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COUNCIL

Wednesday, 6 November 2024

Attendance:

Councillors Present

Gordon-Smith (Mayor)

Achwal S
Aron
Batho
Becker
Bennett
Bolton
Brook
Brophy
Chamberlain
Clear
Cramoysan
Cunningham
Cutler
Eve
Godfrey
Horrill
Laming
Langford-Smith
Latham
Learney

Lee
Morris
Murphy
Pett
Pinniger
Porter
Power
Reach
Rutter
Scott
Small
Thompson
Tippett-Cooper
Tod
Wallace
Warwick
Westwood
White
Williams
Wise

Apologies for Absence:

Councillors Achwal V, Cook, Greenberg and Miller

[Recording of Meeting](#)

1. **MINUTES OF THE ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 18 SEPTEMBER 2024**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Ordinary meeting of the Council held on 18 September 2024 be approved and adopted.

2. **DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

Councillors Porter, Tod, Wallace, Warwick and Williams each declared personal (but non prejudicial) interests in respect of agenda items that may be related to their role as County Councillors.

Councillor Warwick declared a personal and prejudicial interest in respect of agenda item 7a (Notice of Motion regarding smartphones in schools), as the motion was directed to the County Council, of which she was a member and also Deputy Leader. She left the room during consideration of this item and took no part in discussion or the decision thereon.

Councillors Horrill, Learney and Porter each declared personal (but non prejudicial) interests in respect of agenda item 7a (Notice of Motion regarding smartphones in schools), as were governors of Hampshire schools which each had policies regarding smartphones in schools.

Gareth John (Director (Legal)) left the room during consideration of agenda item 5 (Appointment of Monitoring Officer) as the report's recommendations specifically related to him.

3. **ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE MAYOR, LEADER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

The Mayor drew attention to forthcoming events that he was to attend, including those in aid of his charities.

The Leader then provided an update to Council.

He firstly reported on a letter sent to by Deputy Prime Minister to all council leaders outlining implications from the recent budget regarding social and affordable housing and council finances in general.

The Leader then provided a further update regarding devolution discussions in that the upper tier councils had submitted an Expression of Interest to the Government and that he had raised concerns that there should continue to be adequate local levels of representation and a system that was responsive to the needs of communities.

The Chief Executive announced apologies for the meeting.

4. **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

One written question had been received from members of the public, who attended the meeting to present their question. A supplementary question was also asked. The question received and the response was subsequently set out on the [council's website](#).

5. **APPOINTMENT OF MONITORING OFFICER (CL172)**

Councillor Tod (Leader) moved that the recommendation as set out on agenda be approved and adopted (seconded by Councillor Cutler).

Council did not ask questions or debate the recommendation, however Councillor Horrill requested that the best thanks of the Council be awarded to Lisa Kirkman for her interim Monitoring Officer duties. This was unanimously supported.

RESOLVED:

1. That Gareth John, Director (Legal) be appointed Monitoring Officer for the Council with effect from 6 November 2024.
2. That the best thanks of the Council be awarded to Lisa Kirkman for her interim Monitoring Officer duties.

6. **TO CONSIDER AND DETERMINE THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDED MINUTES: AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE HELD 26 SEPTEMBER 2024 - COMMITTEE CODE OF CONDUCT FOR COUNCILLORS (AG140)**

Councillor Morris (Chairperson of the Audit and Governance Committee) moved that the recommended minute of the Audit and Governance Committee be approved and adopted (seconded by Councillor Chamberlain). There were no questions or debate of the matters in the recommended minute and report.

RESOLVED:

That the recommended minute of the Audit and Governance Committee held 26 September 2024 be approved and adopted:

1. That the Local Government Association Model Code of Conduct for Councillors be adopted as the Winchester City Council Code of Conduct to come into force on 1 January 2025.
2. That the recommendation for all councillors to attend training on the new code on the 14 November 2024 be endorsed.
3. That the Monitoring Officer advise all Parish and Town councils of the adoption of the Code.

7. **NOTICES OF MOTION**

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 15, two motions had been submitted for Council.

a) **Request for smartphone ban guidance in Hampshire schools.**

The first motion submitted was by Councillor Tippett-Cooper and was as set out on the agenda. The motion was seconded by Councillor Becker. Following its introduction by Councillor Tippett-Cooper, Council then debated the matters in the motion. In summary the following points were raised:

- Schools already manage the issue – at certain times pupils are encouraged to use them to assist in learning, including using learning apps. At other times they may be confiscated.
- Hampshire County Council have a team to support Head teachers and governors with the guidance to make policy decisions for their schools regarding smartphones.

