

COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on Wednesday, 22 November 2023 in the Council Chamber - Council Offices at 6.00 pm

Members Present:

Cllr T Adams	Cllr P Bailey
Cllr M Batey	Cllr K Bayes
Cllr D Birch	Cllr H Blathwayt
Cllr J Boyle	Cllr A Brown
Cllr G Bull	Cllr S Bütikofer
Cllr C Cushing	Cllr N Dixon
Cllr P Fisher	Cllr T FitzPatrick
Cllr W Fredericks	Cllr M Hankins
Cllr C Heinink	Cllr P Heinrich
Cllr V Holliday	Cllr R Macdonald
Cllr P Neatherway	Cllr L Paterson
Cllr S Penfold	Cllr P Porter
Cllr C Ringer	Cllr L Shires
Cllr M Taylor	Cllr J Toye
Cllr K Toye	Cllr E Vardy
Cllr A Varley	Cllr L Vickers
Cllr L Withington	

Officers in attendance: The Chief Executive, The Monitoring Officer, The S151 Officer, The Democratic Services Manager & the Democratic Services & Governance Officer (Regulatory)

74 ARMED FORCES COVENANT EMPLOYER RECOGNITION SCHEME

The Chairman invited Cllr J Toye, Armed Forces Member Champion, to receive the Armed Forces Covenant Employer Recognition Scheme silver award on behalf of the Council. Cllr Toye said that this was a great achievement and he thanked the officers for all their hard work and continued support.

75 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllrs A Fitch-Tillett, N Housden, G Mancini-Boyle, J Punchard, R Sims and E Spagnola,

76 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 20th September were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

77 TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS FROM MEMBERS

Cllr Dr V Holliday declared a pecuniary interest in Agenda item 12 (3) Council Tax Discounts & Premiums Determination 2024/2025

Cllr S Butikofer declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda item 15 – Opposition Business.

78 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None received.

79 CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Chairman and Vice-Chairman spoke about recent civic events that they had attended:

15 October - The High Sheriff of Norfolk Justice Service, Norwich Cathedral

17 October – Reception at Sandringham House in aid of the Purfleet Trust

28 October – opening of Wighton Village Hall

10 November – Commemoration of Remembrance Day, NNDC Council Offices.

80 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Cllr Adams began by congratulating communities across the district for their very moving and poignant services to commemorate Remembrance Day.

He then thanked everyone who had assisted their communities during the recent flooding events. This had affected residents of Hickling and Potter Heigham but also Letheringsett Bodham and Sheringham.

He then informed members of some very good news that had just been announced regarding levelling up funding for Fakenham. He said that he was delighted to say that NNDC had secured £9.9m for the provision of sports, leisure and swimming facilities at Trap Lane. He believed that this would be a real boost for the town and NNDC would work closely with the Town Council and other stakeholders to ensure the facility was in place by March 2026.

In other good news, Cllr Adams said that two of the Council's new public conveniences had been awarded a diamond award for 'Loo of the Year'. The facilities were at Queen's Road in Fakenham and Stearman's Yard in Wells.

Cllr Adams then thanked members for their involvement and engagement with the Corporate Plan workshops.

In conclusion, Cllr Adams said that the LGA Peer Review report had now been published on the Council's website. He said that the Council was very pleased with the report findings and work was underway on producing an action plan to respond to the recommendations.

81 PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS

There were two members of the public in attendance; Mr B Musson and Cllr F Whymark. Both wished to ask a question relating to the impact of the North Walsham West development on traffic flow in Coltishall. The Chairman thanked them for attending and invited Cllr Whymark to speak first.

Cllr Whymark began by saying that as shown on the photographs of the B1150 there is already a safety issue with the current volumes of traffic in Coltishall. The incidence of HGVs and other traffic mounting the kerb and endangering local people was brought to his attention almost every week. Children and their parents trying to cross the B1150 at Ling Way on their way to school often find the road was almost impossible to cross safely. This would only get worse if the Local Plan was approved and North Walsham gained an additional 1800 homes. He asked whether

the Leader and Members for North Walsham would commit to work with him and the B1150 Special Interest Group, to improve safety on the B1150, particularly through Coltishall and Horstead. Cllr A Brown, Portfolio Holder for Planning thanked him for his question and said that similar questions had been received before. He said that there was a statutory process to follow and a programme of engagement with Broadland District Council had already been agreed and a stakeholder meeting on 27th November in conjunction with Broadland DC. He then explained that a traffic impact assessment (TIA) had been undertaken and the results sent to Broadland DC in advance of the meeting on 27th. There would then be a public consultation event on the TIA on 8th December. Details would be published in the parish magazine. He confirmed that the Council would of course engage with the BB1150 Special Interest Group but not exclusively as there was a requirement to consult and engage widely. Cllr Brown then said he would usually expect these kinds of objections to be received when the planning application came forward to Development Committee for consideration. Before then the Government Inspector must be satisfied that the Council's Local Plan was sound, legal and deliverable. That process was due to start on 22 January 2024. He concluded by saying that the impact of the proposed development on traffic levels must be determined and the impact must be severe for it to reach the required threshold.

