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NORTH EAST LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING HELD ON

12th December 2024

Present: Councillor Beasant (in the Chair)

Councillors Aisthorpe, Augusta, Bonner, Boyd, Bright, Cairns, Clough, Cracknell, Crofts, Dawkins, Downes, Emmerson, Farren, Freeston, Harness, Hasthorpe, Henderson, Holland, Hudson, Humphrey, Jackson, Jervis, Kaczmarek, Lindley, Mill, Morland, Parkinson, Patrick, Pettigrew, Shepherd, Shreeve, Shutt, Silvester, K Swinburn, S Swinburn, Wheatley and Wilson.

Officers in Attendance:

- Rob Walsh (Chief Executive)
- Zoe Campbell (Senior Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)
- David Humm (Civic Chauffeur and Assistant)
- Simon Jones (Assistant Director Law and Governance - Monitoring Officer)
- Jo Paterson (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)
- Eve Richardson Smith (Deputy Monitoring Officer)
- Paul Windley (Democratic and Scrutiny Team Manager)
- Sharon Wroot (Executive Director Place and Resources)

The proceedings were opened with prayers by the Mayor's Chaplain.

NEL.50 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor reminded Members that this meeting was being broadcast and advised on meeting requirements.

NEL.51 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from this meeting were received from Councillors Brookes, Goodwin, Haggis and Mickleburgh.

NEL.52 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of North East Lincolnshire Council held on 26th September 2024 and the special meeting on 30th October 2024 be approved as a correct record.

NEL.53 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Emmerson declared a non-registrable interest in NEL.58 as he was in receipt of a single person Council Tax discount.

NEL.54 QUESTION TIME

The following question was submitted by Mr Bate to Councillor Jackson, Leader of the Council:

*Corporation Bridge - significant overspend over several years.
Children's services - significant overspend over several years.
Will the Leader of the Council assure myself and residents of North East Lincolnshire that the lessons learned from the aforementioned have resulted in realistic budgets, including contingency funds, being set for all current and upcoming projects within the borough, so as to ensure best value is achieved from taxpayer's contributions?*

Councillor Jackson responded that he did not entirely agree with the premise of Mr Bate's question but the answer was yes.

The following question was submitted by Mr Bate to Councillor Jackson, Leader of the Council:

Recent figures shared in the media regarding the reduction in crime in the town centre over the past 12 months is very encouraging. In order to provide context, will the Leader of the council be providing figures to the media and public clarifying over the same 12-month period, month by month, a) the number of trading businesses in operation, b) the number of business closures, c) proportion of vacant units, and d) public footfall?

Councillor Jackson responded that, for reference on 2nd December 2024 an article in the Grimsby Telegraph reported that since the Safer Streets 5 initiative was launched by North East Lincolnshire Council and its partners in late 2023, alcohol-related anti-social behaviour (ASB) in St James' Square has dropped by 88 percent, and by 35 percent in Grimsby town centre as a whole.

The Safer Streets initiative had been run in conjunction with several other activities which aimed to improve the look and feel of Victoria Street to ultimately improve the perception of our town centre; namely street cleaning, new planting, and planned permanent lighting funded through the High Street Accelerator and Green Spaces Fund. The council collected data on vacant town centre properties for the area between Wellowgate and the railway line on Pasture Street, all the streets between, across to Alexandra Road and the Victoria Street junction at Frederick Ward Way – that currently included 364 ground and first floor business premises. For the period October 2023 to September 2024 there had been little change in the number of vacant units, with 87 (24%) vacant in quarter three of 2023, and 92 (25%) in quarter two of 2024. A full breakdown of the four previous quarters was available. The Council had been successful in securing new tenants to Freshney Place, seeing the return of Clarks and New Look this year. The Community Diagnostics Hub would be opening in the new year, bringing five currently recorded vacant units back into use. Other buildings which had been vacant for some time were currently under development, such as St James House and the former Royal Bank of Scotland buildings, and some had been acquired by the council for redevelopment (such as the five vacant properties earmarked for the transport hub, the former House of Fraser and the former British Home Stores). A new initiative funded through the Activation and Community Engagement Fund, the High Street Revival Fund, involved working with local agents, landlords and the E-Factor business support team to bring targeted properties back into use through a range of incentives.

Footfall data was collated at different locations in Grimsby Town Centre - Victoria Street/East St Mary's Gate, St James Square, Riverhead Square and Freshney Place. The council used Victoria Street as the central location for statistics outside Freshney Place to avoid double counting. Victoria Street footfall figures for the period November 2023 to October 2024 were 3.3m against 3.2m the previous year, a drop of 4%. Freshney Place footfall for the period November 2023 to October 2024 was 6.3m against 6.6m in the previous year, a drop of 6%. Freshney Place footfall was down due to the fact that the council had purposefully emptied a large section of the centre for the redevelopment. Whilst footfall was slightly down, it appeared that people that visit were generally spending rather than just visiting. Perhaps the best evidence to support that assertion was the fact so many of our tenants were wanting to stay (as well as expecting the leisure scheme to go ahead). Also, the opening of the Community Diagnostic Centre alone would nearly close all that gap. Victoria Street footfall was slightly down for similar reasons; the top end was just as reliant on the leisure scheme coming forward, where there were a number of properties standing vacant pending redevelopment. Finally, whilst the projects were all coming together, it was a matter of fact that St James House, Horizon Youth Zone and the Community Diagnostic Centre, whilst well advanced, were not yet open. All would bring with them new reasons for people to visit the town centre.

