



**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 3 November 2022 at 6.00 pm.

Present Councillor Andre Gonzalez De Savage (Chairman)
 Councillor John Shephard (Vice-Chairman)
 Councillor Ann Addison
 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 Lizzy Bowen
 Councillor Rebecca Breese
 Councillor Adam Brown
 Councillor Alan Chantler
 Councillor Pinder Chauhan
 Councillor Paul Clark
 Councillor Stephen Clarke
 Councillor Maggie Clubley
 Councillor Fiona Cole
 Councillor Raymond Connolly
 Councillor Karen Cooper
 Councillor Daniel Cribbin
 Councillor Janice Duffy
 Councillor Terrie Eales
 Councillor Alison Eastwood
 Councillor Louisa Fowler
 Councillor Terry Gilford
 Councillor Andrew Grant
 Councillor Mike Hallam
 Councillor Enam Haque
 Councillor Lauryn Harrington-Carter
 Councillor Jonathan Harris
 Councillor Rosie Herring
 Councillor Stephen Hibbert
 Councillor James Hill
 Councillor Nigel Hinch
 Councillor Keith Holland-Delamere
 Councillor Mark Hughes
 Councillor Rosie Humphreys
 Councillor Cecile Irving-Swift

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Councillor David James
Councillor Koulla Jolley
Councillor Paul Joyce
Councillor Andrew Kilbride
Councillor Anna King
Councillor Jamie Lane
Councillor Phil Larratt
Councillor Daniel Lister
Councillor Malcolm Longley
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 Cathrine Russell
Councillor Brian Sargeant
Councillor Sue Sharps
Councillor David Smith
Councillor Laura Stevenson
Councillor Danielle Stone
Councillor Winston Strachan
Councillor Walter Tarasiewicz
Councillor Mike Warren

Apologies
for
Absence:

Councillor Michael Brown
Councillor Muna Cali
Councillor Nazim Choudary
Councillor Imran Ahmed Chowdhury BEM
Councillor Julie Davenport
Councillor Paul Dyball
Councillor Gareth Eales
Councillor Rupert Frost
Councillor Jo Gilford
Councillor Matt Golby
Councillor Cheryl Hawes
Councillor Greg Lunn
Councillor Charles Manners
Councillor Jake Roberts
Councillor Lisa Samiotis
Councillor Zoe Smith
Councillor Richard Solesbury-Timms
Councillor Nick Sturges-Alex

66. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Brown, Cali, Choudary, Chowdhury, Dyball, G Eales, Frost, Golby, J Gilford, Hawes, Lunn, Manners, Samiotis, Solesbury-Timms, J Roberts, Davenport, and Flavell.

67. **Declarations of Interest**

None advised.

68. **Minutes of Council**

A correction to minute item 56, sentence to read:

“It was suggested WNC follow the example of other LAs and provide services, like free bus passes, to key workers.”

The following points to be added to minute item 61:

- If the new school did not cater to children without significant speech delays, how would the gap in provision be filled?
- Disappointment was expressed regarding the use of the word “complainants” in the report in reference to the SEND Action Group’s attendance at the 1st September Cabinet meeting; it was felt that issues raised were not given enough weight.
- A meeting with the SEND Action Group had been requested with sufficient notice for families of children and was yet to be arranged.
- The issues raised by the SEND Action Group, including EHOP wait times, lack of understanding and acknowledgment of diagnoses, acknowledgement of failures, etc., were not covered by the opening of a new school.

With the addition of the above wording at minute items 56 and 61, the minutes of the meeting held on 29th September 2022 were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

69. **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman announced that he and the Vice-Chairman had attended a number of events across the county, and outside of it, including several St Crispin’s events, and the CPRE Awards at Northampton Museum and Art Gallery. Upcoming events included Armistice Day and Remembrance Day, and the Chairman asked Members of the Council to please join him in supporting those events.

70. **Public Participation**

(1) There were no requests to submit petitions.

(2) The Chairman advised of 4 requests to address Council.

Jane Wood, of Climate Action West Northamptonshire, addressed Council in relation to Motion 1 and explained that global carbon emissions in 2021 were the highest they

had been since records began. She noted that the UK had successfully delivered against the first 2 budgets set in line with the 2019 Climate Change Act and was on track to meet the 3rd but was not due to meet any of the next 3 targets. Ms Wood stated that money spent on growth that did not address climate mitigation or adaptation was wasted. She noted that a study of the impact of enterprise zones published by Centre for Cities showed that 1/3 of jobs created were created by existing businesses moving from elsewhere and were overwhelmingly low-skilled, so did little to make local economies more prosperous.