The Chairman asked Cllr Whymark if he had a supplementary question. Cllr Whymark said that he understood the Local Plan process, however, the North Walsham extension was a significant part of the plan and local residents and their representatives were just trying to anticipate some of the issues that may arise from this as it was likely to go ahead. He said that he had seen the TIA and it indicated a 25% increase in traffic which, in his view, was significant. He concluded by saying that when planning proposals were presented to members, that they considered all mechanisms possible to mitigate the impact of the development and ensure safety measures in place. Cllr Brown said that the Council would focus on the extent of the additional impact and how that could be mitigated by the measures set out in the TIA report. He assured Cllr Whymark that the Council wanted to ensure that the best mitigation measures were delivered for the residents of Coltishall.

The Chairman invited Mr Musson to speak:

Mr Musson said that safety was his main concern. It was bad now and was likely to get much worse if the North Walsham West development went ahead. He referred members to the photographs on the screen and drew their attention to the lorries that mounted the pavement to pass oncoming traffic. He said this was a common occurrence and already putting pedestrians in danger on a daily basis. He concluded by asking how NNDC would ensure that mitigation measures would make residents feel safer. The Chairman replied that the issues that were occurring now were the responsibility of Broadland District Council rather than NNDC. He suggested that Broadland DC could work in conjunction with Norfolk County Council Highways Department to put measures in place, irrespective of the North Walsham development, to alleviate the traffic issues that Coltishall was facing.

The Chairman invited Mr Musson to respond. He said that he understood that there was a 'duty to cooperate' across neighbouring councils when large development plans were proposed. In his experience, he said that there had been very little co-operation to date and the delay in sharing the results of the TIA reflected this. The Chairman thanked both speakers for coming.

82 APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES, SUB-COMMITTEES, WORKING PARTIES AND OUTSIDE BODIES

The Leader, Cllr Adams informed members of the following changes to appointments:

Cllr A Brown was stepping down as Chairman of the Planning Policy & Built Heritage Working Party and Cllr G Bull would replace him. Cllr A Varley would become Vice-Chairman.

Cllr J Toye was appointed as a substitute on the Norfolk Joint Museums Committee. Cllr Withington would remain as the main representative.

83 PORTFOLIO REPORTS

The Chairman reminded members that this item had a time limit of 30 minutes. She invited members to ask questions:

Cllr C Cushing said that he welcomed the news that Fakenham was to receive 'Levelling Up' funding of £9.875m to build new facilities at Fakenham Sports Centre, including a 25 metre public swimming pool and improved outdoor sports facilities. He asked the Leader whether he would extend thanks to the two local MPs, Duncan Baker and Jerome Mayhew as they had both worked very hard to get the funding in place. The Leader, Cllr T Adams, replied that he was looking forward to working with local members as the project progressed and he would, of course, thank Jerome Mayhew MP, for all of his hard work and support for the bid. He added that it was likely that the recent successful completion of the Reef Leisure centre in Sheringham had been a factor in the funding being awarded. He thanked local members and town councillors for their ongoing support.

Cllr P Fisher asked Cllr C Ringer, Portfolio Holder for Environment & Waste, about the mandatory collection of food waste and when that would come into effect. Cllr Ringer replied that the Government had mandated that local authorities had to introduce a food waste collection service by the end of March 2026, however, it was possible that NNDC may have it up and running earlier than that. At present, more information on government funding was awaited. He added that he had recently visited an anaerobic digester in Attleborough, a facility where the district's food waste could well go to be processed. It was important to remember that it would also include trade food waste collection too.

Cllr E Vardy asked Cllr P Heinrich, Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Growth whether it would be possible to know which businesses and community groups are benefiting from the Rural England Prosperity Fund. Cllr Heinrich replied that he did not have this information to hand but would provide a written response.

Cllr S Penfold asked Cllr H Blathwayt, Portfolio Holder for Coast, about recent heavy rainfall which had caused flooding in the east of the district. He requested an update on the current situation. Cllr Blathwayt replied that the water was slowly receding in most parts but was still holding where the flood plain was closest to homes, despite and thanks to the Broads IDB, who had been pumping strenuously where water was closest to habitats. He warned about a coming high tide and the water table was extremely high and with the fields currently so saturated, it would not take a major rain event for those fields to flood across to the flood plains. It was a very precarious position. He acknowledged that there had been support from many agencies in managing the problems but would not include Anglian Water in this. He concluded

by saying that the flood wardens had been working extremely hard to protect homes, particularly in Potter Heigham but in Hickling there still some homes that were unable to use their toilets and were having to use the public toilets.

