

COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on Wednesday, 25 September 2024 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 J Boyle	Cllr A Brown
Cllr C Cushing	Cllr N Dixon
Cllr P Fisher	Cllr A Fitch-Tillett
Cllr A Fletcher	Cllr W Fredericks
Cllr M Gray	Cllr P Heinrich
Cllr V Holliday	Cllr K Leith
Cllr R Macdonald	Cllr G Mancini-Boyle
Cllr P Neatherway	Cllr S Penfold
Cllr P Porter	Cllr J Punchard
Cllr L Shires	Cllr E Spagnola
Cllr K Toye	Cllr A Varley
Cllr L Vickers	

Officers in attendance: The Chief Executive, The Monitoring Officer, The Director for Communities, the Director for Place & Climate Change, the Democratic Services Officer (Regulatory)

36 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllrs D Birch, H Blathwayt, S Butikofer, T FitzPatrick, M Hankins, C Heinink, N Housden, L Paterson, C Ringer, J Toye and E Vardy.

37 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Full Council held on 24th July 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the following amendment - Page 7, minute 30: should read Cllr *Boyle*

38 TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS FROM MEMBERS

None received.

39 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None received.

40 CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Chairman began by saying that she had visited several local dementia groups across the district during August and September.

She then updated members on the following civic events that she had attended:
30th August – PositiviTea event, focussing on dementia at Fakenham Sports & Leisure Centre
8th September – Mayor of Dereham's Civic Service, St Nicholas Parish Church, Dereham

9th September – Norfolk County Scout Council AGM, Northgate High School, Dereham

13th September – Gloucester 1682 Supper, Kings Lynn Town Hall

15th September – 84th Battle of Britain Commemoration, Halsey House, Cromer

22nd September – Mayor of Wisbech's Afternoon Tea, Wisbech Castle

The Chairman then invited Dirck Geary from the charity 'So...' to speak about their work. He said that the charity supported people with dementia and their families in Norfolk and he outlined everything that they did, which ranged from informal coffee mornings to working with the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital. He thanked members for their support and the Chairman for her continued work in highlighting the issues faced by those suffering from dementia.

41 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader, Cllr T Adams, began by welcoming Cllr M Gray following his recent election as a member.

He then said he was delighted to say that the Council had been awarded the gold RSPCA Pawprint award for its work with stray dogs. The scheme celebrated and rewarded local authorities and organisations for going above and beyond to deliver the highest quality animal welfare services. He thanked officers for their hard work in achieving this.

Regarding Benjamin Court, Cromer and the Council's representation to the Secretary of State for Health & Social Care, he said that a response had been received. He said that it was disappointing and failed to commit to a solution, despite indicating elsewhere that the Government was supportive of community settings being used to take the strain away from hospitals. He said that the Health Watch report was now awaited.

The Leader went on to say that correspondence had been received regarding the provision of future banking services in Fakenham and North Walsham and it was intended to meet with representatives from Cash Access UK in due course.

He then provided a brief update on the Rocket House, Cromer. The lifeboat, H F Bailey, had been removed ahead of the renovation of the building. He thanked everyone for their help in moving the historic boat. The main contractors had now been appointed to carry out the work and the public toilets would close in November.

Regarding the review of public toilet provision across the district, he said that the next steps would be meeting with interested parties and businesses to assist the Council in determining how to move forward. He clarified that there would be no agreement or ratification of any individual facility at this time. Members and the public would be kept updated.

42 PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS

None received.

43 PORTFOLIO REPORTS

The Chairman reminded members that there was 30 minutes allocated for this item. She invited members to speak:

Cllr J Boyle asked Cllr W Fredericks, Portfolio Holder for Housing & Benefits, about the welfare benefits referred to in her report and if more detail could be provided on them. Cllr Fredericks replied that the Financial Inclusion Team had been set up to advise and support low income families in the district. During the period 1st April to 29 August 2024, almost £1m in missed benefits and income had been identified and awarded to low-income families. This included carer's allowance, council tax support, disability living allowance, discretionary housing payments, job seekers allowance, energy bank vouchers and pension credit. Regarding the latter, she said there had been an extensive push to get as many eligible pensioners as possible to complete the forms within the required timeframe.

Cllr A Fletcher asked Cllr A Varley, Portfolio Holder for Climate Change & Net Zero about the next steps for decarbonisation of the Council Offices. Cllr Varley replied that surveys had been undertaken on the Cromer building. The report would go to Cabinet for consideration. The options included heating systems and fabric measures. It also focused on behaviour changes such as hot-desking. Ultimately the focus was on energy efficiency and on reducing running costs. He added that external funding options were being looked into to minimise the cost of introducing any energy efficient measures.