The following question was submitted by Mr Silkstone to Councillor Jackson, Leader of the Council:

I lead on a petition as there was strength of feeling on 27 Douglas Road, Cleethorpes and the surrounding streets that whilst we fully understand that there is a need for housing, this was a family home which had long term tenants residing in it for over 14 years. The general feeling is that this small house is a terrace property and if occupied as a House of Multiple Occupation has potential to cause many issues. For example, parking, health and safety fire risks and noise to name a few. When we had our meeting in March of this year, we were listened to and we put our points across to the council why it should be left as a small, terraced house for family to live in. The outcome of the meeting was that Councillor Jackson would write a report and send this as a formal response to the petition.

So, my question to Councillor Jackson, where is this report? Myself and Councillor Farren have chased this report as this issue has been going on since November 2023. Please can you provide a timeline.

Councillor Jackson responded that the petition was presented to him when he had the housing portfolio which was now under the remit of Councillor S Swinburn, and he would be taking the matter forward. He noted that the report was complete and was currently working its way through the statutory council process for release. A full response to the petition would be provided early in the new year. Additionally, the council had established a Cabinet Working Party to address concerns around houses in multiple occupation. This petition would feed into the working group and provide valuable evidence for the group to consider.

NEL.55 LEADERS STATEMENT

The Council received a statement from the Leader of the Council.

The Leader opened his statement by commenting on the Freshney Place Leisure Scheme, which he felt was probably the most important regeneration project in the history of North East Lincolnshire. The Leader noted that work had started on a major housing development at the former Western School site following completion of the land agreement with Keepmoat. He explained how funding from Homes England had been used to progress the development. This had further strengthened the council's working relationship with Keepmoat which was also developing a scheme for 130 homes on the brownfield Alexandra Dock site in Grimsby town centre.

The Leader turned to Greater Lincolnshire devolution, noting that the legislation that would bring the devolution deal to life was going through the parliamentary process. The mayoral Combined County Authority would be formed in the new year and in advance of the inaugural mayoral election in May. In the coming weeks the Government was expected to publish a White Paper on devolution.

The Leader felt that North East Lincolnshire was well placed in the devolution conversation because of the deal that had been signed with Ministers.

The Leader referred to two important public consultations that had been agreed by Cabinet. The first was the second stage consultation on the Library and Archive service review. Cabinet wanted to hear the public's view on what they expect from the service so it could be targeted and enhanced whilst improving efficiency. He stressed that no decisions had yet been made on the future of any of our libraries, but he did confirm that there was no intention to demolish the library in Grimsby town centre, as had been rumoured in various publications in the area. The second was a public consultation on a selective licensing trial, largely in the East Marsh ward. The aim was to improve the quality of private rented housing and the environment in the area and would provide valuable experience that could be used as and when similar schemes were rolled out across other parts of the borough. This was in line with the council's housing strategy.

Following the announcement on the retirement of the council's Chief Executive, the Leader paid tribute to Mr Walsh, noting that his determination, integrity and a work ethic had put North East Lincolnshire front and centre on the regional and national stage. His personal and professional skills had ensured this borough had attracted an unprecedented level of investment, which had been significant in overcoming the challenges and grasping the opportunities that North East Lincolnshire faced. The Leader took the opportunity to totally refute the suggestion by G1 Media that Mr Walsh had been pressurised into early retirement because of any alleged performance issues within the authority.

The Leader commented that, as a very busy 2024 drew to a close, this administration was delivering for the residents of North East Lincolnshire with positive change and exciting new developments. He concluded by wishing everyone a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year. He noted that the latest council action tracking report had been circulated and no special urgency decisions had been taken by Cabinet or portfolio holders since the last ordinary meeting of the council.

NEL.56 COUNCIL PLAN 2025 - 2028

The Council considered a report from the Leader of the Council seeking adoption of the new Council Plan 2025-2028. This report was considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 11th December 2024

RESOLVED – That the Council Plan be approved and adopted.

NEL.57 FRESHNEY PLACE LEISURE SCHEME

The Council considered a report from the Leader of the Council providing detail and recommendations around the next steps to progress the Freshney Place

Leisure Scheme. This report was considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 11th December 2024. An addendum to the report was circulated at the meeting.

Councillor Jackson moved the recommendations in the report. This was seconded by Councillor Shreeve.

