

BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK

COUNCIL

**Minutes from the Meeting of the Council held on
Wednesday, 31st January, 2024 at 5.00 pm in the Assembly Room,
Town Hall, Saturday Market Place, King's Lynn PE30 5DQ**

PRESENT: Councillor M Wilkinson (Chair)
Councillors B Anota, B Ayres, T Barclay, M Bartrum, P Beal, A Beales, S Bearshaw, J Bhondi, P Bland, R Blunt, F Bone, A Bubb, A Bullen, R Coates, Mrs J Collingham, S Collop, R Colwell, C J Crofts, S Dark, M de Whalley, T de Winton, P Devulapalli, S Everett, P Hodson, H Humphrey, A Jamieson, B Jones, C Joyce, A Kemp, J Kirk, S Lintern, B Long, J Lowe, J Moriarty, C Morley, S Nash, J Osborne, T Parish, J Ratcliffe, S Ring, C Rose, J Rust, A Ryves, S Sandell, D Sayers, Mrs V Spikings, S Squire, M Storey, D Tyler and A Ware

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Dickinson, D Heneghan, P Kunes and A Lawrence

C:68 MINUTES SILENCE FOR FORMER COUNCILLOR JOHN DOBSON AND HONORARY ALDERMAN JOHN LOVELESS

The Council held a Minute's silence in memory of the late former Councillor John Dobson and the later Honorary Alderman John Loveless both of whom had passed away the previous week.

C:69 PRAYERS

Prayers were led by Rev Canon Adrian Ling.

C:70 MINUTES

RESOLVED: The Minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

C:71 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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Councillor Blunt, Devulapalli and Lintern declared pecuniary interest in CAB89 – regarding second homes and left the meeting during its consideration.

Councillors Bhondi, Ratcliffe and Ware declared a non pecuniary interest in CAB96 Council Companies Funding

Councillor Jamieson declared an interest in CAB89 as Deputy Leader of the County Council.

Councillor Kemp declared an interest in the South Lynn Village Green item as she had been campaigning in favour of it.

C:72 MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

None

C:73 URGENT BUSINESS

None

C:74 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC QUESTIONS[Click here to view the recording of this item on You Tube](#)**Mr Cliff Goodman**

Due to some issues with the sound the meeting was adjourned for 6 minutes to resolve it.

I very much welcome the Council's Corporate Strategy that included strategy on environment protection, and also the recent announcement that the community in Marshland St James has been selected as the starting point for net zero communities in West Norfolk.

I welcome these initiatives as good starting points and hope that Councillors across this council, relevant businesses and residents will buy into helping towards success.

Has the council any plans to make a programme of basic insulation to stop huge waste of energy escaping through poorly insulated roofs and walls part of the Corporate Strategy? and also is there a plan to ensure that the Corporate Strategy and Net Zero Communities proceed as live high importance projects with potential for warm homes that don't cost the earth; delivering on the aims with possible cost benefits to the council?

Councillor Rust responded "that the Corporate strategy says that we'll work with partners to minimise emissions from new and existing properties, housing and other developments. We know how much heating homes can cost to our residents at a time when the cost of living is already sky high and not set to fall at any time. Since February last year we have seen 115 declarations of eligibility for the Eco Flex scheme (Energy Company Obligation) designed to tackle fuel poverty and help reduce carbon emissions. promote measures that improve the ability of low-income, fuel-poor and vulnerable households to heat their homes. Our energy efficiency officer has worked to ensure as many of our local residents as possible can access this scheme and since he has been in post we've seen a huge increase in the number of households submitting a declaration, which, once accepted, means they can access a full house retrofit which includes the installation of greener heating, solar PV, insulation and various other enabling works. Although our housing standards team involvement technically ends once the declaration has been made, they have been following up the work with the installers and households to check everything has gone as expected. Once the work has been done we do an energy efficiency rating can see how the property has improved in that respect. We are now working on a project with the ICB to reach households that would automatically qualify for the scheme so we can reach them more easily. It's important that we remember that when we make a home more energy efficient we also reduce our own carbon emissions. On

average a household in the UK will produce 6 tonnes of CO2 a year. With these energy efficiency measure the CO2 produced has been dramatically reduced. In several instances the CO2 produced was 0, and the most was 1.6 tonnes. As a result of the work done by housing standards our borough has saved 254 tonnes of CO2. I'm always pleased to be able to talk about the amazing work undertaken by this team and I really appreciate being given the opportunity to do so again."