Cllr M Hankins asked Cllr Adams for an update on the two schemes that had been held up by nutrient neutrality and had now been enabled. Cllr Adams replied that the two schemes were in Sustead and Skeyton and although they were individual properties, mitigation had been implemented and he was pleased to confirm that they were now progressing. He thanked the Planning team and Eastlaw for their support with this.

Cllr J Boyle asked Cllr C Ringer about the reference in his report to reduced capacity within the Council's Environmental Protection team. She was concerned about the considerable amount of pressure that this placed on officers and asked when the situation was likely to improve. Cllr Ringer replied that capacity was currently reduced but new starters were joining the team shortly and the situation was definitely improving.

Cllr D Birch asked the Leader about the recent LGA Corporate Peer Review and whether there was a date for publication of an action plan, setting out how the Council intended to respond to the recommendations. Cllr Adams replied that an action plan would be drafted before Christmas and it would then be presented to members in the New Year.

Cllr K Bayes asked Cllr P Heinrich to provide an update on how the Stalham High Street Task Force scheme was progressing. Cllr Heinrich replied that the High Street Task Force Working Party had met the previous week and the onus was now on Stalham Town Council, residents and businesses to come back with proposals. There was currently no budget in place to support this and this would be reviewed in the coming months.

Cllr G Bull asked Cllr W Fredericks, Portfolio Holder for Housing, about the steps that the Council was taking to reduce the number of empty homes in the district. Cllr Fredericks replied that there was an Empty Homes Officer who was working hard to reduce the number of empty homes. In addition, Cllr Fredericks was intending to work with the Communications Team to put out some information for the public with clear guidance on how to report an empty home. This would also be included in the next issue of the Council's in-house magazine, Outlook.

Cllr R Macdonald asked the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Cllr Brown, about the Planning Roadshows that the Council had been running. He asked whether anything more could be done to maximise parish council attendance at these events. Cllr Brown replied that a series of planning roadshows were being held across the district. Two events had already taken place at Stalham and Wells and attendance at both had been very high. The next one would be in Holt and there would be promotion via email, print media and social media. He thanked officers for their commitment to these sessions.

Cllr P Neatherway asked Cllr Fredericks about the success in bringing 92 long-term empty homes back into use. He asked how many of these properties were now available for private rent or for sale. Cllr Fredericks replied that she would provide a written response.

Cllr T FitzPatrick asked Cllr Fredericks about local housing associations selling off some of their properties and then not replacing them. He was particularly concerned

about the loss of two and three bedroom homes, especially in rural areas. He asked whether this was in issue that she was discussing with them. Cllr Fredericks replied that she met regularly with housing associations to discuss their stock and the financial viability of any of the homes that were proposed for sale was considered. She said that she was pleased to report that the number of such homes being sold was much lower now. She said that the Council was also looking at all options for making such homes viable in the short-term where possible.

Cllr J Toye referred to the Council's Social Prescribing team and said that they had the Forces Connect and the Veterans' Gateway App on their phones so that it was easily accessible. He suggested that all members downloaded this too. He then said that a request had been made for the North Norfolk Help Hub to ask anyone referred to them if there was a connection to the Armed Forces. He asked Cllr Fredericks if she could provide information on how many referrals had recorded such a connection. Cllr Fredericks said that she would provide a written response.

84 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CABINET 06 NOVEMBER 2023

1. Cabinet Agenda Item 10: Budget Monitoring P6

The Chairman invited the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Cllr L Shires, to introduce this item.

Cllr Shires began by referring members to page 65, section 2.3 of the report which included additional wording (not included in previous reports) regarding the recent staff pay award.

Cllr Shires thanked officers for all their hard work in managing their budgets so carefully. She then outlined the recommendations in turn, before asking Cllr Fredericks to speak about the impact of the cost of homelessness and temporary accommodation provision on the Council's budget.

Cllr Fredericks informed members that the Council's temporary accommodation bill had risen sharply. The budget for the provision of temporary accommodation was usually spent on nightly accommodation for homeless households and this was generally between £350-450K a year. This year it was approaching £1.3m and whilst the Council did not begrudge spending money on families in need, it was struggling to afford such a steep rise in costs. She said that significant financial help was needed to help with these costs. North Norfolk did not have hotels and bed and breakfasts available to accommodate homeless families in. In conclusion, Cllr Fredericks said it was important to remember that although the Council was facing rising costs, there were homeless families behind these figures that were struggling and increasingly desperate. She concluded by thanking all of the housing officers involved in dealing with such a challenging situation.