Councillor Henderson proposed the following amendment:

That a decision is deferred until members have had an opportunity to sight an updated business case, which provides greater transparency on the project and wider scheme, so that members can better make an informed and correct decision.

The updated business case should provide:

1. More clarity on the intended future of the library and the impact on other town centre regeneration schemes
2. An impact assessment of the use of other funding streams and the impact on borrowing if those funding streams are retained for their original purpose
3. An assessment of best and worst case future borrowing requirements
4. Consideration of potential exit strategies for the Freshney Place development
5. An appraisal of other options for town centre regeneration
6. Updated value for money calculations.

The amendment was seconded by Councillor Bright. Following a debate, the amendment was put to the vote. A recorded vote was requested in accordance with the requirements of the Council's Standing Orders. The votes cast were recorded as follows:

For the amendment:

Councillors Augusta, Bonner, Bright, Clough, Downes, Farren, Freeston, Henderson, Holland, Humphrey, Jervis, Kaczmarek, Mill, Morland, Patrick, Shutt, Wheatley and Wilson (18 votes).

Against the amendment:

Councillors Aisthorpe, Beasant, Boyd, Cairns, Cracknell, Crofts, Dawkins, Emmerson, Harness, Hasthorpe, Hudson, Jackson, Lindley, Parkinson, Pettigrew, Shepherd, Shreeve, Silvester, K Swinburn and S Swinburn (20 votes).

The amendment was declared lost.

Councillor Aisthorpe proposed an amendment that, in addition to the motion proposed by Councillor Jackson, a cross party working group be formed to have oversight of the council's ongoing regeneration programme, including the Freshney Place Leisure Scheme. The regeneration programme oversight group would include councillors from all four political groups, reflecting the political

balance on the council. It would not be a substitute for the formal scrutiny arrangements or the Freshney Place Cabinet committee. Rather it would be a vehicle for ensuring regular cross party involvement, challenge and review of the council's regeneration programme, including engagement with leading officers and advisors. The terms of reference of the working Group and cross party membership would be delegated to the Chief Executive to finalise, in consultation with the group leaders, with the first meeting to take place by the end of February 2025, meeting on a bi-monthly basis thereafter.

The amendment was seconded by Councillor Emmerson. Following a debate, the amendment was put to the vote. A recorded vote was requested in accordance with the requirements of the Council's Standing Orders. The votes cast were recorded as follows:

For the amendment:

Councillors Aisthorpe, Beasant, Boyd, Cairns, Cracknell, Crofts, Dawkins, Emmerson, Freeston, Harness, Hasthorpe, Hudson, Jackson, Lindley, Parkinson, Pettigrew, Shepherd, Shreeve, Silvester, K Swinburn and S Swinburn (21 votes).

Against the amendment:

Councillors Augusta, Bonner, Bright, Clough, Downes, Farren, Henderson, Holland, Humphrey, Jervis, Kaczmarek, Mill, Morland, Patrick, Shutt, Wheatley and Wilson (17 votes).

The amendment was declared carried.

The substantive motion as amended was then debated. During the course of the debate, the Mayor moved that the Council's Standing Orders governing the length of meetings be suspended to permit this meeting to continue beyond 10.00 p.m. This was seconded by Councillor Jackson. Upon a show of hands, the motion was carried and it was:

RESOLVED - That the Council's Standing Orders governing the length of meetings be suspended to permit this meeting to continue beyond 10.00 p.m.

Councillor Wilson requested that his vote against the suspension of standing orders be recorded in the minutes.

The Mayor then moved the exclusion of the press and public to allow Council to consider the exempt appendix to the report. On being put to the vote, a recorded vote was requested in accordance with the requirements of the Council's Standing Orders. The votes cast were recorded as follows:

For the motion:

Councillors Aisthorpe, Augusta, Beasant, Bonner, Bright, Clough, Emmerson, Farren, Holland, Humphrey, Jervis, Mill, Morland, Patrick, Shutt, Wheatley and Wilson (17 votes).

Against the motion:

Councillors Boyd, Cairns, Cracknell, Crofts, Dawkins, Downes, Freeston, Harness, Hasthorpe, Henderson, Hudson, Jackson, Kaczmarek, Lindley, Parkinson, Pettigrew, Shepherd, Shreeve, Silvester, K Swinburn and S Swinburn (21 votes).

The debate continued in open session. The substantive motion, as amended, was put to the vote. A recorded vote was requested in accordance with the requirements of the Council's Standing Orders. The votes cast were recorded as follows:

For the motion:

Councillors Aisthorpe, Beasant, Boyd, Cairns, Cracknell, Crofts, Dawkins, Emmerson, Harness, Hasthorpe, Hudson, Jackson, Lindley, Parkinson, Pettigrew, Shepherd, Shreeve, Silvester, K Swinburn and S Swinburn (20 votes).

