

**ASHFIELD DISTRICT COUNCIL**



Council Offices,  
Urban Road,  
Kirkby in Ashfield  
Nottingham  
NG17 8DA

## **Agenda**

### **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Date: **Thursday, 15th December, 2022**

---

Time: **7.00 pm**

---

Venue: **Committee Room, Council Offices, Urban Road,  
Kirkby-in-Ashfield**

For any further information please contact:

**Lynn Cain**

[lynn.cain@ashfield.gov.uk](mailto:lynn.cain@ashfield.gov.uk)

01623 457317

---

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

## Membership

**Chairman:** Councillor Kier Barsby  
**Vice-Chairman:** Councillor Andrew Harding

**Councillors:**  
Chris Baron Will Bostock  
Trevor Locke Lee Waters  
Daniel Williamson

## FILMING/AUDIO RECORDING NOTICE

This meeting may be subject to filming or audio recording. If you have any queries regarding this, please contact Members' Services on 01623 457317.

## SUMMONS

You are hereby requested to attend a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be held at the time/place and on the date mentioned above for the purpose of transacting the business set out below.



**Theresa Hodgkinson**  
**Chief Executive**

## **AGENDA**

**Page**

1. To receive apologies for absence, if any.
2. **Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and/or Non-Registrable Interests.**
3. To receive and approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 13 October 2022. 5 - 8
4. **Scrutiny Review: Cost of Living.** 9 - 14

This page is intentionally left blank

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting held in the Committee Room, Council Offices, Urban Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield,  
on Thursday, 13th October, 2022 at 7.00 pm

**Present:** Councillor Kier Barsby in the Chair;

Councillors Chris Baron, Trevor Locke and  
Lee Waters.

**Apologies for Absence:** Councillors Will Bostock, Andrew Harding and  
Daniel Williamson.

**Officers Present:** Lynn Cain, Mike Joy and Shane Wright.

### **OS.4 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and/or Non-Registrable Interests**

No declarations of interest were made.

### **OS.5 Minutes**

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23 June 2022, be  
received and approved as a correct record.

### **OS.6 Overview and Scrutiny Co-optees**

The Chairman introduced the item and advised Members that the Council's  
scrutiny function had recently undergone an audit review carried out by the  
Central Midlands Audit Partnership (CMAP).

One of the outstanding recommendations from the audit review had  
highlighted that Members had not recently considered the potential added  
value of appointing non-voting co-opted members to the Overview and  
Scrutiny Committee and/or Scrutiny Panels A and B, so a report was now  
presented to the Committee for consideration.

The Service Manager, Scrutiny and Democratic Services advised Members  
that the option had always been available to the Committee and would involve  
Members presenting a scheme to Council for approval, outlining their plans for  
recruitment of co-optees including interview arrangements and selection  
criteria etc.

If Members were minded to explore the possibility for having non-voting co-optees on the Committee, some preparatory work would need to be undertaken in respect of terms of office, resource implications, officer time and levels of out-of-pocket expenses etc.

Committee discussed the matter and expressed their views as follows:-

- acknowledgement that the term of office for sitting Councillors was due to end in May 2023 and that the decision might be best made by the new Administration and new Members of the Overview and Committee following the District Council elections next year
- consensus that the insights offered by expert witnesses invited to meetings on a review-by-review basis, were welcomed by Members and were probably more beneficial to the Committee as a targeted response to reviews rather than the overall insights, however helpful, that might be offered by a co-opted Member
- concerns regarding any potential co-optee appointments being made on a yearly basis (as opposed to a 4 year term) as any recruitment and selection exercise would be a cost to the Authority each time.

To conclude the Scrutiny Research Officer advised Members that he could use the time up to the District Elections next year to compile some comparison information regarding costs for undertaking a co-optee recruitment and selection exercise, including the cost of advertising any potential vacancies and levels of payment for out-of-pocket expenses etc.

The Chairman thanked Members for their input and reiterated that a decision of this nature, at a time when the Council and its residents were under extreme financial pressures, would not be particularly well received or necessary for the ongoing facilitation of the work of the Committee.

