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NORTH EAST LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON

30th July 2026

Present: Councillor Boyd (in the Chair)
Councillors Aisthorpe, Augusta, K. Batson, P Batson, Beasant, Bonner, Brasted, Bright, Callison, Charlesworth, Clough, Crofts, Dawkins, Downes, Emmerson, Freeston, Goodwin, Grice, Henderson, Humphrey, Jackson, Kaczmarek, Lindley, Mayne, Mill, Mills, Morland, Parkinson, Patrick, Sawkins, Shreeve, Taylor and Wilson.

Officers in Attendance:

- Sharon Wroot (Chief Executive)
- Guy Lonsdale (Interim Section 151 Officer)
- Zoe Campbell (Senior Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)
- David Humm (Civic Chauffeur and Assistant)
- Eve Richardson-Smith (Head of Law and Assurance)

The proceedings were opened with prayers by Paul Wisken (Civic and Mayoral Officer).

NEL.14 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Mayor took the opportunity to thank everyone for attending the meeting.

NEL.15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from this meeting were received from Councillors Brookes, Haggis, Hudson, Jervis, I. Oliver, N. Oliver, Russell and Swinburn.

NEL.16 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meetings of North East Lincolnshire Council held on 26th March 2026, the Mayor Making Meeting of North East Lincolnshire Council held on 12th May 2026, and the Annual General Meeting of North East Lincolnshire Council held on 21st May 2026 be approved as a correct record.

NEL.17 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest by Members in the items on the agenda for this meeting.

NEL.18 QUESTION TIME

There were five questions submitted by a member of the public for this meeting, in accordance with the Council's procedures.

The first question was submitted by Kyle Thompson to Councillor Batson, Portfolio Holder for Housing, Infrastructure and Transport. Kyle did not attend the meeting and his question was read out by the Mayor as set out below.

The council already has a £4.5M gap in its 2025/26 budget and is planning on free parking in Cleethorpes. 2024/25 parking revenues show a £300k deficit in operating NELC parking. How is the council intending to fund this deficit to provide free parking?

Councillor P. Batson, Portfolio Holder for Housing, Infrastructure and Transport, responded that in 2025-26, the Council had a balanced financial position and a balanced budget for the 2026-27 financial year. The free parking proposal on St. Peter's Avenue was on a trial basis for two years with an estimated reduction in income of £145,000. In the short term, this would be funded from the transformation reserve. In the longer term, our goals would be reflected in the budget and medium-term finance plan. He added that the main point was to help the businesses in Cleethorpes by attracting more visitors who would want to hopefully to stay longer in the car park.

The second question was submitted by Tim Mickleburgh to Councillor Freeston, Leader of the Council. Tim did not attend the meeting and his question was read out by the Mayor as set out below.

How much space will be lost to pedestrianisation if the redesigned Cleethorpes Market Place has 12 car parking spaces?

Councillor Freeston, Leader of the Council responded that during the summer months there would be no spaces lost because it would be fully pedestrianised. However, in the winter months, when the space wasn't used as much, the spaces from Blend up to the Market Tavern would be lost.

The third question was submitted by Bryan Dicker to Councillor Mayor, North East Lincolnshire Council. Bryan did not attend the meeting and his question was read out by the Mayor as set out below

If someone had said a few years ago that I would be here asking the question I am about to, I would have thought it was a bizarre joke, considering the campaigning I was involved in on Children Services. However, it is evident that the scrutiny panel has been effective. Would the mayor agree and join me in congratulating the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel, with former Cllr Cracknell as portfolio holder, for the award recently presented?

Councillor Boyd, North East Lincolnshire Council responded that she agreed.

The fourth question was submitted by Bryan Dicker to Councillor Freeston, Leader of the Council. Bryan did not attend the meeting and his question was read out by the Mayor as set out below

My second question relates to freedom of speech. When people raise the colours of a country, nation, community, or cause, they are exercising a fundamental right to express themselves.

It has been announced that only a limited number of flags will be raised above this building. While some may argue that there are more pressing matters, I believe the removal of certain flags raises important questions about freedom of expression and the messages this council chooses to send. The removal of the Ukrainian flag may be interpreted by some as a weakening of visible support for Ukraine at a time when it continues to face invasion. The decision not to raise the Pride flag may also be seen as a failure to support the LGBT+ community's right to celebrate and be recognised. History reminds us why such recognition matters. Alan Turing, who helped shorten the Second World War, was later subjected to chemical castration because he was gay and was only pardoned in this century.

I also note that the Leader of the Council has reportedly blocked people on both his own social media page and those of Reform NEL after they challenged or corrected information posted in the public domain. Will he explain how this approach is consistent with a commitment to freedom of speech, where some expressions of public opinion appear to be restricted while others are considered acceptable?