Against the motion:

Councillors Augusta, Bonner, Bright, Clough, Downes, Farren, Freeston, Henderson, Holland, Humphrey, Jervis, Kaczmarek, Mill, Morland, Patrick, Shutt, Wheatley and Wilson (18 votes).

RESOLVED –

1. That in receiving the Cabinet Report of 11th December 2024, the analysis of the increased budgetary ask be acknowledged and a variance to the 2024/2025 budget policy to facilitate and meet such ask be approved.
2. That the Executive Director Place and Resources, acting as Section 151 Officer, be authorised to:
 - a. increase the Council's capital programme budget from £30.9m to £49.96m.
 - b. increase the external borrowing requirement of the Council by £11.26m.
 - c. undertake further borrowing as may reasonably be required, subject to such borrowing being affordable from within the Freshney Place budget envelope.
 - d. subject to any external grant conditions, to deal with the reallocation of Towns Fund monies of £3.7m to the Freshney Place Leisure Scheme.

3. That a cross party working group be formed to have oversight of the council's ongoing regeneration programme, including the Freshney Place Leisure Scheme.
4. That finalisation of the terms of reference of the working group and cross party membership be delegated to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the group leaders, with the first meeting to take place by the end of February 2025, meeting on a bi-monthly basis thereafter.

There was a brief adjournment of the meeting at this point.

NEL.58 CALCULATION OF THE COUNCIL TAX BASE FOR 2025/26

The Council considered a report from the report from the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets on the setting of the Council Tax Base for 2025/26 and outlining the proposed Council Tax Support Scheme for the forthcoming year. This report was considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 11th December 2024.

RESOLVED –

1. That the proposed changes to the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2025/2026, which maintains the maximum discount of 65% for all working age residents, be supported.
1. That the implementation of the Foster Carer discount be supported.
2. That the Council Tax Base for the Council and other precepting bodies in 2025/2026 be set at 47,205.5 Band D equivalents (as detailed in Appendix A of the report now submitted).

NEL.59 TREASURY H1 REPORT 2024-25

The Council considered a report from the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets containing details of treasury management arrangements, activity and performance during the 2024-25 financial year. This report was considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 11th December 2024.

RESOLVED – That the treasury management activity during 2024-25 be noted.

NEL.60 STATUTORY OFFICER DESIGNATIONS

The Council considered a report from the Chief Executive seeking confirmation of Statutory Officer Designations relating to the appointment of a Statutory Scrutiny Officer and a Deputy Electoral Registration Officer for North East Lincolnshire Council.

Note – Mr Jones left the meeting during consideration of this item.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Assistant Director Policy Strategy and Resources be designated as the Council's Scrutiny Officer for the purposes of Section 31 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 with immediate effect.
2. That the Assistant Director for Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer) for North East Lincolnshire Council be appointed as Deputy Electoral Registration Officer with immediate effect.

NEL.61 APPOINTMENT OF GREATER LINCOLNSHIRE COMBINED COUNTY AUTHORITY RETURNING OFFICER AND THE APPOINTMENT OF THE LOCAL RETURNING OFFICER FOR THE MAYORAL ELECTION ON 1 MAY 2025

The Council considered a report from the Monitoring Officer on the appointment of a Greater Lincolnshire Combined County Authority Returning Officer and a local Returning Officer for the proposed Greater Lincolnshire Combined County Authority Mayoral elections on 1 May 2025.

Note – Mr Walsh and Ms Wroot left the meeting during consideration of this item.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Chief Executive of North East Lincolnshire Council be appointed as the first combined county authority returning officer for the proposed election of mayor on 1 May 2025, in accordance with Article 10 of the Combined Authorities (Mayoral Elections) Order 2017.
2. That the Executive Director Place and Resources be appointed as local returning officer for North East Lincolnshire for the proposed election of mayor on 1 May 2025.

NEL.62 DISPENSATION – SECTION 85 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

The Council considered a report from the Chief Executive recommending the provision of a special dispensation under Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972.

RESOLVED – That a special dispensation be granted to Councillor Janet Haggis until 31st July 2025, in accordance with Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972, for health reasons.

NEL.63 NOTICE OF MOTION 1

The Council considered a Notice of Motion, proposed by Councillor Shreeve and seconded by Councillor Lindley, submitted in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders as set out below:

Council notes the proposed closure of the main Post Office in Grimsby Town centre. This proposal coming at a time when footfall in the town centre is increasing will leave Grimsby with no central post office and present considerable inconvenience and hardship for residents who rely on it, especially those who use the Post Office to draw their pensions and manage their banking.

Apart from the general postal services offered, specialist services for parcels, payment of bills, assistance with passport renewals, driving licence applications amongst many other matters will no longer be available to our residents. This will mean that many who rely on these services, especially our older residents who may not have other access to these services will have nowhere to go for help. It is also worth mentioning that the Post Office still allows cash to be paid in when the remaining high street banks do not.

