

COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Council of the Bolsover District Council held in the Council Chamber, The Arc, Clowne on Wednesday, 9 October 2024 at 10:00 hours.

PRESENT:-

Members:-

Councillor Tom Munro in the Chair

Councillors Rita Turner (Vice-Chair), David Bennett, Anne Clarke, Rowan Clarke, Amanda Davis, Mary Dooley, Will Fletcher, Louise Fox, Steve Fritchley, Justin Gilbody, Mark Hinman, Cathy Jeffery, Chris Kane, Tom Kirkham, Clive Moesby, Sandra Peake, Jeanne Raspin, Sally Renshaw, John Ritchie, Phil Smith, Emma Stevenson, Janet Tait, Ashley Taylor, Catherine Tite, Vicky Waplington, Deborah Watson, Jen Wilson, Carol Wood and Jane Yates.

Officers:- Karen Hanson (Chief Executive), Steve Brunt (Strategic Director of Services), Jim Fieldsend (Director of Governance and Legal Services & Monitoring Officer), Pam Brown (Director of Executive and Corporate Services), Claire Bamford (Deputy S151 Officer), Fiona Herrington (Deputy S151 Officer), and Angelika Kaufhold (Governance and Civic Manager).

CL40-24/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Donna Hales, Duncan Haywood, Rob Hiney-Saunders and Duncan McGregor.

CL41-24/25 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations made at the meeting.

CL42-24/25 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair extended council's welcome to Angelika Kaufhold, the interim Governance and Civic Manager who had recently joined the council.

The Chair also reminded members and officers that the Annual Civic Dinner was arranged for Friday 29 November 2024 and that menu options were now available and will also be emailed out by the Governance Team. Tickets were available at £40 for the dinner and entertainment. Proceeds would be going to this year's charity which was the Chesterfield Royal Hospital NHS Trust which had done fantastic work in developing a well-being centre open to all its staff.

COUNCIL

CL43-24/25 MINUTES

Moved by Councillor Rita Turner and seconded by Councillor John Ritchie
RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 31 July 2024 be approved as a true and correct record.

CL44-24/25 MOTIONS

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 10, Councillors were able to submit Motions on Notice for consideration at meetings of Council.

Prior to formally moving the motion, Councillor Will Fletcher summarised the concerns received from constituents relating to the removal of the winter fuel payment and shared his concerns as to how this would impact Bolsover residents. Concerns were raised that this not only impacted those who were slightly above the threshold for receiving Pension Credit but also those who chose, for whatever reason, not to claim this benefit despite being entitled.

In response it was confirmed by Councillor Steve Fritchley and Councillor Mary Dooley that the Council was already taking a range of actions with partners to raise awareness, for example on Bolsover TV, including an article in the council's InTouch magazine, guidance on council and other websites as well as information leaflets in a range of places including contact centres.

Following discussion Councillor Will Fletcher agreed that the motion be amended as shown below:

Motion on winter fuel payment

This Council Notes:

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.

The estimated impact of this decision, which Age UK says will mean 2 million pensioners who badly need the money to stay warm this winter will not receive it.

The significant role that Winter Fuel Payments play in helping older residents of Bolsover District 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 Council believes:

COUNCIL

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 Bolsover District sit just above the cut-off for Pension Credit and will now lose their allowance.

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:

~~Bring forward a~~ **acknowledge the** *Council-led local awareness campaign to alert those eligible of Pension Credit which in some respects will help access to the Winter Fuel Payment for those most in need.*

Request that the Council Leader 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.

~~Commit the Council 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.~~

~~Encourage~~ **to acknowledge the council's** *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 Bolsover District are supported in claiming their entitlement.*

Councillor Will Fletcher moved the motion, and it was seconded by Councillor Carol Wood.

On being put to the vote the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that this Council:

- (1) acknowledges the Council-led local awareness campaign to alert those eligible of Pension Credit which in some respects will help access to the Winter Fuel Payment for those most in need;
- (2) requests the Council Leader 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; and

COUNCIL

- (3) acknowledges the council's 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 Bolsover District are supported in claiming their entitlement.

CL45-24/25 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Council considered a report relating to the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, members' approval for the Medium-Term Financial Strategy which set out the Council's strategic approach for the management of its finances over the next few years. This strategy related purely to the General Fund as the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) assumptions were based on a 30-year business plan.

Councillor Moesby introduced the report and outlined the main reasons for the recommendations including:-

- the strategy was designed to outline the council's strategic approach to setting and managing its General Fund budget;
- the legal requirement for the Council to set and deliver a balanced and robust budget;
- anticipation that the Council would not receive confirmation of the Government's settlement until after the Autumn Spending Review and this would likely be a one year settlement;
- the Council's intention for the maximum council tax increase of 2.99% (below the threshold where a referendum would be required)
- Maintenance of a financial reserve of £2m which equated to 14% (the CIPFA guidance was between 5% to 100%). The level of the reserve would be monitored.