Councillor Freeston, Leader of the Council, responded that he was one of the biggest advocates of free speech. He was happy to take difficult questions and criticism. What he was not prepared to take was mindless trolling, insults and abuse that went above and beyond what would be ordinarily acceptable in political disagreements. He felt that online abuse had raised and it had become far more toxic and the loss of the late Anne Widdecombe showed that the danger to politicians was increasing. He stated that whilst he had blocked people there were plenty of critics that he hadn't blocked. Councillor Freeston said that he didn't tolerate abuse and he understood that other councillors had also blocked

people online. He made no apologies for blocking people that crossed the line and would never apologise for protecting himself, his family, or his colleagues.

The fifth question was submitted by Stephen Holland to Councillor Callison, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Energy Security. Steve attended the meeting and put the question as set out below.

Sir Tony Blair recently gave a stark warning of the economic consequences of the rush to 'carbon net zero', stating that the country is penalising its own businesses, which cannot be afforded. The Head of the GMB Union last month talked openly of 'net zero madness' closing factories and hitting jobs and investment. The rush to net carbon zero is being encouraged and even led by councils such as ours, that do not appear to understand the impact on our residents comparative to the negligible impact on climate change. Could the Portfolio Holder provide an assurance that this Cabinet, in contrast to the previous one will, as many other councils are doing, take a measured approach on this issue, including a re-assessment of the 2030 target for NELC to be carbon-neutral so that there are sensible policies in place that balance the need for a strong local and national economy against our international climate change obligations?

Councillor Callison, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Energy Security, responded that North East Lincolnshire Council had a NetZero target for 2030, which formed part of the council's existing policy framework inherited by the new administration. As a new administration, they were reviewing a number of existing Council policies, including those of the net zero and decarbonisation. These would be considered carefully, taking into account the statutory responsibilities, the interest of the local residents and the importance of supporting economic growth and investment. The administration's approach would be set out in due course and follow the Council's established decision making process.

NEL.19 THE LEADERS STATEMENT

The Council received a statement from the Leader of the Council who extended his thanks to his colleagues for the support they've given him to carry out his new role. In the interest of goodwill he extended his thanks to the opposition parties for working collaboratively over the last couple of months.

He explained that his administration was not critical of everything that the previous administration did, instead, they wanted to review and look at best practice going forward.

Referring to the successes of the last couple of months Councillor Freeston had been working collaboratively which included extending an invite to attend ward walks across the borough because he wanted to get out on the ground and learn more about every single ward, accepting that each ward was uniquely different.

Another success had been the use of social media, not just his own but that of many other members across this room.

Councillor Freeston felt that it was a good thing and that it showed transparency as the public get to see where their taxes were being spent, but also the challenges that were behind it. He implored all members to consider that on their social media, actually promoting why we can't do things, what our role actually was, and bringing the public along on the journey.

The Leader referred to making tangible differences to people's lives. As an example, for the last three or four years, there had been no toilets on the North Promenade and he was very pleased to work with officers and introduce some temporary toilets, including an accessible toilet, which was free to use. This was a common-sense approach that was low cost, but gave much needed provision.

Referring to the Cleethorpes Market Place his intention on taking office was to review the project. Unfortunately, the contracts had already been signed so alternative solutions were being considered.

Councillor Freeston explained that part of his portfolio responsibility was to restore trust and transparency and judging by the responses to date from the public, this had been welcomed. He encouraged Councillors to work together and promote each other, because ultimately we're promoting the work of councillors to make North East Lincolnshire better.

Councillor Freeston reaffirmed their commitment as a Cabinet to work cross-party.

RESOLVED – That the Leader's Statement be noted.

NEL.20 AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2025/26

The Council considered a report detailing the activities of the Audit and Governance Committee during the Council year and setting out how it has discharged its responsibilities. This report was referred to Council by the Audit and Governance Committee at its meeting on 16th April, 2026.

The Mayor welcomed the independent Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee, Mr Paul Stone, to the meeting. Mr Stone attended the meeting and he was invited to introduce his report. Standing Orders were suspended for this purpose.

Mr Stone presented the committee's Annual Report for 2025-26, highlighting its role in providing independent assurance on the Council's governance, risk management and internal control arrangements.

Key points included:

- The committee undertook a comprehensive programme of work and development sessions, covering areas such as financial management, medium-term financial planning, governance arrangements, risk management, counter-fraud and treasury management.
- The committee approved the audited Statement of Accounts and reviewed the Council's accounting policies for the forthcoming year.
- It scrutinised the Annual Governance Statement, ensuring it accurately reflected the Council's risks and the actions needed to strengthen governance.
- Regular reports were received on internal audit activity, findings and the implementation of recommendations, with the committee providing challenge to improve the timely completion of audit actions.
- Extensive engagement took place with the Council's external auditors, including review of the audit strategy and completion reports for the 2024-25 accounts.
- The Council received an unqualified audit opinion, with no significant weaknesses identified in value-for-money arrangements, representing progress from previous years.
- Risk management remained a significant area of focus, ensuring it remained embedded and responsive as the Council's operating model evolves.
- The committee also reviewed governance arrangements relating to partnerships and commissioned services, including children's services, adult social care and the transition following the end of the Equans contract.
- An annual self-assessment against CIPFA's Audit Committee Good Practice Framework found that the committee largely complied with expected standards, while identifying opportunities to further strengthen member skills, member selection processes and awareness of the committee's role across the Council.