The closure comes at a time of major redevelopment of the town centre with expected increase in footfall from the Freshney Place leisure scheme, Community Diagnostic Centre and the Horizon Youth Zone. In addition, the redevelopment of St James House will have a positive impact on town centre footfall. All of these developments will improve Post Office viability. Taking these factors into account, the closure is all the more disappointing

This Council therefore resolves to write to the Secretary of State for Business and Trade and the Chairman of the Post Office, objecting in the strongest terms to the proposed closure and urging that the closure proposal is reversed.

An amendment to the Motion had been received, in accordance with the Constitution, and was moved by Councillor Wheatley, seconded by Councillor Mill, requesting that the following be added to the end of the text:

This council also welcomes the work being carried out by the MP for Grimsby and Cleethorpes with regards to the actions already taken to protect Grimsby post office from closure, including the setting up of a petition and resolves to work collaboratively with her in future endeavours to prevent the proposed closure.

Members debated this amendment and at the conclusion of the debate, the amendment was put to the vote. A recorded vote was held in accordance with the requirements of the Council's Standing Orders; the votes cast were recorded as follows:

For the amendment:

Councillors Augusta, Bright, Clough, Downes, Emmerson, Farren, Humphrey, Jervis, Kaczmarek, Mill, Morland, Parkinson, Patrick, Pettigrew, Shutt, Wheatley and Wilson (17 votes).

Against the amendment:

Councillors Aisthorpe, Beasant, Bonner, Boyd, Cairns, Cracknell, Crofts, Dawkins, Freeston, Harness, Hasthorpe, Henderson, Holland, Hudson, Jackson, Lindley, Shepherd, Shreeve, Silvester, K Swinburn and S Swinburn (21 votes).

Therefore, the amendment was declared lost and the debate returned to the substantive motion. Following the debate, and with the agreement of Council, a vote on the substantive motion was taken on a show of hands. Upon a show of hands, the substantive motion was agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED – That this Council writes to the Secretary of State for Business and Trade and the Chairman of the Post Office, objecting in the strongest terms to the proposed closure of the main post office in Grimsby town centre and urging that the closure proposal is reversed.

NEL.64 NOTICE OF MOTION 2

The Council considered a Notice of Motion, proposed by Councillor Holland and seconded by Councillor Henderson, submitted in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders as set out below

The United Kingdom as a whole is facing a looming public health crisis. As of April 2024, 2.8 million people of working age or 7% of the workforce were unable to work due to long term health problems. Poor public health and associated economic inactivity is a key cause for concern because in addition to the personal consequences it restricts labour supply and economic growth. Due to a number of factors, including the increase in retirement age to 67, some studies show that the total number unable to work due to long-term ill health could increase by up to 50% over the next 5 years.

In some areas of our Borough, it is evident that a public health crisis already exists and that is reflected in our published health statistics. This Council recognises that more can and must be done as a matter of urgency in helping improve the physical and mental health of people within our Borough of all ages. To work towards achieving that goal, the Council will:

A. Declare itself to be a 'Public Health Council'.

B. Establish a cross-party Cabinet working group which will advise Cabinet before 31st July 2025 on the feasibility of North East Lincolnshire Council becoming a 'Marmot' Place with the adoption of some or all of the 'Marmot' principles and their practical implementation as below:

- 1. Give every child the best start in life.*
- 2. Enable all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives.*
- 3. Create fair employment and good work for all.*
- 4. Ensure a healthy standard of living for all.*
- 5. Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities.*
- 6. Strengthen the role and impact of ill health prevention.*
- 7. Tackle racism, discrimination and their outcomes.*
- 8. Pursue environmental sustainability and health equity together.*

Following a debate, a recorded vote was held in accordance with the requirements of the Council's Standing Orders. The votes cast were recorded as follows:

For the motion:

Councillors Aisthorpe, Augusta, Bonner, Boyd, Bright, Cairns, Clough, Cracknell, Crofts, Dawkins, Downes, Emmerson, Farren, Harness, Hasthorpe, Henderson, Holland, Hudson, Humphrey, Jackson, Jervis, Kaczmarek, Lindley, Mill, Morland, Parkinson, Patrick, Pettigrew, Shepherd, Shreeve, Shutt, Silvester, K Swinburn, S Swinburn, Wheatley and Wilson (37 votes).

Against the motion:

Councillor Freeston (1 vote).

The motion was therefore carried and it was:

RESOLVED –

1. That North East Lincolnshire Council declare itself to be a 'Public Health Council'.
2. That a cross-party Cabinet working group be established to advise Cabinet before 31st July 2025 on the feasibility of North East Lincolnshire Council becoming a 'Marmot' Place with the adoption of some or all of the 'Marmot' principles and their practical implementation as below:

- Give every child the best start in life.
- Enable all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives.
- Create fair employment and good work for all.
- Ensure a healthy standard of living for all.
- Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities.
- Strengthen the role and impact of ill health prevention.
- Tackle racism, discrimination and their outcomes.
- Pursue environmental sustainability and health equity together.