The Chairman invited members to speak:

Cllr L Withington said that she welcomed the recommendation to provide a new play area at the Lees in Sheringham. It had suffered in the past due to its location but it was an important asset for the town and would be welcomed by residents and visitors alike.

Cllr N Dixon then spoke on behalf of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and said that they had supported the recommendations at their meeting on 15 November. It was proposed by Cllr L Shires, seconded by Cllr W Fredericks and

RESOLVED to

- 1) Approve an additional capital budget of £58k so that the work for the refurbishment of the Red Lion roof (Cromer), the Art Deco Block roof and handrails (Cromer) and the Chalet Block at Sheringham can be awarded as one contract. And that approval be given to fund the additional expenditure from the Asset Management Reserve.
- 2) Approve an increase to the DFG capital budget of £118k and approves that it is funded by the additional grant received for this purpose from the Government.
- 3) Approve the provision of a new play area at the Lees in Sheringham and approves a capital project budget for this of £65k and that funding for this should come from the Delivery Plan Reserve.
- 4) Approve the capital spending of £11k on the Morris Street Car Park Boundary Wall and that it be funded from the Asset Management Reserve.
- 5) Approve that the £85k of the Car Park refurbishment capital budget is reallocated to the Public Conveniences so that the outstanding works can be carried out and complete the scheme.

2. Cabinet Agenda Item 11: Treasury Management Mid-Year Report 2023-2024

Cllr Shires introduced this item. She referred members to page 107 which provided further information about the current economic situation and interest rates.

Cllr N Dixon then spoke on behalf of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and said that they had supported the recommendations at their meeting on 15 November. It was proposed by Cllr L Shires, seconded by Cllr P Heinrich and

RESOLVED

To approve the Treasury Management Mid Year Report 2023/2024

3. Cabinet Agenda Item 12: Council Tax Discounts and Premiums Determination 2024-2025

Cllr Shires introduced this item. She referred members to recommendation 4 and paragraph 4.4 of the report which explained that care leavers were eligible for a 100% discount on their council tax and this was fully compensated by Norfolk County Council. Cllr Shires then spoke about recommendation 9, which proposed the introduction of a new second homes premium of 100% from 1 April 2025. She said that this would see an additional £550k income to the Council and that there were ongoing discussion with the County Council about having a fairer share of council tax income.

Cllr N Dixon spoke on behalf of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and said that they had supported the recommendations at their meeting on 15 November.

Cllr L Withington commented on the second homes council tax issue and said she wanted to acknowledge the hard work of the North Norfolk Town and Parish Forum

over several years in bringing this to a successful conclusion.

It was proposed by Cllr L Shires, seconded by Cllr T Adams and

RESOLVED

That under Section 11A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 2012 and other enabling powers that:

- 1) The discounts for the year 2024-25 and beyond are set at the levels indicated in the table at paragraph 3.1.
- 2) To continue to award a local discount of 100% in 2024-25 for eligible cases of hardship under Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended). See the associated policy in Appendix B.
- 3) That an exception to the levy charges may continue to be made by the Revenues Manager in the circumstances laid out in section 3.2 of this report.
- 4) The premiums for the year 2024-25 and beyond are set at the levels indicated in the table at paragraph 4.2.
- 5) To continue to award a local discount of 100% in 2024-25 for eligible cases of care leavers under Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended).
- 6) Those dwellings that are specifically identified under regulation 6 of the Council Tax (Prescribed Classes of Dwellings) (England) Regulations 2003 will retain the 50% discount as set out in paragraph 2.1 of this report.
- 7) Those dwellings described or geographically defined at Appendix A which in the reasonable opinion of the Revenues Manager are judged not to be structurally capable of occupation all year round and were built before the restrictions of seasonal usage were introduced by the Town and Country Planning Act 1947, will be entitled to a 35% discount.
- 8) The long-term empty-property premium of 100% is brought forward to increase from 12 months rather than 24 months from 1 April 2024.
- 9) A new second homes premium of 100% as detailed in paragraph 4.3 is applied from 1 April 2025.

85 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 15 NOVEMBER 2023

The Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Cllr Dixon, informed Full Council that there were no further recommendations to report.

86 QUESTIONS RECEIVED FROM MEMBERS

None received.