The report concluded that the Audit and Governance Committee had effectively fulfilled its responsibilities during 2025-26, complied with recognised good practice and continued to play an important role in promoting strong governance, accountability and resilience across the Council.

Mr Stone thanked committee members, officers and auditors for their commitment, professionalism and collaborative approach, noting that the committee's work had contributed to a year of rigorous oversight, constructive challenge and continuous improvement.

RESOLVED – That the Audit and Governance Committee Annual Report be received.

NEL.21 QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Fourteen Questions on Notice have been submitted for this meeting

The Chair invited Councillor Shreeve to present the following question to Councillor Grice, Portfolio Holder for Children and Education, the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.

Shortly after the change of administration, our Children's Services won a prestigious national award, the Local Government Chronicle Award, recognising the dramatic transformation in our service in recent years. The press release covering this showed the new portfolio holder proudly holding the award flanked by the Chief Executive and Director of Children's services. I know changes of administration happen but in the press release there was no mention of the considerable contribution made by the previous portfolio holder Councillor Margaret Cracknell. Shame on all of you. Can the portfolio holder put this right and acknowledge the contribution made by Councillor Cracknell.

Councillor Grice, Portfolio Holder for Children and Education, responded that the award was an acknowledgement for all involved, including the previous Portfolio Holder. He acknowledged that Margaret Cracknell had done an amazing job along with officers.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Shreeve asked if the Portfolio Holder could tell him what his plans were to personally ensure that our schools and academies honour their commitments to integrate as many children as possible within mainstream education.

Councillor Grice confirmed that he had visited all of our SEND schools within the area. He explained that the council had already opened several SEND hubs and there were two more due to come online later this year with more in the pipeline.

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

I recall that the operational and finance plan for 2026-27 included extending council tax relief to persons with terminal illnesses. This has not yet been applied; can the portfolio holder explain the delay and give a commitment to implement as the finance plan dictates.

Councillor Taylor, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets, noted that the resolution agreed by Council was to develop the framework for such a scheme during the 2026-27 financial year. Officers had been progressing that work and since taking office in May, he had been working with Cabinet colleagues and officers to develop the framework required to introduce the scheme. He explained this was work in progress in accordance with the timetable agreed by full Council rather than a delay. Introducing a new council tax scheme required careful policy development to ensure it was fair, legally robust and financially

sustainable before it could be implemented.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Shreeve asked the portfolio holder to explain what actions he would personally take to ensure that persons who could claim, including those that were digitally excluded, were entitled to do so.

Councillor Taylor responded that he would provide an answer in writing.

The Chair invited Councillor Wilson to present the following question to Councillor Callison, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Energy Security, the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.

"Given that numerous alleyways across the borough remain heavily blighted by dumped items and uncollected household waste — creating direct public health risks through severe rodent infestations, including mice and rats — will the Portfolio Holder commit, under your leadership, to reviewing and changing current council policy to ensure the council takes active responsibility for the cleaning and ongoing maintenance of these alleyways?"

Councillor Callison, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Energy Security, responded that the question had come too soon as he was currently looking at this issue across all wards. He noted that he only had a small budget for this but it was important to find a fair solution and he expected to report to Cabinet in the very near future.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Wilson asked how he would ensure that the funding for each ward represented its proportion of alleyways to make it fair?

Councillor Callison responded that he wanted to make it a fair and easier process and he would report back to Councillor Wilson should his plans reach fruition.

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

"With regards to the Meridian showground and the increased capacity announced earlier in the year, can the portfolio holder please give us an update as to what events have been confirmed, taking advantage of the increased capacity?"

Councillor Brasted, Portfolio Holder for Culture, Heritage and the Visitor Economy, responded that at the beginning of this year, the previous administration approved plans to increase the public event capacity for Meridian Showground from 5,000 to 15,000, which would give more opportunities to attract larger events. However, before we can actively market the increased capacity to promoters and event organisers, we do need to ensure that the venues ageing infrastructure was ready to accommodate these larger event audiences. Work

was underway to assess the venue. At present, bookings were looking promising for 2027.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Dawkins noted the anticipated numbers for a forthcoming Pride event in Scunthorpe and asked whether the portfolio holder would work with local Pride organisers to bring a similar event to Cleethorpes?

Councillor Brasted responded that she would work with officers to establish whether or not the infrastructure was in place to allow the showground to host larger events.

The Chair invited Councillor Humphrey to present the following question to Councillor Freeston, Leader of the Council, 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. Those open spaces are 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 Freeston, Leader of the Council agreed that it was a very serious issue and noted that he had offered to go on a ward walk with the ward councillors. He suggested that ward councillors take him up on this offer so that this could be further looked at.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Humphrey asked how the anomaly of private management companies with extra charging on public open space fit with the leader's vision of place leadership within his portfolio holder remit.