NEL.65 NOTICE OF MOTION 3

The Council considered a Notice of Motion, proposed by Councillor Farren and seconded by Councillor Patrick, submitted in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders as set out below

Violence against women and girls has been a systemic issue in society for countless decades, and no area more so than in North East Lincolnshire. It is only recently that it has started to become more widely acknowledged within the public awareness and agenda.

It is to the tribute of many local fantastic volunteers in years gone by that support has been available to women and their children who have been victims of abuse, and we owe a debt of thanks to the trail blazers that made this happen, like Sylvia Moss, Anne Pask, and many others that lead the fight for a place of refuge that was opened, grown and thrives to this day.

Further tribute must be paid to the staff and volunteers that continue to make all this possible, which at times is emotionally and physically exhausting, but makes a massive difference in the lives of those they provide vital support to.

There are no reliable prevalence data on domestic abuse, but the Crime Survey of England and Wales (CSEW) offers the best data available. In November 2023, the latest figures, to the year ending March 2023, found that around one in four women (27%) have experienced domestic abuse since the age of 16. For men, the figure is around one in seven (13.9%). For partner abuse only, the figures are 22.7% for women and 10.2% for men (ONS, 2023). However, as noted above, all of these figures are likely to significantly underestimate gender asymmetry.

The latest figures also found that an estimated 1.4m women experienced domestic abuse in the previous year. Although this number is lower than the year prior to this (an estimated 1.7m women in the year ending March 2022), this does not represent a statistically significant change, due to an error in the survey in the year ending March 2023 (ONS, 2023). However, it is also important to note that this data does not take into account important context and impact information, such as whether the violence caused fear, who the repeat victims were, and who experienced violence in a context of power and control.

In the year ending December 2023, the police recorded a domestic abuse offence approximately every 40 seconds (ONS, 2024).

According to CSEW data for the year ending March 2023, only 18.9% of women who had experienced partner abuse in the last 12 months reported the abuse to the police (ONS, 2023).

In 2023/24, there were 623 recorded sexual offences across North East Lincolnshire, a 7.2% increase from 2022/23.

Additionally, both domestic abuse crimes and crimes recorded as violence against women and girls rose by 28% from 2022/23. Figures released in response to a Freedom of Information Request (FOI) made by Melanie Onn MP showed a similar picture between January and August of 2024.

In the first 8 months of this year, 2,212 arrests were made for violence against women and girls in Humberside, with 3,117 arrests for domestic violence.

Whilst any act of violence is unacceptable, the growing figures are a devastating trend, and to that end, local women and girls are fighting back with the start of the newly formed 'North East Lincolnshire Reclaim the Night'.

This forms part of the 16 Days of Action, an international campaign to raise awareness of issues around violence against women and girls. It runs from 25th November (the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women) to the 10th December (Human Rights Day).

Council resolves to:

- Give our unwavering support in the campaign to end violence against women and girls.*
- Welcome the creation of the 'North East Lincolnshire Reclaim the Night' in their campaign to help make women and girls safer.*
- Congratulate North East Lincolnshire Reclaim the Night on their community event, marching from Nun's Corner to Grimsby Town centre and wish them every success in future.*

An amendment to the Motion had been received, in accordance with the Constitution, and was moved by Councillor Aisthorpe, seconded by Councillor Emmerson, as follows:

Replace the word 'congratulate' in the third bullet point with 'Welcome', so the revised text reads:-

- *Welcome the North East Lincolnshire Reclaim the Night on their community event, marching from Nun's Corner to Grimsby Town centre and wish them every success in future."*

Add the following additional bullet points:-

- *Extend an invitation to all councillors, across all parties, to participate in future Reclaim the Night walks and stand united in solidarity.*
- *Ensure future Reclaim the Night walks are scheduled at times that do not conflict with other council responsibilities, such as mandatory training sessions or other important council meetings.*
- *Endorse becoming a White Ribbon Accredited authority.*
- *Appoint a white ribbon Champion and Ambassador within the council to lead accreditation efforts and oversee ongoing compliance.*
- *Write to the Secretary of State for Justice and the Home Secretary urging changes to the early release criteria and sentencing guidelines, ensuring domestic abuse is appropriately recognised and penalised, and to exclude domestic abuse offenders from early release.*

Members debated this amendment and, on the advice of the Monitoring Officer, it was agreed to remove the first two additional bullet points as they were beyond the remit of Council. At the conclusion of the debate on the amendment, it was put to the vote. A recorded vote was held in accordance with the requirements of the Council's Standing Orders; the votes cast were recorded as follows:

For the amendment:

Councillors Aisthorpe, Augusta, Beasant, Bonner, Boyd, Bright, Cairns, Clough, Cracknell, Crofts, Dawkins, Downes, Emmerson, Farren, Freeston, Harness, Hasthorpe, Henderson, Holland, Hudson, Humphrey, Jackson, Jervis, Kaczmarek, Lindley, Mill, Morland, Patrick, Pettigrew, Shepherd, Shreeve, Shutt, Silvester, K Swinburn, S Swinburn, Wheatley and Wilson (37 votes).