RESOLVED that

- a) having considered the potential added value of appointing non-voting co-opted members to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and/or Scrutiny Panels A and B, it be agreed that this course of action be declined at the present time;
- b) as a result of a) above, the Scrutiny Research Officer be requested to add the item to the first Overview and Scrutiny Committee agenda following the District Council Elections in May 2023, to enable new Members to consider the matter further.

## **OS.7 Scrutiny Review: Cost of Living**

The Scrutiny Research Officer presented the introductory report for the 'Cost of Living' review and asked Members to consider the national context of the cost of living crisis, the actions the Council had taken so far to acknowledge the impact of the crisis and to establish appropriate terms of reference for identifying the next steps needed to progress the review.

An informal Working Group had been arranged in September 2022 to allow Members time to determine the remit for the review but unfortunately the meeting was cancelled and so Committee was now being asked, in its formal setting, to identify the parameters for the review. Members were asked to consider how the Council might best help its residents to cope with the impacts of the cost of living crisis that was showing no signs of abating.

Members were provided with the following information:

- outcomes from recent Office for National Statistics surveys between 14 September and 25 September relating to food shopping, pay, jobs, future concerns, energy bills and mortgage and rent payments
- the latest information regarding energy prices, energy caps and Government support for households
- the current rate of inflation and contributing factors resulting in the sharp increases over the preceding few months
- the work being undertaken by the Local Government Association to offer solutions and support to local authorities working through the crisis and the introduction of the new 'Cost of Living Hub'; a toolkit sharing best practice and offering guidance to enable Councils to support residents with the rise in the cost of living.

Members were also reminded of the Council's declaration of a 'Cost of Living Emergency' through a notice of motion to the Council meeting in July 2022. A cost of living survey had recently been made available for employees to complete and it was acknowledged that the results and any outcomes from the survey would be helpful for informing the work of the review.

The Service Manager, Scrutiny and Democratic Services acknowledged that the cost of living crisis would undoubtedly have an impact on all of the Council's services and residents and the importance of the Council being adequately prepared for the tough times ahead.

Members debated the matter and considered, amongst other things:

- the initial reasons for its inclusion on the Scrutiny Work Programme as a result of concerns that not enough information was being made available to residents, through the Council's media channels, to assist them with navigating the rising cost of living
- concerns regarding how the cost of living crisis was evolving and deepening nationally and across Europe and its inevitable effect on housing, debt, bills, employment and mental health for all
- the importance of the Council being able to effectively signpost and support people who cannot cope during the crisis
- the potential for providing 'Warm Rooms' across the District through the winter to offer help and support to residents and encourage some much needed community spirit

- the alarming reductions in disposable income for the majority of households due to the rise in interest rates and mortgage repayments
- acknowledgement that the Council's Annual State of Ashfield Debate was due to tackle the cost of living crisis at its meeting to be scheduled in December 2022
- the urgent need for local authorities to lobby their local MP's and Government to ensure their complete focus remains on assisting the nation through the crisis and not on in-house disputes
- the possibility of speaking to an energy company representative as part of the review to gain some insight into the crisis from their perspective.

The Service Manager, Scrutiny and Democratic Services advised Committee that some authorities were already starting to address the potential impacts of the crisis by reviewing all their current policies to ensure they remained fit for purpose. New focussed policies were also being created to address food provision, financial wellbeing and anti-poverty issues. Some Council's were also developing 'Here to Help' strategies to ensure optimum targeted support was offered to residents during the course of the crisis.

#### RESOLVED

that the Scrutiny Research Officer be requested to undertake and ascertain the following in readiness for the next meeting of the Committee in December 2022:

- a) whether the Council is intending to refresh their current Corporate Plan document to reflect the local and national difficulties being faced as part of the cost of living crisis;
- b) if the Council is utilising their buildings and/or preparing any events over the winter period to provide warm, safe places for people and to increase community spirit and wellbeing;
- c) to establish which of the Council's current policies might benefit from a refresh to incorporate any additional support or contingencies for residents struggling with the impacts of the cost of living crisis;
- d) what provision and/or dedicated pages are currently available on the Council's website offering support, signposting and guidance to residents needing help with housing, financial, emotional difficulties as a direct result of the crisis;
- e) to circulate the results of the recent employee cost of living survey, if available.

