

**Questions to Council Under Rule 11 of the Constitution –
Council 11 December 2024**

Q1. Councillor Ros Jackson Councillor William Gray, Portfolio Holder for Housing Communities and Better Ageing

Can you give an update please on the numbers of empty homes in East Lindsey, sorted by the length of time they have been known to be empty?

- A. Long term empty homes are classed as those that are unoccupied longer than 6 months. There are many reasons why homes become empty. Many of these reasons are complex and may include lengthy legal proceedings.*

Through council tax records, we are aware that 841 properties within the district have been empty between 6 months and two years, with a further 385 properties empty for longer than two years.

The Long-Term Empty Dwelling Premium (additional council tax charges) encourages homeowners with long term empty homes to bring them back into use through financial incentive.

Additionally, through the Private Sector Strategy due to be considered for adoption in the new year and associated action plan, the Housing Standards Team at ELDC are developing further opportunities in supporting and addressing Empty Homes within our district.

Q2. Councillor Travis Hesketh to Councillor Craig Leyland, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Corporate Affairs.

In the 6 months Since July 17th (when a motion was passed to hold a referendum within 12 months or withdraw from the GDF process), what new information, evidence or knowledge has been produced by NWS? (not old information recycled)

- A. Nothing that is not in the public domain. The purpose of the motion was to ensure that NWS were held to account for their lack of progress. The time limit for that being one year from the date of that motion. I believe NWS are fully aware of the challenge and have apologised to the Community Partnership for their lack of clear progress. Cllr Hesketh, I suggest you look at the NWS website and the minutes of the CP meetings to see how matters are progressing. The Executive will consider the motion and its implications when appropriate.*

Q3. Councillor Travis Hesketh to Councillor Craig Leyland, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Corporate Affairs.

In your recent statement you state "We have known for a while that the former gas terminal site at Theddlethorpe has potential competing uses. The question of whether a GDF surface entry site at this location was feasible and compatible to those other uses has obviously been an issue for NWS culminating in their recent statement." The minutes of the Nuclear Waste Services Community Partnership have no mention of this issue. The NWSCP are supposed to be the link to the

community. How long before the 12th November NWS announcement were you informed and what date was the NWSCP consulted on this critically important change?

- A. *First of all Cllr Hesketh, Nuclear Waste Services are distinct from the Theddlethorpe Community Partnership. NWS have one voting position on the Community Partnership as you well know.*

It is/was self-evident that the Theddlethorpe gas terminal site had potential competing uses. The use of the site for carbon capture and hydrogen production have all been in the public domain. Cllr Hill and myself were informed by NWS on the 14th October that they had to factor these competing uses into their approach and that they would have to consider other potential options within the search area for the GDF surface site. At that, point NWS had not carried out any further surveys into any alternative sites and it was for NWS to inform the CP when they had more specific information. The matter was discussed at the CP meeting held on the 21st November.

Q4. Councillor Travis Hesketh to Councillor Craig Leyland, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Corporate Affairs.

Since Theddlethorpe is now (suddenly) too small for a GDF you could, being impartial, by invitation, expand the search area or request a new search area to other areas of East Lindsey. Why don't you do that?

- A. *The Theddlethorpe site is still under consideration but the competing potential uses have necessitated NWS looking wider within the search area.*

The Government Guidance for methodology for identifying Areas of Focus explains how a search area is determined. And I quote:

“The GDF Siting Process begins with a conversation between an Interested Party and NWS. The Search Area is derived from the area first put forward for consideration by the Interested Party and is defined using district or unitary council electoral ward boundaries, depending on the administrative arrangements in place for the particular area.

The next stage in the Siting Process is to form a Working Group to begin local discussions and fact-finding with the community. One of the tasks of the Working Group is to identify a Search Area(s), the geographical areas within which NWS undertakes studies and considers potential sites for a GDF if a Community Partnership is formed.

For areas which include potential for development under the seabed, the policy definition of the Search Area refers to the area on land (not inshore).

As NWS's investigations progress, the Community Partnership may refine the Search Area as it identifies areas that it prefers to be ruled out of consideration, or brings in additional areas that were not initially part of the Search Area.

NWS takes time to understand the Search Areas, and where relevant, the adjacent inshore areas. Because Search Areas are quite large, NWS will in most cases need to narrow them down to focus studies on locations in them that could be suitable to host a GDF."

Q5. Councillor Travis Hesketh to Councillor Craig Leyland, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Corporate Affairs.