Councillor Freeston responded that everybody should be responsible and that the services delivered to residents of this borough should be first class. He was happy to take any suggestions forward for discussion with his colleagues and he implored all Members to raise such issues with him on ward walks rather than delay things by waiting until a full Council meeting.

The Chair invited Councillor Jackson to present the following question to Councillor Freeston, Leader of the Council, the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.

The North East Lincolnshire Council "Local Government Reorganisation Proposal" which was unanimously supported at a special Full Council meeting last November, included the following statements:

- *"We propose that we remain as an existing high performing unitary council, within our existing borough boundaries." (page 4);*
- *"We have.....a solid track record of financial prudence, operational resilience and strategic foresight...." (page 6);*
- *"....our external auditors, Forvis Mazars, have constantly found no significant weaknesses in the council's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness. These arrangements consider financial sustainability, performance and service delivery and governance and decision making." (page 31);*
- *"We are an established high performing unitary council and wish to remain so." (page 50).*

Does the Leader of the Council stand by these statements that he voted in favour of last November?

Councillor Freeston, Leader of the Council responded that he stood by the vote that he made last year. Irrespective of whether he agreed with every single thing that was in the proposal, he took a holistic approach when reaching his decision.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Jackson asked on that basis that the Leader of the Council supported those statements last November, why a few weeks later did he publish and have distributed a leaflet which stated that the Council was broken?

Councillor Freeston responded that he believed that the Council was broken and his administration were on the way to repairing it.

The Chair invited Councillor Aisthorpe to present the following question to Councillor Sawkins, Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities, the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.

The Council has publicly committed to supporting women and girls and is a White Ribbon accredited organisation. Given the administration's decision to discontinue flying the International Women's Day flag, can the portfolio holder explain how that decision aligns with those commitments?

Councillor Sawkins, Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities responded by making it very clear that the Council supported women and girls and White Ribbon. The Council also supported the work to end male violence against women and girls, and the people who do that difficult work every day. Each year around 1,000 year 12 students received training that helped them spot harmful behaviour and gave them confidence to step in safely. The council had

invested in CCTV, lighting, and visible ambassadors to help women feel safer in Grimsby Town Centre. The council worked with pubs through 'Ask for Angela', and with schools, colleagues, businesses, transport providers and Humberside Police. That work would continue. However, he felt that the question here was whether this Council should keep choosing which causes and groups should be represented by a flag above a civic building. Who decides which cause was important enough? Who decides which group was recognised? Which group was left asking, why not us? Councillor Sawkins felt that this did not bring people together. The council's job was to serve every resident equally and there was one banner that belonged to all of us - the Union flag. It did not ask who you are, what you believe in, or what your sex, your race, your faith, or sexuality were. He reiterated that the policy was not about taking support away from anyone, it was about treating everyone fairly and applying one clear rule to all. He asked that this council not be judged by a flag above a building but rather by the lives improved inside and beyond it. He felt that people, education, partnership and action protected people, not flags. That was where this Council continued to put its time, its effort and its resources.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Aisthorpe noted that the numbers of male violence against women and girls was significantly higher than that to men and asked what message the administration believed it was sending to women and girls by removing the recognition represented by the flag.

Councillor Sawkins responded that he would reply in writing as he believed he had answered the question in his original response but wanted to make sure he had his facts right.

The Chair invited Councillor Aisthorpe to present the following question to Councillor P. Batson, Portfolio Holder for Housing, Infrastructure and Transport, the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.

Disabled residents can complete the Council's entire application and approval process for a disabled parking bay, only to find that it cannot be installed because another vehicle repeatedly obstructs the location before the road markings can be painted. Does the Portfolio Holder consider that an acceptable outcome for a disabled resident who has been assessed as needing that parking bay?

Councillor P. Batson, Portfolio Holder for Housing, Infrastructure and Transport responded that it was not an acceptable outcome.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Aisthorpe asked what changes would the portfolio holder consider to ensure that disabled residents who had been assessed as needing a disabled parking bay were able to receive that provision?

Councillor Batson responded that he would speak to the highways team to see if it was possible to find a solution.

The Chair invited Councillor Aisthorpe to present the following question to Councillor Freeston, Leader of the Council, the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.

Councillors across the chamber have previously been advised not to publish photographs of themselves with frontline operational staff because of concerns about maintaining officer impartiality. Can the Leader confirm whether that remains the Council's current guidance to members?

Councillor Freeston, Leader of the Council responded that he had asked the Monitoring Officer to provide advice so that a formal policy was available in writing to be shared with all Members.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Aisthorpe asked that the guidance apply equally to all councillors.

Councillor Freeston agreed that it should.

The Chair invited Councillor Beasant to present the following question to Councillor Batson, Portfolio Holder for Housing, Infrastructure and Transport, the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.

Councillors across the Borough regularly report uneven and at times dangerous footpaths, and sometimes they are repaired very quickly and at other times officers advise us that works will be completed within 3 months. Will the portfolio holder commit to making sure that repairs are always completed on time, but most people would say that 3 months to repair footpaths is too long. With that in mind would he also commit to coming forward with a new policy, which will make our footpaths safer for all pedestrians?