87 OPPOSITION BUSINESS

The Chairman invited Cllr C Cushing to introduce this item. He set out the motion, as follows:

'The Department for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities (DLUHC) has issued guidance for local authorities in England who are considering adopting a 4-day working week – where staff have their working hours reduced by 20% but retain 100% of their pay (or equivalent/similar). This states that:

- The government does not support a 4-day working week in local authorities, as it does not believe that it delivers local taxpayers' value for money.
- The government does not expect councils to adopt this arrangement.
- Should councils disregard this advice and there is evidence of service decline or failure, DLUHC or another government department may raise concerns directly with the authority, monitor performance more closely and consider options to correct declining performance.

The government supports an individual's right to request flexible working, which allows employees to apply for changes to the hours, timing, or location of work. This is clearly different as it relates to the right of an individual employee to request a different working pattern or place of work. This guidance does not seek to relate to the latter.

Local authorities must be mindful of the Duty of Best Value when it considers provision. This is a statutory requirement for councils 'to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.' In practice this extends to securing value for money in all spending decisions. It is the government's view that the implementation of the 4-day week is unlikely to demonstrate adherence to the Best Value Duty. Neither, for clarity, does the government support trials, experimentation, or pilots (or equivalent) of the 4-day working week concept within the local government sector.

The 4-day working week is an organisation-wide approach to pay and working hours. NNDC staff have a well-deserved reputation for striving hard to deliver the services that the council provides to the public. We are regularly told that these services are stretched. The adoption would exacerbate staff stress levels by having to cram into 4 days the work that it would normally take them 5 days to do.

Given that the narrative around council services is that they are already hard-pressed, it is unlikely that reducing the working hours by 20% will be popular with North Norfolk Council Tax taxpayers, especially at a time when Council Tax is raised by the maximum each year.

Full Council was therefore requested to resolve to:

- Recognise and respect the Government's Guidance of a 4-day working week.
- Prior to any consideration of any form of trial or pilot exercise of a 4-day working week it collects and assesses the evidence of such trials conducted by other Councils, elsewhere, to inform an outline business case to justify it.
- Commits not to introduce a 4-day working week at North Norfolk District Council without an overwhelming detailed business case showing substantial benefits to North Norfolk residents and businesses and a concession from central Government supporting the case.'

Cllr Cushing said that the introduction of a 4-day working week was a topical issue in

local government, following South Cambridgeshire District Council's (SCDC) trial which commenced in January 2023. Norwich City Council had also recently indicated that it was considering introducing a 4-day week for its staff. Cllr Cushing said that he appreciated this was not something that the Administration had raised at all or that they had indicated that they were considering, however, he felt that it was beneficial to have a debate on the Council's approach to this matter. He went on to say that the introduction of a 4-day working week could raise several corporate-level risks, such as the Council's duty to provide best value and being fair to council taxpayers and to its staff.

Cllr Dixon seconded the motion and reserved his right to speak.

The Chairman then asked the Leader to respond to the motion.

The Leader, Cllr Adams, said that the Administration would not be supporting the motion. There were no plans to introduce a 4-day working week. It wasn't in the Council's Corporate Plan and no proposals had been discussed. However, he said that it was important to learn from the experience at SCDC and review the outcomes from such a model. He then said that a growing number of businesses had been driving this approach successfully but that when local government attempted the same, it was being pulled apart before the trial period had even ended. It was still in its infancy and he said it was not the Government's place or that of any local authority to interfere whilst the trial was still ongoing. The Government should not be attempting to interfere on this scale with local government decisions. Cllr Adams concluded by saying that in his view, it was a simplistic attempt at populism to bring forward a debate on an issue that had not even been considered by the Council. Many of the lines used in the motion had been lifted directly from correspondence circulated by the Taxpayers' Alliance and it was no secret that they were no supporters of Local Government. He added that he had not seen a similar motion being put forward by other Conservative groups elsewhere and he was sure that Conservative-run councils would also be keen to learn about the trial at SCDC.

The Chairman invited other members to speak:

Cllr L Shires said that in the recent 2023 elections, across the country Conservative councillors 'rebranded' themselves as local conservatives who campaigned for local priorities. However, motions such as this brought these claims into question. She said that this particular issue highlighted a key conflict at government level as they consistently championed the transfer of powers to local authorities and promoted devolution, yet in this instance they were imposing their views and attempting to centralise decision-making. Cllr Shires went on to say that it was entirely appropriate for a council to test the ground for effective ways of working and seek more innovative ways of delivering their services to local residents. She said that a 4-day working week had been linked to numerous benefits such as increased productivity, employee wellbeing and environmental sustainability. By not allowing local authorities to explore such a model, the Government was hindering councils from aligning workforce management with local economic and social aspirations. Local Government should be empowered to take such decisions not hindered by Central Government.

Cllr J Toye said that the motion asked members to recognise the guidance issued by the Government on a 4-day working week and should base any business case on evidence collated. However, the guidance set out the Government view which clearly stated that it was not supportive, regardless of any evidence. He said that he was supportive of basing a decision on the evidence but this was clearly not the

approach that the Government was taking and which was reflected in its guidance. He would therefore not be supporting the motion.

