

**MINUTES
COUNCIL**

Wednesday 18 September 2024

Councillor Ron McCrossen (Mayor)

Present: Councillor Michael Adams Councillor Viv McCrossen
Councillor Roy Allan Councillor Julie Najuk
Councillor Sandra Barnes Councillor Marje Paling
Councillor Stuart Bestwick Councillor Michael Payne
Councillor David Brocklebank Councillor Lynda Pearson
Councillor Lorraine Brown Councillor Sue Pickering
Councillor John Clarke Councillor Catherine Pope
Councillor Jim Creamer Councillor Kyle Robinson-Payne
Councillor Boyd Elliott Councillor Alex Scroggie
Councillor David Ellis Councillor Martin Smith
Councillor Rachael Ellis Councillor Sam Smith
Councillor Roxanne Ellis Councillor Ruth Strong
Councillor Paul Feeney Councillor Clive Towsey-Hinton
Councillor Helen Greensmith Councillor Jane Walker
Councillor Jenny Hollingsworth Councillor Henry Wheeler
Councillor Paul Hughes Councillor Russell Whiting
Councillor Alison Hunt Councillor Paul Wilkinson

Absent: Councillor Andrew Dunkin, Councillor Andrew Ellwood, Councillor Kathryn Fox, Councillor Grahame Pope and Councillor Michelle Welsh

14 THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The Mayors Chaplain was unable to attend the meeting so no thought for the day was given. The Mayor welcomed the newly elected councillor, Councillor Darren Maltby, to the chamber.

15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dunkin, Ellwood, Fox, Grahame Pope, and Welsh.

16 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor noted that he had been on several visits in the community over the past few weeks, including a visit to the Community Hub in Gedling village who were raising funds to renovate the old station.

17 TO APPROVE, AS A CORRECT RECORD, THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 26 JULY 2024

RESOLVED:

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

18 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor Clarke declared an interest in item 13, as a recipient of the Winter Fuel Payments in which the motion was concerned with.

19 TO DEAL WITH ANY PETITIONS RECEIVED UNDER PROCEDURAL RULE 7.8

None received.

20 TO ANSWER QUESTIONS ASKED BY THE PUBLIC UNDER PROCEDURAL RULE 7.7

One question was received and printed on the agenda pack from Matthew Francis. Matthew Francis addressed the meeting and confirmed that he would be withdrawing his question.

21 TO ANSWER QUESTIONS ASKED BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL UNDER PROCEDURAL RULE 7.9

A question was asked of the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources and Performance by Councillor Whiting, as follows:

“What support, if any, is Gedling Borough Council able to provide those pensioners who will lose their Winter Fuel Allowance as a result of the introduction of means testing?”

Response from Councillor Payne:

Can I start off by thanking Cllr Whiting for his question and by saying that this is an issue that is a concern for everyone in this chamber. Support for our most vulnerable residents is something this council has been focused on since we took control of the council in 2011 and will continue to be focused on.

In terms of the specific question that you asked, despite huge financial cuts imposed by the previous conservative government over many years, this labour council is incredibly proud of its ongoing support to its most vulnerable residents, and I am pleased to say that this commitment has been continued by Gedling Borough Council into this financial year. I can give you four particular examples, three of which pensioners who you referred to specifically in your question, are eligible for.

Firstly, we provide discretionary housing payments and in 2023/2024 we distributed £184,000 in accordance with the eligibility criteria set out. Secondly, we provide hardship relief to council tax payers and in 2023/2024 we granted a further £107,000 to our local residents. Thirdly, although not relevant to this particular question about pensioners, the council provided £214,000 of council tax support to care leavers, an issue that I know is very important to you and everyone in this chamber. Fourthly, we of course continue to be one of only a handful of councils that maintains the 100% council tax reduction scheme meaning that our most vulnerable residents across the borough are protected from paying any council tax at all.