Councillor Batson, Portfolio Holder for Housing, Infrastructure and Transport responded that with 478 miles of footpaths, the council must be committed to taking a risk-based approach to inspect and maintain them. Some were repaired as an emergency, others were maintained over a planned period of time. On the point of a new policy, he committed to requesting officers to carry out a policy review when an update on the national policy was released in the autumn. In the meantime, he welcomed feedback from ward councillors regarding footway conditions and their performance.

The Chair invited Councillor Beasant to present the following question to Councillor Freeston, Leader of the Council, the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.

On 17th March 2022 this Council unanimously supported the following Notice of Motion:

This Council is appalled by the shocking events in Ukraine and the devastating effects on her people. We welcome the generous support being offered by our local community to the people of Ukraine. As a Council, we pledge to do all we can to facilitate and enable further support across North East Lincolnshire, including for those families who have been forced to flee their homeland.

In light of this unanimous decision, why did the Leader of Council change our flag's policy to stop the Ukrainian flag from above our Town Hall?

Councillor Freeston, Leader of the Council responded that, before taking office, when speaking to the public they had been clear that they wanted one flag or the flags of this nation to fly above our Town Hall, less of the division, less of the nonsense. Whilst he supported Ukraine, and indeed many countries that were in conflict across the world, was one country superior to another?

In a supplementary question, Councillor Beasant asked given that 50 residents across this borough who had talked to him about this policy and found it appalling, would he reconsider?

Councillor Freeston responded that was democracy and everybody had a different view on things.

The Chair invited Councillor Morland to present the following question to Councillor Freeston, Leader of the Council, the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.

Would you agree with me that a Council Leader should lead the authority with dignity, openness and accountability on behalf of all residents?

Councillor Freeston, Leader of the Council responded that he did.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Morland asked whether he would therefore give an apology to a member of this community that the BBC noted was racially abused because of one of his posts on social media.

Councillor Freeston responded that the matter had gone through the standards process, he had made his comments public and reached out to the person in question. He felt it shameful that Council Morland was now using this for political capital.

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

Would you please inform full council which flags the minority Reform administration have decided can be flown in North East Lincolnshire?

Councillor Brasted, Portfolio Holder for Culture, Heritage and the Visitor Economy responded that the 2026 flag policy had been updated from the 2012 policy and set out a clear and formal approach to the flag flying across the borough. On 9th March, the Commonwealth flag would fly at Grimsby and Cleethorpes Town Hall. On 23rd March, the Grimsby Borough flag would fly at Grimsby Town Hall only in recognition of Grimsby Charter Day. On Armed Forces Weekend, Grimsby, Cleethorpes and the Cleethorpes Memorial Gate would fly the Armed Forces flags. When a delegation from Konigswinter arrived, Cleethorpes, as their twin town, would fly the Konigswinter flag. On 3rd September, the Red Ensign flag would fly in recognition of the Merchant Navy. On 23rd September, the Cleethorpes Borough flag would fly in recognition of Cleethorpes Charter Day. From 1st to 11th November for Remembrance Week, the Royal British Legion flag would fly at Grimsby and Cleethorpes Town Hall. As a mark of respect to our King and country, the Union flag would fly 365 days a year and the St George flag would fly every day except the days mentioned above. The 2026 amended flag policy was available on the North East Lincolnshire website.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Morland asked whether the authority would be flying the emergency services 999 flag to celebrate the emergency workers of this area on August 15th.

Councillor Brasted responded that she would review that and reply in writing to Councillor Morland.

The Chair invited Councillor Emmerson to present the following question to Councillor Freeston, Leader of the Council, the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.

Given the cancellation of the first scheduled cabinet meeting, will the leader agree that scrutiny panels and certain committees were in a disadvantage to be able to conduct their plans, business and overall work due to not having robust decisions and information to work with, which has resulted in the proper timely, democratic procedures, not being able to fully take place?

Councillor Freeston, Leader of the Council responded that in his first speech as Leader he had said that sometimes you'll make mistakes and it was about holding your hands up. He was given advice that the meeting should be suspended because we had a whole new cabinet who were familiarising themselves with their portfolios. So, on the surface, it seemed like a sensible thing to do but in hindsight it would have been better to have had the meeting, He apologised for that but hoped that Members would understand the rationale.

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

In local government, every administration must balance existing financial commitments with new priorities and statutory responsibilities, with new ideas, ambitions and targets, therefore, can the portfolio holder provide an indication of whether the administration currently expects council tax to increase in the next financial year?

Councillor Taylor, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets, responded that at the present time, no formal decision had been taken on council tax levels for the 2027-28 financial year. The Council would consider council tax as part of the medium term financial plan and the budget setting process later this financial year. That work would be informed by the government's autumn budget, the local government's finance settlement, updated forecasts of demand, inflation, funding levels and the council's priorities. The current approved medium term financial plan included planning assumptions for future council tax increases. However, those were planning assumptions, not decisions. Any proposed council tax level would be considered through the council's normal budget process, involving scrutiny members, before the final decision was taken by full Council in February 2027. Therefore, it would be inappropriate for him to pre-empt that process today.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Emmerson asked whether the portfolio holder and the whole cabinet would be willing to work on a cross-party basis for the upcoming budget.