Moved by Councillor Clive Moesby and seconded by Councillor Steve Fritchley
RESOLVED that the:

- (1) Medium-Term Financial Strategy be approved;
- (2) General Fund revenue base budget continued to be funded from the full amount of New Homes Bonus (and related grants such as Services Grant) allocated by Government;
- (3) Council continued to be a member of the Derbyshire Business Rates Pool whilst it remained financially advantageous for the Council to do so;
- (4) strategic intention to raise Council Tax by the maximum allowed in any given year, without triggering the need for a Council Tax referendum, be set; and
- (5) minimum level of Balances for the Resources Fund of £2m be maintained.

CL46-24/25 SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

COUNCIL

Council considered a report presented by Councillor Catherine Tite which summarised the work of the Scrutiny Committees and reviews which had taken place during 2023/24 as well as tracking the recommendations agreed by the Executive. The Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

Moved by Councillor Catherine Tite and seconded by Councillor David Bennett
RESOLVED that the Annual Report of the Scrutiny Committee's activities, in accordance with the Council's Constitution be noted.

CL47-24/25 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EMPLOYMENT AND PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

Council considered a report of the Chair of the Employment and Personnel Committee presented by Councillor Deborah Watson (Vice-Chair), which sought agreement for budget increases for the establishment a new customer services post and restructure of the Governance team which had been agreed at the Employment and Personnel Committee on 11 September 2024

The proposals agreed at the Employment and Personnel Committee required an increase to the Council's General Fund budget as follows:

- Establishment of a full-time Customer Advisor/Complaints Administrator as a Grade 5 post necessitating an increased budget of £26,072.09.
- Replacement of the 0.6 FTE Governance & Civic Manager and 0.4 FTE Governance & Civic Manager/0.6 FTE Governance & Civic Officer with 1 FTE Governance & Civic Manager as a Grade 10 post.
- The establishment of 1 FTE Senior Governance & Civic Officer as a Grade 7 post. These changes necessitated an increased budget of £36,641.

Moved by Councillor Deborah Watson and seconded by Councillor Mary Dooley
RESOLVED that the increase in salary budgets as recommended by the Employment and Personnel Committee on 11 September 2024 be approved.

CL48-24/25 PROPORTIONALITY AND APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES AND ADVISORY GROUPS

Council considered a report presented by the Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer, relating to proportionality and appointments to committees and advisory groups. It was confirmed that there had been a change to the political make-up of the Council in August 2024. When changes to the political balance take place then council was required to decide the allocation of seats to political groups in accordance with the Political Balance rules as set out in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

The political makeup of the Council had changed to: Labour 31 Councillors, Conservative – 2 Councillors, Reform – 1 Councillor, and three independent Councillors.

COUNCIL

It was confirmed that whilst there had been a change to the numbers in political groups of the Council the current committee allocation still met the legal requirements of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 so no further changes to committee memberships was recommended.

Moved by Councillor Steve Fritchley and seconded by Councillor Will Fletcher

RESOLVED that the proportionality of committee places as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, and the continuation of the current committee places allocation as set out in Appendix 2 to the report be noted.

CL49-24/25 COUNCIL CHAMBER AUDIO VISUAL SOLUTION

Council considered a report presented by Councillor Clive Moesby Portfolio Holder – Resources, which sought approval for the purchase of new audio-visual equipment to make the council chamber fit for purpose. It was confirmed that this was project was instigated in response to recommendations submitted to the Executive following the scrutiny review of Member’s ICT and support and ICT Service Delivery.

The Executive had approved a key finding requesting an urgent review of the ICT equipment in the chamber and meeting rooms and further feedback was received from a Member’s working group which confirmed that members were experiencing issues with the quality of the microphones and sound quality of the speakers.

The existing audio visual equipment was over 9 years old and no longer manufactured or supported and could not be configured to enable automatic streaming or recording. It was therefore proposed to procure a new solution and a demonstration of a possible solution was provided to the Leader, Deputy Leader, Senior Managers and Governance in May 2024.

This project was likely to cost in the region of £180,000 which would be financed from the Council’s ICT Reserve. The maintenance of the system would be £5,000 per annum which would be added as a cost to the Council’s General Fund.

Moved by Councillor Clive Moesby and seconded by Councillor Steve Fritchley

RESOLVED that approval be given:

- (1) to fund the purchase of audio-visual equipment to make the Council Chamber fit-for-purpose with a budget of £180,000 from the ICT Reserve; and
- (2) to increase the revenue budget by £5,000 per annum to cover the maintenance of the system.

CL50-24/25 CHAIRMAN'S CLOSING REMARKS

The Chair reminded members that the Civic Dinner options would be emailed out by the Governance Team.

COUNCIL

The meeting concluded at 10:47 hours.