By way of supplementary Mr Goodman asked for clarification on the take up of the schemes, to which Councillor Rust stated that in the year since the Borough Council had been promoting the scheme in house the take up had increased and 115 properties had been improved.

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Q 2 - Mr Robert Shippey

A 'climate emergency' was declared in 2021 under the previous Conservative administration, and a target set of 2035 for net-zero corporate emissions and borough-wide by 2050 (in line with UK law). I assume those targets are still in place, even though they were not included in the recent corporate strategy of this administration. The new corporate strategy says you aim to 'Lead by example by reducing our own carbon emissions'.

To address an emergency you must stop what you're doing, seek expert advice, reprioritise, and divert resources.

Since forming the new administration, has a plan been developed in line with the emergency to reach net zero by the 2035 or the 2050 target with tangible quantifiable steps? What budget has the new administration allocated to such a plan?

Councillor Parish responded as follows: "The Council agreed its climate change strategy and action plan in September 2021. We also allocated a reserve fund of approximately £1m to support a range of activities such as improvements to our properties, installation of EV charging facilities across the borough and projects to encourage community action on decarbonisation. The Council also seeks to access government grants to support that work. The work of our Housing Standards team is such an example.

The strategy is due to be reviewed this Autumn and in Spring we will be providing an update on the action plan and reserve fund, our latest carbon footprint and begin the process of developing our new climate change strategy and action plan. We will be undertaking consultation on this in due course."

By way of supplementary Mr Shippey asked what the Climate Change budget was. Councillor Parish responded that the budget was in the process of being agreed.

C:75

REVIEW OF PROPORTIONALITY

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Following the formation of the new Progressive Group proportionality had been further reviewed following the original report published with the agenda. An updated report and recommendations were considered.

RESOLVED: The proportionality was agreed as per the amended report and table.

C:76 **APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES AND INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARDS**

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Council was invited to nominate members to serve on the King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Charity and the East of Ouse, Polver and the Nar Internal Drainage Board.

Nominations of Councillor Rust to the Borough Charity had been received, and Alan Holmes to the Internal Drainage Board.

No further nominations were invited. On being put to the vote the nominations were agreed.

RESOLVED: That Councillor Jo Rust be appointed to the King's Lynn Borough Charity, and Alan Holmes be appointed to the East of Ouse Polver and the Nar IDB.

C:77 **RECOMMENDATIONS FROM COUNCIL BODIES**

i **Cabinet: 5 December 2023**

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Councillor Parish proposed the recommendations in CAB74: Council Tax Support - Final Scheme for 2024-25, seconded by Councillor Moriarty.

In debating the recommendations Councillor Bone supported them.

Councillor Dark spoke against the recommendations drawing attention to Great Yarmouth's reduction in percentage support which had therefore decreased the county council's funding element. The County Council had then allocated Great Yarmouth part of those savings for a hardship fund. He considered this Council's level of support should stay at its current level or should have worked with the County Council to create a scheme to help a larger number of people.

Councillor Osborne spoke in support of the recommendations in order to assist those in real poverty.

Councillor Kemp spoke in support, drawing attention to the rising costs of the basics for families.

Councillor Joyce spoke in support of the recommendations, but commented that he considered people should be means tested and get 100% support with council tax.

Councillor Morley, in supporting the recommendations drew attention to the fact that the recommendations were what had been promised and urged members to support it.

Councillor Ratcliffe supported the increased level of support for those in need, and confirmed that the options available could be reviewed in the future.

Councillor Long considered the proposal didn't allow any room for assisting other households who also needed support.

Councillor Jamieson stated he would not support the recommendations as the impact on the County Council's budget was high. He indicated he would prefer a hardship fund or funding through Lily.

Councillor de Whalley indicated support for the scheme to reduce inequality.

Councillor Parish summed up stating that if the recommendations were not agreed it reverted back to the existing 84% level, which required more people to have to fill in forms to receive support, and additional officer time in processing the applications. He stated there had been no consultation with the County Council on the options available although he had been holding discussions with them on other matters. He commented that the Council was not in the position to negotiate with the County Council regarding the funding at this stage, but it was possible in future years.

