

ASHFIELD DISTRICT COUNCIL



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

Agenda

Principal Select Committee

Date: **Thursday, 25th January, 2024**

Time: **7.00 pm**

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

For any further information please contact:

Lynn Cain

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Principal Select Committee

Membership

Chairman: Councillor Kier Barsby

Vice-Chairman: Councillor Julie Gregory

Councillors:

Jamie Bell

Warren Nuttall

John Smallridge

Jodine Cronshaw

Phil Rostance

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 Principal Select 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 15 November 2023. 5 - 8
4. **Petition Received - Community Sites.** 9 - 12

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PRINCIPAL SELECT COMMITTEE

Meeting held in the Committee Room, Council Offices, Urban Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield,

on Wednesday, 15th November, 2023 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor Julie Gregory in the Chair;

Councillors Jamie Bell, Jodine Cronshaw,
Warren Nuttall, Phil Rostance and
John Smallridge.

Apology for Absence: Councillor Kier Barsby.

Officers Present: Lynn Cain, Mike Joy and Nicky Moss.

In Attendance: Councillors Samantha Deakin, Andy Meakin and
John Wilmott.

PS.10 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and/or Non-Registrable Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

PS.11 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 28 September 2023,
be received and approved as a correct record.

PS.12 Executive Lead Member Update - Universal Credit

Councillor Andy Meakin, Executive Lead Member for Social Housing and
Assets commenced his update by reminding Committee Members that the
impact of Universal Credit had originally been reviewed by the Overview and
Scrutiny Committee back in 2019/20.

Universal Credit had initially been rolled out in June 2015 to all new claimants
and single households and by August 2017, there were 96 tenants set up and
claiming Universal Credit. As of 6 November 2023, there were now estimated
to be 2368 Council tenants claiming Universal Credit towards their housing
costs which equated to 36.22% of all Council tenants.

The latest data captured in May 2023 showed that within the District as a
whole, the rollout of Universal Credit from legacy benefits was now 68%
complete. The deadline for completion of the full Universal Credit roll out was
the end of 2024, except for those claiming Employment Support Allowance,
and tenants could still currently apply for advanced payments if required.

Universal Credit processing was now firmly embedded into the Housing Income Team's day to day income recovery work, similar to dealing with Housing Benefit cases. To assist officers within the Team, access was available to the Department of Work and Pension's Universal Credit Landlord Portal where rent charges, requests for direct payments and Universal Credit payments dates, could be sourced and verified.

Of the 2368 Council tenants claiming Universal Credit, 1277 tenants currently had rent arrears. These arrears equated to 72.69% of the Council's total rent arrears debt or £465,000 in value. The Council was presently receiving direct payments for 490 of the 1277 tenants in receipt of Universal Credit.

In respect of care for Council tenants, support was offered and provided at the pre-tenancy stage and throughout the life of their tenancy. Two Money Management Advisors were on hand to support tenants in rent arrears, undertaking financial assessments, providing budgeting support and assist tenants with maximising their income. This also included supporting tenants with applications for benefits.

The Housing Management Team also employed two Tenancy Sustainment Officers who offered support to tenants at risk of losing their homes. In the last financial year, between April 2022 and March 2023, 955 tenants had been supported with welfare and money management advice and in the same year the Team had collectively secured around £108,000 in backdated benefits, additional benefits and charitable donations. For April to September 2023, 507 tenants had already been provided with support and guidance as required.

To conclude and in respect of the Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB), the Council's Assistant Director for Housing Management had contacted the CAB Manager the previous week to ask for feedback regarding the roll out of Universal Credit. Ashfield CAB currently provided a Help to Claim service via phone which was aimed at supporting claimants in the early stages of their Universal Credit claims. This service was funded by the DWP, but this financial support had unfortunately been reduced in 2022.

The CAB Manager did confirm however that between April and September of 2023, they had helped 166 clients with 639 Universal Credit related problems and in most cases clients who switched over were better off financially. In respect of those showing an indication of being worse off financially, advice was being given to wait until they received the managed migration invitation as there was going to be transitional protection available to ensure the switch over wouldn't leave claimants in financial difficulties.

On conclusion of the update, the Chairman thanked Councillor Meakin for his attendance and presentation to the Committee. Members then debated the issue and considered amongst other things:

- the good relationship the Council had enjoyed with the CAB, built up over years of support and partnership working, including the new arrangement for the organisation to be present in the Council's main reception one day a week to assist tenants and residents of Ashfield

- acknowledgement that the Council had worked hard to implement Universal Credit with all claimants soon to be fully migrated over to the new scheme
- the pros and cons of managed payments which could assist tenants in arrears but with the proviso that a balance was struck to avoid sending claimants into further debt and difficulties
- acknowledgement that current eviction levels were low due to the Council's sustained efforts to keep people in tenancies and in their homes
- the benefits of the Money Management and Tenancy Sustainment leaflets produced and circulated to tenants alongside their annual rent letters
- the Council being one of the best performing authorities in respect of the roll out and administration of Universal Credit being welcomed, and the Team being congratulated for their achievements
- the preparatory work being undertaken in respect of contacting and supporting the remaining 32% of claimants being migrated over to Universal Credit during 2024
- how the Council supports the wellbeing of staff working in the Housing Management Team as they navigate their complex and often stressful roles
- how the Council has learnt from the last few years of Universal Credit migration and the fact that staff are now in an excellent position to offer informed support and guidance wherever needed
- the lengthy stages of the tenant eviction process and how actual eviction is the very last resort following the exhaustion of various intermediary arrangements for paying off debt arrears etc.