Most people understand the need to provide more transmission (electrical) infrastructure to support the transition to a low carbon economy with demand likely to double by 2050. Can you please provide a quantified list of financial and community benefits to East Lindsey from the Critically Important National Grid Grimsby to Walpole and other electrical infrastructure projects in terms of

- a. Capital Investment
- b. Jobs
- c. National Grid Community Grants
- d. National Grid Community benefits for local businesses.
- e. Community benefits for infrastructure or local facilities or direct payments,
- f. New businesses

A. It is premature at this stage as this information will form part of any subsequent NSIP process.

Q6. Councillor Jill Makinson-Sanders to Councillor Craig Leyland, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Corporate Affairs.

Outside this council chamber is a Changing Places multi-functional lavatory but unfortunately this is not accessible to the public on a daily basis, unlike the other CP loos in the district. The Changing Places initiative was funded by a government grant, so please can you explain exactly how the one outside correctly fits the stated criteria?

A. I thank Councillor Makinson-Sanders for her question, she is absolutely correct that a number of facilities across the District have recently been funded by a Government Grant; a grant that this Council applied for and secured, with all of the schemes funded under that initiative being fully registered with Changing Places dot Org and accessible to those who need to use those fantastic facilities.

As a responsible organisation, the facility outside of this Chamber was entirely funded by Council for the benefit of any current or future staff, members or visitors who may require such facilities, as it did not receive any funding under the Changing Places Toilet Fund, it is not registered under the national scheme.

Q7. Councillor George Horton to Councillor Tom Kemp, Portfolio Holder for Finance.

How do we come to a decision, and what is the criteria, for writing off debts? How much have we written off this year and what is the total write off for the last five years?

A. The Debt Management Policy sets out the Councils approach, including legislative provisions and details of the possible recovery and enforcement options. This policy is published on the website and can be found here: - [Corporate Debt Management Policy](#)

Decisions leading to debt write off are made on facts and evidence of each individual case.

Reasons for write off vary, but some of the most common reasons are: -

- Insolvency – (e.g. Debt Relief Orders, Bankruptcies),
- Deceased with no estate,
- Absconded.

Occasionally debt can be uneconomical to pursue, i.e. where it would cost more to pursue and recover debt than the actual value of the debt itself.

Before any debt is recommended for write off, Officers consider and exhaust all appropriate recovery and enforcement options, as provided in legislation.

The Councils Financial Procedures within the Constitution set out the decision makers for write off. Up to £75,000 can be approved by S151 Officer, with amounts over £75,000 by Executive Board, and over £500,000 by Full Council.

The total amounts written off in 2024/25 to date, and the total for the previous 5 years, are shown in the following table by debt type. The cost to this council is also shown:

| | Council Tax | Business Rates | Sundry Debt | Housing Benefit Overpayment | Total |
|--------------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|-----------------------------|------------|
| 2024/25 | £38,409 | £24,480 | £4,530 | £26,973 | £94,392 |
| 2019/20 to 2023/24 | £757,730 | £575,029 | £31,433 | £530,389 | £1,894,581 |
| Total | £796,139 | £599,509 | £35,964 | £557,362 | £1,988,974 |
| Est. loss to ELDC | 10% | 40% | 100% | 60% | |
| | £79,614 | £239,804 | £35,964 | £334,417 | £689,799 |

Please note that the amounts shown are the debt written off in the year irrespective of the year to which the debt related, i.e. these include prior year(s) debt.

The following information might provide useful context in relation to Council Tax and Business Rates: -

| | Collectible Debit | Written off | % written off |
|--|-------------------|-------------|---------------|
|--|-------------------|-------------|---------------|

| | 2019/20 to 2024/25 | 2019/20 to 2024/25 | |
|----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------|
| Council Tax | £534,972,911 | £796,139 | 0.15% |
| Business Rates | £194,564,104 | £599,509 | 0.31% |

With any debt written off, if information subsequently comes to light that suggests a debt may be recoverable after all (e.g. an absconder re-appears in the district), the write off would be reversed and the debt pursued again.

Q8. Councillor George Horton to Councillor Martin Foster, Portfolio Holder for Operational Services.

I notice in a recent councillor brief that a decision was made without the usual consultation to reduce waste refuse collections. Can you please explain all the acronyms you have used, particularly regarding the vehicles?

A. There has been no decision to reduce waste collections.

Q9. Councillor George Horton to Councillor Graham Marsh, Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Leisure and Culture, and Carbon Reduction

I understand that the application for a 3G pitch in Louth is expected to go forward in January. This has taken almost three years to get to this stage. What is the cost, particularly Officer and consultant time, to date?