Councillor Taylor responded that he would.

NEL.22 POLLING DISTRICT AND POLLING PLACES REVIEW

The Council considered a report seeking approval to commence a review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations, and to agree the proposed timetable and consultation approach

RESOLVED –

1. That a review of polling district and polling places commence on Friday 31st July 2026.
2. That the proposed timetable at paragraph 1.11 contained within the report now submitted, be approved.
3. That the current and proposed polling stations, incorporating the comments of

the Returning Officer, detailed at appendix 1 of the report now submitted, be used as the basis of the consultation.

4. That power to designate polling districts in accordance with section 18 and 18A of the Representation of the People Act 1983 be delegated to the Chief Executive and Electoral Registration Officer.
5. That power to designate polling places in accordance with section 18 and 18B of the Representation of the People Act 1983 be delegated to the Chief Executive, and for such power to be exercised only where necessary, when a decision is required at short notice to secure lawful and effective electoral arrangements, and it was not possible to await a decision of Council.

NEL.23 AMENDMENTS TO PLACES ON COMMITTEES AND PANELS OF THE COUNCIL AND OUTSIDE BODY APPOINTMENTS

The Council considered a report that advised of proposed changes to places on Committees, Panels and Outside Bodies of the Council since the Annual Meeting held on 21st May, 2026.

Councillor Jackson moved an amendment that recommendations one, three, four and five be approved but that, in relation to recommendation 2, Councillor Freeston be given an opportunity to reconsider his position to withdraw from the Health and Wellbeing Board, noting that Councillor Henderson could be appointed as an additional member whether or not the Leader remained a member. This was seconded by Councillor Shreeve.

Following a debate, the amendment was put to the vote and, upon a show of hands, the amendment was lost with 7 votes for, 21 against and 5 abstentions.

The debate returned to the substantive motion. Following a debate, a vote was taken and upon a show of hands, with 25 for, 6 against and 3 abstentions, it was:

RESOLVED –

1. That Councillor Mayne replace Councillor K. Batson as a full member of the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel and Councillor K. Batson be appointed as a substitute member of the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel.
2. That it be noted that the Leader of the Council has changed his appointments to the Health and Well Being Board to replace himself with Councillor Henderson.
3. That Councillor Morland replace Councillor Patrick as the Labour Group's representative on the Humber Police and Crime Panel.

4. That Councillor Sawkins replace Councillor P Batson as a substitute member for Councillor Freeston on the Greater Lincolnshire Mayoral Combined Authority.
5. That Councillor N. Oliver be removed as the Reform UK Group's substitute member of the Greater Lincolnshire Mayoral Combined Authority Scrutiny Committee.

NEL.24 NOTICE OF MOTION 1

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

Bringing Long-Term Empty Homes Back into Use Through Council Ownership

North East Lincolnshire faces a growing housing challenge. The Council's Housing Strategy 2023–2028 identifies significant demand for affordable housing, with 4,780 households on the housing register and almost 500 households in urgent or high housing need. At the same time, Government data cited within the strategy records 2,819 empty homes across the borough, including 1,348 long-term empty properties that have stood vacant for more than six months. Many of these are concentrated in urban areas where housing market failure, poor property condition and neighbourhood decline are most evident.

The Council's current Empty Property Strategy rightly seeks to work with owners to return homes to occupation through advice, grants, loans and, where necessary, enforcement action. However, despite these interventions, the number of long-term empty homes has remained persistently high over many years. The current strategy places the responsibility primarily on private owners rather than enabling the Council to intervene directly where owners are unwilling or unable to act.

North East Lincolnshire Council is not currently a social landlord. Consequently, opportunities to acquire neglected homes, refurbish them and retain them as permanently affordable housing are limited. This leaves the authority dependent upon registered housing providers and the private sector to meet increasing housing demand.

At a time when families remain on waiting lists, homelessness pressures continue to rise and vulnerable residents struggle to access secure accommodation, the Council should consider a more ambitious approach by directly intervening in the empty homes market.

Returning empty homes to occupation would regenerate neighbourhoods, reduce anti-social behaviour, improve public health, preserve existing housing stock and make better use of existing infrastructure while reducing pressure for new development.

This Council Notes:

- There are over 1,300 long-term empty homes within North East Lincolnshire.
- Nearly 5,000 households remain on the Council's housing register.
- Long-term empty properties contribute to neighbourhood decline, crime, anti-social behaviour and reduced confidence in local communities.
- The Council currently supports owners through grants, advice and enforcement but does not have a mechanism to directly acquire and retain empty homes as council-owned affordable housing.
- The Council is not currently a social landlord.