Cllr G Mancini-Boyle asked Cllr A Varley for an update on the Net Zero Communities project. He asked for more information on the businesses that had been contacted across the district. Cllr Varley replied that the Stalham Communities Project was going well and several events had been hosted jointly with the Town Council. He said that he would provide a further, more detailed update shortly. Regarding, the businesses that had been contacted, he said that he would find out and provide a written response.

Cllr C Cushing asked the Leader, Cllr T Adams, about the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF). He asked for information on the outcomes that these funding streams were delivering and whether the Leader was confident that the Council was getting value for money. The Leader replied that there were a lot of recipients of this funding, so he suggested that a detailed written response was provided on this. More generally, the Council wanted to maximise the potential for any funding provisions and he felt that this was a good example of this. Cllr Cushing suggested that Overview & Scrutiny could consider looking at this in detail.

Cllr A Fitch-Tillett asked Cllr L Shires, Portfolio Holder for Finance & Assets, about the request for the installation of a defibrillator on the railings on the slipway down to the beach. She said that the Council was insisting on levying a charge for this. Cllr Shires said that she would go back to the Property Services team and the Parish Council and see if a different solution could be found.

Cllr M Gray asked the Leader, Cllr T Adams, for an update on the Devolution deal for Norfolk and the impact on North Norfolk. Cllr Adams replied that he had no new update on the situation. He said that it was the Council's wish to see a cross-county consensus on the basis for a devolution arrangement and NNDC needed to set out its stall as soon as possible to the Government. He said he had confidence in neighbouring authorities and believed a consensus could be reached. He added that he believed the prize for North Norfolk would be around the development of rural transport and this was linked to economic inactivity in some locations. There would be a lot of discussions at a political level on whether it would be a Norfolk / Suffolk arrangement or Norfolk only. He was hopeful that the discussions would remain constructive and that an agreed position could be presented to the Government as

soon as possible.

Cllr M Batey asked Cllr A Brown, Portfolio Holder for Planning & Enforcement, about the Government's increased housing target and how that would impact on the district number-wise. Cllr Brown replied that when the Local Plan was submitted which confirmed the number of approximately 480 homes being delivered per year, the Council was confident that the figure was accurate. The Planning Inspector's examination in March pointed out that the methodology used to ascertain the figure should have referenced the 2014 population statistics. This was challenged as later census figures showed that the population was falling compared to 2014. The Inspector's response suggested that using the 2014 statistics would increase the housing target to 557. However, the change of Government, meant that a further increase was required and the Inspector now advised that the annual target for North Norfolk should now be 943. It was accepted that the Inspector's approach was correct given the Government's new target. A report would come to Planning Policy & Built Heritage Working Party on 10 October 2024 as to how the Council would address the substantial increase in the housing target.

Cllr M Taylor asked Cllr L Withington, Portfolio Holder for Tourism & Leisure why she had not mentioned the very successful Stalham & Smallburgh Beer Festival in her update. He mentioned several annual events taking place in the town and said that it was clear that Stalham was now the 'undisputed champion' of North Norfolk events and asked Cllr Withington to join him in thanking Stalham residents for their work in supporting these community events. Cllr Withington congratulated Stalham for their very successful event. She said there were a lot of very well attended events across the district that should also be highlighted and praised. She asked members to let officers know of upcoming events so that they could ensure they were highlighted and promoted as much as possible.

Cllr Penfold asked Cllr Withington about the three Green Flag spaces managed by the Council. He asked what was being done to ensure that young people engaged with these, to be more active in them. Cllr Withington replied that she was proud to have retained the Green Flag spaces this year. A lot of additional work had been done to build on the previous offer and this included events such as mini beast collecting, orienteering and challenge days. The team was now getting ready for Halloween and all of these events encouraged children to engage with nature as well as bringing in revenue. She went onto say that the Countryside team had started to work with the Youth Advisory Board (YAB) which would bring additional support and engagement opportunities. There were also volunteering opportunities via the Muddy Boots scheme.

Cllr K Bayes asked Cllr L Shires about the capital programme and referenced the high amount of funding allocated to Cromer, totalling £2.56m. He said that he could not see anything for parishes east of North Walsham and said that Cromer appeared to be favoured over other areas. Cllr Shires replied that no member would want to have the Rocket House in their ward, with all the problems and costs that it presented. Regarding capital bids for Cromer, she said that there were a large number of assets there. In the east of the district there were very few assets. However, if there were any proposals for other areas she would be keen to consider them.