The meeting closed at 8.05 pm

Chairman.





<b>Report To:</b>	<b>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>15 DECEMBER 2022</b>
<b>Heading:</b>	<b>SCRUTINY REVIEW: COST OF LIVING</b>
<b>Executive Lead Member:</b>	<b>NOT APPLICABLE</b>
<b>Ward/s:</b>	<b>ALL</b>
<b>Key Decision:</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Subject to Call-In:</b>	<b>NO</b>

### **Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to provide Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with further information regarding the Scrutiny Review: Cost of Living. Members have held one previous meeting on this topic in October 2022.

### **Recommendation(s)**

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members are recommended to:

- a. Note the information contained within the report.
- b. Consider next steps to progress the Scrutiny Review: Cost of Living.

### **Reasons for Recommendation(s)**

Cost of Living was added to the scrutiny work programme 2022/23 by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2022. Furthermore, a cost of living emergency has been declared by Council and a State of Ashfield Debate has been organised focused on the key issues arising from the cost of living crisis.

### **Alternative Options Considered**

No alternative options have been considered at this stage of the review. Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members will consider all work being undertaken across the Council in efforts to mitigate the impacts of the cost of living crisis and avoid duplication of work.

## **Detailed Information**

### **FUEL POVERTY AND WARM HUBS**

The End Fuel Poverty Coalition is a broad coalition of anti-poverty, environmental, health, and housing campaigners, charities, local authorities, trade unions, and consumer organisations. The Coalition defines fuel poverty as the condition by which a household is unable to afford to heat (or cool) their home to an adequate temperature. Fuel poverty is caused by low income, high fuel prices, poor energy efficiency, unaffordable housing prices, and poor quality private rental housing.<sup>1</sup>

In August 2022, the Child Poverty Action Group, a group that works on behalf of the more than one in four children in the UK growing up in poverty, published fuel poverty estimates for the United Kingdom. The analysis estimates that by January 2023, over half of households in the UK (15 million) will be in fuel poverty – spending over 10 per cent of net income on fuel. These households will on average be spending £37.51 above the 10 per cent threshold. Over 80 per cent of large families, lone parents, and pensioner couples will be in fuel poverty.<sup>2</sup>

At the previous meeting of the Committee, Members discussed 'Warm Hubs' resolving that it be ascertained as to whether the Council is utilising buildings and/or preparing any events over the winter to provide warm, safe places for people. Warm Hubs are intended as places in local communities where people can find a safe, accessible, and warm environment during the day to help reduce the cost of heating their own homes and to help those facing extreme fuel poverty through the winter.

Following this, the Council's Health and Wellbeing Team have provided information regarding efforts to organise and establish Warm Hubs in Ashfield. At an Ashfield Community Development Group meeting in September 2022, attendees representing organisations were asked to think about support they could offer in establishing Warm Hubs amidst the rising cost of living.

Interested organisations were asked to register for the Warm Welcome Campaign and notify the Council of intentions to set up Warm Hubs so the information could be shared. The Warm Welcome Campaign website includes a feature where people can find a space in their local area and details of the facilities on offer.

### **INFORMATION FOR COUNCIL EMPLOYEES**

At the previous meeting, Members learned of work being undertaken internally by the Council to understand the impact of the cost of living crisis on employees. Members wished to understand what information had been made available to employees to provide support throughout the cost of living crisis and the many issues associated.

A Cost of Living Helpful Information page has been established on the internal website for Council employees. The page features various links where employees can access financial information, energy/utility help, unions, and additional support such as confidential support services for anyone struggling to cope.

Furthermore, Aspiring Leaders within the Council have recently asked employees to take part in a short survey relating to the cost of living crisis. 134 employees took part in the survey with the results showing that 122 of responders feel they will be worse off.

---

<sup>1</sup> End Fuel Poverty Coalition, *About Fuel Poverty*, September 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Johnathan Bradshaw and Antonia Keung, *Fuel Poverty: Updated Estimates for the UK*, Child Poverty Action Group/Social Policy Research Unit – The University of York, 4 August 2022.

## **COST OF LIVING HUB**

At the previous meeting of the Committee, Members discussed the importance of the Council acting as an information hub for residents and requested further information on what dedicated pages are currently available on the Council's website offering support, signposting, and guidance to residents seeking help and advice with a wide array of issues relating to the cost of living crisis.