Against the amendment:

None.

Therefore, the amendment was declared carried. With the agreement of Council, a vote on the substantive motion as amended was taken on a show of hands. Upon a show of hands, the substantive motion was agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED –

1. That this Council gives its unwavering support in the campaign to end violence against women and girls.

2. That this Council welcomes the creation of the 'North East Lincolnshire Reclaim the Night' in their campaign to help make women and girls safer.
3. That this Council welcomes the North East Lincolnshire Reclaim the Night community event, marching from Nun's Corner to Grimsby Town centre, and wishes them every success in future.
4. That this Council endorses becoming a White Ribbon Accredited authority.
5. That a white ribbon Champion and Ambassador be appointed within the council to lead accreditation efforts and oversee ongoing compliance.
6. That this Council writes to the Secretary of State for Justice and the Home Secretary urging changes to the early release criteria and sentencing guidelines, ensuring domestic abuse is appropriately recognised and penalised, and to exclude domestic abuse offenders from early release.

Note – Councillor Patrick left the meeting at this point.

NEL.66 QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The Chair invited Councillor Augusta to present the following question to the Councillor Dawkins, Portfolio Holder for Culture, Heritage and the Visitor Economy the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.

Does the portfolio holder plan to proceed with the project and see further redevelopment and utilisation at Barrett's Recreation ground as laid out in the council's playing pitch strategy 2020-2032? This plan would expand and diversify our sporting provision across North East Lincolnshire. We have seen success with parts of this strategy including tennis court at Barrett's and the facilities at Clee Fields. In the strategy, a recommendation was made to perform a feasibility study on the merger of the old Scartho Baths site and Barrett's Recreation ground to create a sporting hub which would be in an ideal location to service several communities from wards including Park, Scartho and South. It also will turn the sites that are currently underutilised into a centre for the sporting community here in North East Lincolnshire.

Councillor Dawkins responded that there had been successful delivery across parts of the playing pitch strategy, in particular the partnership with the Football Foundation to address the shortfall in 3G pitch provision in the borough. There had also been a wider investment, through grant funding secured from the Lawn Tennis Association, into Barrett's Recreation Ground, Sidney Sussex Recreation Ground and Haverstoe Park to improve tennis court facilities. Barrett's Recreation Ground was identified as a potential priority site within the existing playing pitch strategy. A feasibility study was completed around merging the

former Scartho Baths site and the recreation ground. Whilst this had potential, there were realities to consider around the cost of the scheme, whether grant funding could be secured, and the viability of future operation of the site. In addition, the recreation ground's site development plan needed to be reassessed given the adjacent facility provision at Oasis Wintringham, including the recent 3G pitch provision. The existing playing pitch strategy was now coming to its five year point and was therefore due a full review. Officers had started the early stages of this review. For the future, Barrett's Recreation Ground would remain a focus within the review of the playing pitch strategy, along with many other sites across the Borough with potential to develop. He added that large scale projects were unlikely to move forward during 2025 whilst the review was being undertaken and it would be clearer from 2026 onwards where development would be prioritised.

The Chair invited Councillor Humphrey to present the following question to the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Economy, Regeneration, Devolution and Skills, the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.

Many residents in my ward of Scartho are paying both their Council Tax and an Open Space Management Fee annually, the latter to a private company called Greenbelt, who state that they are 'the UK's leading specialist in the stewardship of public open spaces'. However, many residents are dissatisfied with Greenbelt as they feel the services received are inadequate (flooded paths, closed play areas, inaccessibility etc.) and the company viewed as not transparent, accountable, nor value for money. The spaces remain public open spaces, but privately managed and charged for. How will the council leader support myself and the other 2 ward councillors in seeking to ensure this situation is tackled?

Councillor Jackson, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Economy, Regeneration, Devolution and Skills responded that he was not entirely convinced that was his role as Leader of the Council to intervene in this matter. Councillor Shepherd, who was one of the other Scartho ward councillors, had been the lead on this and had met with residents together with relevant officers of the council. The local authority had limited levers in this as it was a private matter between the residents and the company that charged them for the services. The council had supported the residents with copies of service specifications submitted during the planning process and by listening and providing advice in public meetings. As part of the local plan review, the council could also look if there were policies it could implement that would reduce the risk of these situations for future developments. The Leader added that he sympathised with the residents positions on this, but the principle of allowing developers to appoint an independent management company instead of funding for the local authority to adopt, is set by national policy and similar scenarios were playing out across England.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Humphrey asked how residents could be assured that similar situations would not occur regarding open spaces in other high profile developments such as those at Western School and Alexandra Dock.