The recommendations were put to the vote.

RESOLVED: The recommendations from Cabinet on 5 December 2023 were agreed.

ii **Cabinet : 15 January 2024**

Recommendation CAB88: Polling District Review had been withdrawn from this meeting and would be presented at the next meeting.

Councillor Parish moved each of the recommendations, seconded by Councillor Moriarty.

CAB89: Council Tax Premiums for Long-Term Empty Properties and Second Homes

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Council was informed that recommendation1 and the relevant part of recommendation 3 relating to empty properties would be taken first.

In proposing the recommendation, Councillor Parish referred to the potential figures which could be raised for each precepting body, he referred to discussions with the County Council on apportionment of the funding. He expressed the hope that those with empty homes would be encouraged to bring them back into use, or sell them so they could be brought back into use by others.

Councillor Dark referred to the exceptions in the policy such as hardship or probate and asked if it was proposed to maintain those exceptions. Councillor Moriarty confirmed and drew attention to the exceptions.

Councillor Bone expressed the hope that the policy would encourage more people to sell those properties to provide homes for those who need them.

Councillor Long supported the increase commenting that some kept properties empty deliberately, which then often made the properties a magnet for anti social behaviour and crime. He made reference to issues faced by executors dealing with empty homes.

Councillor Kemp supported the recommendation hoping it would focus owners minds.

Councillor Morley drew attention to the measures in place to check if homes were empty, and the enforcement of the new law.

Councillor Joyce commented on the that generally where children went to school was their home. He commented on the valuation office writing properties off for Council Tax.

Councillor Rust responded on the stringent checks on properties before they could be deemed derelict. She referred to the information contained on the Valuation Office website and undertook to send it to members.

On being put to the vote recommendation 1 and the relevant part of recommendation 3 were agreed.

Councillors Blunt, Lintern and Devulapalli declared pecuniary interests in the remainder of the item and left the meeting during its consideration.

Councillor Parish proposed recommendations 2 3 (remainder of), 4 and 5 of CAB89 Council Tax premiums for Long Term Empty Properties and Second Homes. This was seconded by Councillor Moriarty.

In proposing the recommendations Councillor Parish drew attention to the potential funding from the decision, and explained that discussions were ongoing with the County Council regarding apportionment of it. He acknowledged owners would either pay the Council tax, live in them, turn the properties into businesses, or sell them.

Councillor Bone in supporting the recommendations acknowledged it would bring in additional revenue, as too many second homes in a village often caused it to be uninhabited out of season. He drew attention to the number of neighbourhood plans which were being agreed with conditions on second homes, and the number of areas which local people could no longer afford to live in.

Councillor Dark announced a free vote for his group on the issue. He commented that the law was a tool to be used for this rather than a weapon. He considered the report vague on the benefits of it, and the vast majority of properties were not band D or above. He had distributed an email from a constituent who drew attention to the fact that while they paid council tax they rarely needed to draw on the County's services. He also sought assurance that the additional money raised would to those areas affected. He also did

not think that the County Council would negotiate on the apportionment when the earlier decision taken had cost them in the region of £200,000.

Councillor Morley commented that people could live here, pay the tax or sell their properties. He acknowledged he used to come on holiday here, but chose to move here full time to give back to the area.

Councillor Jamieson spoke in support of the recommendations as it would help ease the financial pressures the County Council was under particularly child and adult social services. He also commented that he was concerned that some second home owners were prevented from registering to vote.

Councillor Sandell spoke against the recommendation as the area she represented an area with a lot of second homes which she considered contributed to the local economy and supported local businesses. She asked if the parishes would receive the funding.

Councillor de Winton spoke of the contribution to the Council Tax pot that the second homes along the coast made. He proposed an amendment to rec 2 "that up to a 100% premium" and rec 4 "that the funding to go to the parishes, not the Borough Council". This did not receive a seconder so fell.

Councillor Bullen supported the recommendations and asked how many school aged children were now in the coastal areas full time.

Councillor Joyce made reference to the grants issued during covid for holiday lets, he also expressed the opinion that the business rate qualification should be based on the number of days let in the summer and winter.

Councillor Rust reminded members that council tax bands did not change until the property changed hands. She commented on the lack of community cohesion often experienced in areas of high second homes with local populations needing those services which were cut due to second home ownership such as childcare.