RESOLVED that

- a) the update in respect of the Universal Credit Scheme, as presented, be received and noted;
- b) the Scrutiny Research Officer be requested to write to the Department of Work and Pensions and Ashfield Citizens' Advice Bureau to ascertain how both organisations are intending to support the remaining 32% of Ashfield claimants moving over to the Universal Credit scheme during 2024
- c) a further update be presented to the Committee during 2024 once the final migration of claimants over to Universal Credit has been completed.

PS.13 Select Work Programme

The Assistant Director for Democracy updated Members with regard to the current status and progress of the 2023/24 Select Work Programme, as attached to the report.

RESOLVED

that progress of the 2023/24 Select Work Programme, as presented, be received and noted.

The meeting closed at 8.15 pm

Chairman.



Report To:	PRINCIPAL SELECT COMMITTEE
Date:	25 JANUARY 2024
Heading:	PETITION RECEIVED – COMMUNITY SITES
Executive Lead Member:	NOT APPLICABLE
Ward/s:	NOT APPLICABLE
Key Decision:	NO
Subject to Call-In:	NO

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to present the Principal Select Committee with details of a petition received by the Council. This report details the received petition and the process that must be followed in accordance with the Council’s Petition Scheme and Constitution.

Recommendation(s)

The Principal Select Committee is recommended to:

- a) Receive and note the petition submitted.
- b) Consider any recommendations to be made to Cabinet if required.

Reasons for Recommendation(s)

The Council has received a petition submitted with 866 signatures. In accordance with the Council’s Petition Scheme, the submitted petition has met the threshold for consideration at a meeting of the Principal Select Committee.

Alternative Options Considered

No alternative options have been considered. The Council has an agreed Petition Scheme, further detailed in the Constitution, setting out how petitions received by the Council will be responded to.

Detailed Information

PETITION RECEIVED

The Council recently received a petition with 866 signatures.

The submitted petition reads as follows:

We the undersigned petition the council to We the undersigned object to the bulldozing of our community centres based on one years figures post covid, when there has been no actual Tenant engagement officer to Facilitate joint working between tenants, staff, Elected Members and communities in order to achieve effective community involvement and actions as stated by the tenants charter

The ability to engage with the most vulnerable people face to face at a local level is an integral part of reducing social isolation, helping both mental and physical health. Many people still do not have access to the internet and cannot access any online resources and are overlooked. The social cohesion brought about by the meeting rooms locality and availability is a vital part of building good community relations

END.

PETITION SCHEME

Ashfield District Council has an established Petition Scheme approved by Council. As part of the scheme, the response to a petition is decided by the number of signatures the submitted petition has received.

As per the Petition Scheme:

- If a petition submitted to the Council contains **between 750 and 1499 signatures**, it will be referred to the Principal Select Committee for consideration. Further information on this can be found at section 8 below.

The Petition Scheme continues:

- A petition containing **between 750 and 1,499 signatures** will be considered by the Council's Principal Select Committee.
- The most appropriate Senior Council Officer will be invited to give evidence at a public meeting of the Principal Select Committee relating to the issues set out in a petition.
- The petition organiser will be permitted a total of **15 minutes** to ask up to a maximum of three questions to the Officer(s) in attendance regarding the petition.
- The petition organiser must provide the Service Manager – Scrutiny and Democratic Services with written notice of these questions at least **10 clear working days** before the Principal Select Committee meeting.

- Questions submitted as part of this process considered by the Chief Executive to be vexatious, discriminatory, abusive, unreasonable, or otherwise inappropriate will not be considered.
- Following the questions asked by the petition organiser, a further **15 minutes** will be allocated to allow discussion between Principal Select Committee Members and the invited Officer. During this allocated time, Committee Members may seek further clarification from the petition organiser.
- Following discussion, Members of the Principal Select Committee may decide to approve recommendations to be submitted to a future meeting of the Council’s Cabinet.

Implications

Corporate Plan:

The Council, as established within the Corporate Plan 2023 – 2027, sets out core values of:

- People focussed
- Honest
- Proud
- Ambitious

Legal:

There are no direct legal implications as a result of the recommendations within this report. If, as a result of the petition, the Principal Select Committee make recommendations to Cabinet, any legal implications will be detailed in a further report.

Finance:

There are no direct financial implications as a result of the recommendations within this report. If, as a result of the petition, the Principal Select Committee make recommendations to Cabinet, any financial implications will be detailed in a further report.

Budget Area	Implication
General Fund – Revenue Budget	Not applicable.
General Fund – Capital Programme	
Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	

Risk:

There are no direct risks associated with the recommendations within this report.

Human Resources:

There are no direct HR implications as a result of the recommendations within this report. If, as a result of the petition, the Principal Select Committee make recommendations to Cabinet, any HR implications will be detailed in a further report.

Environmental/Sustainability:

There are no direct environmental/sustainability implications as a result of the recommendations within this report. If, as a result of the petition, the Principal Select Committee make recommendations to Cabinet, any environmental/sustainability implications will be detailed in a further report.

Equalities:

There are no direct equalities implications as a result of the recommendations within this report. If, as a result of the petition, the Principal Select Committee make recommendations to Cabinet, any equalities implications will be detailed in a further report.

Other Implications:

There are no other implications as a result of the recommendations within this report. If, as a result of the petition, the Principal Select Committee make recommendations to Cabinet, any legal implications will be detailed in a further report.

Reason(s) for Urgency

None.

Reason(s) for Exemption

None.

Background Papers

None.

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