Councillor Jackson was not sure that we could ever guarantee that it wouldn't happen again because it was clearly a matter between the residents and the particular organisation. It was not necessarily local government that needed to step in and sort out what remained a civil matter between two different parties.

The Chair invited Councillor Mill to present the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets, the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.

The number of telephone calls by residents to North East Lincolnshire Council in 2023-24 was 105,609 calls.

The rate of calls in the 4 months to July 2024 remained at a similar rate.

Despite a similar rate of calls from residents, 2 alarming issues have arisen during 2024:

- 1. The time taken for calls to be answered by NELC staff has increased by 52% (from 1 minute 26 secs to 2 minutes 11 seconds)*
- 2. The number of calls being abandoned by residents has increased from 7.4% of calls last year to 10.9% of calls up to July 2024, despite residents hanging on an average of 2 mins 49 secs before giving up!*

The cost to residents of waiting for calls to be answered by council staff is estimated to be in excess of £36,000 per year (based on 16 pence per minute, 2mins 11 secs average waiting time and 105,000 calls per year).

What plans does the portfolio holder have to minimise the estimated £36,000 phone call costs that North East Lincolnshire residents are incurring whilst they wait for their calls to be answered?

Councillor Harness, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets, responded that the question was based on information as at the end of July 2024 and the comparison for time taken to answer calls was not on a like for like basis. The statistics for 2024/25 predominantly cover the first quarter of the financial year, which was always the busiest for the contact centre due to queries relating to payments for the garden waste service. The contact centre dealt with the telephone queries for the elections and this year there was both a local and a parliamentary election. In addition, during the first quarter of 2024/25, the team was carrying a vacancy from the end of March which was filled mid-May. The training programme for a customer advisor takes 11 weeks and therefore there was a reduction in resource during that time. Councillor Harness was happy to share the latest data with Councillor Mill.

Councillor Harness questioned the £36,000 cost figure quoted by Councillor Mill although he acknowledged it wasn't particularly relevant as nobody wanted to be hanging on a telephone waiting for somebody to answer.

Councillor Harness noted that the council is at the end of the contract for the current ICT platform that it uses for its calls. Over recent years it had not been reliable and calls were often dropped for no reason, adding to the reported abandoned call rate. Following user testing, the Contact Centre was moving to Microsoft Teams software on 13th January 2025. He detailed the benefits of the new system, including better reporting functionality, greater security and increased options for transferring calls. The replacement of the current, ageing telephone technology would also negate the need for expensive upgrade costs. Additional features such as callback, chat, video and future integration with Artificial Intelligence (AI) could be achieved. In addition to improving our phone service system, the council would also be exploring the use of AI to make it easier for residents to get in touch and engage with us. This would involve testing and using AI tools that could handle some queries automatically and give instant responses. This will help us to provide a better and faster service to everyone.

Note – Councillor Patrick had submitted four questions on notice for this meeting but these were not asked as he had left the meeting.

NEL.67 MINUTES OF THE CABINET AND COMMITTEES OF THE COUNCIL

The Council received the minutes of decisions taken under delegated powers at the following meetings, subject to any questions asked in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders:

Cabinet – 18th September, 30th October and 13th November 2024
Freshney Place Cabinet Sub Committee – 8th October
Portfolio Holder Housing, Infrastructure and Transport – 17th September, 21st October and 24th October 2024
Scrutiny Panel Children and Lifelong Learning – 1st October 2024
Scrutiny Panel Communities – 5th September 2024
Scrutiny Panel Economy, Culture and Tourism - 3rd October 2024
Scrutiny Panel Health and Adult Social Care – 25th September 2024
Scrutiny Panel Transport, Infrastructure and Strategic Housing – 10th September 2024
Joint Meeting of the Economy, Culture and Tourism Scrutiny Panel and the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel – 7th November 2024
Crime and Disorder Committee – 10th October 2024
Health and Wellbeing Board – 9th September 2024
Audit and Governance Committee – 7th November 2024
Planning Committee – 4th September, 2nd October and 30th October 2024

Licensing and Community Protection Committee – 11th September and 6th November 2024
Standards Referrals Panel – 2nd October and 14th November 2024
Appointments Committee – 7th October 2024

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the following meetings of Cabinet and the Committees of the Council be approved and adopted:

Cabinet – 18th September, 30th October and 13th November 2024
Freshney Place Cabinet Sub Committee – 8th October
Portfolio Holder Housing, Infrastructure and Transport – 17th September, 21st October and 24th October 2024
Scrutiny Panel Children and Lifelong Learning – 1st October 2024
Scrutiny Panel Communities – 5th September 2024
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Planning Committee – 4th September, 2nd October and 30th October 2024
Licensing and Community Protection Committee – 11th September and 6th November 2024
Standards Referrals Panel – 2nd October and 14th November 2024
Appointments Committee – 7th October 2024

There being no further business, the Mayor declared the meeting closed at 12.36 a.m.