This Council Believes:

- Every long-term empty home represents a missed opportunity to house local people.
- Existing housing stock should be brought back into use before significant new development is pursued wherever practicable.
- The Council should play a greater leadership role in tackling empty homes.
- Care leavers, Armed Forces veterans, victims of domestic abuse, disabled residents and those experiencing homelessness should receive priority access to high-quality affordable accommodation.

This Council Resolves:

1. To commission a report examining the feasibility, financial implications and legal requirements for North East Lincolnshire Council to become a provider of social housing, either directly or through a wholly-owned housing company.
2. To explore the development of a programme for the acquisition of long-term empty residential properties through:
 - voluntary purchase;
 - negotiated acquisition;
 - Compulsory Purchase Orders where appropriate; and
 - other statutory powers available to local authorities.
3. To explore the establishment of a revolving Empty Homes Regeneration Fund, using external grants, Government funding, borrowing where appropriate and receipts from property income to refurbish acquired homes.
4. To ensure that all refurbished properties meet high standards of energy efficiency, accessibility and quality.
5. Subject to the Council becoming a social housing provider, and subject to any necessary review of the Council's Housing Allocations Policy, to allocate refurbished homes in accordance with the Council's Housing Allocations Policy, giving particular priority to:
 - Care leavers;

- Armed Forces veterans;
- Victims of domestic abuse;
- Residents leaving temporary accommodation;
- Disabled residents requiring adapted housing;
- Key workers where there is an identified local housing need.

6. To request the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Infrastructure and Transport to provide an annual report to Full Council detailing:

- the number of long-term empty homes identified;
- the number returned to occupation;
- acquisitions completed;
- expenditure and income;
- households accommodated; and
- recommendations for expanding the programme where appropriate.

An amendment to the Motion had been received, in accordance with the Constitution, and was moved by Councillor Jackson and seconded by Councillor Shreeve, proposing that the resolution be replaced with the following:

Second bullet point under "This Council believes:" to read "Existing housing stock should be brought back into use before significant new development is pursued wherever practical, though empty homes brought back into use do not contribute to North East Lincolnshire's unrealistic and undeliverable government-imposed target of 622 new homes per year."

Resolution 4 under "This Council resolves:" to read "Where there is a proven business case to bring empty homes back into use, refurbished properties should meet high standards of energy efficiency, accessibility and quality."

Following a 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 Boyd, Crofts, Dawkins, Jackson, Lindley, Parkinson and Shreeve (7 votes).

Against the amendment:

Councillors Aisthorpe, Augusta, K. Batson, P Batson, Beasant, Bonner, Brasted, Bright, Callison, Charlesworth, Clough, Downes, Emmerson, Freeston, Goodwin, Grice, Henderson, Humphrey, Kaczmarek, Mayne, Mill, Mills, Morland, Patrick, Sawkins, Taylor and Wilson (27 votes)

The amendment was therefore lost.

The substantive motion was put to the vote and, with the consent of Council, the requirement for a recorded vote on the motion was waived and, upon a show of hands it was unanimously

RESOLVED –

1. That a report be commissioned examining the feasibility, financial implications and legal requirements for North East Lincolnshire Council to become a provider of social housing, either directly or through a wholly-owned housing company.
2. That the development of a programme be explored for the acquisition of long-term empty residential properties through:
 - voluntary purchase;
 - negotiated acquisition;
 - Compulsory Purchase Orders where appropriate; and
 - other statutory powers available to local authorities.
3. That the establishment of a revolving Empty Homes Regeneration Fund, using external grants, Government funding, borrowing where appropriate and receipts from property income to refurbish acquired homes be explored.
4. That that all refurbished properties meet high standards of energy efficiency, accessibility and quality be ensured.
5. That subject to the Council becoming a social housing provider, and subject to any necessary review of the Council's Housing Allocations Policy, to allocate refurbished homes in accordance with the Council's Housing Allocations Policy, giving particular priority to:
 - Care leavers;
 - Armed Forces veterans;
 - Victims of domestic abuse;
 - Residents leaving temporary accommodation;
 - Disabled residents requiring adapted housing;
 - Key workers where there is an identified local housing need.
6. That the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Infrastructure and Transport provides an annual report to Full Council detailing:
 - the number of long-term empty homes identified;
 - the number returned to occupation;
 - acquisitions completed;
 - expenditure and income;
 - households accommodated; and
 - recommendations for expanding the programme where appropriate.

NEL.25 NOTICE OF MOTION 2

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

Voluntary Asylum and Refugee Resettlement Schemes and Opposition to Compulsory Asylum Dispersal

This Council notes that:

1. This Local Authority continues to face significant pressures on housing, public services and local finances.
2. Participation in a number of refugee and humanitarian resettlement schemes is voluntary and requires the agreement of the local authority.
3. The Home Office also operates compulsory asylum dispersal arrangements, under which asylum accommodation may be provided within local authority areas without the Council's agreement.
4. Many residents have expressed concerns regarding the impact of these policies on local housing availability, public services, community cohesion and local infrastructure.
5. The published figure of approximately 270 asylum seekers reflects those currently supported by the Home Office asylum system at a particular point in time. It does not include people who have subsequently been granted refugee status or another form of leave to remain and have moved into mainstream housing, nor does it necessarily reflect the longer-term impact of asylum and refugee policies on local housing, public services and infrastructure. The Council therefore believes greater transparency and more comprehensive local data are required.