- Head teachers should be able to decide within their own settings what was appropriate for their school.
- Although an outright ban was undesirable, society already restricts people from doing certain things until reached a certain age where it was known that they cause harm. Schools were the appropriate place to help set and develop social norms regarding use of smartphones.
- There is a serious concern of the links to children's mental health. Children do not interact with each other verbally as they used to.
- The county council should consider different sets of guidance for up to year six, and then year seven through to year 11. They should take account existing best practice in schools.
- The government has already issued guidance for schools on prohibiting the use of mobile phones throughout the school day.

Having reserved her right to speak, the seconder of the motion (Councillor Becker) then addressed Council, followed by the proposer of the motion (Councillor Tippett-Cooper) who exercised his right to respond to debate. The Council then voted on the motion as set out on the agenda.

RESOLVED:

That the motion proposed by Councillor Tippett-Cooper (seconded by Councillor Becker) be supported, and that this Council resolves:

1. To call on Hampshire County Council to develop and issue guidance for schools across Hampshire to consider introducing restrictions or bans on smartphone use during school hours, ensuring that students benefit from a more engaged and supportive learning environment. This request (and points 2 and 3) below are to be made to Hampshire County Council through a letter from the Leader of Winchester City Council.
2. To request that Hampshire County Council provide schools with resources, training, and consultation opportunities to ensure the effective implementation of these measures, including engagement with teachers, parents, and students.
3. To ask Hampshire County Council to monitor the impact of any smartphone restrictions on academic performance, pupil behaviour, and mental health, and to report back on the outcomes to enable informed decision-making.
4. Requests the relevant Winchester City Council Cabinet lead to engage with the Smartphone Free Childhood campaign to identify potential adjustments to Winchester City Council activities that support the aims of the campaign.

By passing this motion, Winchester City Council seeks to support the health, wellbeing, and academic success of school students in the district.

b) Changes to the Winter Fuel Allowance and protecting pensioners from fuel poverty.

The motion was submitted by Councillor Bolton and was as set out on the agenda. The motion was seconded by Councillor Horrill. Following its introduction by Councillor Bolton, Council then debated the matters in the motion. In summary the following points were raised:

- In addition to the risks associated with means testing the winter fuel allowance, there are broader implications for all age groups facing fuel poverty and financial hardship. Options to provide more emergency fuel support through local schemes would assist.
- There will be pensioners who are just above the threshold and therefore taking a more informed and appropriate approach to income versus outgoings would have been preferable.
- There are some pensioners for who there was a stigma with claiming the pension credits to which they're entitled. The council should focus on removing this stigma.

AMENDMENT – Moved by Councillor Tod and seconded by Councillor Becker:

Motion – as amended as follows (**changes to original motion in bold**):

- a. MOTION: Changes to the Winter Fuel Allowance and protecting pensioners from fuel poverty

Council Notes:

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. The significant role that Winter Fuel Payments play in helping older residents of the Winchester district and across the UK afford heating during the coldest months, thereby preventing 'heat or eat' dilemmas and safeguarding health.
4. The criticism from Age UK, the Countryside Alliance and other charities, highlighting the social injustice and potential health risks posed by this sudden policy change.

5. 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.

Council believes:

1. That the Winter Fuel Payment has been a lifeline for many older people across the UK and that restricting its availability solely to those on Pension Credit risks leaving many pensioners in financial hardship.
2. ***The burden of sorting out the last government's mismanagement of the economy and public services – and the resulting £22bn gap in the country's finances – should not fall on the most vulnerable.***
3. While some pensioners currently in receipt of the Winter Fuel Payment may not require it, many thousands across the Winchester district sit just above the cut-off for Pension Credit and will now lose their allowance.
4. The decision to ***crudely*** means-test Winter Fuel Payments, especially with such short notice and without adequate compensatory measures, is deeply unfair and will disproportionately affect the health and well-being of our poorest older residents.
5. The government's approach fails to consider the administrative barriers and stigma that prevent eligible pensioners from claiming Pension Credit, leaving many without the support they desperately need.

Council resolves to:

1. ***Bring forward a Continue with its*** council-led local awareness campaign to alert those eligible of Pension Credit which in some respects will help access to the Winter Fuel Payment for those most in need.
2. Request that the Council Leader write to ***Dr Danny Chambers MP, the MP for Winchester thanking him for his timely challenge to*** the Chancellor of the Exchequer ***on September 3, 2024***, 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 – ***and to all three of our MPs recognising their vote against the changes and encouraging similar representations on local residents' behalf.***

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. ***Continue to*** 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 the Winchester district are supported in claiming their entitlement.