Cllr P Heinrich referred members to a new report from the Autonomy Think Tank which said that Artificial Intelligence (AI) would improve efficiency in the workplace and allow millions of workers to move to a 4-day week. A reduced working week could improve working practice as well as work/life balance. Local authorities had to be able to take a flexible approach that enabled harnessing the use of rapidly changing technology. He said he would not support the motion.

Cllr W Fredericks said it was important to remember that a 4-day working week did not mean that the Council offices were only open 4 days a week. A rota system was used to ensure that all services were covered and operated as usual.

Cllr L Withington said that it was very disappointing to see that the focus for Opposition business was to agree with an out of touch Government response to a 4-day week trial. She said that they had failed to take an opportunity to really represent residents and their concerns and try to improve their lives. She said that a 4-day week was not part of the Council's Corporate Plan and not even been raised by staff. She said that it was also disappointing to see the Opposition requesting a business case. This implied that they considered this not to be normal practice. A business case was always undertaken for key projects and good practice was at the heart of the way the Administration worked.

The Chairman, Cllr S Butikofer, said that the Government talked about devolution of powers, yet when a council leader stepped up and took a decision to take their council forward, the Government jumped in and attacked them at the first opportunity. All council leaders faced a range of challenges unique to their own authorities and if the Opposition had taken time to investigate why SCDC were trialling a 4-day working week they may take a different view.

Cllr Butikofer said that most local authorities were currently facing a recruitment and retention crisis and leaders needed to try new and innovative solutions. SCDC was based at the heart of a high-tech community with a wealth of opportunities and many private companies offering a 4-day week. Those working in the public sector should be able to expect the same rights as those working in the private sector. She said it was absolutely right that residents should be able to expect that service levels were maintained and that their local council was always striving for better. In conclusion, she said that thanks to the 4-day working week trial at SCDC, the council had saved £100k on agency staff fees and recruited to over 50% of hard-to-fill posts. SCDC's performance was consistently amongst the best in the country. In conclusion, Cllr Butikofer said that local government was local and central government should focus on keeping their own house in order. She said that she was disappointed but not surprised that only a month after talking about working as a collaborative council, the Opposition sought to bring forward a debate on a divisive matter.

The Chairman then invited Cllr Dixon, seconder of the motion, to speak.

Cllr Dixon said that a lot of disappointment had been expressed during the debate. It was just an opportunity to have a discussion on what an approach to a certain topic might be. He said that the motion did not seek to restrict how local government responded to the issue. Cllr Dixon said that Full Council was the forum for debate and for members to explain what their thoughts might be on certain matters. He said that it was important that all members should keep an open mind on important topics and it was disappointing that there had not been a more constructive and positive

debate.

The Chairman then invited the proposer of the motion, Cllr Cushing, to close the debate. Cllr Cushing said that the Administration seemed to be debating an entirely different topic. He said it was about discussing what the Council would put in place if it opted to go down this route. He said that it was interesting to hear the voracious response from the Administration to this issue. Although it may not be top of their current agenda, it clearly indicated that it was something that they supported for the future.

The motion was put to the vote, with 11 members voting in favour and 22 against. It was therefore not supported.

88 NOTICE(S) OF MOTION

The Chairman invited the proposer, Cllr W Fredericks, to introduce the motion. Cllr Fredericks set out the motion as follows:

‘Homelessness has increased by 40% in North Norfolk over the course of the last 3 years, reflecting similar pressures in District and Borough Councils throughout England

This number continued to increase and between 01 April and 31 October 2023, 228 households had been assessed as threatened with or were already homeless.

The primary reasons for Homelessness were:

- Private landlord Eviction: **78**
- Friends and Family no longer able to accommodate: **54**
- Domestic Abuse:**38**

As at the 31 October 2023 there were 75 households in temporary accommodation. This was an overall increase of 33% from the same date in 2022. The number of children living in temporary accommodation had also increased by 44% compared to October 2022. This meant that 85 children were living in unstable accommodation and the majority of cases were living without space to play, away from schools, work and support network and sometimes out of District entirely. It was overwhelmingly disruptive, challenging and mentally harmful.

There was not just a human cost to using Temporary Accommodation, there was also a major financial cost. The Council was only able to reclaim a small proportion of the amount it spent on nightly, bed & breakfast type accommodation. If the Council placed a household in bed & breakfast type accommodation costing £700 per week it was only able to claim £98 of that cost back. The Council’s net costs for purchased TA have risen from £371k in 2021/22 to a forecast figure of £910k for this year.