A. The preparation and delivery of such projects are included within the day job for Officers, so are not costed separately. The consultants/contractors involved with the delivery of this project were secured through the Football Foundation, and the consultant developing the bid to the Football Foundation, through Magna Vitae.

The Council has paid £11, 232 to date in preparation for the planning application, and it is anticipated that the Council would pay a total of circa 30% of the £1.4m cost of the project, should Planning Permission be granted, and the application to the Football Foundation be successful.

Q10. Councillor George Horton to Councillor William Gray, Portfolio Holder for Communities and Better Ageing.

We are all aware of the problems in the NHS with doctors, ambulances etc, what is this authority doing to relieve problems with dentistry in particular?

A. East Lindsey District Council has no direct responsibility for dentistry provision. Unfortunately, lack of dentistry provision is not just a local problem but one that is particularly acute in areas of economic deprivation. National surveys quoted by health scrutiny groups suggest that 1 in 5 adults are now avoiding dental visits due to financial constraints, this is significantly up from 1 in 10 that was estimated a decade ago.

Locally, Healthwatch Lincolnshire, who have a statutory function to obtain the views of people about their needs and experiences of the local health service, make these views known to commissioners and have continued to lobby and raise concerns about lack of dentistry on behalf of Lincolnshire residents. This included providing evidence at the government health select committee which has informed national policy and resulted in the publication of a new national dental recovery plan.

For reference: <https://www.healthwatchlincolnshire.co.uk/response/2024-02-19/nhs-dental-recovery-plan-our-response>

Published in February 2024 by the NHS and the Government, the dental recovery plan sets out major reforms to ensure more people can access NHS dental services. It includes a national focus on prevention, good oral health and an expansion of the dental workforce.

For reference: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-plan-to-recover-and-reform-nhs-dentistry/faster-simpler-and-fairer-our-plan-to-recover-and-reform-nhs-dentistry>

Locally, we are pleased to note the recent opening of a new dental practice in Mablethorpe where people have not had access to a dentist in the town. Appointments are now available and are initially being offered to those with clinical need, with children and those in need of urgent care being prioritised.

ELDC will continue to flag the lack of dentist provision across our District at the Lincolnshire Health & Wellbeing Board and at our own partnership Healthy Living Board. But I would encourage residents facing barriers to accessing health provision to share their concerns with Healthwatch Lincolnshire

For reference: <https://www.healthwatchlincolnshire.co.uk/>

Call: 01205 820892 between the hours of 09:00 – 15:00 Monday to Thursday and 09:00 - 12:00 Friday

Post: Rooms 33 – 35, The Len Medlock Centre, St George's Road, Boston, Lincolnshire, PE21 8YB

Email: info@healthwatchlincolnshire.co.uk

Q11. Councillor George Horton to Councillor Tom Kemp, Portfolio Holder for Finance.

We are now entering the tail end of the 24-25 financial year. How much has this authority this financial year on outside consultants.

- A.** *The council spends money on external consultants/professionals but within the Council coding structure, expenditure is classified as agency or professional services and contractors fees, it would be useful if Cllr Horton could specify what he means as consultants spend as there are currently 1500 lines of data to interrogate.*

Q12. Councillor Roger Dawson to Councillor Tom Ashton, Portfolio Holder for Planning

Have there been other cases similar to the Briggs Meadows development, such as the Chestnut Drive applications, where post-planning permission delays have impacted the delivery of housing and our economy?

- A. Post-resolution to grant planning permission any lapse of time to a formal decision would usually be as a result of drafting and finalising s106 agreements. Post-decision the need to discharge pre-commencement planning conditions may also be cause for time to lapse. However, these are both normal parts of the planning process. The AD for Planning is currently embarking on a service review where capacity and process will both be reviewed. Performance against national targets has been improving in recent months and performance against the Housing Delivery Test i.e. delivery on the ground is good.*

Q13. Councillor Roger Dawson to Councillor Tom Ashton, Portfolio Holder for Planning

How much of the post-planning permission work performed by Planning is legally required, how much is discretionary, and is it justifiable in terms of the value of the work performed?

- A. S106s and planning conditions must only be applied where they meet certain legal and policy tests, hence by their nature they must be justifiable.*

Q14. Councillor Roger Dawson to Councillor Tom Ashton, Portfolio Holder for Planning

What lessons should be taken from the delays in the Briggs Meadow planning application in order to ensure that planning applications are processed efficiently and in a timely manner in the future and that ELDC's house building targets will be met?