Cllr K Toye asked Cllr Fredericks about the number of people in temporary accommodation. Her report indicated that this had gone down and she asked for more information on this. Cllr Fredericks replied that the hard work of the Council's Prevention Team, together with Customer Services, Housing Options and the Social

Prescribing team in supporting residents to stay either where they were – by providing support and advice on how to manage rent increases. She said that the Council's Housing Allocation policy had also been reviewed and was currently out for consultation. The Council continued to work with its partners to fill any empty homes. She concluded by saying that the ending of Section 21 could cause some issues as some landlords may not want to continue in the residential lettings business.

44 REVIEW OF POLITICAL BALANCE AND ALLOCATION OF SEATS TO COMMITTEES, SUB-COMMITTEES, WORKING PARTIES AND PANELS

The Chairman invited the Leader to introduce this item. He explained that it was a statutory report that had to be presented to Full Council each time there was a change in the political balance.

He said that he wanted to advise members of the appointment of Cllr M Batey as a substitute to an outside body, the Norfolk Records Committee.

It was proposed by Cllr T Adams, seconded by Cllr E Spagnola and

RESOLVED

1. That Council approves the revised political balance calculation as per section 2.6 of this report, noting the removal of an independent non-aligned member from the calculation.
2. That Council approves the allocation of seats to political groups as shown at Appendix A, noting that there is no change to the previous allocation agreed at the meeting of 24 July 2024

45 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CABINET 09 SEPTEMBER 2024

The Leader, Cllr Adams, advised members that there was an error in the first item Budget Monitoring P4, Recommendation 2. Cabinet had agreed the following amendment (in italics) and it was this that Full Council was being asked to approve: Seek approval of Full Council to include an addition to the capital programme in 2024/25 to *the extension and enhancement of the car parking offer in the District, at a location to be identified* and that this is funded from revenue (car park income) (as explained in paragraph 5.6)

Cllr L Shires, Portfolio Holder for Finance, said that she wanted to thank the Overview & Scrutiny Committee for their work in monitoring the Council's budget as agreed in February when the budget was set. She drew members attention to key points in the report, particularly the financial impact of temporary accommodation costs. She referenced section 2.6 to 2.9 which explained the variations. Officers continued to work hard to reduce the deficit.

She then spoke about savings and drew members' attention to the relevant section. Regarding the savings to yet be identified, Cllr Shires said that a list was provided on page 81. She was confident that the remaining savings would be found by the end of the year.

The fall in inflation would impact on the council's investment and this was detailed on page 58, point 4.

In conclusion, regarding the proposals for the public conveniences, she reiterated Cllr Adams' earlier comments that this was the start of the process, not a 'done deal'.

Cllr M Taylor asked Cllr Adams for information on the other options that were being considered for an extension to the car parking offer. Cllr Adams replied that he couldn't give specific details but assured Cllr Taylor that several sites were being looked at and members would be kept updated as matters progressed. Referring to the Meadows car park in Cromer, he said that some concerns had been raised regarding the use of an established open space. In addition, a private car park had opened up nearby recently. He added that concessions were also being reviewed where there was a high footfall. Car parking revenue was supporting the tourism infrastructure and it was important that it was maximised where possible.

Cllr C Cushing raised concerns about the second recommendation from Cabinet, 'Savings – Public Conveniences'. He said that the proposals were causing great concern to residents and he asked whether an impact assessment would be undertaken on the proposed closures and transfers. Cllr Adams replied that the focus was on facilities that had seen the smallest levels of usage and in some of these they were barely used. In Weybourne there were high levels of abuse which was expensive and time-consuming to address. For Stalham, it was clear that it was in the wrong location as usage was low but he wanted to see a facility in the town. Transfer of facilities would be explored where there was a revenue monopoly by businesses or organisations. He added that it was very early in the process and was in advance of the setting of next year's budget.

