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman highlighted the tragic incident that occurred on the afternoon of 22nd March in which a young man lost his life. He implored anyone with any information to contact Northamptonshire Police and on behalf of the Council, passed on his condolences to the young man's family and friends. He led Council in a minute's silence and invited local Ward Councillors to make statements.

Councillor Barrett stated that it had been a devastating 24 hours for the local community and passed on his condolences to the young man's friends and family. He stated that the school was doing everything in its power to ensure the safety of students as it looked to get students back in school. He stated that violence must never win and that everybody must stand together to ensure that repeated incidents did not happen. He implored people not to speculate, particularly on social media.

Cllr Rumens stated that residents of Kingsthorpe had been "shaken to the core" and asked that people let the police get on with their investigation, then people could figure out their response as a community. He passed on his condolences to the young man's loved ones.

Councillor Beardsworth stated that more work needed to take place with young people to prevent these tragic incidents and to help them realise that knife crime does not pay. She passed on her condolences to the young man's family and friends.

The Chairman advised that the month of Ramadan was now underway and encouraged Members observing it to step out of the meeting at sunset to break their fasts, if they wished.

102. **Public Participation**

(1) There were no requests to submit petitions.

(2) The Chairman advised of 2 requests to address Council.

Jean Lineker addressed Council in respect of Item 7 - report of the Cabinet Member for Community Safety. She commented that the Citizens Advice office in Northampton had shorter opening hours than the offices in Kettering and Corby and was concerned that West Northants residents were not getting the service they deserved. She questioned whether Citizens Advice received more funding in North Northamptonshire compared to West Northamptonshire.

Donna Bodaly addressed Council in respect of Item 7 – report of the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Built Environment and Rural Affairs. She stated that regarding 5G towers, no public consultation had taken place before they had been erected, and no information had been publicised around potential health risks and lamented the removal of trees in order to erect the towers. She also commented that Council meetings in general were not publicised sufficiently.

Kim Fuller addressed Council in respect of Item 7 – report of the Cabinet Member for Housing. She advised that she had been in contact with her housing officer for many months, as recently as December 2022, regarding damp and mould in her property, and to date the issues had not been resolved. She stated that the problem was so bad that she was living out of bags and boxes and was unable to keep food in cupboards. She had been in touch with Andrew Lewer MP and received no response, and further advised that no work had been carried out on her property under the Decent Homes scheme.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Fuller for raising her issues and advised that he would ask NPH to conduct a review into the matters raised and to be tackled as a matter of urgency.

The Chairman thanked the speakers for their contributions.

103. **Opposition Priority Business**

Councillor Roberts proposed and Councillor Holland-Delamere seconded:

“This Council notes: that the Socio-Economic Duty (Section 1 of the Equality Act 2010) (6) requires public bodies to adopt transparent and effective measures to address the inequalities that result from differences in occupation, education, place of residence or social class. While the Duty has been enacted in Scotland and Wales. The United Nations has criticised the UK government for failing to activate the Duty since 2010.

That authorities in Newcastle, Southwark, Stroud and North of Tyne have signed up and Councils including in Sheffield, Preston, Glasgow, Wigan, York, Bristol & Manchester are taking action due to cutbacks and financial struggles affecting their residents. In the midst of the cost-of-living crisis it is essential now more than ever

that this Council's Anti-Poverty Strategy is directly linked with any decisions this Council makes. The socio-economic duty is a central element that localities seeking to address poverty should adopt.

The work done to create an Anti-Poverty Strategy for West Northamptonshire Council and the work done so far drawing upon good practice examples from other towns and cities and the consultation with diverse local community groups, unions, and our partners in the voluntary and community sector. The work of the Anti-Poverty Oversight Group is acknowledged. A key factor for all concerned in the creation of the strategy was that this Council would "sense check" all decisions made against this strategy. This is not at present being consistently applied.

Section 1 of the Equality Act 2010 asks public bodies to consider how their decisions and policies could increase or decrease inequality that results from socio-economic disadvantage. Voluntarily adopting the duty will complement the anti-poverty strategy, inclusive economy, and equalities approaches as well as strengthening our sustainability commitments.

This Council resolves to:

Formally adopt the Socio-Economic Duty

‘Poverty-check’ decisions and policies for socio-economic impact, and how this interacts with other types of inequalities (protected characteristics e.g., race, disability, sex) including within EIAs (Equality Impact Assessments) and include anti-poverty impact assessments in all WNC reports.”