Leslaw Darocha addressed Council in respect of item 7 (Report of Councillor Fiona Baker - Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education) and explained that prior to moving to the UK, his son had attended a specialist nursery due to his autism. Since relocating in March, he had been placed in a mainstream school to undergo further assessment, however his official assessment did not begin until July, and had not been completed to date. Mr Darrocha believed that the Council was not putting families at the heart of what it did.

The two remaining speakers did not attend.

71. **Opposition Priority Business**

Councillor Purser stated that the damage done to local governments by 12 years of Conservative government made people poorer and contributed to the Council's financial problems and noted that grants to local authorities had been reduced by £19 billion in the last 10 years, with dire implications for services. Cuts were counterproductive, leading to reduced preventative services and more costly statutory interventions. He proposed that the Leader and Deputy Leader have an urgent meeting with the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to set out the case that there must be no more cuts to local government funding, and that the funding settlement must reflect pressures that the Council faced, particularly in Adults and Children's Services. Councillor Purser noted that in October, the government promised £500 million to support social care and questioned when the announcement would be made. He stated that social care was understaffed, underpaid and under-supported, which had led to a significant increase in demand for Children's Services; there was a pressing need to build back preventative services. School funding should also be reinstated. Reductions in bus subsidies and services, use, mileage, were destroying the green agenda ambition. IN respect of housing, young people had been priced out of the housing market which had caused an increase in homelessness. Highways funding had seen a 27% real terms cut. Councillor Purser asked the administration to reassure Council that it had learned lessons from its predecessors and assure Members that the Leader and Deputy Leader would meet with the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to ensure that funding kept up with inflation, which the LGA calculated would cost around £8 billion across the country.

Councillor Nunn responded and questioned why the opposition group did not use the time under this item to highlight where they may have legal, costed alternatives to the administration's approach on any area. He advised that the Council was in regular contact with the government and continually lobbied for funding, and noted that some funding had been forthcoming, including flexibility in using capital receipts for local

government reform, business rates retention, the social housing decarbonisation fund, rough sleeper funding, regeneration funding from Future High Streets Fund, funding for arts venues, the Household Support Grant, and the Levelling Up Fund. Councillor Nunn stated that the next few years would be tough but assured Council that the administration was delivering. Some recent successful projects included the Daventry Arc Cinema, the Reach for Health Centre, hosting women's cycle tournament, the recently opened Northampton cycle park, the Flore bypass, and the additional SEND school, as well as 4 existing schools being extended. Councillor Nunn also noted that several hundred social houses had been built by WNC since its creation.

Councillor Randall stated that many West Northamptonshire residents will not have noticed their lives improving over the last decade. School budgets had been decimated causing rising class sizes. The Fire Service implored the former NCC at a meeting not to cut their budget and gave a warning that should their budget be cut further, they would be operating unsafely. Councillor Randall further stated that people could not access GPs and that people could be seen queueing in tents outside of A&E departments. She highlighted the national care worker shortage following the pandemic and noted that many had opted to work in factories because factory work paid more. She advised that people in full-time employment were forced to use food banks and stated that the 4 Northamptonshire MPs should be doing more in Parliament to represent their constituents.

72. **Cabinet Reports and Record 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:

- Home to school transport audit results were due imminently, the work was now complete, and a report would be taken to the following Audit Committee meeting.
- Regarding empty buildings owned by the Council, a recent Cabinet proposal was considered regarding community use of buildings. An assessment on each property would be required.
- It was noted that the Council had no powers to set private rents; the Cabinet Member for Housing shared concerns raised by Members regarding private rent increases.
- There were some outstanding fines from private sector landlords, but larger fines had been paid.
- Regarding the new governance arrangements with Northampton Partnership Homes (NPH), the Council was better able to work alongside NPH to ensure delivery of services. It also presented more opportunities to join up services.
- Regarding the energy efficiency scheme, registered providers delivering funding and the Council worked alongside providers to ensure that money was spent appropriately.
- The current system regarding staff vacancies was that at weekly meetings, any applications were put before a group of Members and officers and if justified, appointments made.
- An additional planning focus week was planned for December. The number of applications had been reduced by 180 after the last meeting.

