

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday, 19 September 2024

PRESENT: THE MAYOR COUNCILLOR K MCCARTNEY (CHAIR)

Councillors: F Geddes, J Adams, R Beadle, M Brain, L Brand, C Buckley, P Burns, B Clelland, P Craig, W Dick, S Dickie, P Diston, K Dodds, C Donovan, A Douglas, D Duggan, J Eagle, P Elliott, M Gannon, A Geddes, J Gibson, J Green, S Green, G Haley, M Hall, S Hawkins, K Henderson, G Kasfikis, L Kirton, J McElroy, E McMaster, M McNestry, J Mohammed, L Moir, R Mullen, C Ord, M Ord, J Park, I Patterson, S Potts, D Robson, S Ronchetti, J Simpson, Sowerby, B Turnbull, J Turner, K Walker, J Wallace, D Welsh, A Wintcher and K Wood

APOLOGIES: Councillors: V Anderson, D Burnett, L Caffrey, S Gallagher, M Goldsworthy, T Graham, H Kelly, P Maughan, J McCoid, B Oliphant, A Ord, J Turnbull, R Waugh and D Weatherley

CL127 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD 18 JULY 2024

COUNCIL RESOLVED:

- (i) That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2024 to be approved as a correct record.

CL128 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

CL129 OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

No official announcements have been noted.

CL130 PETITIONS

There were no petitions received.

CL131 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions submitted by members of the public.

CL132 THE IMPACT OF PRIDE IN GATESHEAD

The Council received a presentation from Peter Darrant, representing Out North East, on the impact of Pride in Gateshead.

The Council thanks Peter for his presentation.

CL133 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Consideration was given to the report seeking approval of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2025/26 to 2029/30:

COUNCIL RESOLVED:

- i. To approve the Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2025/26 to 2029/30 and the medium-term financial context as reported.

CL134 ENFORCEMENT AND PENALTY POLICY IN RELATION TO THE RELEVANT LETTING AGENCY LEGISLATION

Consideration was given to seek the approval of the new proposed Enforcement and Penalty Policy.

COUNCIL RESOLVED:

- i. The approval of the Enforcement and Penalty policy.

CL135 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE AUDIT AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Consideration was given to a report seeking approval of the annual report of the Audit and Standards Committee 2023/24.

COUNCIL RESOLVED:

- i. That the annual report of the Audit and Standards Committee for 2023/24 be endorsed.

CL136 HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY

Consideration was given to seek the approval of the revised Health and Safety Policy covering all Council employees and others affected by the Council's work activities.

COUNCIL RESOLVED:

- i. That the revised Health and Safety policy is approved.

CL137 CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR APPOINTMENTS

On the motion of Councillor J Adams, duly seconded:

COUNCIL RESOLVED:

- i. That the chairs and vice chairs of the bodies linked in Annex A to Part 3 of

the Constitution and of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees for the municipal year 2024/25.

CL138 COUNCIL APPOINTMENTS

(i) Labour Group Nominations

Councillor Adams, duly seconded, moved that the members listed in the report appointed to Rights of Way Committee, Planning and Development Committee and Licensing Committee.

COUNCIL RESOLVED:

- i. That the nominations of the Labour Group listed in the report are approved.

(ii) Democrats Group Nominations

Councillor Beadle, duly seconded, moved that the members listed in the report appointed to Strategic Housing Board.

COUNCIL RESOLVED:

- i. That the nominations of the Liberal Democrats Group listed in the report are approved.

CL139 NOTICE OF MOTION

CL140 MOTION ON WINTER FUEL PAYMENTS

Councillor Welsh moved the following motion:

Council notes the recent announcement by the Government to end universal Winter Fuel Payments and restrict eligibility to only those in receipt of Pension Credits and other means-tested benefits.

Council is deeply concerned that many pensioners on lower incomes will now not receive the payments. Across England and Wales the number of people eligible for winter fuel payments will fall by 10 million (from 11.4 million to only 1.5 million). In Gateshead the number of pensioners affected by the change in eligibility criteria is 31,105, according to official Government figures. DWP statistics for winter 2022-2023 shows that 36,931 people in Gateshead received the payment last year. That means 84.2% of Gateshead pensioners currently eligible for Winter Fuel Payments will no longer be able to claim the payment. Gateshead is the 47th most deprived local authority in England in the overall Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019, and the sudden withdrawal of the Winter Fuel Payment will leave many of our residents facing serious hardship over the winter.

Council believes that the Government has set the threshold at which pensioners do not qualify for Winter Fuel Payments far too low. Only those receiving a pension of

less than £218.15 a week (or £332.95 for couples) are eligible for pension credits. This is significantly lower than the living wage rate.

Council is also concerned by the low take up of pension credit with only 63% of those eligible nationwide receiving them – and over 880,000 pensioners not doing so. Council recognises the role we have to play to increase awareness of benefits such as Pension Credit to ensure people are aware of the support they are entitled to.

Council further notes that the Energy Price Cap is due to rise by 10% in October, which combined with the removal of Winter Fuel Payments will push thousands of local pensioners into fuel poverty.

Although the Council and other local organisations have provided support in the form of Warm Spaces and similar initiatives, by nature these cannot be enough to cover the shortfall.