The Council was constantly exploring options to increase its provision of decent Temporary Accommodation, it was also important that it focussed on longer-term solutions to ensure that a household’s stay in temporary accommodation was as brief as possible and they could secure a more permanent housing solution. In addition to homeless demand pressures, the Council had also seen a significant reduction in the supply of permanent accommodation with a 38% reduction in available properties across Housing Register partners. The reasons for this reduction were complex but were primarily associated with reduced levels of new-

build completions and tenants not wanting to move due to cost-of-living pressures and generally unfavourable economic conditions.

There were currently over 2,500 households on the Housing List and the severe shortage of social rented homes, meant, on average, there were 150 bids for each property advertised through Your Choice Your Home, with additional pressures for family homes with some properties receiving over 300 bids. The private rental sector was out of reach for most applicants as Local Housing Allowance levels for all of North Norfolk residents, had been frozen by Central Government since 2020, based on rent levels in the 2018-19 financial year. Monitoring of private rented homes to let had found only seven homes available with rents within Local Housing Allowance levels so far this year. Real-term spending power for Councils remained substantially below 2010 levels.

The Council was committed to tackling the Homelessness Crisis through all available means. Local Authorities (LAs), regardless of political administration, had been let down by Central Government's lack of investment in building affordable rented homes and enabling affordable homes for sale to local people. This had left Councils ill-equipped to tackle the current Housing Crisis or develop long-term strategies to mitigate future housing pressures and sustainable market resilience. Affordable new homes construction performed a pivotal role in addressing the Temporary Accommodation crisis and would be a key contributor to the reduction of supply and demand driven private rental revenue costs for LAs. In conclusion, Cllr Fredericks said that she also wanted to highlight the extreme stress placed on the Council's housing teams who were listening to the most vulnerable and desperate members of our communities, with limited resources to help them.

Cllr T Adams seconded the motion and reserved his right to speak.

The Chairman opened the debate.

Cllr Cushing said that he wished to propose the following amendments:

1. Delete "**begin**" and replace with "**re-energise**". This now reads as:
 - "The Leader of the Council, and leaders of the opposition groups, to write to the Secretary of State to **re-energise** the process of readdressing the challenges to the Housing Crisis."
2. Amend to added with the addition of: "**and the removal of the private rental market disincentives applied over the past 25 years**". This now reads as:
 - "Local Housing Allowance to be urgently increased to realistic levels for Norfolk in line with private rental amounts, **and the removal of the private rental market disincentives applied over the past 25 years.**"
3. Replace entire wording with:
 - "**A government cross party working group to explore how land could quickly be released for sustainable low cost and affordable housing and how house construction, and building conversions to residential, could be ramped up.**"

4. Replace entire wording with:

- **“A government cross party working group to explore national planning policy changes to take stricter control of land banks so that land can be quickly built on using innovative housing schemes which transform viability assessments and encourage builders to work alongside Local Authorities to create new, more effective, delivery models. NNDC to task the Planning Policy and Built Heritage Working Party to consider and draft the changes it wants to see to the National Planning Policy Framework to address the affordability, land release and build incentive issues and submit these to central government for action.”**

Cllr N Dixon seconded the amendments.

The Chairman advised members that due to the 30 minute time limit for the debating of motions, she proposed that 10 minutes was allowed to debate the amendment.

She invited the proposer of the substantive motion, Cllr Fredericks, to respond to the amendments.

Cllr Fredericks said that she had only had sight of the amendments a few minutes before the start of the meeting and had not had sufficient time to consider them fully and it was not entirely clear what they meant. She briefly addressed them in turn and said that she would not accept any of them. She reiterated that vulnerable refugees were not in any way contributing to the homelessness crisis in North Norfolk. Fleeing domestic abuse and evictions from rental properties were the main causes.

Cllr A Varley said that this was a very important topic and he thanked the Opposition for engaging and bringing forward amendments for debate. However, he would not be supporting them on this occasion as he did not think that they were sufficient.

Cllr T FitzPatrick said that given the importance of the topic, members must not turn it into a political spat. It was imperative to reach a consensus as this would add strength to the views expressed.

Cllr A Brown commented that it was disappointing to have had such short notice of the amendment as this meant it was hard to have a meaningful debate on it. He said that having a roof over your head was not a ‘nice to have’ and that government policy had played ‘fast and loose’ with people’s rights and proposals to introduce a ban on ‘no fault evictions’ had been deferred due to the courts being too busy to cope with the number of breaches of tenancy agreements that landlords would resort to. He added that the Planning Policy & Built Heritage Working Party was already working on the issue highlighted in the 4th amendment. He therefore would not be supporting the amendments.