Council debated the motion and made the following comments:

- Much was already ongoing to tackle socioeconomic inequality and the Anti-Poverty Working Group should be proud of the work it had undertaken so far. It had worked on over 100 actions, including monitoring of the Hardship Fund, Warm Welcoming Spaces, and was looking to see how people’s needs could be met during the summer.
- Adopting the Socio-Economic Duty would further help to understand the issues people in West Northamptonshire faced.
- The Council could and should do more to put the ambitions of the Anti-Poverty Strategy to use. The UK was one of the most socioeconomically unequal countries in the developed world, and any measure to reduce and equalise that should be welcomed.
- Reports were missing properly published equalities impact assessments; different demographics were impacted differently, and comprehensive equality impact assessments would show patterns of inequality.
- This was a missed opportunity - the administration could have made an amendment to the motion so that it was accepted by the Chamber.
- It was suggested that the administration did not want to hold itself to account.
- Over-regulation of every activity risked having ineffective policies.
- Progress made was not across the board and some decisions were working against communities’ ability to thrive. All parts of the organisation needed to be working effectively, not in silos.

- Any policy could not be at its best if it did not consider inequality. There was concern that equality/community impact assessments and socioeconomic reviews would not appear in council reports.

Upon requisition of a vote, the motion fell.

104. **Cabinet Reports and Records of Decisions Taken by the Cabinet**

Cabinet Members each highlighted the salient points of their reports. Members made comments and asked questions and the following points were raised:

- The Council had responded to requests from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities regarding data around damp and mould condensation. Next steps were to review the data and look at the information to understand issues. The Council was working with NPH officers to give timely and robust responses to enquiries. A root and branch review of NPH practices had been undertaken and the data was currently being reviewed.
- Following the police investigation, the Leader would arrange a meeting with the Cabinet Member for Community Safety & Engagement and Regulatory Services and ward councillors to see what actions could be put in place regarding knife crime.
- Regarding housing for homeless, every effort was made by the Council to house families locally.
- Regarding the Pensions Fund recommendation that re-divestment of fossil fuel is not done until 2050, it was suggested that this be reviewed by the Working Group.
- It was acknowledged that there were issues with the planning call-in process – this would be brought to the attention of officers.
- Regarding local contingency hotels for refugees, it was noted that there was no funding forthcoming from the Home Office – further representations would be made to make them aware of the huge burden being put on West Northamptonshire residents.
- Regarding the Ofsted report following its inspection, it was advised that the reasons for cases going to tribunal were numerous – in many cases, there were not enough appropriate school places for young people. In the future it was hoped that many issues would be resolved before they reached tribunal stage.
- Dates for various workshops relating to the West Northamptonshire Local Plan would be released in the very near future.
- The Children's Trust was set up by the Department for Education and was under their statutory guidance. The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education did not believe that bringing the service back in house would improve it and explained that embedded issues that required addressing were among the reasons that turning the service around was taking longer than expected.
- Lots was going in in terms of recruitment; the lowest paid employees were given inflation-busting pay increases, the Council was promoting jobs not expected by councils, e.g., cyber security specialists.
- Regarding Fair Cost of Care, the Council had to be careful with how it shared the information it found.

- The Cabinet Member for Transport, Highways and Waste visited JCB to see a piece of equipment not available elsewhere – if purchased, it would result in increased efficiency in filling potholes. Work was underway with Kier on a business case to purchase one. He also confirmed that he would be happy to facilitate meetings with Members regarding flooding issues.
- Lighting across West Northamptonshire was provided to an agreed standard, and this was not subject to change. However, the Council was looking to replace bulbs with LED bulbs which would save energy.

RESOLVED:

Council note the Cabinet Member reports and the decision records from 8th November 2022, 6th December 2022, 20th December 2022, 17th January 2023, 13th February 2023, and 7th March 2023.

105. **Northampton Local Plan Part 2**

Councillor Breese presented the report which sought Council's approval to formally adopt the Northampton Local Plan Part 2 and its policies maps as recommended by Planning Policy Committee on 28 February 2023, to agree that on adoption of the Northampton Local Plan (Part 2) all of the remaining saved policies from the Northampton Northamptonshire Local Plan (1997) and the Northampton Central Area Action Plan (2013) would be formally replaced, and to authorise the Executive Director for Place, Economy and Environment, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning Portfolio Holder for Planning, Built Environment and Rural Affairs, to make minor editorial and presentational changes to the plan as deemed necessary ahead of publication.