The financial outlook remains incredibly challenging, as it does for the county, but I am sure I speak for everyone when I say that we will continue to do all that we can to maintain our support for our most vulnerable residents in future years. I will finish by saying this – this council also has an incredibly important role to play in making sure that other forms of funding handed out by central government are levied to support the most vulnerable people in the borough even if we are not directly responsible for it. I know that is something you have done in the past and will continue to do so I hope Councillor Whiting that you will join me in pressing Nottinghamshire County Council to make sure that the extended household support fund goes to the most vulnerable residents, including to those pensioners who now might be struggling this winter. It is absolutely critical that Nottinghamshire County Council see fit to do this – central government have taken the right decision in my view to extend that funding by a further £421 million to county councils across England. Nottinghamshire county council is receiving a fair share of that, and it is critical that they make sure that a fair share of that funding goes towards the pensioners here in Gedling.

Councillor Whiting followed up confirming he would like to join in praising the work that this council had done but wondered if he could make four particular suggestions that the council might be able to consider. He asked if the following options were possible:

- Could the Council help to advertise pension credit, how to sign up for it and eligibility on their social media channels?
- Could officers give individual councillors information to help to identify people within their wards who might be eligible for help but may be struggling to sign up?
- Could the council advertise schemes for insulation for houses? There are many draughty Victorian houses across the borough that are hard to keep warm
- Could the council commit to continuing to support community groups that are going to be providing warm hubs as they have done in the past?

Follow up response from Councillor Payne:

Thank you for your considered follow up question and can I say that you deserve a huge amount of credit for coming here to ask an important question and give potential constructive criticism, which I am willing to take on the chin, but also for offering some solutions and suggestions to help the people of this borough.

In terms of the pension credit advertising – I give you my commitment that we will do whatever we can do on this. We have brilliant staff in Communications and Revenue and Benefits who always go above and beyond and will no doubt be happy to assist anyone.

In terms of sharing data on vulnerable people in wards, there may be an issue with this due to GDPR and data sharing between central and local authorities. We need to get to the bottom of this issue as it can't be right that we can't get to these specific people – I have pressed this point with central government. The Secretary of State for the Department of Work and Pensions has committed to write out to every pensioner on housing benefit to encourage them to apply for pensions credit, which would likely give them eligibility for the winter fuel allowance under the new arrangements.

In terms of insulation – the council has a really good track record of signing up for boiler and insulation schemes so I will ask officers to dig deep to see what else they can do in terms of bidding for funding in these areas. Insulating homes is something that was on the Labour government manifesto, so we have a mammoth job on our hands with around 90 million homes needing it.

These are really important issues, and you have my word as part of this council and as Member of Parliament for Gedling, that I will do my best to help with them.

Lastly on the warm homes, this council has a great track record of supporting them in the past and is committed to continuing to support them and the great voluntary sector groups that run them.

A question was asked of the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Growth and Economy by Councillor Bestwick, as follows:

"Will the Council be following the new Labour Government's directive to drop the local connection test for social housing? If so, how many non-UK nationals are likely to be added to the list in Gedling and what will that mean to the local residents already on the waiting list?"

Response from Councillor Hollingsworth

Earlier this year, the former prime minister consulted on six new tests to determine whether people qualify for social housing, these included a UK connection and a local connection. At the beginning of August, the

new minister confirmed that government does not intend to enact the proposals in the consultation. Therefore, the current rules apply.

The existing system allows Local Authorities to set their own allocation policy. The Housing team are currently reviewing our existing policy, as we would do annually, due to the overall demand for social housing in the Borough.

There are no plans to alter our current local connection criteria which is 3 years living or working in the Borough.

Refugees are allowed to claim social housing but anyone who is not entitled to benefits is not, which means that most Non-UK Nationals are already excluded. Figures shows that 90% of lead tenants in social housing are British citizens. We cannot predict the number of non-UK Nationals in our area as this is not in our control.

Councillor Bestwick followed up to say he felt the answer did not give assurance to local residents on non-UK nationals being given priority on the housing register, due to the changes in local connection rules. Councillor Hollingsworth read out the part of her original answer that confirmed that there are no plans to alter the council's current local connection criteria - which is 3 years living or working in the Borough.

