

MINUTES COUNCIL

Wednesday 17 November 2021

Councillor Meredith Lawrence (Mayor)

Present: Councillor Sandra Barnes
Councillor Michael Adams
Councillor Peter Barnes
Councillor Chris Barnfather
Councillor Michael Boyle
Councillor Nicki Brooks
Councillor John Clarke
Councillor Liz Clunie
Councillor Bob Collis
Councillor Jim Creamer
Councillor Boyd Elliott
Councillor David Ellis
Councillor Rachael Ellis
Councillor Roxanne Ellis
Councillor Andrew Ellwood
Councillor Kathryn Fox
Councillor Des Gibbons
Councillor Helen Greensmith
Councillor Jennifer Hemingway
Councillor Jenny Hollingsworth
Councillor Mike Hope
Councillor Rosa Keneally
Councillor Ron McCrossen
Councillor Viv McCrossen
Councillor Barbara Miller
Councillor Simon Murray
Councillor Julie Najuk
Councillor Marje Paling
Councillor John Parr
Councillor Michael Payne
Councillor Alex Scroggie
Councillor Martin Smith
Councillor Sam Smith
Councillor John Truscott
Councillor Henry Wheeler
Councillor Paul Wilkinson

Absent: Councillor Pat Bosworth, Councillor Paul Feeney and Councillor Clive Towsey-Hinton

40 THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Council stood in silent tribute to Sir David Amess who was murdered carrying out his work as a Member of Parliament in Southend in October.

As the Mayor's Chaplain was unable to attend, The Mayor delivered the thought for the day, which was on remembrance, and a poem called 'In Flanders Fields' which inspired the use of the poppy.

41 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bosworth, Feeney and Towsey-Hinton.

42 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

The Mayor spoke about his attendance at a number of engagements, including the opening of Apollo House Children's Home in Mapperley and the new Sainsbury's store in Cowlick.

The Mayor also attended a remembrance service at All Hallows Church along with the Youth Mayor as well as the Polish Cross Remembrance Service in Calverton.

The Mayor, at the request of Councillor Brooks, paid tribute to the staff and volunteers at the Richard Herrod Centre for the work done over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst working as a volunteer at the vaccination centre, Councillor Brooks had been impressed with how the staff had adapted to working in a clinical setting whilst maintaining good humour and professionalism. The Mayor thanked the staff at the centre praising them as one of the Council's greatest assets.

43 TO APPROVE, AS A CORRECT RECORD, THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15 SEPTEMBER 2021

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the above meeting, having been circulated, be approved as a correct record.

44 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS.

Councillor Brooks declared a Non Pecuniary interest as a Trustee of Gedling Conservation Trust and a volunteer with The Waterside Care Trust.

45 TO DEAL WITH ANY PETITIONS RECEIVED UNDER STANDING ORDER 8A.

None received.

46 TO ANSWER QUESTIONS ASKED BY THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDER 8.

None received.

47 TO ANSWER QUESTIONS ASKED BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL UNDER STANDING ORDER 9.

Question from Councillor Martin Smith

"We're delighted that this Conservative Government has invested £210,426 of 'Welcome Back Fund' into Gedling to improve our high streets and public spaces. Could the Finance Portfolio Holder update us on where this funding has been spent?"

Response from Councillor Michael Payne

"May I thank Councillor Smith for his question.

Just as a bit of background information, Gedling Borough Council was initially allocated £105,213 as part of the Reopening High Street Safely Fund in July 2020.

Despite claims from the opposition that the money has been provided by this Government, in reality this funding was sourced from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and is subject to European rules on eligibility, spend, and procurement processes.

As part of this process, the Government required a Grant Action Plan submitting and agreeing before any spend could be claimed for reimbursement, therefore any expenditure we did make during that year was committed at risk of not being eligible for reclaim.

This process took some time with the Grant Action Plan being submitted in July 2020 and the contract being finally signed by government officials in April 2021, some 9 months later. The end date for this project was 30th June 2021, giving us 10 weeks to spend it all, which was impossible. This has affected ALL local authorities and not just Gedling.

These design flaws in the initial scheme were recognised by the Government when they announced the new Welcome Back Fund this year. This Fund was set up in response to some of the criticisms of the Reopening High Street Safely Fund, and the inability by local authorities to spend it due to the inherent risks designed into the scheme. It is less prescriptive and gives a greater degree of flexibility over spend.

The new Welcome Back Fund allows for any underspends from the previous Reopening High Street Safely Fund to be added into this new scheme, which allocated a further £105,213 to Gedling Borough Council.

Turning to the question about what we are spending the grant on, I (Jenny) reported this to the Cabinet meeting held on 5th August this year. This report set out what the council has done since June 2020 and what it proposes to do up to 31st March 2022.