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

RESOLVED to approve:

Cabinet Agenda Item 11: Budget Monitoring P4 2024 – 2025

- 1) To include a budget of £300k for borrowing costs in 2024/25 and that this be funded by using the Treasury Management Reserve (as explained in paragraph 4.8).
- 2) To include an addition to the capital programme in 2024/25 to *the extension and enhancement of the car parking offer in the District, at a location to be identified* and that this is funded from revenue (car park income) (as explained in paragraph 5.6)

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

RESOLVED to approve

Cabinet Agenda Item 12: Savings Public Conveniences

Option 1 - Full and winter closures is progressed by officers, for the least well used and most aged sites in terms of management or maintenance, to include discussions with town and parish councils and other interested parties, regarding possible transfer of sites, where there is a particular context for doing so.

11 members voted against the recommendations.

The Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Cllr N Dixon, introduced this item. He set out the context of the first recommendation regarding the East of England Ambulance Service Trust. The Committee had tracked ambulance response times in rural areas for some time now and had worked with the Norfolk Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee (NHOSC) for some time to ensure a countywide approach was taken. The Council had very little influence over the drivers behind poor response times and were beyond the reach of the committee to address. However, the committee agreed to look at what could be done to mitigate some of the poor response times and the recommendations reflected this.

He said he had nothing further to add regarding the second recommendation for the North Walsham Heritage Action Zone. He asked the Vice-Chairman, Cllr S Penfold, to update members on recommendations from the meeting of 20th September. He said that they would come through to the next meeting of Full Council. He summarised the outcomes of the meeting which considered recommendations from the Homelessness Task & Finish Group. He thanked the Chairman, Cllr Dr V Holliday and everyone who had supported the process.

Cllr T Adams asked about expectations in the future regarding the Ambulance Service Trust. Cllr Dixon said that the committee would want to monitor the Trust in the future but it would be up to members to decide on specific actions in the future. It was proposed by Cllr N Dixon, seconded by Cllr C Cushing and

RESOLVED to

1. East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust

(A) Request the East of England Ambulance Trust to provide

- (1) the mapping of Community First Responders in North Norfolk to establish where any gaps in the numbers of volunteers are
- (2) communication materials for members of the council to use when talking to their respective Parish and Town Councils about the co-responding and the role of CFRs

(B) the Council

- (1) works with the Norfolk Ambulance Trust to help promote its Campaign on Community First Responders and co responding by signposting members of the public towards the Ambulance Trust's Community First Responders <https://www.eastamb.nhs.uk/join-the-team/volunteering-and-volunteers/community-first-responders>
- (2) encourages the members of the council to talk to their respective Parish and Town Councils on the importance of the work being done by Community First Responders with the aim of increasing the understanding of these roles and seeking to achieve more volunteers to apply for these roles

2. North Walsham High Street Heritage Action Zone

'To update the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in 12 months' time on the impact of the North Walsham High Street Heritage Action Zone initiative and learning from this, to establish a set of evaluation criteria, including baselines, that can then be used for similar projects in other towns in North Norfolk.'

The Chairman of the Constitution Working Party, Cllr A Varley, introduced this item. He began by saying that the Procurement Act was due to be enacted at the end of October 2024, however, this was now delayed due to issues with setting up the new digital platform. He then took members through the key changes that would be implemented to reflect the requirements of the new Act. The bidding process would be more efficient and more transparent. He drew members attention to the increase in the bidding threshold from £5k to £15k.

It was proposed by Cllr A Varley, seconded by Cllr M Batey and

RESOLVED to

- (i) Approve all the proposed changes to the Contract Procedural Rules, namely by approving the newly drafted Contract Procedure Rules, at appendix A, in their entirety.
- (ii) Approve delegation to the Monitoring Officer to make any further necessary changes to the Contract Procedure Rules if required to comply with subsequent Government guidance, policy and updated legislation

48 QUESTIONS RECEIVED FROM MEMBERS

None received.

49 OPPOSITION BUSINESS

The Chairman advised members that there was 30 minutes for this item and then the Motion at Agenda Item 15 on the same topic would be debated. She invited Cllr C Cushing to introduce the item.

Cllr Cushing said that he and Cllr Adams had agreed prior to the meeting that the two motions would be grouped together as they covered the same territory. He began by saying that he could not recall a new Government falling from grace so quickly, despite projected growth in the coming year. Instead, there were predictions of doom and gloom that were being used to justify cruel cuts to pensioners' income. He said that the removal of the winter fuel payment from all pensioners who did not receive pension credit would affect 10m people and save about £1.3bn. This would hit North Norfolk particularly hard, hitting approximately 25,000 pensioners. Rural housing was likely to be older and less energy efficient. Over 70% of rural homes in the UK were built before 1980 with an average of 49.6% energy efficiency and many were not connected to mains gas networks, with many relying on heating oil.