A question was asked of the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Growth and Economy, By Councillor Sam Smith, as follows:

“Following the Labour Government’s announcement of the reintroduction of housing targets and the increase of 45% in Gedling. Can you inform the Council of what additional sites you have highlighted for future housing development across our borough?”

Response from Councillor Hollingsworth

The Government has recently published draft revisions to the NPPF and to the standard method for assessing local housing need. The draft standard method uses an area’s housing stock rather than the 2014 household projections as its base. For Gedling Borough Council, the draft standard method housing need would be 11,970 new homes over the Strategic Plan period (2023 – 2041) - this compares with a housing need of 8,280 based on the existing 2023 standard method.

However, the government recognises that local plans at an advanced stage should still proceed under the current NPPF version if they have reached publication stage within one month of the publication of the new NPPF and are within 200 dwellings per annum of the governments proposed housing target. Therefore, the plan can be examined under the current 2023 NPPF. The Greater Nottingham councils plan to publish the plan before the end of 2024 under these transitional arrangements. For

Gedling, this will be subject to Cabinet and full council approval in October.

In terms of housing sites, consultation on the Greater Nottingham Strategic Plan took place between 4 January and 14 February 2023 and included an extension to the existing allocation for 640 dwellings.

The Publication Draft Strategic Plan continues to propose an extension to the existing allocation at Top Wighay Farm, for 710 dwellings - this allocation would not require any amendment to the Green Belt boundary.

The remainder of Gedling's housing provision, currently around 1,050 homes identified through the transitional arrangements, may increase further dependent on the Standard Method that is in force at the time and will be met through non-strategic allocations in future plan preparation. This may include sites in or adjoining the Key Settlements for growth of Bestwood Village, Calverton and Ravenshead.

Councillor Smith followed up to ask what the council were doing to protect the green belt, given the new labour government directives in increased housing targets. Councillor Hollingsworth explained the many processes and steps that would be taken before any green belt land was identified for use and noted that these steps in themselves help to protect the green belt.

22 REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE OR A COMMITTEE (PROCEDURAL RULE 7.10)

Councillor Sam Smith left the meeting.

None.

23 APPROVAL OF THE NEW CONTRACT AND PROCUREMENT RULES

Due to a delay in the implementation of the Procurement Act from the 28 October 2024 to Feb 2025 and the potential legislative changes that come with this, this item was withdrawn.

24 CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Councillor Sam Smith re-joined the meeting.

Councillor Clarke proposed amended recommendations, in the following terms:

To approve the following changes to representation on committees:

- 1) Remove Councillor Welsh from the Joint Consultative and Safety and Committee; and
- 2) Appoint Councillor Creamer as Chair of the Joint Consultative and Safety and Committee; and
- 3) Add Councillor Roxanne Ellis to the Joint Consultative and Safety Committee as Vice-Chair of the committee

RESOLVED to:

- 1) Remove Councillor Welsh from the Joint Consultative and Safety and Committee; and
- 2) Appoint Councillor Creamer as Chair of the Joint Consultative and Safety and Committee; and
- 3) Add Councillor Roxanne Ellis to the Joint Consultative and Safety Committee as Vice-Chair of the committee

25 TO CONSIDER COMMENTS, OF WHICH DUE NOTICE HAS BEEN GIVEN, UNDER PROCEDURAL RULE 7.11

None received.

26 TO CONSIDER MOTIONS UNDER PROCEDURAL RULE 7.12

Councillors Clarke and Greensmith left the meeting

Councillor Adams, seconded by Councillor Elliott, proposed a motion in the following terms:

Gedling Borough notes:

- The Labour Government's recent decision to restrict the Winter Fuel Payment to only pensioners in receipt of means-tested benefits like Pension Credit, as announced by Chancellor Rachel Reeves.
- The estimated impact of this decision, which Age UK says will mean 2 million pensioners who badly need the money to stay warm this winter will not receive it.
- The significant role that Winter Fuel Payments play in helping older residents across Gedling Borough and the UK afford heating during the coldest months, thereby preventing 'heat or eat' dilemmas and safeguarding health.
- The additional strain this decision will place on vulnerable pensioners, many of whom do not claim Pension Credit despite being eligible, further exacerbating their financial hardship.