To summarise, these actions are:

- The Communications team are about to launch a 'Rediscover' campaign that aims to drive footfall in the town centres and get more people shopping locally across the borough. The campaign will highlight businesses across the region using the council's social media channels.
- A new website dedicated to supporting local businesses and promoting Christmas events will be launched this month.
- Roll out a "quality scheme" for businesses to be accredited for being Covid secure.

- Continue employing a Retail Business Advisor, who has already made a significant impact working with our retail businesses in the borough, providing tailored support and building relationships.
- Use of footfall counters to provide an analysis of shoppers for each town centre area.
- Looking to develop a town centre app.
- Supporting and promoting a safe public environment through temporary public realm works, including appropriate Covid signage, new benches, planters etc.
- Delivery of bespoke activities within the town centres, for events such as the Xmas market etc.”

Question from Councillor Greensmith

“Can the Environment Portfolio Holder confirm plans for road sweeping during autumn to prevent flooding?”

Response from Councillor Payne

“Throughout the year, the council operates on an 8 weekly sweeping round cycle.

From the start of November, this is suspended in order to target areas of the borough that have a large number of mature trees.

We do this in order to clean up the leaf fall to prevent it blocking up the underground highways drainage system, which is a responsibility of the County Council.

If however an underground highways drainage system does become blocked, then the County have to send out one of their Gully vacuum machines to remove the accumulation of leaves.

Should a report of a blockage come through to councillors or officers, then it is helpful if we can request the resident to notify the County Council direct. Alternatively, our officers can do this on their behalf but it may take longer to resolve the problem.”

In response to a supplementary question about the scheduling of road sweepers, Councillor Payne described the process for raising service issues. He then reiterated the decision made to reallocate resources away from areas less prone to fallen leaves in order to address problem areas.

Question from Councillor Adams

“What progress has the Council made to reduce its £200,000+ annual spend on B&B temporary accommodation?”

Response from Councillor Henry Wheeler

“The Council at its budget meeting of 4th March 2021 agreed a budget of £1.154m for the purchase of up to 8 properties for use as temporary accommodation.

Since that time, officers have been reviewing the housing market regularly to ensure we identify newly advertised properties and undertake a viewing of the premises as soon as possible.

This work has been ongoing throughout this financial year and numerous properties have been inspected for their suitability. There is a high demand for properties in the borough from first time buyers and investors, and due to the lack of available homes on the market, there has been an increase in house prices.

Despite this, the authority has had 3 individual bids accepted and these are currently undergoing the relevant conveyancing process. The properties are:

- two 2-bedroom houses located in the Arnold area;
- one 3-bedroom property in Carlton.

The 3 properties are ideally located centrally in the Borough and have access to public transport, services and schools. The team continues to work closely with our local estate agents, and will continue to view properties each week with the aim of securing further suitable temporary accommodation for our residents.

The team has also been working in partnership with the County Council with the aim of leasing 3 school caretaker properties located within the borough. These are all 3-bedroom properties that are currently unoccupied and empty.

The proposal is to lease them over a 2-year period, and use them as an alternative to expensive Bed and Breakfast accommodation. The Department for Education has approved the proposal and they are with the respective council legal teams to agree the terms of the lease.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Housing Needs team utilised temporary accommodation managed by Rushcliffe Borough Council. This was an alternative for families to avoid emergency Bed and Breakfast accommodation, but during the pandemic this option was stopped.

However, from 1st November 2021, they are again accepting referrals and we are actively working with families currently placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation to relocate them.

As a result of all of these measures, the council's expenditure on bed and breakfast temporary accommodation should notably decrease over the coming months."

In response to a supplementary question on the types of housing being purchased by the council, Councillor Wheeler explained that the market did not have sufficient properties for the Council to consider bidding on.

Question from Councillor Sam Smith

"This Council has spent £70,500 over the last three months on agency staff for our environment departments. This is in addition to £45,000 approved between April and June. Yet bin collections are still being missed. What is being done to recruit more internal staff, reduce the agency costs to the taxpayers of Gedling and improve bin collection services?"

Response from Councillor Michael Payne

"Agency staff are hired to cover for Annual Leave, Sickness Leave and Training, and to carry out Seasonal Grounds Maintenance work between April and October each year. They are also used as supply labour if the Waste service requires extra bin deliveries or bin collections.

They are hired on a daily basis as and when required, and are workers who live locally, supplied by our Agency contract provider.

During the Covid-19 epidemic, our Waste, Street Cleansing, Parks and Cemeteries staff have been working tirelessly to keep our council frontline services going.

Last year was a particularly difficult time requiring long periods of isolation if a member of staff and/or a family member caught Covid. It fell on the rest of the team to maintain the service, and our staff often gave up holiday entitlement to ensure the service was delivered.