- A. Planning processes are kept under constant review given that planning is a quasi-judicial process. The AD for Planning is currently embarking on a service review, which will look at both capacity and processes. Performance against national targets has been improving in recent months and performance against the Housing Delivery Test i.e. delivery on the ground is good.*

Q15. Councillor Roger Dawson to Councillor Tom Ashton, Portfolio Holder for Planning

What is the overall impact of ELDC's current Planning capacity on the ability of developers to bring projects forward?

- A. The AD for Planning is currently embarking on a service review where capacity and process will both be reviewed. Performance against national targets has been improving in recent months and performance against the Housing Delivery Test i.e. delivery on the ground is good.*

Q16. Councillor Daniel Simpson to Councillor Craig Leyland, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Corporate Affairs.

What is the position on resolving legal matters relating to Kingfisher?

A. I thank Councillor Simpson for his question, the case referred to is subject to Directions from the High Court with the timing of any hearing being entirely in the hands of the Court.

Q17. Councillor Daniel Simpson to Councillor Craig Leyland, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Corporate Affairs.

What steps have been taken resolve infrastructure issues that prevent full capacity of the Kingfisher Park being achieved?

A. I thank Councillor Simpson for his question; the infrastructure needs of the site remain under continual review with works being planned and undertaken based on asset condition and forecast occupancy; for example, £92,000 has just been invested to replace the main water tank serving the site; pitch base upgrades continue to be demand led with a further £75,000 capital commitment having been approved in the summer, and an electricity capacity study is due for commission next year.

Q18. Councillor Daniel Simpson to Councillor Craig Leyland, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Corporate Affairs.

What stage has been arrived at in consideration of the future of Kingfisher Park as a retained Council asset or its disposal?

A. I thank Councillor Simpson for his question, an options appraisal for the Park is being developed and is due to be presented to the Executive by the end of February 2025.

Q19. Councillor Daniel Simpson to Councillor Craig Leyland, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Corporate Affairs.

Has any aspect of the Scrutiny report been considered or acted upon.

A. I thank Councillor Simpson for his question; I can confirm that Executive Board colleagues have considered the recommendations as I outlined in my report.

Q20. Councillor Daniel Simpson to Councillor Craig Leyland, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Corporate Affairs.

The Scrutiny made a recommendation that a presentation be made to Council about Invest East Lindsey with a business case to justify its future. When is this going to happen so that Members can make an informed decision in the course of Budget setting/approval with the financial implications that Invest East Lindsey clearly presents in budget considerations?

- A. *I thank Councillor Simpson for his question; the Shareholder is due to receive the Company's Budget and Business Plan for 2025/26 by the end of January 2025; once that has been received and reviewed, a presentation can follow in due course.*

Q21. Councillor Daniel Simpson to Councillor Craig Leyland, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Corporate Affairs.

Some months ago, it was brought to your attention the issue of timely responding to email and phone calls. Your response was that you were afflicted with the same issue. What progress have you been able to make in sorting this issue out as Members and more importantly the ratepaying public are still experiencing poor service?

- A. *The Chief Executive has discussed the matter with senior managers and set out my clear expectation that members receive a timely response to their enquiries in line with that set out in the constitution.*

I've asked previously that members who have issues in securing responses to their queries from officers escalate the matter directly to the chief executive and I. We will follow up with the service concerned.

In respect to the customer contact centre, call handling times continue to improve with support from the newly implemented webchat service and call back service.

Q22. Councillor Jill Makinson-Sanders to Councillor Sarah Devereux, Portfolio Holder for Partnerships.

Please would you explain what is meant by domestic abuse?

- A. *The Home Office 2021 definition of domestic violence and abuse now states:*

Behaviour of a person ("A") towards another person ("B") is "domestic abuse" if A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and the behaviour is abusive.*

Behaviour is "abusive" if it consists of any of the following:

*physical or sexual abuse
violent or threatening behaviour
controlling or coercive behaviour
economic abuse
psychological, emotional or other abuse*

The full definition can be found on page 21 of the Statutory Guidance. Domestic abuse (sometimes called 'domestic violence' or 'intimate partner violence') is an incident or a pattern of behaviour that is used by someone to control or obtain power over their partner or ex-partner. It is never the fault of the person who is experiencing it, and it is a crime.

Domestic abuse can affect anyone, regardless of age, disability, gender identity, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. Domestic abuse can also manifest itself in specific ways within different communities.

The term 'victim' is used in the 2021 Act to denote someone who has experienced domestic abuse. This includes children who have seen, heard, or experienced the effects of domestic abuse, and are related to either the victim of the abusive behaviour, or the perpetrator.