Councillor Jameson made a point of clarification that childcare funding had not been decreased by the County Council.

Councillor Collingham commented that if the people of the Borough wanted the services they should pay for them, not expect second homes to do so. She referred to the fact that the second homes were kept neat, and drew attention to the employment provided by the hospitality sector which employed many young people. She commented that many of the current generation of second home owners had dug deep to afford the properties.

Councillor Osborne spoke in support of the recommendations stressing that it was not about penalising those with second homes, but it was being done in order to support local communities and those who did not have a home.

Councillor Squire acknowledged that no one was saying that second home owners were not welcome, but west Norfolk had problems due to the level of them.

It was proposed and seconded that the question now be put. This was put to the vote and agreed. Councillor Parish summed up briefly, and on being put to the vote the CAB 89 recommendations 2, 3 (part), 4 and 5 were agreed.

Therefore all the recommendations of **CAB89 Council Tax Premiums for Long Term Empty Properties and Second Homes were agreed.**

At 19.24 Council adjourned for 10 minutes and re convened at 19.34.

Councillor Parish proposed CAB90: Whistle Blowing Policy, seconded by Councillor Moriarty.

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Councillor Nash expressed his dissatisfaction with the administration of the Whistle Blowing Policy to date, where he commented that the process should be confidential, but had not been.

Councillor Joyce explained how he considered it should be dealt with, as did Councillor Everett.

Councillor Moriarty responded that it appeared they were historic issues being raised, felt it was key that the witnesses should be supported, and invited him to meet with him to discuss.

Councillor Beales would not comment on personal issues, but commented on a clear and plain English policy and strengthened procedure which had been put forward.

Councillor Rust supported the strengthening of the policy.. Councillor Kemp commented the policy and procedure should be kept under review.

In summing up Councillor Parish drew attention to the opportunities to discuss the report to date. On being put to the vote, the recommendation **CAB90: Whistleblowing Policy was agreed.**

Councillor Parish proposed the recommendations in CAB91: Designation of a Village Green, South Lynn, seconded by Councillor Moriarty. In proposing Councillor Parish referred to the long awaited Green which was larger than originally intended due to the addition of the community orchard.

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Councillor Kemp wished to raise an amendment that the Council would proceed with the Local Plan process and then reviews the sites within the east of Hardings Way and look to remove the sites for 50 dwellings for a more suitable location. In the mean time the Council will not develop the land in any way.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer gave advice that the amendment was a new issue relating to the local plan rather than the village green.

Councillor Joyce challenged the opinion of the Monitoring Officer as he had advised the Leader on the process and he had no court decision on the matter. The Deputy Monitoring Officer responded that a court decision was not relevant. Councillor Joyce challenged the Mayor to decide. Councillor Beales asked Councillor Joyce to clarify the area of the Constitution which had been breached. Councillor Joyce stated that Councillor Beales had been responsible for a planning application to put general traffic on Hardings Way, to which Councillor Beales asked him to withdraw the statement.

The Mayor agreed to move on, the Monitoring Officer confirmed the amendment was not admissible. Councillor Kemp challenged this ruling.

Councillor Dark expressed concern that there were questions around amendments which would change the original recommendation. He questioned the amendment being ruled out. He suggested withdrawing the item at this stage.

Councillor Moriarty expressed the view that the ruling of the Monitoring Officer had been made and should be accorded with.

The Mayor ruled to continue with the original motion. Councillor Kemp spoke on it she considered it wasn't adequate because of the risk of traffic on Hardings Way. Councillor Moriarty challenged the points raised as being part of the aborted amendment.

Councillor Everett suggested that the meeting was due to approaching the 3 hour threshold. It was confirmed 20.16 was the cut off time. The Mayor proposed moving to the vote. This was agreed. Councillor Parish briefly summed up.

On being put to the vote the recommendations in **CAB91 Designation of a Village Green, South Lynn** were agreed.

RESOLVED: That the following items from Cabinet 15 January 2024 be AGREED:

CAB89: Council Tax Premiums for Long Term Empty Homes and Second Homes

CAB90: Whistle Blowing Policy

CAB91 Designation of a Village Green, South Lynn

The meeting closed at 8.16 pm