As a result, staff working in these areas collected up a good deal of annual leave that has to be taken in this financial year, and this requires backfilling with agency labour.

To add a further layer of difficulty this year, the national situation with shortages in HGV drivers has resulted in 3 of our drivers leaving the council, all requiring additional cover to maintain our waste collection rounds.

Moving forward, I have asked officers to review the remaining leave entitlement for our frontline staff, and to estimate any further impacts on the budget in quarters 3 and 4. This will be presented in the quarterly budget monitoring report.

Yes I would agree that some bin collections are missed, but this is mainly due to blocked streets caused by badly parked cars. A refuse truck is a wide vehicle and sometimes we simply cannot get down a street. However if this happens, the waste crews do repeatedly return to try to collect the waste again.

We employ several methods to ensure that we can collect the waste:

- such as deploying a narrow vehicle,
- we request the County Council to place double yellow parking lines on street corners,
- we send flyers to residents houses asking them to be considerate when parking on bin collection days; and
- we used leaflets, our contacts magazine, and social media to promote the recycling and good parking message.

Satisfaction with our waste collection service is high amongst our residents, but we are not complacent and always strive to collect every bin first time.”

In response to a supplementary question on steps being taken to address the Environment Department’s overspend, Councillor Payne explained that reducing the expenditure on the Environment Budget will directly affect council services and the overspend is a result of ensuring the delivery of these services in difficult times.

48 CHANGES TO REPRESENTATION ON COMMITTEES

Councillor Hemmingway joined the meeting at 6:47pm.

Consideration was given to a report of the Democratic Services Manager, seeking approval to change committee memberships and outside body representation as set out in the report.

In moving the recommendation Councillor Wilkinson explained that due to a change in circumstances, no amendments to the membership of the Planning Committee would be proposed.

RESOLVED to:

Replace Councillor Roxanne Ellis with Councillor Rachael Ellis on the Environment and Licensing and Licensing Act Committees.

49 APPOINTMENT OF CO-OPTED PARISH REPRESENTATIVE TO THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Governance and Customer Services, seeking approval to change committee memberships of the Standards Committee, to fill the vacant post of co-opted Parish representative.

RESOLVED to:

Co-opt Martyn Thorpe, Parish Councillor for St Albans, on to the Standards Committee to fill the vacant post of co-opted Parish representative until the annual meeting in 2022.

50 REVIEW OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MEMBERS

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Governance and Customer Services, to obtain agreement from Members that the Council's current Code of Conduct for Councillors remains unchanged.

RESOLVED to:

- 1) Note the work undertaken by the Standards Committee and Working Group in reviewing the Council's Code of Conduct; and
- 2) Agree that no changes are made to the Gedling Borough Council Code of Conduct.

51 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Corporate Resources, seeking approval for the current Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) to continue without revision in 2022/23.

RESOLVED to:

Approve and adopt the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) 2022/23, from 1 April 2022 with no changes to the CTRS for working age people as described in Section 2 of the report, except for the annual uprating and amendments of allowances and premiums in line with Housing Benefit levels.

52 EXTERNAL AUDIT PROCUREMENT

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Corporate Resources, seeking approval for the Council to accept the invitation from Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA) to "opt-in" to their sector-led national scheme to appoint a local auditor to audit the Council's accounts under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and the Local Audit Regulations 2015.

RESOLVED to:

Accept the invitation from Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd to "opt-in" to their sector-led national scheme to appoint a local auditor to audit the Council's accounts from 2023/24 to 2027/28 under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

53 TO RECEIVE QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS CONCERNING ANY MATTER DEALT WITH BY THE EXECUTIVE OR BY A COMMITTEE OR SUB-COMMITTEE (STANDING ORDER 11.1).

In accordance with Standing Order 11.1, a number of comments were made and responded to by the appropriate Cabinet Member or Committee Chair.

54 TO CONSIDER COMMENTS, OF WHICH DUE NOTICE HAS BEEN GIVEN, UNDER STANDING ORDER 11.03(A).

None received.

55 TO CONSIDER MOTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDER 12.

Councillor Scroggie left the meeting at 7:28 pm.

Motion One

Upon a notice of motion received in the name of Councillor Boyle, a proposition was moved by Councillor Boyle seconded by Councillor Payne, in the following terms:

This Council notes:

This Council is deeply concerned by the shocking levels of sewage discharged into our waterways, rivers and oceans locally and across the country.

This Council expresses concern at figures published by the Rivers Trust, which highlight in 2020 alone there was at least 5,752 hours of sewage spills into waterways across Gedling parliamentary constituency by water companies and at least 4,279 hours of sewage spills into waterways across Sherwood parliamentary constituency.

This Council firmly believes there should be a statutory duty on all water companies to take all reasonable steps to ensure untreated sewage is not discharged from storm overflows. In light of the harm caused to the environment, individual and public health, this Council wishes to see the practice of discharging raw sewage into our nation's rivers, waterways and oceans eliminated entirely, not simply progressively reduced.

