

## **Harborough District Council**

Minutes of an Ordinary Meeting of Council on

**Monday 7<sup>th</sup> October 2024** commencing at 6.30pm

Held at **The Council Chamber, The Symington Building**, Adam and Eve Street,  
Market Harborough, LE16 7AG

Present:

Councillor Elliott (Chairman)

Councillors: Anderson, Asher, Bannister, Bateman, Beadle, Birch, Burrell, Dann, Elliott, Finan, Forman, Gair, Galton, Grafton-Reed, Graves, Hallam, Hollick, James, Johnson, King, Knight, Knowles, Nunn, Mrs Page, Sarfas, Whelband, Whitmore, Woodiwiss.

Officers: John Richardson (Chief Executive), Liz Elliott (Deputy Chief Executive), Clive Mason (Director of Resources & Section 151 Officer), Nancy Barnard (Head of Democratic and Election Services & Monitoring Officer), Sarah Hamilton (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Naomi Kwasa (Senior Democratic Services Officer), David Atkinson (Director of Planning), Rebecca Jenner (Head of Human Resources).

### **1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors Bilbie, Mahal, Modha, Taylor and Rickman.

### **2. Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman started by welcoming the council's new Monitoring Officer, Nancy Barnard, and thanked Naomi Kwasa the Senior Democratic Services Officer, who would be leaving the team.

He also highlighted some of the events he had attended since July. These included The Leicester Botanic Garden Festival, the Rural Community Council's Centenary Celebration and Awards Evening, and the opening of Wellington Place Primary School in the district.

He thanked the Vice Chairman, Councillor James, who had attended the North West Leicestershire's Chairman's Charity Dinner and the Mayor of Oadby and Wigston's Charity Curry Night.

### **3. Declarations of Members' Interests**

Regarding the Motion relating to the Government's proposed withdrawal of the Winter Fuel Allowance, the Monitoring Officer has approved dispensation for all Councillors present to enable them to take part in the debate despite having a non-registrable interest in the matter.

Councillor King declared an interest in Item 11, as an appointee by Leicestershire County Council to the Leicestershire Pensions Board.

Councillor Mrs Page declared an interest in Item 11, as the Chair of the Leicestershire Pensions Board.

#### **4. Draft Council Minutes – 29<sup>th</sup> July 2024.**

The Minutes of the Council meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> July were proposed by Councillor Knowles and therefore were received and adopted.

#### **5. Leader's Report**

The Leader of the Council introduced the report.

Nominations for The Community Awards had opened, and Councillors were encouraged to nominate voluntary and community groups, charities, volunteers, individuals or partnerships in their wards. The awards event will be taking place on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2024.

Lutterworth Leisure Centre hosted a successful Open Day on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2024 to celebrate the refurbishment and renaming of the facility. The refurbishment of Harborough Leisure Centre is on schedule, and an open day would be taking place on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2024.

Congratulations was given to all the winners from the Harborough district at East Midlands in Bloom. Market Harborough, Lubenham in Bloom, Bowden Bowls Club and Stamps Funeral Directors in Little Bowden all received awards.

A process is being developed which invites greater involvement from ward members and residents in the sign-off of open space works on new developments (Practical and Final Completion Certification). Residents are being given a greater voice, and the council won't be signing off sites until all parties are satisfied.

A village centre makeover has been completed in Fleckney. High street shops have received grants to make changes to signage and repaint their frontages. The village pond, library and museum, and area around the village hall had also received improvements.

Congratulations was given to the council's Market and Events Manager, who recently won Small Market Manager of the Year awarded by the National Association of British Market Authorities.

The Leader also congratulated Harborough Town FC on their FA Cup success, and Dunton & Broughton Ladies were also congratulated for getting through to the 3<sup>rd</sup> qualifying round of the Ladies FA Cup.

The Leader also discussed the Parish Council meetings he had been part of, including the Kibworths, Broughton Astley and Great Bowden. Parishes have shared information about issues and priorities for their communities.

The council would be taking part in a Corporate Peer Challenge, arranged by the LGA (Local Government Association), which would be taking place from 11<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> November 2024. Meetings with specific members would be arranged, as well as key staff meetings and staff focus groups.

The Leader also wanted to clarify some misinformation that had been in the local media. There had been speculation and inaccurate information distributed to residents in Great Glen. The council officers and Leader are taking steps to correct the claims and provide correct facts.

The Leader went on to highlight the discussions that he had been having with officers to ensure the most vulnerable in the community were being provided enough support to access all benefits they were entitled to. Officers will be looking into the possibility of face-to-face events across the District and will be working with partners to signpost key services.