The Act provides the definition of "personally connected" and this includes those who would constitute a "relative" of the victim. The definition of "relative" has the meaning given under section 63(1) of the Family Law Act 1996 ('the 1996 Act') which includes immediate biological family, stepfamily and extended family of an individual including such family members of their present or former spouse, civil partner or cohabiting partner.

Domestic abuse most commonly takes place in intimate partner relationships, including same sex relationships. Intimate relationships can take different forms, partners do not need to be married or in a civil partnership and abuse can occur between non-cohabiting intimate partners. As with all forms of abuse, abuse in intimate relationships can vary in severity and frequency, ranging from a one-off occurrence to a continued pattern of behaviour.

Abuse can continue or intensify when a relationship has ended or is in the process of ending. This can be a very dangerous time for a victim including an increased risk to their physical safety. It is a highly critical period for ensuring support for victims, as they may consider returning to perpetrators during the period immediately after fleeing or ending the relationship. Separation can raise both the likelihood and consequences of risk because of the perpetrator's perceived lack of control.

*For further information, please view:
Lincolnshire Domestic Abuse Strategy
Lincolnshire Domestic Abuse Specialist Service
The Homicide Timeline – Dr Jane Monckton-Smith*

*Or contact Wendy Dales, ELDC Domestic Abuse Officer - 01775 764485.
Domestic Abuse courses are available via the Lincolnshire County Council Safeguarding training website.*

Q23. Councillor Jill Makinson-Sanders to Councillor William Gray, Portfolio Holder for Communities and Better Ageing.

Louth has a number of asylum seekers rehoused here. What is the council doing towards their time here, and our other market towns in the district, now the government thinks it's preferable to being together in hotels?

- A.** *The Home Office has a legal obligation, as set out in the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, to support asylum seekers (including any dependents) who would*

otherwise be destitute and provide for their essential living needs whilst their claim for asylum is being considered. Asylum seekers can apply for accommodation, subsistence, or both accommodation and subsistence support.

Those on asylum support are allocated accommodation on a 'no choice basis', in line with the Allocation of asylum accommodation policy (accessible) - GOV.UK. The Home Office meets most of its statutory duties through commissioning 'Asylum Accommodation and Support Services (AASC)' and 'Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility (AIRE)' which set the framework to how housing and support services for asylum seekers are provided.

In the East Midlands, the Home Office provider for the AASC contract is Serco. Nationally, the Home Office provider for the AIRE contract is Migrant Help.

Full Asylum Dispersal announced by ministers in early 2022 resulted in all local authorities across England, Scotland and Wales moving to a full model for asylum dispersal. This model aimed to ensure an equitable spread across the UK and to support the Home Office ending its reliance on expensive contingency accommodation (hotels).

Those in dispersal accommodation live independently and are visited once a month by a Serco provided Housing Officer. They purchase and cook their own meals and are expected to access local services, as any other member of the public would do so.

Provision by Serco includes:

- providing and maintaining accommodation, furniture, equipment, and utilities*
- an induction service upon arrival at the property, including information about the local community and local services*
- visiting at least once per month*
- promoting wellbeing, including making referrals to relevant agencies where this would help*
- providing translation and interpreting services where necessary*
- information about the nearest available GP surgery and helping register*

Telephone support is provided by Migrant Help's asylum helpline.

Migrant Help is a charitable organisation operating a national service called Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility (AIRE) separate from the Home Office. Migrant Help can provide independent advice and guidance on the asylum process and rights. They can also direct the asylum seeker to other services available in the UK.

Migrant Help will assist in accessing financial support, accommodation, legal advice, and other services that they are entitled to by law. They will provide information to help understand the asylum process, support entitlements and how to access other essential services (including health care and legal advice) before the asylum interview.

Migrant Help's free helpline can advise on topics which include:

- *how to claim asylum*
- *financial support*
- *finding legal representation*
- *the asylum processes*
- *accessing healthcare*
- *accommodation support*
- *any other asylum issues*

In addition, advice and guidance will be provided by Migrant Help soon after receiving a final decision from the Home Office to support next steps. This may include signposting to DWP, Housing Authorities, Social Care, education support and/or other required services.

The councils involvement may start when a positive asylum decision is issued to the asylum seeker with the council receiving an automated email via Serco of this decision. Should the Housing Team be approached, we would assist individuals as per our usual advice, support and applications assessment process, utilising Home Office received funding as appropriate.

Ends.