- It was vital that the pre-application service was brought back to improve the quality of applications as well as being an income generator for the Council.
- Active travel, revenue funding allocation – There was currently no active travel strategy for Northampton; Daventry and Brackley plans were progressing, however, and work on the West Northamptonshire strategy was underway from which the Northampton strategy would emerge.
- The Cabinet Member for Community Safety & Engagement and Regulatory Services would speak with the Resettlement Team regarding concerns raised about Ukrainian refugees being asked for increased deposits and rent in advance by private landlords.
- It was explained that covid funds were specifically for covid related requirements, and that it was for each councillor to determine how to spend their allocated funds. The scheme would run until the end of the financial year.
- The toilets at Abington Park were the subject of regular vandalism and needed to be kept in good order as the park was the most frequently used public space in Northampton.
- An issue relating to a Persimmon Homes development in Deanshanger Ward had been referred to the Chief Executive the Director for Planning and would be reported back to the Ward Member in due course.
- 2 Pioneer Local Area Partnerships (LAPs) had been set up; DSN4 (comprising Deanshanger, Towcester & Roade, Bugbrooke, Hackleton & Grange Park wards), with 4 Conservative councillors representing those wards, and N4 (comprising Castle, Abington & Phippsville, St George and Dallington & Spencer), with 4 Labour councillors representing those wards. Both LAPs had now met.
- The Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education assured Members that she regularly pressed for alternatives to online tools to be made available at libraries, etc, to assist people who were not able to access the internet for a variety of reasons.
- Regarding flooding, issues in Far Cotton were acknowledged and it was stated that there was a need to look at the long-term sustainability of drainage systems in Far Cotton.
- Discussions had taken place with the Assistant Director for Regulatory Services regarding a trolley collection policy; this would need to be contracted work.
- A meeting had taken place earlier in the day in relation to the White Ribbon campaign and the Cabinet Member would follow up with the enquiring Member after the meeting.
- The former M&S building would be used for high-quality, family-friendly housing, and small unit shops.
- The Economy Team had undertaken work on social value policies.

RESOLVED:

Council note the Cabinet Member reports and the decision records from 23rd September 2022 and 11th October 2022.

73. **Youth Justice Plan**

Councillor Baker proposed and Councillor Hughes seconded the report which provided details of progress made against agreed outcomes for Children and Young People. The report outlined priorities, alongside potential future challenges for the partnership over the coming year. The Youth Justice Plan highlighted the partnership arrangements and budget position for the Youth Offending Service.

Members made comments as follows:

- There were 21 county lines in the Eastern District and 40 across Northampton. Educational aspiration was being depressed; more preventative work was needed.
- A generation of young people were growing up with no ambition and nothing to do in the town.
- Whilst there were activities for young people to do (sports/youth clubs, etc.), lots of activities required money; vulnerable children were being offered money for illegal activities.
- More support should be given by the Council to groups that supported young people.
- A YMCA report looking at Northamptonshire found a 94% change in investment in youth services since 2010.
- Grassroots organisations were better placed to deliver some services; the Council was a good facilitator.
- A bid for government funding had been made; 5 areas of Northampton had been identified as being in need and eligible for the funding. A youth offer would then be developed, which was a criterion for bidding of the youth investment fund. A multi-agency youth offer board had also been developed and a cross-party group would work alongside it to produce a youth offer which would lead to a decision about whether the Council would put in an expression of interest itself, or whether it supported other organisations in eligible areas with their own bids.

RESOLVED:

- 1) Council approved the Youth Justice Plan.

74. Annual Report of the Corporate Parenting Board

Councillor Baker proposed and Councillor Fowler seconded the report which sought to set out the legal underpinning of corporate parenting, the structure and role of the Board, to summarise the Board's activity during the reporting period, and set out the Board's performance against the priorities set out in the Trust Improvement Plan, and the Board's future priorities.

Members made comments as follows:

- Improvements in child in care outcomes were improving, however there were still gaps – how were IRO caseloads being managed? The safety of young people must come first, and smaller caseloads would enable more effective practice.
- Less than 50% of placements were achieved with NCT approved foster carers – this required immediate remedy and focus.

- The fostering process was plagued with problems; it should be smooth and error-free, to ensure carers felt valued and respected.
- More information was requested as to what Members could do as corporate parents.
- The report should include more detail (age, length of time in care, how many moves each child has experienced, etc.)
- Was the mentoring befriending scheme working?
- Systems should flag up who children in care and care leavers were.
- A report from the Select Committee regarding exempt housing revealed that housing providers were charging more than regular housing benefit allowance; many care leavers in West Northamptonshire were living in exempt housing which was making a lot of care leavers vulnerable. These were usually areas of high criminality.
- Members were pleased to see in the report references to apps that support young people in learning – information sharing was very helpful, and Members were also pleased to see tailored training and that the report included and benefit audits undertaken.
- More detail would be forthcoming in the upcoming Ofsted report.
- Exempt housing was an NCC legacy issue, and Housing were working on a solution. The Deputy Leader would bring an update to Council in due course.
- The Corporate Parenting Board was a combined board between the North and West, which made it more difficult to make decisions. Often Members would not attend meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board and those Members who sat on it were encouraged to attend every meeting.