The seconder of the motion, Cllr Dixon, reserved his right to speak.

Cllr T Adams said that his group would be supporting the motion. He explained the position taking so far by the Administration which had been to focus on practical solutions. Over 160 pensioners had now been identified as eligible for pension credit by Council officers. He hoped that the proposed removal of the winter fuel allowance would be reversed now, falling opposition from all quarters. He then referenced the petition which was part of the motion. Whilst the Council could not corporately sign it, he said that he would commit to personally adding his signature and he hoped other members would too.

Cllr Dixon then spoke as seconder of the motion. He welcomed the comments of the Leader and he said that all members would accept that both motions on the agenda were essentially the same and it was important that the needs of residents were at

the forefront of everyone's mind as they voted on this matter.

The Monitoring Officer asked Cllr Cushing if he was willing to change the third bullet point of the last recommendation to:

'Request that members of the Council commit to signing the 'Save the Winter Fuel Payment for Struggling Pensioners' petition being run by Age UK'

Cllr Cushing agreed.

The Chairman invited Cllr Cushing to close the debate. He thanked Cllr Adams for his positive statement and said he was pleased that there was cross-party support on this matter and the Council was doing everything it could to support residents. It was proposed by Cllr C Cushing, seconded by Cllr N Dixon and

RESOLVED to note

- The Labour Government's recent decision to restrict the Winter Fuel Payment to only pensioners in receipt of means-tested benefits like Pension Credit, as announced by Chancellor Rachel Reeves.
- Age UK estimate that 2 million pensioners who badly need the money to stay warm this winter will not receive it. According to a recent EDP article, a total of 25,796 people in North Norfolk could potentially forfeit the payment, giving the district the fourth-highest number of people who could lose it in the UK.
- Energy bills are set to rise by 10 per cent after regulator Ofgem announced it was increasing the price cap for gas and electricity bills. The regulator announced it is hiking its price cap from the current £1,568 for a typical household in England, Scotland and Wales to £1,717, adding around £12 a month to an average bill.
- The significant role that Winter Fuel Payments play in helping older residents of North Norfolk and across the UK afford heating during the coldest months, thereby preventing 'heat or eat' dilemmas and safeguarding health.
- The criticism from Age UK, the Countryside Alliance and other charities, highlighting the social injustice and potential health risks posed by this sudden policy change.
- The additional strain this decision will place on vulnerable pensioners, many of whom do not claim Pension Credit despite being eligible, further exacerbating their financial hardship. This is particularly relevant in North Norfolk which has the oldest demographic of any local authority area in the UK.

This Council believes:

- That the Winter Fuel Payment has been a lifeline for many older people across the UK and that restricting its availability solely to those on Pension Credit risks leaving many pensioners in financial hardship.
- While some pensioners currently in receipt of the Winter Fuel Payment may not require it, many thousands across North Norfolk sit just above the cut-off for Pension Credit and will now lose their allowance. Despite publicity to do so, many pensioners who may be eligible for Pension Credit do not claim it and will be particularly badly hit, a real concern in districts such as North Norfolk with its high percentage of pensioners and this has to be addressed.
- The decision to means-test Winter Fuel Payments, especially with such short notice and without adequate compensatory measures, is deeply unfair and will disproportionately affect the health and well-being of our poorest older residents.
- The government's approach fails to consider the administrative barriers and stigma that prevent eligible pensioners from claiming Pension Credit, leaving many without the support they desperately need.

This Council resolves to:

- To ensure a Council-led local awareness campaign is robust to alert those eligible of Pension Credit which in some respects will help access to the Winter Fuel Payment for those most in need. This should be done using the local press, town and parish magazines and in particular highlighting in the next edition of the NNDC Outlook magazine what help is available and encourages people to claim all benefits to which they are entitled.
- Request that the Leader of the Council, the Members of Parliament for North Norfolk and the Broadland and Fakenham constituencies write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, urging a review of the decision to means-test the Winter Fuel Payment and asking the government to ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who do not claim Pension Credit, are protected from fuel poverty.
- Requests that members of the Council commit to signing the 'Save the Winter Fuel Payment for Struggling Pensioners' petition being run by Age UK and write to all members offering them the opportunity to sign the petition themselves. 'Save the Winter Fuel Payment for Struggling Pensioners' petition: <https://chnng.it/xwVN4SHdHj>
- Encourage local efforts to promote Pension Credit uptake through council services and partnerships with local charities and community organisations to ensure that all eligible pensioners in North Norfolk are supported in claiming their entitlement.