Council believes that:

1. A key responsibility of this Council is to ensure that local housing, public services and infrastructure provision primarily meets the needs of our existing residents, particularly our young people with respect to housing.
2. Decisions with significant implications for local communities should be made with the consent of local authorities rather than imposed by central government.
3. Government policies should not place additional pressure on the borough's limited housing stock where there is already significant demand from existing residents and others lawfully resident in the United Kingdom.
4. Local communities should have greater democratic control over decisions relating to refugee resettlement and asylum accommodation within their area.

This Council resolves to:

1. Request that Cabinet reviews the Council's participation in the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS), the Afghan Resettlement Programme (ARP),

and any other voluntary refugee or humanitarian resettlement schemes in which the Council participates, with a view to withdrawing from those schemes where participation is voluntary.

2. Request that the Leader of the Council writes to the Home Secretary expressing this Council's opposition to the compulsory dispersal of asylum seekers into the borough without the Council's consent and calling upon the Government to end compulsory dispersal into local authority areas that have not agreed to participate.
3. Call upon the Government to publish comprehensive local data showing:
 - the number of individuals granted refugee status or other leave to remain who have remained within the borough following the conclusion of their asylum claim;
 - the number of individuals who have left the asylum support system following refusal of their claim where their onward destination is unknown; and
 - the cumulative impact of asylum and refugee schemes on local housing demand and public services.
 - crime, arrests, charges, prosecutions and convictions, broken down by offenders' nationality and immigration status.
4. Request that copies of the Leader's letter be sent to the borough's Members of Parliament, neighbouring local authorities and the Local Government Association.

Following a debate, the Mayor put the motion to a recorded vote in accordance with the Constitution. The votes cast were recorded as follows:

For the motion

Councillors K. Batson, P Batson, Brasted, Callison, Charlesworth, Downes, Freeston, Grice, Mayne, Mills, Sawkins and Taylor (12 votes)

Against the Motion

Councillors Aisthorpe, Augusta, Beasant, Bonner, Boyd, Bright, Clough, Crofts, Dawkins, Emmerson, Goodwin, Henderson, Humphrey, Jackson, Kaczmarek, Lindley, Mill, Morland, Parkinson, Patrick, Shreeve, and Wilson.
(22 votes)

Therefore the motion failed.

NEL.26 NOTICE OF MOTION 3

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

In March, Secretary of State for Transport Heidi Alexander confirmed that North East Lincolnshire would not be getting its long-promised through train from London Kings Cross, despite many years of lobbying by local MPs, business leaders and trade organisations. Restoration of this through service would be a major boost for local business, industry and tourism.

We have a new Prime Minister wanting to see Northern towns and coastal communities thrive and committed to "good growth in every postcode".

This Council resolves to write to the Prime Minister, copying the Secretary of State for Transport and local MPs, setting out the clear business case for restoring a direct London rail service to North East Lincolnshire and requesting Government intervention to support its delivery.

In proposing the motion, Councillor Jackson accepted an amendment to the Motion that had been received, in accordance with the Constitution, and was due to be moved by Councillor Downes and seconded by Councillor Bright, proposing that the resolution be replaced with the following:

To delete the final paragraph of the motion and replace it with the following:

"This Council resolves to write to the Prime Minister, copying the Secretary of State for Transport, local MPs and the Office of Rail and Road, reaffirming the strong business case for a direct rail service between North East Lincolnshire and London.

The Council welcomes and recognises the current application by Grand Central to introduce a direct London service serving Grimsby and Cleethorpes and requests that the Government supports the timely consideration of this proposal, ensuring that it is not unduly impeded and that North East Lincolnshire is able to benefit from improved rail connectivity as soon as practicable.

The Council further requests that, should the current proposal not proceed, Government works with the rail industry to secure an alternative direct London service at the earliest opportunity."

With the consent of Council, the original motion was subsequently altered to include the suggested amendment.

Following a debate the amended motion was put to the vote. With the consent of Council, the requirement for a recorded vote on the motion was waived and, upon a show of hands it was unanimously

RESOLVED –

1. That this Council writes to the Prime Minister, copying the Secretary of State for Transport, local MPs and the Office of Rail and Road, reaffirming the strong business case for a direct rail service between North East Lincolnshire and London.

2. That the Council welcomes and recognises the current application by Grand Central to introduce a direct London service serving Grimsby and Cleethorpes and requests that the Government supports the timely consideration of this proposal, ensuring that it was not unduly impeded and that North East Lincolnshire was able to benefit from improved rail connectivity as soon as practicable.
3. That it be further requested that, should the current proposal not proceed, Government works with the rail industry to secure an alternative direct London service at the earliest opportunity.

There being no further business, the Mayor declared the meeting closed at 10.25 p.m.