RESOLVED:

1) Council:

- a) Approved the establishment of Corporate Parenting Operational Groups as set out in Section 3 of the annual report.
- b) Approved the inclusion of corporate parenting responsibilities being set out in every job description with NCT and West Northamptonshire Council, as set out in Section 3 of the annual report.
- c) Approved NCT and West Northamptonshire Council becoming a Fostering-Friendly employer, as set out in Section 3 of the annual report.

75. Northamptonshire Children's Trust: Annual Review

Councillor Baker proposed and Councillor Fowler seconded the report which sought to provide Council an update as to the progress made by the Children's Trust and areas for improvement identified.

Members made comments as follows:

- The Children's Trust seemed to be accepting of past errors which was positive to see.
- Had consideration been given to the Children's Trust reporting individually to the 2 local authorities?

- The report referred to social worker targets being “just above target” but this did not seem to be the case when Members spoke with social workers.
- More information was requested regarding the SEND Accountability Board.
- It was asked whether the “new system as soon as possible to be live for January 2025” as mentioned in the report had been factored into the budget, or if it was an additional expense.
- Some Members felt that the Children’s Trust was being set up to fail. It did not have enough money to operate properly.
- Members looked forward to the Ofsted report and hoped that it showed that improvements had been made.
- Concerns were raised regarding long-term monetary issues. The Children’s Trust exceeded its allocated budget, and it may have to use reserves going forwards. Some Members were worried that it may impact other statutory services and they urged the administration to continue lobbying government about the funding gap.

RESOLVED:

- 1) Council received the Annual Report for information.

76. **Boundary Review: Submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission**

Councillor Patel proposed and Councillor Brown seconded the report which sought approval from Council for the draft ward pattern to be submitted to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England. Council was asked to note that the report made recommendations to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) on ward boundaries and names of wards.

Members made comments as follows:

- The report presented was not the work of the Task and Finish Group; it was suggested that there was a lack of collaboration in some areas.
- The 78 Member submission was not discussed at the Task and Finish Group.
- A number of wards were not considered “community based” but rather a number-driven exercise.
- It was explained that the Monitoring Officer could make changes in order to give effect to anything agreed by Council, to ensure that the report reflected what was agreed by Members.
- The Task and Finish Group made no recommendations; the draft report that went to the Democracy and Standards Committee was not approved. The report before Members today was only published on 3rd November, this was the first time that any Member of the Council had seen it.
- Wards should reflect existing communities and not socially engineered new wards.
- The 78 Member submission was more equally representative in the west of the area.

- It was felt that local government reorganisation had already been forced upon residents of West Northamptonshire, that a submission that no Members could agree on was a concern.
- Members and residents were urged to respond to the forthcoming consultation by the Boundary Review.

RESOLVED:

- 1) Council:
 - a) Noted the work of the cross-party working group and the Democracy and Standards Committee on the second phase of electoral arrangements for West Northamptonshire;
 - b) Approved the document set out at Appendix A of the report for submission to the LGBCE; and
 - c) Delegated authority to the Director of Legal and Democratic Services in consultation with the Chair of the Democracy and Standards Committee to make any minor amendments to the wording of the proposed submission to the LGBCE and to finalise the submission in light of any comments from Council and any minor or typographical changes identified.

77. Updates to the Constitution

Councillor Patel proposed and Councillor Grant seconded the report which sought to provide an update on behalf of the Democracy & Standards Committee on a number of proposed updates to the Constitution and recommend the revised Constitution for adoption.

Members made comments as follows:

- All of the proposals were considered sensible.
- A question was asked as to who would be monitoring the Call-in inbox.
- Call-ins must have planning reasons.

RESOLVED:

- 1) Council:
 - a) Noted and approved the updates to the Constitution as set out in Section 5 of the report;
 - b) Delegated to the Monitoring Officer the power to make those amendments and any consequential amendments that may be necessary; and
 - c) Noted that these changes would come into effect following the conclusion of the meeting at which they were agreed.

78. Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme

Councillor Longley proposed and Councillor Parker seconded the report which provided Council with an update on the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS) for West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) for the financial year 2022-2023 and asked Members to approve a 'no change' Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2023-2024.

Members discussed the report.

RESOLVED:

- 1) Council:
 - a) Noted the contents of the report.
 - b) Approved a Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the financial year 2023-2024 as outlined in the report.
 - c) Gave delegated authority to the Executive Director for Finance to make any changes to the LCTRS regulations up to and including 31 January 2023 in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance.