Therefore, Council resolves to:

- Instruct the Chief Executive to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer calling for the policy on linking Winter Fuel Payments to Pension Credit receipt to be immediately paused, and for a more generous threshold for Winter Fuel Payments to be introduced. Council further requests the Chief Executive write to all MPs covering Gateshead to ask them to give their formal support to halting the changes to the Winter Fuel Payment eligibility.
- Request the Council and Opposition Leaders to sign a joint letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer calling for the new Winter Fuel Payment policy to be suspended and reviewed.
- Urgently increase the existing work by Council Officers to maximise uptake of Pension Credits and other benefits. This will include use of Council noticeboards, social media, promotion in local press and targeted letters to those who may be eligible.

Proposed by: Councillor Welsh
Seconded by: Councillor Ord
Supported by: Councillor Beadle
Councillor Patterson
Councillor Diston
Councillor Wintcher

CL141 NOTICE OF AMENDMENT ON WINTER FUEL PAYMENT

Councillor Gannon moved the following amendment:

Remove all after 'Council'. Replace with:

recognises that the decision to restrict the payment of winter fuel allowance to pensioners in receipt of pension credits or other means tested benefits will have an enormous impact in Gateshead, particularly on those just above the eligibility threshold.

Gateshead Council is determined to ensure that every support and encouragement

is given to our pensioners who are eligible but who don't currently apply.

We want to place on record our thanks to the staff and officers of Gateshead Council and those in our partner organisations in the community and voluntary sector, who have already responded magnificently to this challenge, supporting hundreds of residents to apply.

Whilst the Council recognises that the newly elected Labour government has inherited an extremely difficult legacy as a consequence of 14 years of austerity and economic mismanagement, from both the coalition and Conservative government, we are equally clear that further austerity is not the solution.

This Council will write to the Prime Minister and the Chancellor to express our supports for the new government in its mission to rebuild the UK, to restore sustainable public finances and to invest in our vital public services.

We will express our view that this cannot be achieved through further austerity but through investment in our infrastructure and public services funded through a progressive taxation system that ensures that those most able pay the most.

Proposed by: Councillor Gannon
Seconded by: Councillor Adams

CL142 LOCAL GOVERNMENT PAY

Councillor Dodds moved the following motion:

This Council notes:

Local government has endured central government funding cuts of more than 50% since 2010. Between 2010 and 2020, councils lost 60p out of every £1 they have received from central government. Research by UNISON has shown that councils across England, Wales and Scotland are facing a collective funding shortfall of more than £4bn by the financial year 2024/25 and a cumulative funding gap of £8bn by 2025/26. The last Government's 'levelling up' pots of money did little to help.

Council and school workers kept our communities safe through the pandemic, often putting themselves at considerable risk as they work to protect public health, provide quality housing, ensure our children continue to be educated, and look after older and vulnerable people.

Since 2010, the local government workforce has endured years of pay restraint with the majority of pay points losing at least 25 per cent of their value since 2009/10. Staff have endured the worst cost of living crisis in a generation.

At the same time, workers have experienced ever-increasing workloads and persistent job insecurity. Across the UK, 900,000 jobs have been lost in local government since June 2010 – a reduction of more than 30 per cent. Local government has arguably been hit by more severe job losses than any other part of the public sector. There has been a disproportionate impact on women, with women

making up more than three-quarters of the local government workforce.

Recent research shows that if the Government were to fully fund the unions' 2024 pay claim, around half of the money would be recouped thanks to increased tax revenue, reduced expenditure on benefits and tax credits, and increased consumer spending in the local economy.

This council believes:

1. Local government workers keep our communities clean and safe, look after those in need and keep our towns and cities running.
2. Without the professionalism and dedication of our staff, the council services our residents rely on would not be deliverable.
3. Local government workers deserve a proper real-terms pay increase. The Government needs to take responsibility and fully fund this increase; it should not put the burden on local authorities whose funding has been cut to the bone and who were not offered adequate support through the Covid-19 pandemic.

This council resolves to:

- A. Support the pay claim submitted by UNISON, GMB and Unite on behalf of council and school workers for an increase of £3,000 or 10%, whichever is the greater
- B. Call on the Local Government Association to make urgent representations to central government to fund the NJC pay claim
- C. Write to the Chancellor and Secretary of State to call for a pay increase for local government workers to be funded with new money from central government
- D. Meet with local NJC union representatives to convey support for the pay claim and consider practical ways in which the council can support the campaign
- E. Encourage all local government workers to join a union.

Proposed by: Councillor Dodds
Seconded by: Councillor Gannon
Supported by: Councillor Donovan
Councillor Adams

CL143 GATESHEAD WOMEN AND GIRLS COMMITTEE

Councillor Douglas moved the following motion:

At a previous Council meeting, a motion was agreed ensuring that all of our services are focused on the needs of women and girls.

That motion made the following pledges:

- We will listen to women and girls from all communities, and act on what they tell us, to understand what they need and the barriers they face.
- We will explicitly consider the specific impact on women and girls of every policy / strategy we develop, seeking to maximize positive and mitigate negative impacts.

- We will take practical steps to improve the lives of women and girls in Gateshead.
- We will put in place systems and structures to ensure equality for women and girls.
- We will work to ensure women and girls can access safe transport, can access housing, good quality jobs, training, health services and adult education.

This Council agrees that the best way of ensuring we do this is by establishing a Gateshead Women and Girls Committee, made up of women; Council members, officers, representatives of VCSE Groups, BME Groups, Health services, other public services and anchor organisations in Gateshead.

This Committee will establish a work programme and a timescale for carrying out our pledges and report back to Council by January 2025.

Proposed by: Councillor Douglas
Seconded by: Councillor Hall
Supported by: Councillor Donovan
Councillor Kirton

CL144 QUESTIONS

There were no questions submitted by Members of Council.

Mayor.....