50 NOTICE(S) OF MOTION

As explained earlier, the motion on Winter Fuel Payments would be debated first as it was closely linked to the item of Opposition Business. The Chairman invited the proposer of the motion, Cllr L Withington to introduce it.

Cllr Withington referred member to several slides which set out the reasons for requesting a review and outlined the financial impact on pensioners in the District. She highlighted the number of homes with a D rated Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) and the high levels of households living in fuel poverty. In addition, many were not connected to mains gas. The number of excess winter deaths in Norfolk was also higher than the national average. In conclusion, pensioners in North Norfolk would be particularly impacted by the Government's proposals to remove the winter fuel allowance from everyone not on pension credit. She urged members to support the request to ask the Government to urgently review of the means testing levels of the winter fuel payment scheme.

The seconder of the motion, Cllr W Fredericks, reserved her right to speak.

The Chairman opened up the debate:

Cllr T Adams said that regardless of these changes, there was a role for Government departments to have as much data as was reasonable to help identify people that were eligible for pension credit and any other benefits. Helping to sustain households financially could only be beneficial. He said that Council officers had had meetings with the Department for Work and Pensions and raised this issue.

Cllr L Shires said that she had recently had several conversations with older residents who struggled to put their pride aside and apply for pension credit or ask for assistance with heating their home. Help was available and she urged them to seek it.

The seconder of the motion, Cllr W Fredericks, closed the debate by reiterating Cllr Shires comments and urged residents to contact the Council for assistance. There were specialist teams which could provide support and guidance on all areas. She then asked members to be present in their communities and help residents. Just completing the pension credit application form was difficult.

The proposer of the motion, Cllr L Withington said she had nothing further to add. The Chairman then put the motion to the vote and it was

RESOLVED unanimously

- To submit a letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer urging a review of the winter fuel allowance means test, particularly considering pensioners with incomes below the national living wage.
- To call upon our two local MPs in particular the North Norfolk MP to continue to lobby the Government for this review, emphasizing the potential negative impact on elderly residents in North Norfolk

The Chairman then moved onto the second motion – Temporary Accommodation Costs and Budget Pressures. She invited the proposer, Cllr W Fredericks, to introduce it.

Cllr Fredericks began by saying that there were several reasons why people became homeless. In North Norfolk, the top three were domestic abuse, ending of a private rental tenancy and family and friends no longer being able to provide accommodation. It was not a refugee issue but local residents who were presenting as homeless. Several of the Council's teams were working hard to assist people. It was impossible to anticipate how many people may present to the council as homeless on any given day but there was a duty to support them and find a bed for them until a more sustainable solution could be found. The financial cost of placing a family in nightly paid accommodation for a week was between £350 and £632 per week. The Council received £98 from the Government and the shortfall had to be covered from other budgets. In 2023/2024 NNDC spent £1.3m on nightly paid accommodation. The Government paid £334k and the Council funded the shortfall of £861k. Cllr Fredericks said if the Council had not purchased its own properties for use as a temporary accommodation (26 homes) then the cost would be almost double. Councils across the country faced the same issue. Placing a family in council-owned accommodation could mean in income in rent and fully covered subsidy of housing benefit. She said the increase in costs was crippling and having a heavy impact on the Council. Being able to afford to provide statutory services such as environmental health and waste collection was challenging enough let alone being able to continue to provide non-statutory services such as public toilets.

Cllr Fredericks said that representatives from NNDC had met with the Department for Housing, Levelling Up and Communities (DHLUC) to suggest possible solutions and the Council's work had been recognised nationally for its work in this area. She urged members to support the motion.

The seconder of the motion, Cllr L Shires, reserved her right to speak.

The Chairman opened up the debate to members:

Cllr N Dixon said that this was already a work in progress and had been going on for some time and he was surprised to see a motion coming forward on this matter. He

said the merit in the argument was clear. Cllr Fredericks said that DHLUC visited NNDC in March because of the lobbying and work undertaken by the Council. She said that she would like all members support on this matter as it affected everyone.

Cllr L Withington spoke about a resident that she had supported that day who had fled domestic abuse. The housing team had offered support but it was out of area and not ideal and so the community had stepped in and offered a short term solution. Sadly, this was not an isolated case and it was a huge issue. She said she would like to see members stand together on this and lobby the Government for proper financial support.

51 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

52 PRIVATE BUSINESS

The meeting ended at 7.52 pm.

Chairman