Council recognises that the cost of keeping warm does not just affect pensioners, and so:

- a. ***Welcomes the Government's extension of the Household Support Fund (HSF) until 2025/26 – while backing the LGA's call for a more integrated, preventative, community-based approach to local welfare, to improve outcomes for low-income households.***
- b. ***Will continue to support the retrofit of inadequately insulated houses***
- c. ***Will continue to provide information about how all residents can get help with the pressures of increased fuel bills.***

The Mayor called for a short adjournment to the meeting whilst the amendment was circulated in writing and then for the groups to discuss its detail therein.

Upon its reconvening, as the Mayor was satisfied that there had been adequate debate of the original motion by Council, the Mayor called the proposer of the Amendment (Councillor Tod) to introduce it, before the meeting proceeded to debate the matters in the Amendment.

In summary the following points were raised:

- The final lines of the amendment were important as added a broadened range to the original motion regarding other groups living in relative poverty.

- The council had recently arranged drop-in sessions regarding claiming for pension credit etc.
- The substance of the original motion remained in place - the government was trying to fill a financial gap and the council in general were wanting this to be achieved without impacting negatively on vulnerable groups.
- The work that the council was already doing to support those who may be impacted by the withdrawal of the universal winter fuel payment, and by the cost of living crisis more generally, had previously already been explained.
- 'Heating or eating' was not limited to those of pensionable age, and the changes to the motion would ensure that this was recognised.

Having reserved her right to speak, the seconder of the Amendment (Councillor Becker) then addressed Council and then at the conclusion of debate, Councillor Bolton (as proposer of the original Motion) was invited to exercise his right of reply before Council voted on the Amendment.

As it was the request of at least five members present (as is required by the council's constitution regarding on recorded votes) a recorded vote was taken on the Amendment before Council.

The following Members voted in favour of the Amendment before Council:

1. Councillor Sudhakar Achwal
2. Councillor Rachel Aron
3. Councillor James Batho
4. Councillor Kathleen Becker
5. Councillor Michael Bennett
6. Councillor Adrian Brophy
7. Councillor Chris Chamberlain
8. Councillor Angela Clear
9. Councillor Steve Cramoysan
10. Councillor Neil Cutler
11. Councillor Nathan Eve
12. Councillor Brian Laming
13. Councillor Ritchie Latham
14. Councillor Kelsie Learney
15. Councillor Jonny Morris
16. Councillor Richard Murphy
17. Councillor Jerry Pett
18. Councillor Jackie Porter
19. Councillor Margot Power
20. Councillor Mark Reach
21. Councillor Jane Rutter
22. Councillor Jamie Scott
23. Councillor Anne Small
24. Councillor Lucille Thompson
25. Councillor John Tippet-Cooper
26. Councillor Martin Tod
27. Councillor Malcolm Wallace
28. Councillor Chris Westwood

29. Councillor Suzanne White
30. Councillor Jonathan Williams
31. Councillor Charlie Wise

No Members voted against the Amendment before Council.

The following Members abstained from voting on the Amendment before Council:

1. Councillor Neil Bolton
2. Councillor Caroline Brook
3. Councillor Patrick Cunningham
4. Councillor Stephen Godfrey
5. Councillor Russell Gordon-Smith
6. Councillor Caroline Horrill
7. Councillor Paula Langford-Smith
8. Councillor Danny Lee

The following Members (who were present) did not vote:

1. Councillor Clare Pinniger
2. Councillor Jan Warwick

MOTION AS AMENDED CARRIED.

RESOLVED:

That the motion proposed by Bolton (seconded by Councillor Horrill) and as amended by Councillor Tod (seconded by Councillor Becker) be supported, and that this Council resolves:

1. Continue with its council-led local awareness campaign to alert those eligible of Pension Credit which in some respects will help access to the Winter Fuel Payment for those most in need.
2. Request that the Council Leader write to Dr Danny Chambers MP, the MP for Winchester thanking him for his timely challenge to the Chancellor of the Exchequer on September 3, 2024, 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 – and to all three of our MPs recognising their vote against the changes and encouraging similar representations on local residents' behalf.
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. Continue to 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 the Winchester district are supported in claiming their entitlement.

Council recognises that the cost of keeping warm does not just affect pensioners, and so:

- a. Welcomes the Government's extension of the Household Support Fund (HSF) until 2025/26 – while backing the LGA's call for a more integrated, preventative, community-based approach to local welfare, to improve outcomes for low-income households.
- b. Will continue to support the retrofit of inadequately insulated houses
- c. Will continue to provide information about how all residents can get help with the pressures of increased fuel bills.

8. **CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIPS**

RESOLVED:

There were no changes to committees to announce.

9. **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF COUNCIL**

11 written questions had been received which were heard at the meeting along with associated supplementary questions. The questions received and their response were subsequently set out on the [council's website](#).

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and concluded at 9.25 pm

The Mayor