Councillor Chantler seconded the proposal.

Members discussed the report and made the following comments:

- The report was welcome and necessary, but far from perfect. The loss of minimum space standards was regrettable, and a more detailed account on how active travel would be promoted was needed.
- When putting together the West Northamptonshire Local Plan, the Council should look into making improvements to HMO policies and revisit the idea for transit sites for travellers.
- Evidence should be provided to ensure that adult services and fast-food establishments were prevented from being constructed near schools.
- The Council should be thinking now about how it may provide evidence to the Inspector when working on the West Northamptonshire Local Plan
- It was regrettable that the Inspector did not agree that national minimum space standards should be included in the Local Plan.
- The protections for Fraser Road as green space would be of benefit to local residents but it meant the end of a scheme that would deliver 125 social housing units.

- The Inspector had effectively landlocked Northampton and given the limited supply of brownfield land, the Council would likely need to look at densification of social housing and building upwards.
- Thanks were given to staff in the Planning Policy department for their work on the Local Plan over a number of years.

Upon requisition of a vote, the recommendations contained within the report were agreed.

RESOLVED:

Council:

1. Adopted the Northampton Local Plan Part 2 and its policies maps as recommended by Planning Policy Committee on 28 February 2023, to form part of the Council's policy Framework.
2. Agreed that on adoption of the Northampton Local Plan (Part 2) the Central Area Action Plan (2013) and all the remaining saved policies within the Northampton Local Plan (1997) were formally replaced.
3. Authorised the Executive Director for Place, Economy and Environment, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning Portfolio Holder for Planning, Built Environment and Rural Affairs, authority to make minor editorial and presentational changes to the plan as deemed necessary ahead of publication.

106. **Statement of Gambling Policy**

Councillor Warren presented the report which sought Council's agreement to publish a new three-year West Northamptonshire Council Statement of Gambling Licensing Principles Policy, following statutory public consultation and recommendation by the Alcohol and Gambling Licensing Committee. An alteration to the recommendation was proposed, which read:

"It is recommended that work is progressed to understand the impacts of gambling informed by the LAP profile data and the wider determinants of health.

It is recommended that the anti-poverty oversight group has consideration of the impact of gambling in its work and where appropriate consider lobbying government on this issue in line with the objectives of the Anti-Poverty Strategy."

Councillor D Smith seconded the proposal.

Members discussed the report and made the following comments:

- Gambling could be a huge blight on people's lives. Casinos did not improve the quality of life for residents.
- Gambling was becoming normalised for young people due to its prevalence in town centres.
- Gambling was an addiction that ruins lives and should be treated as such – more work needed to be done to look at the effects it has on people.

- What was presented within the report had a lot of measures, but none were mandatory – these changes should be made at a national level.
- The Council had a legal duty to implement a policy of this nature, and it was noted that further legislation would be required for the Council to consider any application for a casino.
- The alteration to the recommendation did not go far enough in terms of equality impacts.

The Democratic Services Manager clarified that 3 votes would be taken in respect of the item; to publish the draft policy; to agree to refuse to pass a “no casino” resolution; to agree the additional resolution as an alteration.

Upon requisition of a vote, the recommendations contained in the report, including the additional recommendation, were agreed.

RESOLVED:

Council:

1. Resolved to publish the draft Policy at Appendix A of the report as the West Northamptonshire Statement of Gambling Licensing Principles Policy 2023-2025.
2. Did not pass a “no casinos” resolution for inclusion within the West Northamptonshire Statement of Gambling Licensing Principles Policy 2023-2025.
3. Resolved to progress work to understand the impacts of gambling informed by the LAP profile data and the wider determinants of health.
It was recommended that the anti-poverty oversight group have consideration of the impact of gambling in its work and where appropriate consider lobbying government on this issue in line with the objectives of the Anti-Poverty Strategy.

107. **Updates to the Constitution**

Councillor Patel presented the report which sought Council’s consideration of the recommendations made by the Democracy and Standards Committee in relation to proposed updates to the Constitution and changes to committees.

Councillor Grant seconded the proposal.

Members discussed the report and made the following comments:

- Some were not happy with the way the Constitution was being interpreted.
- Splitting West Northamptonshire into 2, in respect of planning committees, did not make sense. There was also little detail around these proposals.
- There was concern expressed around the contents of the proposed scrutiny committees.
- The lack of consultation was disappointing.
- Task and Finish Groups were important, it was difficult to see how workloads could be managed if their numbers were reduced.