**Action:** Officers to provide dates of face-to-face events to provide support and signposting to access benefits at the next meeting of the Council.

The Leader then invited questions and comments from Members on his report.

### **Comments on the Leader's Report**

Following contradicting statements from the Leader and from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and from the council's SHELAA (Strategic Housing, Employment and Land Availability Assessment), is a development of 10,000 new homes next to Glen likely to happen? What is the total number of houses to be delivered on that site? The number that was identified in the government press release was an amalgamation of sites around the country which are what is being called 'stored', meaning they currently have no status. In reference to the SHELAA, the previous government mandated that councils must produce this document, and that sites that currently have no planning status, those that have been put forward to the council by promoters, landowners, etc. that they wish to be considered in the Local Plan must be added to the required maps. A decision will be made on which sites will be taken forward. The Chairman invited the Director of Planning to provide comment on the question. He brought the members

attention to the acronym meaning, and that the document is an assessment of housing and land availability for allocation.

The Leader of the opposition echoed the support for the Community Awards evening, the successful opening of the Lutterworth Leisure Centre, and congratulations to Harborough in Bloom. He anticipated the housing numbers which would clear up any confusion regarding housing allocation in the new Local Plan.

He asked whether there had been any response from the Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government and their office regarding the Leader's request to meet to discuss the new NPPF and issues that have been noted? Will members be sent the consultation response regarding the NPPF?

What action is taking place regarding the new process of signing off open space works on new developments? Will members be privy to this process prior to implementation? The process is currently in development and will endeavour to fix problems that have been raised, including instances where sites receive conditional sign off, and the required work is not completed by final sign off. It is hoped there will be increased involvement from the Portfolio Holder, Ward Member(s) and members of the community. Work is ongoing to develop the final Open Spaces policy, which will be reviewed by Council in the near future.

He also prompted the Leader to ensure he is visiting smaller, more rural parishes to continue the work in engaging with parishes across the district.

Regarding the Corporate Peer Challenge, it was asked if the time to meet with the opposition members could be adjusted, to accommodate members who could not make a daytime meeting.

**Action:** Officers to liaise with the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge team to see if the meeting with opposition members could be re-organised for a different time.

Regarding the plan to provide support for the vulnerable members of the community in accessing benefits, it is important that officers ensure that they are targeting those living in the most rural areas of the community, and not just those in villages. This has been raised, and there should be a minimum of four events (in Market Harborough, Broughton Astley, Lutterworth and Scraptoft), but there will be further events that will cover more locations.

It was suggested that perhaps the Community Safety van could be used to ensure the most rural communities are being reached with support and advice.

What can the council's 'help' events assist with, working alongside Citizens Advice Bureau, Parish Councils and meetings, third party and charity organisations.

Following the central government's proposal to remove VAT exemption from Private Schools, will the Leader be seeking clarification from the government on the impact of this policy on the district and in particular the employment of teachers and support staff, and availability of facilities of these schools used by community groups. It was noted that all central government policy is closely monitored by officers, but as this specifically was not mentioned in the Leader's report, so could not be answered in this portion of the meeting.

Regarding the Open Space Policy, it was stressed that ward members needed to be involved in the development and scrutiny of the policy, to ensure it works to the benefit of the community.

## **6. Questions from the Public**

There were none.

## **7. Petitions from the Public**

There were none.

## **8. Questions from Members**

**The following question was received from Councillor Bateman, for the Leader:**

"Is the Leader aware that 8<sup>th</sup> May 2025 is the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE) Day, and if so, can he assure members that this authority will offer financial assistance to any of the District's Parishes and Towns to assist them in ensuring this important anniversary is marked in a manner befitting its importance in our Country's history?"

The Leader responded:

"Thank you for your question Councillor Bateman, and of course we are all aware of this extremely important anniversary. Whilst there is no specific Town and Parish Council funding that has been earmarked for VE Day events at present, there is a raft of other support available, and our veterans are always at the forefront of our minds throughout all of our service delivery. The Council is fortunate to have its own Armed Forces Officer and Armed Forces Member Champion, and does a lot of work in this area – the Armed Forces Information Day held on 26<sup>th</sup> September is one example of this. In addition, we have also undertaken work to restore the War Memorial, which I have had many positive comments on. We are also lucky enough to have one of our own elected Members as President of the Royal British Legion.

Should Town and Parish Councils experience any challenges in organising events – either financial or otherwise – then we can provide support through

the new Community Development Team, or via one of our many grant programmes.”

**The following question was submitted by Councillor James to the Leader, Councillor Knowles:**

“The UK produces more plastic waste per person than almost any other country in the world so what happens to it? The UK is dumping our waste on other countries.

Presently most is going to Turkey and Malaysia, where often it is set on fire which is certainly damaging the health of people living nearby. The alternative is to dump it in the oceans.

The destinations of Single Use Plastics following the recycling collection service operated by Harborough District Council.

Leicestershire use Casepak, together their partner Oceala, to process plastic waste that is collected in Leicestershire and it seems that these plastics are being transported across the world to ‘the Far East and Asia to get the best process’.

Can the Council Leader please tell me:

- Is any of Harborough District’s plastic waste being exported to Asia?
- Which countries are receiving it?
- The approximate annual tonnage being exported.
- Is any of it being burned and/or dumped in the world’s oceans?”

The Leader responded:

“Thank you for your question, Cllr James, and we do of course all share your concerns around single use plastics finding their way into our oceans. As you will appreciate this question requires a great deal of detailed and technical information to be gathered, from officers and third-party organisations, and therefore will take some time. I am not in a position to provide an answer at this time, however a full written response will be prepared and sent to you in due course when officers have had time to consider it fully.”

**The following question was submitted by Councillor Sarfas to the Leader of the Council.**

“Several of my residents have recently contacted me regarding the Council’s Green Waste Collection Service. It seems that some residents cannot book to continue this service online, in which case they have to wait in a phone queue. Many residents assume that their subscription will auto renew at the beginning of the collection season and wait and wait for a collection that does not happen. Thereby missing out on the full service.

Can the Council Leader please investigate to see if an auto renewal of subscriptions option can be put in place for 2025?

They would provide a better service to our regular users and save the customer service staff a considerable amount of time and also improve our customer service to residents.”

The Leader responded:

“Thank you for your question, Councillor Sarfas, and we can all agree on the importance of a green waste collection service that is as easy as possible for residents to access. The council previously operated an auto renew service; however, this led to a significant increase in calls received from residents who, a year later, had either forgotten about the payment, or whose financial circumstances had changed. The review of the Symington Building, which includes consideration of the concierge and customer services area, provides an ideal and timely opportunity for us to consider all our customer service processes again. Therefore, officers will reconsider in early 2025, and at the very least ensure ample communications are put in place for resident awareness before the start of next year’s collections.”

## **9. Report from Cabinet**

The Chairman invited any comments or questions from members on the content of the report, and any decisions that Cabinet had made since the last meeting of the Council.

It was asked of the decision in relation to the Community Awards, whether the ceremony would include the presentation of the Citizenship Cup. It was confirmed that the officers had been working alongside the Market Harborough Civic Society, and the Citizenship Cup would be presented.

In relation to the decision taken on Planning Enforcement, it was asked if this would become more proactive. It was confirmed that this was the aim, and additional staffing had been recruited to the team to achieve this.

On the Community Awards decision, it was also asked how the award winners would be decided, and who would make this decision. The decision making body would be made up of members of outside bodies working in the district. Councillors would be provided with the process and those organisations.

It was moved by Councillor Knowles and seconded by Councillor Graves.

It was therefore, **RESOLVED** that Council receive the report.

## **10. Update from Committees and Panels since the last Council meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> July 2024**

The Leader introduced the report, and invited Councillors to ask any questions they had on the contents.

It was noted that there was an error in the Audit and Standards minutes from 31<sup>st</sup> July 2024. Councillor Johnson gave her apologies and was substituted by Councillor Burrell. This would be rectified prior to the minutes being published.

Councillor Knowles moved the report.

It was therefore, **RESOLVED** that Council note the report.

## **11. Recommendations from the Employment Committee, 5<sup>th</sup> September 2024**

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate presented the report and recommendations to Council.

It was asked whether the employees have the opportunity to increase their pension contributions under the proposed changes. Currently there is already an additional voluntary contribution scheme, this report is to attach a salary sacrifice scheme to this.

It was also asked whether the introduction of partial early retirement could impact the Council, with a large number of employees potentially wanting to take that early retirement. People can choose to take flexible retirement benefits, but there is an extensive application process.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Beadle and seconded by Councillor Knowles.

It was therefore, **RESOLVED** that:

- Council approve the adoption and implementation of a new salary sacrifice scheme for Shared Cost Additional Voluntary Contributions for employees at no cost to the council.
- Council adopt the revision to the discretion policy for flexible retirement for employees at no cost to the council.
- Council adopts the proposed Harborough District Council Pensions and Discretions Policy revisions/additions in respect of 2 and 3 above and as detailed below.
- Subject to Council approving 1,2 and 3 above that the Head of Paid Service is given delegated authority to consider and determine any requests under the current and revised and updated Pensions Discretions Policy.

## **12. Notices of Motion**

Prior to commencement of the debate, it was proposed by the Chair that Council extend the time for debating these motions to a maximum of one

hour. This was **CARRIED**, and therefore the motions would be received one hour.

Two Notices of Motion had been received by the Council and accepted in accordance with the Council Procedure Rules.

The first motion to be considered by the Council was proposed by Councillor Bateman and seconded by Councillor Nunn.

“Labour’s proposal to remove the Winter Fuel Payment (WFP) from pensioners who do not claim Pension Credit or are on other benefits is regressive and backward.

Particularly for those living in rural communities.

850,000 pensioners are eligible for the credit but don’t claim it.

One in five excess winter deaths are directly attributable to cold homes, and one in ten to fuel poverty.

- 1) This Labour Government policy will mean more pensioners will die from the cold this winter. Why does this policy unfairly affect rural communities?
- 2) Rural housing is more likely to be older and less energy-efficient, with a significant proportion built before modern insulation standards were introduced.
- 3) Over 70% of rural homes in the UK were built before 1980, compared to about 50% in urban areas.
- 4) Rural houses have on average 49.6% energy efficiency compared to 65.5% in city centres.
- 5) Many rural homes are not connected to mains gas networks, with households often relying on more expensive off-grid heating sources like oil, wood or canister LPG. Around 1.5 million homes in the UK rely on oil for heating, with the majority located in rural areas.
- 6) Heating oil in January 2020 was 54p per litre, it is now 66p per litre, further straining the limited financial resources of rural pensioners. In addition, OFGEM has announced a further 10% increase in energy costs, further increasing the burden.
- 7) Public Health England reports a 1.5% increase in EWDs for every degree Celsius drop below 18°C, underscoring the critical need for adequate heating. Excess winter deaths (EWDs) are a significant issue, with over 30,000 EWDs recorded in the UK each year, and a higher incidence in rural areas where healthcare access is limited.
- 8) Rural communities often face isolation due to poor transport links and limited access to services. This lack of connectivity can hinder pensioners from accessing alternative financial support, energy efficiency schemes, or healthcare services.

9) Council resolves to:

-Condemn the proposal to remove the Winter Fuel Payment from pensioners who do not claim Pension Credit or are on other benefits, recognising the disproportionate impact this will have on our most vulnerable residents, particularly those in rural communities.

-Commit the Leader of this Council to write to both the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to ask for funding for a local advertising and outreach campaign to raise awareness about Pension Credit and other benefits, targeting pensioners who may be eligible but are not currently claiming.

Furthermore the Leader should commit the Council to support 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."

This motion was debated by Councillors, and following a request by five members, a recorded vote on this motion was called.

**For 23**

**Against 3**

**Abstain 1**

Following the motion being proposed and seconded, the motion was **CARRIED.**

Action: The Leader will write to both the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

The second motion to be considered was proposed by Councillor Knowles, as Leader of the Council, and seconded by Councillor Bateman, as Leader of the Opposition.

"In Harborough District we are proud of our local sports champions and in September 2021 I had the honour of seconding a motion put by the then Leader of the Council to recognise the sporting achievements of our local Olympians in the 2021 Tokyo Olympics.

Now as Leader of the Council, I have the pleasure of again proposing a motion to recognise the latest gold medal winner from our district, Lauren Henry, who won as part of the team who competed in the Womens quadruple skulls rowing event. The team competed on 31<sup>st</sup> July in the final for this event and narrowly beat The Netherlands in a photo finish to bring

home the gold medals. It is the first gold medal Team GB has ever won in the event.

Lauren, 22, who lives in Lutterworth was the youngest member of the crew. She joined Leicester Rowing Club when she was just 13 and has had a great many other wins and achievements in her journey to the Olympic gold.

To recognise this amazing success, I propose that we again ask officers to arrange for the Freedom of the District to be granted to Lauren Henry in recognition of her sporting achievements and her local connection to our district; and to arrange a special Council meeting to agree the proposal prior to the Council meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2024.

The Freedom can then be bestowed on Lauren at a suitable public meeting of the Council in the coming months.”

The motion was debated, and following the motion being proposed and seconded, it was **CARRIED**.

### **13. Any Urgent Business**

The Chairman agreed that the report ‘Appointment to Outside Body’ could be considered as an urgent item of business.

It was proposed by Councillor Beadle and seconded by Councillor Knowles, and therefore it was **RESOLVED** that:

Council approved the appointment of John Richardson as the Council’s representative on the Market Harborough and Bowdens Charity, replacing Liz Elliott.

The meeting ended at 20:36.