79. **Budgets for Building Adaptations for Office Optimisation**

Councillor Longley proposed and Councillor Nunn seconded the report which sought authority for budget provision to be carried out for stage 1 of building adaptation works for the office optimisation programme. These related to the planned closure of the Lodge Road, Daventry offices for Council services and creation of a new Daventry hub.

Members made the following comments:

- The Labour Group would be voting against the recommendations and would be calling in the decision.
- Councillor McCord would be abstaining on this item.

RESOLVED:

- 1) Council:
 - a) Agreed the recommendation from Cabinet that the capital budget be amended to reflect the proposed new budget of £2 million to carry out Stage 1 of the Office Optimisation project and include works to both the Abbey Centre and possible works to the leisure centre.
- 2) Noted that Cabinet:
 - a) Authorised the Assistant Director Assets & Environment to procure and award the contracts to deliver the Stage 1 works.
 - b) Authorised the Assistant Director Assets & Environment in consultation with the Executive Director Finance and Cabinet Member for Finance to dispose of the Lodge Road offices, in whole or part, by leasehold or freehold, for the best consideration reasonably obtainable.
 - c) Agreed that the Lodge Road offices be vacated by 31st March 2023 in order that the revenue savings and/or capital gains be achieved as quickly as practicable thereafter.
- 3) Noted that the decision of Cabinet had been called-in by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

80. **Motions**

Councillor McCord proposed that under Procedure Rule 29.1 (e), Procedure Rule 10 be suspended for the duration of Motion 1.

Councillor Harris seconded the proposal.

Upon a vote, the motion was carried and Motion 1 was considered in full.

Motion 1

Councillor Humphreys proposed and Councillor Harris seconded:

“Low tax zones to drive economic growth, foster business agglomeration and unlock development were announced in the mini-budget on 23rd September by the then Chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng. Since then most of the proposals contained in the mini-budget have been paused, cancelled or reversed with Jeremy Hunt now replacing Kwasi Kwarteng as Chancellor. Investment Zones remain as one of the Government’s key tools to accelerate growth and deliver housing.

Council notes that an expression of interest in becoming an Investment Zone was submitted by this Council. The government envisages that Investment Zones will be one or more specific sites within an eligible local authority where a variety of tax, regulatory innovations and flexibilities, and planning simplifications will apply within those site’s boundaries.

Conservation groups and planning experts have raised serious concerns about these proposals. Zones could be designated in the most environmentally protected areas of the UK, with no mention of the environmental constraints on building in protected habitats under the habitat regulations. These regulations provide protections for some of the most vulnerable habitats and wildlife across England.

While the Council notes that for Investment Zones “the planning system will not stand in the way of investment and growth” it has also to be mindful of its Sustainability Strategy and Net Zero Pledges as well as the natural and cultural assets it is custodian of. In West Northants these include buildings and areas of national importance, sensitive landscape, heritage and biodiversity.

Council therefore resolves:

- 1) To ensure that wherever possible any site/sites in West Northants which are designated Investment Zones (should the Expression of Interest be successful) are only developed if the Council is confident that the liberalised planning laws which will apply to these Zones do not conflict with its commitments to Net Zero, its Sustainability Strategy and its “clean and green” corporate objectives.
- 2) To ensure that wherever possible all housing and commercial growth in such zones accords with the draft Full Plan and so is plan-led and appropriate.”

Following discussion, Councillor Humphreys proposed that the motion be referred to the Planning Policy Committee for consideration.

Councillor Nunn seconded the proposal.

Upon a vote, it was agreed that the motion be referred to the Planning Policy Committee.

At 21:55 the Chairman drew Council's attention to Rule 10 of the Council Procedure Rules:

10 Extension of the meeting

10.1 If the business of a Council meeting has not been concluded by 9.45 pm, the Chair will draw the attention of the meeting to the time and to this Rule.

10.2 In the case of any motions or recommendations on the agenda that have not been dealt with by 9.45 pm the Chair will decide whether to end the meeting or to deal with the outstanding matters provided that those matters can reasonably be dealt with by 10.00pm.

10.3 Where the outstanding matters cannot be dealt with by that time each item will be put to the vote without further debate and a vote will be taken on whether the item should be accepted, rejected, referred, deferred or withdrawn.

Motion 2

Motion 2 was withdrawn prior to the meeting.

Motion 3

Councillor Jolley requested that the motion be withdrawn.

The Chairman accepted the request, and the motion was withdrawn.

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

None advised.

The meeting closed at 22:00

Chairman: _____

Date: _____