- The item should be deferred – Members should be able to vote on individual points in the report.
- The reduction of planning committees from 3 to 2 was a cost-saving exercise – there was not enough work for 3. It was also noted that 2 peer reviews recommended the changes.
- It was important that Members know the areas that they would be making decisions on.
- The vast majority of Members would have no input if the recommendations were agreed.
- Members questioned how long the planning committee trial would last for, and what would happen if the trial was unsuccessful.
- It was noted that the number of Members would be reduced in the future, and it would be difficult to fill vacancies on 3 planning committees.

Upon requisition of a vote, the recommendations contained within the report were agreed.

RESOLVED:

Council:

- a) Noted and approved the updates to the Constitution as set out in paragraphs 5.2 to 5.8 of the report, to come into effect following the conclusion of the meeting at which they were agreed;
- b) Approved the splitting of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee to create two new Overview and Scrutiny Committees as set out in paragraphs 5.9 to 5.16 of the report and approved the reduction in the number of members appointed to each of the four Scrutiny Committees to 11 per committee.
- c) Noted that the changes set out in recommendation b) would come into effect immediately before the Council's Annual Meeting on 18th May 2023.
- d) Noted and agreed the recommendation of the Democracy and Standards Committee to abolish the existing three Local Area Planning Committees and the establishment of two new Development Control Committees as set out in paragraph 5.20 of the report, subject to the Committee reviewing the arrangements for the two new Development Control Committees at its next meeting and reporting back to the Annual Meeting of the Council.
- e) Noted the retention of the Strategic Planning Committee and the Planning Policy Committee as currently structured.
- f) Approved the recommendation of the Democracy and Standards Committee that Planning Committees be webcast where the facility is available and that, across all Planning Committees, site visits would be held where there were planning reasons for doing so and would be arranged by Democratic Services with Members accompanied by a Planning Officer on site, as set out in paragraph 5.24 of the report.
- g) Agreed that the Planning Protocol be amended to reflect recommendation f).
- h) Delegated to the Monitoring Officer the power to make these amendments and any consequential amendments that may be necessary.

108. **Private Finance Initiative (PFI) Lifecycle Works - Recommendation from Cabinet**

Councillor Parker presented the report which sought Council's approval for capital budget of £1.1m to be fund replacement of failed building fabric items at Northampton PFI schools.

Councillor Nunn seconded the proposal.

Members discussed the report and made the following comments:

- The report demonstrated historic dire straits – this was a lesson for all not to focus on the short-term.
- Members supported the report but asked to know what the initial costs of impact would be and also requested that a school condition report be made available for all Members.
- It was requested that the administration produce a list of schools in need, and it was suggested that a further piece of work was needed to understand the state of West Northamptonshire schools.

Upon requisition of a vote, the recommendations within the report were agreed.

RESOLVED:

Council:

- 1) Agreed the recommendation from Cabinet that it approve a capital budget of £1.100m to undertake essential asset replacement works to the Northampton PFI Schools.
- 2) Noted that Cabinet had authorised the procurement of these works.

109. **Motions**

Motion 1

Councillor Humphreys proposed and Councillor Beardsworth seconded:

“West Northamptonshire Council, like all local authorities, has a statutory duty to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in need in our area. Children and young people in our unitary authorities are experiencing an epidemic of mental health challenges at present as the recent report of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee has demonstrated.

Looked after children are at much greater risk of poor mental health than their peers. Our children's social care system could be improved by reintroducing therapeutic support that was available in our children's homes until 2016. This support could operate in residential facilities and be available to fostered children. Positive outcomes could include quicker diagnosis of conditions and providing better support for children with special educational needs and disabilities. Early intervention is a wise investment and in order for this Council to take its corporate parent role effectively it must give greater focus to the children in its care.

We call on this Council, subject to Cabinet approval, to appoint a Task and Finish Group to identify the therapeutic needs of our children in care and how they may be supported.”

Council debated the motion and made the following comments:

- The prioritising of young people in care should not be to the detriment of those who were not.
- A report by the Local Government Association reported that young people in care were 4 times more likely to suffer with mental health issues than those not in care.
- Young people needed advocates – they had better results when adults stood up for them.

Upon requisition of a vote, the motion was declared carried.

110. **Urgent Business (previously agreed with the Chairman)**

There was no urgent business on this occasion.

The meeting closed at 8.40 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____