Gedling Borough Council believes:

- That the Winter Fuel Payment has been a lifeline for many older people across the Borough and that restricting its availability solely to those on Pension Credit risks leaving many pensioners in financial hardship.
- While some pensioners currently in receipt of the Winter Fuel Payment may not require it, other pensioners within Gedling Borough sit just above the cut-off for Pension Credit and will now lose their entitlement to the Winter Fuel Payment.

Therefore, Gedling Borough Council resolves to:

- 1) Launch a Council-led local awareness campaign in a future Contacts Magazine to alert and encourage those eligible for Pension Credit to apply for it because doing so will trigger access to Winter Fuel Payments.
- 2) Send a letter from the Council Leader to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, urging a review of the decision to means-test the Winter Fuel Payment and asking the Government to ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who do not claim Pension Credit, are protected from fuel poverty.
- 3) Commit the Council to signing the 'Save the Winter Fuel Payment for Struggling Pensioners' petition being run by Age UK and write to all members offering them the opportunity to sign the petition themselves.
- 4) Encourage local efforts to promote Pension Credit uptake through council services and partnerships with local charities and community organisations to ensure that all eligible pensioners in Gedling Borough are supported in claiming their entitlement.

Proposer: Cllr Mike Adams

Secunder: Cllr Boyd Elliot

Councillor Greensmith rejoined the meeting

An amended motion was proposed by Councillor Payne and seconded by Councillor Hollingsworth, in the following terms:

Gedling Borough notes:

- The £22 billion black hole left in the public finances by the previous Conservative government (now being investigated by the independent Office for Budget Responsibility), which has forced the Labour Government into making the tough decision to target the Winter Fuel Payment to pensioners in receipt of Pension Credit, as announced by Chancellor Rachel Reeves.
- The estimated impact of this decision, which Age UK believes will mean 2 million pensioners who badly need the money to stay warm this winter will not receive it.

- The significant role that Winter Fuel Payments play in helping older residents across Gedling Borough and the UK afford heating during the coldest months, thereby preventing 'heat or eat' dilemmas and safeguarding health and therefore welcomes the £460 increase in the State Pension for the year ahead, as a result of the government's commitment to the Pension Triple Lock
- The strain this decision may place on vulnerable pensioners, particularly in light of the fact the previous Conservative government failed to address the injustice that 880,000 pensioners do not claim Pension Credit despite being eligible, further exacerbating their financial hardship.
- The Labour government's decision to extend the Household Support Fund – providing £421 million to pensioners and others struggling to heat their homes or afford other essential items over the colder months.
- The Labour government's action to write to all pensioners in receipt of pensioner Housing Benefit, encouraging them to apply for Pension Credit, given they are highly likely to be eligible and therefore eligible for Winter Fuel Allowance.

Gedling Borough Council believes:

- That the Winter Fuel Payment, which was introduced by a Labour government has been a lifeline for many older people across the Borough and that the £22 billion black hole in the public finances left by the previous Conservative government, which has led to restricting its availability solely to those on Pension Credit risks leaving many pensioners in financial hardship.
- While some pensioners currently in receipt of the Winter Fuel Payment may not require it, other pensioners within Gedling Borough sit just above the cut-off for Pension Credit and will now lose their entitlement to the Winter Fuel Payment.
- The previous Conservative government failed to support pensioners by failing on its commitment to combine pensioner Housing Benefit with Pension Credit, which would have increased uptake of Pension Credit, given pensioner Housing Benefit is a 'gateway' to Pension Credit and therefore the Winter Fuel Allowance.