Cllr Dixon then spoke as seconder of the amendment. He said that there were no councillors in the Chamber who would not support the aspirations of the substantive motion and all of them would love to be able to ‘wave a magic wand’ and resolve all of the problems. It was important to come from a common perspective even if a common approach was not shared. He said that this was not a short-term problem and it was important to address the causes not just the symptoms. If the Council continued to focus on the symptoms then it would not succeed and everyone wanted to see success. In conclusion, Cllr Dixon said that the purpose of the amendments

was to seek to influence others in higher places to address the causes and increase resources. It also required the Council to explore what more it could do to 'think outside the box' and although he accepted Cllr Brown's point about the Planning Policy & Built Heritage Working Party, he felt there was more to do and he offered to work with the Chairman of the Working Party to look at all options.

Having been duly proposed and seconded, the amendment was put to the vote, with 11 members voting in favour and 22 against. The amendment was therefore not supported.

The Chairman advised members that she would now open the debate on the substantive motion.

Cllr J Toye said that the motion asked for clear actions and he fully supported it.

Cllr C Cushing said that there were wider pressures that were causing problems with housing across the nation. In response to the points raised regarding the amendments coming forward at a late stage, he said that he was also disappointed that the Administration had put forward a motion without consulting with the Opposition at all. If there had been a discussion at an earlier stage it was very likely that a consensus would have been reached. He said that there was a lot of talk about working together but no attempts to reach out at all. He concluded by saying that there were no easy answers to the serious problem of homelessness and the main opposition would be willing to work with the Administration to address the issue.

Cllr L Withington said that she supported the motion and that the statistics quoted within it demonstrated how serious an issue it was, adding that people categorised as a high priority need no longer got a look in. She then gave an example of a local family that she had been supporting and spoke about their experience and the challenges they faced in acquiring a home. It was hard to just support the desperate people in her own ward of Sheringham, let alone everyone across the district. She thanked the Council's housing officers for their continued hard work in extremely difficult circumstance. Cllr Withington concluded by saying that the Government must acknowledge the severity of the problem and take action.

Cllr L Shires said that every member was there because of North Norfolk residents. She spoke about the many resilient people she had met in the last few years who fought tirelessly for their families and for basic rights. She said that she wanted them to know that the Council heard them and was listening and that members would try and make the situation better.

Cllr M Hankins said that as a newcomer to North Norfolk and the Council, he was shocked by the level of deprivation and homelessness. To call it a crisis was definitely appropriate. He was fully supportive of the motion.

Cllr N Dixon said that he was supportive of the aspirations but was disappointed that that the Administration had not taken the opportunity to make it more heavyweight on actions. Even once the vote was taken and whatever the outcome, there was an opportunity to work across the benches to find a solution. He said that the Opposition wanted to support the motion and they wanted to do even more.

Cllr C Ringer reminded the Opposition that at the last meeting of Full Council on 20 September, they had put forward a motion on Blakeney surgery which was supported unanimously. Like that, this motion also required cross-party support to show the strength of feeling about the issue of homelessness in the district. He said

that nothing in the motion was politically motivated and he urged all members to support it.

Cllr T Adams spoke as seconder of the motion. He addressed Cllr Cushing's point regarding consultation with the opposition and said that there had been plenty of opportunity for all members to fully engage on policy matters during the development of the Corporate Plan. He then said that it was heartening to see so many councils coming together to discuss big issues such as homelessness and agree on a shared position. He concluded that by saying that the situation could not continue. The Autumn statement had not included any substantive proposals that would effect real change. A re-alignment was needed to deal with homelessness as a national priority and the local housing allowance needed to be raised to keep in line with costs and with temporary accommodation costs escalating at a shocking pace, many more councils would be issuing Section 114 notices as they simply would not be able to cope with the financial impact. Cllr Adams concluded by saying that a national approach was needed to deal with extremely challenging circumstances. A credible national housing plan was urgently needed. He asked all members to support the motion.

Having been duly proposed and seconded, the motion was put to the vote and it was

RESOLVED unanimously to call for

1. The Leader of the Council, and the leaders of opposition groups, to write to the relevant Secretary of State to begin the process of readdressing the challenges to the Housing Crisis.
2. Local Housing Allowance to be urgently increased to realistic levels for North Norfolk. In line with private rental amounts
3. Central Government policy to support Councils to buy land for affordable housing developments based on current use, as per established Local Plans, rather than on "hope value", by reforming the Land Compensation Act 1961.
4. National Planning policy amendments, so that house-builders are pro-actively encouraged to incorporate the provision of 'truly affordable' homes in their development projects, supporting Local Authorities to challenge the renegeing of these duties on 'viability assessment' grounds.

89 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

90 PRIVATE BUSINESS

The meeting ended at 8.02 pm.

Chairman