A cost of living support hub has been established on the Council's website. The hub is featured prominently on the main page of the website and features numerous pages with key information and links to help residents and businesses during the cost of living issues. This includes links to information on:

- Benefits, Council Tax, and Housing Support
- Council Services Support
- Support for Businesses
- Money, Bills, and Debt Support
- Health and Wellbeing Support
- Support from Other Organisations

The page also links to the Government's cost of living factsheet updated in June 2022. The factsheet provides information and advice on:

- Energy bills support scheme information
- Cost of Living payment for people on means tested benefits
- Pensioner Cost of Living payment
- Disability Cost of Living Payment
- Household support fund

A further link is also included to the Cost of Living: Support in Ashfield Directory produced by Ashfield Voluntary Action. The directory includes information for many organisations throughout Ashfield that are offering an array of support such as:

- Food banks, food clubs, and other food related support
- Money, debt advice, benefits checks, and other financial support
- Mental health support
- Children and families support
- Energy and fuel support
- Housing
- Domestic abuse
- Useful contacts/links

A 'Feeding Ashfield' page has also been established on the Council's website. Feeding Ashfield is a network of local food banks, food clubs, allotments, and other organisations working collaboratively with the aim of providing improved access to food and educational opportunities throughout the District.

The Feeding Ashfield page provides details of services available such as food banks and food clubs and features an interactive map to find the locations of food banks, food clubs, and community allotments in Ashfield.

## **STATE OF ASHFIELD DEBATE**

The annual State of Ashfield Debate will take place on Thursday 8 December. The debate will focus on the cost of living crisis with attendance from all Councillors. The purpose of the meeting will be to enable the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet to gather information on the issues and matters which are of concern to Members and which can be considered as part of the preparations for business planning and the proposals for the Council's budget and policy framework in the forthcoming year.

The debate will feature an introduction from the Council's Chief Executive, a presentation by the Chief Executive of Citizens' Advice Ashfield, a presentation from Our Centre, a presentation from Under One Roof Community Resource Centre, and a presentation by the Mid Nottinghamshire Placed Based Partnership. Following introductions and presentations, Members will have the opportunity to undertake a question and answer session with all attendees.

**As the State of Ashfield Debate will take place before the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting, Members may wish to discuss the outcomes of the debate and the potential impact to the Scrutiny Review: Cost of Living.**

## **Implications**

### **Corporate Plan:**

The cost of living crisis has many implications for all key priorities set out by the Council within the Corporate Plan 2019 – 2023. Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members will use the priorities within the Corporate Plan to understand to understand how the Council should respond to the crisis going forward.

### **Legal:**

There are no direct legal implications resulting from the recommendations within this report.

### **Finance:**

There are no direct financial implications resulting from the recommendations within this report.

<b>Budget Area</b>	<b>Implication</b>
General Fund – Revenue Budget	None.
General Fund – Capital Programme	
Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	

### **Risk:**

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>
The cost of living crisis is an issue of key priority for the Council following the declaration of a cost of living emergency and the impacts to many aspects of the Council's service delivery.	The Council is using many different forums to understand the key issues caused by the cost of living crisis such as Overview and Scrutiny, an organised State of Ashfield Debate, and internal working groups.

### **Human Resources:**

There are no direct human resources implications resulting from the recommendations within this report.

### **Environmental/Sustainability:**

There are no direct environmental or sustainability implications resulting from the recommendations within this report.

## **Equalities:**

There are no direct equalities implications resulting from the recommendations within this report.

## **Other Implications:**

None.

## **Reason(s) for Urgency**

None.

## **Reason(s) for Exemption**

None.

## **Background Papers**

None.

## **Report Author and Contact Officer**

Shane Wright  
Scrutiny Research Officer  
[shane.wright@ashfield.gov.uk](mailto:shane.wright@ashfield.gov.uk)  
01623 457318

## **Sponsoring Director**

Ruth Dennis  
Director of Legal and Governance  
[ruth.dennis@ashfield.gov.uk](mailto:ruth.dennis@ashfield.gov.uk)  
01623 457009