Therefore, Gedling Borough Council resolves to:

- 1) Launch a Council-led local awareness campaign in a future Contacts Magazine and using all other channels available to alert and encourage those eligible for Pension Credit to apply for it because doing so will trigger access to Winter Fuel Payments.

- 2) Send a letter from the Council Leader to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, urging the government to take swift action on its commitment to combine pensioner Housing Benefit with Pension Credit, following the decision to means-test the Winter Fuel Payment and asking the Government to ensure that Nottinghamshire County Council ensures vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who do not claim Pension Credit, are protected from fuel poverty, by using the extended £421 million Household Support Fund to support them
- 3) Commit the Council to working with Age UK on supporting pensioners who require support applying for Pension Credit and note all members offering them have the opportunity to sign the Age UK petition themselves.
- 4) Encourage local efforts to promote Pension Credit uptake through council services and partnerships with local charities, community organisations and our local Members of Parliament to ensure that all eligible pensioners in Gedling Borough are supported in claiming their entitlement.
- 5) Urge Nottinghamshire County Council to use its share of the extended Household Support Fund to support vulnerable pensioners with struggling to heat their homes or afford other essential items over the colder months.

On being put to vote, the amendment was carried and became the substantive motion. The new substantive motion was put to a vote and was carried.

RESOLVED that:

Gedling Borough notes:

- The £22 billion black hole left in the public finances by the previous Conservative government (now being investigated by the independent Office for Budget Responsibility), which has forced the Labour Government into making the tough decision to target the Winter Fuel Payment to pensioners in receipt of Pension Credit, as announced by Chancellor Rachel Reeves.
- The estimated impact of this decision, which Age UK believes will mean 2 million pensioners who badly need the money to stay warm this winter will not receive it.
- The significant role that Winter Fuel Payments play in helping older residents across Gedling Borough and the UK afford heating during the coldest months, thereby preventing 'heat or eat' dilemmas and safeguarding health and therefore welcomes the £460 increase in the State Pension for the year ahead, as a result of the government's commitment to the Pension Triple Lock
- The strain this decision may place on vulnerable pensioners, particularly in light of the fact the previous

Conservative government failed to address the injustice that 880,000 pensioners do not claim Pension Credit despite being eligible, further exacerbating their financial hardship.

- The Labour government's decision to extend the Household Support Fund – providing £421 million to pensioners and others struggling to heat their homes or afford other essential items over the colder months.
- The Labour government's action to write to all pensioners in receipt of pensioner Housing Benefit, encouraging them to apply for Pension Credit, given they are highly likely to be eligible and therefore eligible for Winter Fuel Allowance.

Gedling Borough Council believes:

- That the Winter Fuel Payment, which was introduced by a Labour government has been a lifeline for many older people across the Borough and that the £22 billion black hole in the public finances left by the previous Conservative government, which has led to restricting its availability solely to those on Pension Credit risks leaving many pensioners in financial hardship.
- While some pensioners currently in receipt of the Winter Fuel Payment may not require it, other pensioners within Gedling Borough sit just above the cut-off for Pension Credit and will now lose their entitlement to the Winter Fuel Payment.
- The previous Conservative government failed to support pensioners by failing on its commitment to combine pensioner Housing Benefit with Pension Credit, which would have increased uptake of Pension Credit, given pensioner Housing Benefit is a 'gateway' to Pension Credit and therefore the Winter Fuel Allowance.

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- 3) Commit the Council to working with Age UK on supporting pensioners who require support applying for Pension Credit and note all members offering them have the opportunity to sign the Age UK petition themselves.
- 4) Encourage local efforts to promote Pension Credit uptake through council services and partnerships with local charities, community organisations and our local Members of Parliament to ensure that all eligible pensioners in Gedling Borough are supported in claiming their entitlement.
- 5) Urge Nottinghamshire County Council to use its share of the extended Household Support Fund to support vulnerable pensioners with struggling to heat their homes or afford other essential items over the colder months.

The meeting finished at 7.35 pm

Signed by Chair:

Date: