

NEWARK AND SHERWOOD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of **Policy & Performance Improvement Committee** held in the Civic Suite, Castle House, Great North Road, Newark, NG24 1BY on Monday, 30 June 2025 at 6.00 pm.

PRESENT: Councillor M Pringle (Chair)
Councillor N Ross (Vice-Chair)

Councillor A Brazier, Councillor P Harris, Councillor J Hall, Councillor S Haynes, Councillor R Holloway, Councillor D Moore, Councillor P Rainbow, Councillor M Spoors, Councillor T Thompson, Councillor L Tift and Councillor T Wendels

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor N Allen, Councillor L Brazier and Councillor J Kellas

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillor C Brooks, Councillor A Freeman and Councillor K Roberts

117 NOTIFICATION TO THOSE PRESENT THAT THE MEETING WILL BE RECORDED AND STREAMED ONLINE

The Chair advised that the meeting was being recorded and live streamed from Castle House.

118 DECLARATION OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no declarations of interest.

119 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 2 JUNE 2025

The minutes from the meeting held on 2 June 2025 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

120 ATTENDANCE AT COMMITTEE BY REPRESENTATIVES OF THE DEPARTMENT FOR WORK & PENSIONS

The Chair welcomed to the meeting two representatives from the Department of Work & Pensions (DWP): Tracy Whelan, Senior Partnership Manager; and David Williams, Partnership Manager who had been invited to attend Committee to address the Members in relation to the provision of their services in the Ollerton area.

The representatives advised of their primary roles within the DWP and responded to a number of queries raised by the Members as follows.

In response to what the DWP's offer in the district and ongoing key initiatives were, noting educational levels within the Ollerton area Members were advised that education was not within the remit of the DWP and that they could only comment on benefit claimants. It was stated that the DWP addressed issues that acted as barriers in getting people into employment. Once employed, it was hoped that they would

continue to improve their skills which in turn could lead to better employment opportunities and also reduce the number of benefit claimants. It was confirmed that partnership working was undertaken with educational establishments to advise what skills were needed by employers.

A Member queried as to the how the DWP's focus was determined and what metrics were used to inform their actions. In response, Members were advised that it was necessary to match the person to the vacancy and this was driven by the persons needs. There was also an element of localism and ultimately it was to provide people with the opportunity to earn a living.

In referring to the removal of a Level 7 qualification, a Member commented on the significance of this and queried how the DWP might assist employers in resolving the issue. In response, Members were advised that this issue was more relevant to employers and educational establishments. The majority of clients the DWP dealt with would not be able to undertake a Level 7 qualification and that if a person was unemployed or seeking employment, they were not able to undertake that higher level of qualification. The Member acknowledged that the DWP dealt with lower-level qualifications, 1-3, but the gap between those levels and 6-7 needed to be recognised. The representatives accepted that the gap between the levels was an issue and would raise this in an appropriate forum, providing a response to the Committee if received.

A Member queried as to whether the DWP engaged with employers locally and more widely which could lead to a client being given the opportunity to work remotely. Members were advised that funds were utilised through the UK Strategic Partnership Fund. Local business contacts were developed but this also extended nationally. The post-Covid labour market was very much changed but the DWPs clients still needed to be able to compete in that market and sector specific vocational training was available. Job Centres were involved in this process and client lists were produced which contributed to the way in which training was provided.

In response to what initiatives were in the pipeline for the more deprived areas of the district, the DWP acknowledged that youth unemployment was an issue as was supporting people with health barriers. The DWP were able to offer training to all their clients. Each individual required to search for employment were allocated a designated work coach. After a period of six months, if they still remained unemployed, they would be entered into a national programme. It was also noted that a client prevented from working due to a disability would be allocated a disability employment provider who would assist in looking to make reasonable adjustments to enable them to secure employment. Members were advised that new initiative was to be launched in July in relation to people who were considered to be economically inactive and considered more difficult to assist, noting that participation was voluntary.

A Member queried as to the extent to which the DWP linking in with other agencies in relation to support for hard-to-reach families. In response, Member were advised that such families would be supported by Family Community Work Coaches who would be based in family hubs and that school advisors would also support that work.

In noting and commending the DWPs work with veterans, a Member raised the issue of accessibility and how barriers might be removed to ensure that contact with the DWP was made as easy as possible, with a focus on areas of deprivation. Members were advised that there were various ways that claims for Universal Credit could be made, noting that these were mostly either done digitally or via a telephone. Digital communication was available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week with access to a journal messaging system for the user. Since the closure of the Ollerton facility, the DWP were open to providing community outreach events to promote support available and also to link into other available support from alternative providers which included that for the economically inactivity due to health-related issues. It was also noted that, if necessary, the DWP would undertake video-calls and also visit people in their own homes.

In closing the debate, the Chair welcomed the DWPs willingness to work in partnership with other organisations, with specific mention of the work undertaken with partners in education. He stated he would welcome further information in this regard, with particular emphasis on the Ollerton area. He added that further consideration was needed in relation to how people could contact the DWP who were geographically remote and unable to use digital communication. He requested that the District Council's Ollerton Members be provided with this information via email.

121 NEWARK & SHERWOOD COMMUNITY LOTTERY - ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee considered the report of the Business Manager – Regeneration & Housing Strategy which provided Members with the annual update on the Community Lottery Scheme.

The report set out the impact of the scheme since its launch, providing information as to the number of 'good causes' registered with the lottery who were receiving financial support through ticket sales. It was also reported that although there had been a reduction in the number of supporters registered with the Community Lottery, ticket sales had increased with the amount of income generated increasing from £34,569.00 in year 3 to £39,405.60 in year four.

In considering the report a Member noted issues surrounding gambling and queried whether the demographic profile of supporters was measured. The Business Manager advised that she would report back on whether that information was available.

AGREED that the report be noted.

122 HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND ROUGH SLEEPER STRATEGY AND DELIVERY PLAN (2024-2029) ANNUAL UPDATE - YEAR ONE

The Committee considered a report from the Business Manager – Regeneration & Housing Strategy and the Homeless Strategy Officer which provided Members with progress made against the Delivery Plan within the first year of the Council's Homelessness Prevention & Rough Sleepers Strategy 2024/2029.

It was reported that housing authorities had a statutory requirement under the Homelessness Act 2002 to carry out a homelessness review of their district and to formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results. Following this review and publication of the strategy, a multi-agency delivery plan had been developed, with key actions aligned to each of the strategy's six objectives. It was further reported that additional funding to prevent homelessness was expected to promote the new national Homeless Prevention Strategy which offered a cross departmental approach. Contained within the report was information as to a number of key projects that had taken place during 2023/2025, including: taking the lead in the Rough Sleeper Initiative; continued involvement with the Safeguarding Adults Board; participation in the pilot of a homeless women's census organised by Solace Women's Aid; development of a Prison Release Protocol; participating in a Homelessness Prevention & Rough Sleepers event; and working with county colleagues to commission a Homeless Link to carry out a supported housing needs assessment.

In considering the report, a Member queried when the Prison Release Protocol would be launched in Nottinghamshire. Members were advised that the draft protocol was awaiting final amendment by the Probation Service and it was hoped it would be signed off on 7 July. The Chair requested that the Committee be advised of when the Protocol became effective.

In noting the actions completed within the Plan, a Member queried whether it was possible to include timelines for those actions which had not yet commenced. The Business Manager advised that this could be included on the next update report to Committee.

In response to whether there was anything the Council could do to assist in bringing forward additional items within the Plan, the Business Manager advised that the known priorities had been identified and funding for those had been approved but consideration could be given as to what additional actions could be brought forward.

In relation to the effects of homelessness on women, a Member queried whether the Council consciously worked to prevent this. Members were advised that a female's experience of homelessness was different to that of a male. Females, on the whole, attempted to find somewhere to sleep rather than sleeping rough. Following a pilot scheme which had been run in London, this was to be rolled out nationally.

In closing the debate, the Chair advised that he would wish to see regular updates on the Actions undertaken from the Delivery Plan.

AGREED that the progress against the delivery plan be noted.

123 CORPORATE ANNUAL BUDGET STRATEGY FOR 2026/27

The Committee considered the report of the Business Manager - Financial Services which sought to provide Members with information to enable the Council's budget process to proceed. The report set out the General Fund, Capital and HRA Budget Strategy for 2026/27 for Members' consideration, prior to the detailed work commencing.

The budget process would result in setting the budget and the Council Tax for 2026/27 and the Housing Revenue Account budget and the rent setting for 2026/27.

The Strategy took into consideration agreed financial policies on Budgeting and Council Tax, Reserves and Provision, Value for Money and also a set of budget principles which set out the approach to be taken to the budget process. The policies had been reviewed and updates as appropriate and were attached as appendices to the report.

The current Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) was approved on 6 March 2025. The report set out a summary of the financial forecast identified within the current MTFP, assuming that Council Tax at average Band D will increase by the same rate as in the 2025/26 financial year namely 1.94%.

The report also set out a number of underlying assumptions which would be applied in compiling the draft budget for 2026/27 including: staff costs; employers superannuation; provision for inflation; fees and charges and interest rates.

AGREED that the Policy & Performance Improvement Committee:

- a) recommend to Cabinet approval of the overall General Fund, Capital & HRA Budget Strategy for 2026/27;
- b) note the consultation process with elected Members;
- c) note that Budget Officers continue to work on the assessment of various budget proposals affecting services for consideration in setting the Council's budget;
- d) note that Budget Managers work with Finance Officers in identifying further efficiency savings, increasing income from fees and charges and in identifying new sources of income; and
- e) recommend to Cabinet that the policies and principles on Budgeting, Council Tax, Reserves & Provisions, Charging, Value for Money be reviewed with any recommendations being forwarded to Council for consideration.

124 PROVISIONAL FINANCIAL OUTTURN REPORT TO 31 MARCH 2025

The Committee considered the report the Business Manager - Financial Services, which sought to provide the provisional financial outturn position for 2024/25 on the Council's revenue and capital budgets. The information contained in the report included: general fund revenue; housing revenue account; capital programme; provisions and impaired estimates on debtors, usable reserves and collection fund. The report provided a summary of actual income and expenditure compared to the revised budget and how any surpluses/deficits had been allocated to or from reserves.

The accounts showed a favourable variance of £1.744m on service budgets, with a total favourable variance of £3.384m which was broken down in the report.

In considering the report, a Member referred to the underspend on capital schemes/project budgets and what measures were being taken to address this. The Business Manager advised that the budgets were reviewed quarterly with meetings being held with Project Managers, adding that the Senior Leadership Team had a corporate oversight of all major projects. He added further that it would be difficult to assess the slippage for each individual project and how this may impact on the district.

In closing the debate and noting the above comments, the Chair requested that Cabinet provide additional information around the variances within the capital programme.

AGREED that the Policy & Performance Improvement Committee:

- a) note the final outturn of revenue and capital spending for 2024/25;
- b) note the capital financing proposals as set out in Table 5 at paragraph 1.19;
- c) note the capital programme reprofiling of £7.817m carried forward into 2025/26 as per appendices E and F;
- d) note the movement in provisions and impaired estimates on debtors;
- e) recommend to Cabinet approval of the creation of the new reserve, as outlined in paragraph 1.28; and
- f) note the individual contributions to and withdrawals from, the revenue and capital usable reserves.

125 COMMUNITY PLAN PERFORMANCE FOR QUARTER 4

The Committee considered the report of the Senior Transformation & Service Improvement Officer which provided Members with the Q4 Community Plan Performance for 1 January to 31 March 2025.

In noting the report, Members raised a number of queries in relation to: considering the footfall in Newark equated to the combined footfall from Ollerton Southwell and Edwinstowe, was the funding spent equally proportionate; the delivery of community initiatives through ongoing grant schemes and the criteria applied in determining who received funding; the work undertaken by the Council on Warmer Homes Schemes and whether consideration had been given to cooler homes, given the effects of climate change; and how much was within the Council's control in relation to the increase in rent arrears. The Senior Transformation & Service Improvement Officer advised that a written response to these would be provided.

AGREED that:

- a) the report be noted; and
- b) a written response be provided in relation to the queries raised above.

126 CUSTOMER FEEDBACK - HALF YEAR 2 - 2024/2025

The Committee considered the joint report of the Transformation & Service Improvement Manager, the Senior Transformation & Service Improvement Officer and the Research & Development Officer which sought to provide Members with a summary of customer feedback in order to better understand how the customer was receiving the services delivered.

The report set out an overview of all types of customer feedback received between October 2024 and March 2025, including complaints, suggestions and compliments.

In considering the report, a Member noted the increase in complaints and what measures were being taken to address this. Members were advised that there had been an increase in complaints in relation to housing services and this had been, in part, due to resource implications. It was agreed that further detail on the driving force for this be provided.

AGREED that the report be noted.

127 PRESENTATION BY THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION, CABINET MEMBER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO

The Committee considered the report of the Cabinet Member without Portfolio, Cllr. Jack Kellas – Leader of the Opposition.

As detailed within the report, Cllr. Kellas had been invited to attend Committee to provide information on his role as leader of the opposition which included the constructive challenge of the Council's policies and strategies together with the co-ordination of alternative policies, strategies and service delivery. Cllr. Kellas had been provided with three specific questions in relation to his role which he responded to verbally at the meeting.

In relation to the balance between constructive challenge and acknowledging initiatives that provided value to the district and its residents, Cllr. Kellas believed he was fair in his approach and provided Cabinet with constructive views. He acknowledged that these were not always accepted or successful, citing the challenges made to the decision regarding the siting of the Kidney Stones and the result of the public consultation in this regard.

In relation to the forthcoming changes through Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and the political challenges in supporting its delivery of the existing capital programme to ensure continuity after vesting day. Cllr. Kellas commented that this was one of the reasons that he had supported the separation of the Audit &

Governance Committee. He added that in his view, LGR would diminish the influence of elected members in relation to the Capital Programme but believed that Officers and Cabinet were preparing for the forthcoming changes to the best of their ability.

In relation to whether the current structure of the Council was conducive to effective opposition, Cllr. Kellas commented that it was the role of the Policy & Performance Improvement Committee to challenge the executive. He noted that the Conservative Group had successfully challenged on occasion but that this could be improved upon. He suggested that elected Members should be afforded a degree of autonomy in their decision making. Cllr. Kellas commented that it was his opinion that the loss of an opposition spokesperson on Committees was detrimental to the effective scrutiny of the Council.

In response to whether a changed opposition structure would better prepare the Council for LGR, Cllr. Kellas stated that potentially it could lead to a more collaborative approach.

A Member raised concerns as to the current governance arrangements, commenting that there was little appetite for reorganisation and considered that the Council's constitution did not provide for a no-overall control Council, adding that the current Cabinet did not reflect the largest group of the Council.

In closing the debate, the Chair thanked Cllr. Kellas for his open and honest presentation.

128 OUT OF REMIT ACTIVITIES (OORA) WORKING GROUP UPDATE

The Committee considered the joint report of the Transformation & Service Improvement Manager and the Senior Transformation & Services Improvement Officer which provided Members with an update on the progress made by the Out of Remit Activities Working Group and for endorsement for the recommendations in relation to flood resilience. The summary of the report was delivered by the Chair of the Working Group, Cllr. Rhona Holloway.

In considering the report and the recommendations therein, a Member suggested that the issue of discretionary funding be considered, commenting that there should be a review of services the Council provided that were not mandatory.

Further to the suggestion that the Working Group look at the Council's provision in relation to the Heritage, Culture & the Arts Portfolio, the Chair stated that the scope of the Working Group for Out of Remit Activities was very clear. It was to look at activities the Council undertook that should be undertaken by other (public) bodies, not just all discretionary services. Should Members wish to look at Heritage, Culture & the Arts they should submit a topic request form for a Working Group on this subject, but it could not be considered by the current working group which had critical work to do which would be important in preparing for local government reorganisation.

In referring to the number of current vacancies, a Member commented that a reduction in this would reduce the pressure on officers who were performing tasks that should be provided by other organisations and suggested that this form part of the next Agenda to the Working Group.

AGREED that the Policy & Performance Improvement Committee:

- a) endorse the Working Group's recommendation that the Council write to the East Midlands Combined County Authority (EMCCA) to request a renewed focus and further support on building flood resilience for the communities of Newark & Sherwood;
- b) endorse the Working Group's recommendation to invite the Environment Agency to the meeting of the Committee scheduled to take place on 1 December 2025; and
- c) note the progress of the Working Group.

129 CABINET FORWARD PLAN (JUNE TO SEPTEMBER 2025)

NOTED the Forward Plan of the Cabinet for the period June to September 2025.

130 TOPIC REQUEST FORM - REVIEW OF ESTATE WALKABOUTS

The Committee considered the Topic Request Form to establish a Working Group to review the provision of Estate Walkabouts within the district. As was usual practice, all Members of the Council would be invited to express an interest in participating in the Working Group with the Chair of the Policy & Performance Improvement Committee and the Chair of the Working Group determining the membership, which would be a maximum of 9 members.

AGREED that a Review of Estate Walkabouts Working Group be established with the following Policy & Performance Improvement Members expressing an interest in participating in the Group:

Councillors: Alice Brazier
Jean Hall
Peter Harris
Rhona Holloway
David Moore
Penny Rainbow
Neil Ross
Linda Tift
Tim Wendels

131 PROVISIONAL ITEMS FOR FUTURE AGENDA

NOTED the provisional items for future meetings of the Policy & Performance Improvement Committee.

Meeting closed at 8.52 pm.

Chair