This Council resolves to engage with agencies including Severn Trent Water, the Environment Agency, Nottinghamshire County Council and the UK Government to urge swift action to stop the disgraceful discharge of raw/untreated sewage in our waterways and rivers.

This Council encourages and supports the use of its Overview & Scrutiny processes to assist in holding to account those agencies responsible for discharging raw and untreated sewage into our waterways and rivers locally.

This Council calls on our local Members of Parliament, Tom Randall and Mark Spencer to publicly support our call for the banning and elimination of discharge of raw and untreated sewage into our waterways, rivers and oceans.

This Council also calls on Gedling borough's two Members of Parliament to campaign and vote for a statutory requirement on water companies to eliminate not simply progressively reduce the discharge of raw and untreated sewage into our waterways, rivers and oceans.

There then followed a debate on the motion, the proposition was put to a vote and was supported.

It was therefore

RESOLVED that:

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This Council also calls on Gedling borough's two Members of Parliament to campaign and vote for a statutory requirement on water companies to eliminate not simply progressively reduce the discharge of raw and untreated sewage into our waterways, rivers and oceans.

Motion Two

Upon a notice of motion received in the name of Councillor Payne, a proposition was moved by Councillor Payne seconded by Councillor Clarke, in the following terms:

This Council notes:

This Council agrees with Sir John Armit, Chair of the UK's National Infrastructure Commission, who recently commented that the Government should stop making councils 'plead on bended knee' for vital funds if 'levelling up' is to work. This Council concurs with Sir John Armit's view that the system of bidding for multiple pots of ringfenced funding to Whitehall is 'inefficient and ineffective'.

This Council's recent 'Levelling Up Fund' bid would help to kickstart high street regeneration, improve Arnold town centre and encourage healthy travel in Netherfield. It was a bid that could help to make Gedling borough an even better place to live, work and raise a family.

This Council notes the Prime Minister's response to our local Member of Parliament at Prime Minister's Questions on 30 June 2021 that the 'Levelling Up Fund' would 'indeed invest in infrastructure projects that improves life across the country but in his constituency (Gedling) particularly.'

This Council is therefore extremely disappointed not to have received a single penny from the UK Government's 'Levelling Up Fund', which follows on from communities across Gedling borough not receiving a single penny from the UK Government from the Towns Fund and the Future High Streets Fund too.

This Council was also disappointed to have been classified by the Government as a 'category 2' area for the purposes of the 'Levelling Up Fund', whilst other areas across the country that had already benefited from millions of pounds funding allocations from the Towns Fund and Future High Streets Fund were classified as 'category 1'.

This Council calls on our two local Members of Parliament, Tom Randall MP and Mark Spencer MP and the Government to demonstrate they

back Gedling borough's communities, town & village centres and businesses when it comes to 'levelling up' by ensuring Gedling borough urgently receives its fair share of capital investment for local infrastructure improvements and regeneration, particularly following the triple-whammy insult of being overlooked by the Government for the Towns Fund, Future High Streets Fund and Levelling Up Fund.

This Council also calls on our Members of Parliament and the Government to ensure this year's local government finance settlement rectifies the utterly unsatisfactory situation of Gedling Borough Council being the worst affected council in the country for two years running in terms of reduction in Core Spending Power since 2015/16.

In accordance with Standing Order 17.03, the proposition was put to a named vote as follows:

For the motion:

Councillor Peter Barnes	Councillor Hemmingway
Councillor Sandra Barnes	Councillor Hollingsworth
Councillor Boyle	Councillor Hope
Councillor Brooks	Councillor Keneally
Councillor Clarke	Councillor Lawrence
Councillor Clunie	Councillor Ron McCrossen
Councillor Collis	Councillor Viv McCrossen
Councillor Creamer	Councillor Miller
Councillor David Ellis	Councillor Najuk
Councillor Rachael Ellis	Councillor Paling
Councillor Roxanne Ellis	Councillor Payne
Councillor Ellwood	Councillor Truscott
Councillor Fox	Councillor Wheeler
Councillor Gibbons	Councillor Wilkinson
Councillor Greensmith	

Against the motion:

None.

Abstentions:

Councillor Adams	Councillor Murray
Councillor Barnfather	Councillor Parr
Councillor Elliott	Councillor Martin Smith
Councillor Greensmith	Councillor Sam Smith

It was therefore

RESOLVED that:

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This Council also calls on our Members of Parliament and the Government to ensure this year's local government finance settlement rectifies the utterly unsatisfactory situation of Gedling Borough Council being the worst affected council in the country for two years running in terms of reduction in Core Spending Power since 2015/16.

The meeting finished at 8.55 pm

Signed by Chair:
Date: