

## **NUNEATON AND BEDWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **COUNCIL**

**16<sup>th</sup> September, 2025**

An Extraordinary Council meeting of the Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council was held on Wednesday, 16<sup>th</sup> September 2025.

### **Present**

The Mayor (Councillor B. Saru)

Councillors, M. Bird, J. Bonner, , A. Bull, J. Clarke, J. Collett, T. Cooper, S. Croft, L. Cvetkovic, S. Dhillon, M. Etienne, J. Gutteridge, W. Hancox, J. Hartshorn, S. Hey, P. Hickling, B. Hughes, T. Jenkins, A. Khangura, N. King, M. Kondakor, S. Markham, W. Markham, B. Pandher, C. Phillips, K. Price, R. Roze, J. Sheppard, C. Smith, T. Venson, M. Walsh, C. Watkins, K. Wilson and M. Wright.

Apologies were received for Councillors E. Amaechi, D. Brown, R. Smith, J. Sheppard and Deputy Mayor Councillor T. Sheppard.

#### CL21 **Declarations of Interests**

**RESOLVED** that the Declarations of Interests for this meeting are as set out in the schedule available to view on the website.

#### CL22 **Announcements**

A one minute silence was held for HRH Duchess of Kent who passed away on the 4<sup>th</sup> September 2025 and in memory of Len Hardy who was the driving force behind the development of the Veterans Contact Point and to give a moment of reflection to all those in the world that are currently being affected by conflict.

#### CL23 **Public Participation**

**Question 1** – Stuart Miller asked the following question on behalf of John Swift:

Does the council agree, just as the immigrants of yesteryear have demonstrated, the immigrants of today are the doctors, carers, teachers, bus drivers, councillors and good neighbours of tomorrow. Above all they are human beings worthy of respect?

**Councillor C. Watkins, Leader of the Council deferred to Councillor K. Wilson, Leader of the Main Opposition Group to answer the above question as it related to their motion.**

**Councillor K. Wilson responded as follows:**

Thank you Mr. Mayor and I thank the questioner and the person asking it on his behalf.

Yes, I agree that every human being is worthy of respect and yes we have had immigrants - the vast majority of immigrants of yesteryear as he has said in his question were the doctors, carers, teachers, bus drivers, councillors and good neighbours. And they still are.

The question that we have to tackle, and I think is at the heart of a lot of people's frustration within the community is that many or not all or the vast majority of the people he's referred to have come to this country through legal means. It's the illegal means which is frustrating people and the illegal means which have to be tackled otherwise the current community tensions that we are experiencing now, as bad as they are, are only going to get worse. If we don't tackle them and ensure fair play, I think it is the British sense of fair play here. People are happy to see legal migration where it is according to the law and controlled. But at the moment, we are seeing illegal migration which isn't under control. That is people's frustration.

**Question 2 – Heather Kincaid asked the following question:**

Human rights legislation is a recognition of the equality and humanity of all people under the law. As a fundamental principle, these rights must necessarily apply either to every single human person, or to none of us.

Given the council's proposal to disapply the human rights act from vulnerable people seeking sanctuary in our town, can the council members please confirm whether they are in favour of abandoning the principle of human rights altogether and leaving all of their constituents no longer able to rely on the basic rights and freedoms they have long taken for granted? Or if not, is it the case that the members believe that people who have fled war and persecution to seek safety in our country are not truly human?

I would also like to ask each of the council members putting forward this proposal whether they have ever personally met a single person seeking asylum, and if they have not, how is it that they feel they feel qualified to pass judgement on the humanity of an entire group of people, or their entitlement to the basic rights and freedoms that council members would surely expect to enjoy themselves?

**Councillor C. Watkins, Leader of the Council deferred to Councillor K. Wilson, Leader of the Main Opposition Group to answer the above question as it related to their motion.**

**Councillor K. Wilson responded as follows:**

Thank you, Mr. Mayor. the European Convention on Human Rights has always since its inception had the ability to derogate - or suspend - part of the obligations and rights in the convention where it is necessary and in the country's interest to do so.

In fact, it was done in memory back in the last Labour government as well, where there were temporary derogations from the European Convention on Human Rights. But what really annoys me and other members of the public is that this concept that human rights begins and ends with the Human Rights Act. We have had a long proud history throughout the centuries of our rights evolving through a natural process of democratic accountability. Right from the Bill of Rights and the Magna Carta right through to the present day; the Human Rights Act isn't the end all of our rights. In fact, it used to be the presumption that you were free to do anything in this country unless it was proscribed by law. That was the legal position until the Human Rights Act changed everything on its head. What we are asking for is the ability to safely deal with potential threats to the security of this country. That isn't some kind of radical proposal. But trying to get 50 odd nation states to agree to changing the European Convention is very, very difficult and in the meantime, we need to protect our residents first. Those who are in genuine need of asylum, we have no issue whatsoever with, where they are genuinely escaping their persecution.

There is a geographical nature that has to be realised here. To get to this country, you have to go through at least 10 to my account, probably more safe countries to get to this country. So long as there is a safe and fair way for people to come here, that's not what we're arguing about. This is about the illegal routes of entry into our country.

Thank you.

**Question 3 – County Councillor Keith Kondakor read the following statement to Council:**

Mr Mayor,

It is very unhelpful and unreasonable that the exact wording of this statement had to be produced a week ahead of the meeting to have a good chance to speak, I hope you will allow me to deviate if things have changed.

I need to make it clear how unhelpful this motion, from part of the Conservative Group, is. Over the last 7 weeks the population and businesses in Nuneaton

and Bedworth have suffered considerably from some who spread misinformation, racism and division. We cannot now talk about the details of the dreadful case that started this chain of events before the trial process takes place at the end of January. There will be a lot to discuss, hopefully in a responsible way, once that case is concluded.

We already knew we had an issue in some parts of the borough with the concentration of Homes of Multiple Occupation (HMO) and know that a working party had been formed to look at this. We already know that asylum cases take far too long to be determined, not helped by the halting of assessments for part of 2024. Most of us understand the contribution made to our Borough from the diverse range of nationalities who now call this Borough their home.

My father was a refugee from when the Russians rolled into Hungary in 1956 to put down a revolution. He arrived in the UK on Christmas Eve, 1956, aged just 17.

We know the current arrangements are helpful to no one. I want things to work better and for this council to be constructive in what it does and in any letter to the Government. I want the council to improve the quality of HMO regulation and bring more into requiring planning permission. I want to get rid of rogue employers who exploit migrants of all types. Most importantly, I want the immigration system to work properly without massive backlogs.

**Councillor C. Watkins, Leader of the Council deferred to Councillor K. Wilson, Leader of the Main Opposition Group to answer the above question as it related to their motion.**

**Councillor K. Wilson responded as follows:**

Mr. Mayor. I actually don't disagree with a lot of what County Councillor Kondakor says in some respects. I think there is a lot to be done with HMOs. I think there is a lot to be done about looking at the misinformation and racism being a threat because this is part of the problem, we are facing in our community that by raising these issues there are some elements who instantly brand you as racist and far right etc. It isn't racist or far right to want to discuss legitimate issues in our community. By doing that, it forces these people underground into far more extremist views in a lot of cases.

If we fail to tackle these issues, we are failing to address the issues that our residents are concerned about. That is my one of my prime concerns. But also his family history - I could kind of guess a bit with the name of County Councillor Kondakor - . I think partly highlights my concern and others about the revolution in Hungary in 1956. We are talking about laws which were written in this case

almost 80 years ago, and laws which fail to keep pace with modern times end up looking out of date and anachronistic and don't respond to the issues facing the country as they are now.

We just have to look across the ponds to America with rights enshrined in 1789 which are causing massive issues over there because people are holding certain things to be sacrosanct. If we preserve things in aspic and don't change them to catch up with modern day society, we're only going to compound those issues. I would much rather actually reform the European Convention on Human Rights if at all possible. But I remain sceptical about the ability to do that because of all the other partners that we have to deal with. My primary concern as a local councillor and indeed as a resident of this Borough is about the safety of my fellow neighbour's, my fellow residents and of the of the people of this country

**County Councillor Keith Kondakor gave a supplementary statement as follows:**

When my father came here from Hungary, there was a legal and safe way for him to do so. The international committee at the time sorted out how many people go to each country, and I believe passionately in human right legislation, and I think we should have a legal and safe route, not to bring more people here, but to actually make the process quicker and safer for everyone. It's the delays that are causing all the stress. And that's what I'm really upset about that we're actually putting these people in a dreadful position themselves. And we need a better system. We shouldn't get rid of human rights. We should keep human rights and make the system work better. Thank you.

**Question 4 – Colin Hughes read the following statement to Council:**

The rhetoric around asylum seekers has become dangerously simplistic, fuelled by populist soundbites and tabloid headlines. Complex issues are being reduced to playground politics, with parties competing over who can appear toughest on so-called 'illegals'.

What is particularly disappointing is the proposal to scrap or sideline the Human Rights Act — legislation rooted in the European Convention on Human Rights, which was itself shaped by Winston Churchill and other post-war Conservatives. It is a proud part of our democratic heritage.

This deserves an honest, adult conversation about rights, responsibilities, and the rule of law. Instead, we are seeing posturing and game-playing at the expense of both truth and humanity.

**Councillor C. Watkins, Leader of the Council deferred to Councillor K. Wilson, Leader of the Main Opposition Group to answer the above question as it related to their motion.**

**Councillor K. Wilson responded as follows:**

Thank you, Mr. Mayor, I have tremendous amount of respect for, Mr. Hughes. We have a personal history. We remain on opposite sides of the political spectrum, but we can agree to disagree on a number of respects.

Winston Churchill is actually one of my heroes. He wasn't perfect by any means. No one is. But actually, I think if Winston Churchill was here today, he would consider what is going on a national security threat. I genuinely believe that because we cannot continue going on in this direction. Now, he didn't actually incorporate the European Convention Human Rights into domestic law. He could have converted it into domestic law at the time.

But again, he is highlighting part of the argument that I have great concern about, and I referenced it in the previous is that this law was written for a different age. If we fail to keep up with modern challenges and modern issues, we are going to end up with the same problem that we have now. I believe it can be reformed but I think it is extremely difficult. Now at the end of the day we have to ensure that those who are coming here illegally, and this is where the concern is, are dealt with swiftly. I agree that they're being dealt with according to the process of law, but the law isn't used in a way that it was ever intended. That's the absurdity of it.

Now Mr. Hughes is actually quite right that we are falling down to rhetoric and simplistic arguments in a lot of quarters. But it's a failure to address that proper democratic debate that is forcing people to extremist views and frightening people. And that is what I disagree with the most. Let's have that debate. Let's have that challenge. Let's agree to disagree, but let's at least have the debate because that's what has failed for far too long across governments of all stripes. And that's where we've led to now. And if we don't tackle it soon, we're going to end up with even more potential crimes being committed on our streets. More people worry and I'm frightened that people are going to start taking matters into their own hands. And we've seen that in other areas because we failed to have that democratic debate. We can disagree. We're human. Let's have a genuine democratic debate. And if we fall out, let's shake hands after.

#### **CL24 NOTICE OF MOTIONS**

In accordance with the Council Constitution at the Council Procedure Rules, rule 4.3.1 a request was made to convene an Extraordinary Full Council Meeting to consider two motions:

**a) Councillor K. Wilson put forward the following motion that:**

*The Chief Executive be requested to write to the Home Office, Serco, Warwickshire Police and Warwickshire County Council (Communities Team) to invite them to an extraordinary meeting of the Housing and Communities OSP to be called by the Chief Executive to scrutinise the placement, housing, monitoring and support of asylum seekers within Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough. The NBBC Communities Team is also to attend the extraordinary meeting.*

**Councillor S. Croft seconded the motion.**

**An adjournment was taken to consider an amendment by the Labour Group, this was withdrawn and the meeting resumed.**

**A recorded vote on the motion was taken.**

FOR: Councillors M. Bird, J. Clarke, J. Collett, T. Cooper, S. Croft, L. Cvetkovic, M. Etienne, J. Gutteridge, J. Hartshorn, A. Khangura, M. Kondakor, S. Markham, W. Markham, B. Pandher, R. Roze, M. Walsh, K. Wilson, and M. Wright

AGAINST: Councillors J. Bonner, A. Bull, S. Dhillon, W. Hancox, S. Hey, P. Hickling, B. Hughes, T. Jenkins, N. King, C. Phillips, K. Price, B. Saru, C. Smith, T. Venson and C. Watkins

ABSTENTIONS: None

**RESOLVED** that the Chief Executive be requested to write to the Home Office, Serco, Warwickshire Police and Warwickshire County Council (Communities Team) to invite them to an extraordinary meeting of the Housing and Communities OSP to be called by the Chief Executive to scrutinise the placement, housing, monitoring and support of asylum seekers within Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough. The NBBC Communities Team is also to attend the extraordinary meeting.

**b) Councillor K. Wilson moved the following motion:**

*Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council supports a policy of zero illegal migrant and asylum seekers being housed within our Borough and calls on His Majesty's Government to take immediate action to deal with the impact of asylum seekers on our local community. Therefore, Council requests the political leaders at Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council to write jointly to*

*the Home Secretary and Justice Secretary to immediately implement the following:*

- i) An immediate review of all asylum seekers presently within Nuneaton and Bedworth to shut down the temporary accommodation units currently in our towns;*
- ii) Until the accommodation units are closed, immediate risk assessments are undertaken on all asylum seekers within our Borough;*
- iii) Legislation be brought forward to disapply the Human Rights Act 1998 from all asylum claims;*
- iv) Detention and deportation of asylum seekers or illegal immigrants who are in our country without lawful excuse;*
- v) An increase in the funding available for the Immigration and Asylum Tribunal in terms of sitting days and judiciary (salaried and fee paid) to determine asylum claims quicker.*

*The Members of Parliament covering Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council and the Leader of Warwickshire County Council be invited to jointly sign the letter set out above.*

**Councillor S. Croft seconded the motion**

**Councillor C. Watkins moved the following amendment:**

*This Council resolves to:*

- Begin the process of exploring the feasibility of an Article 4 Direction across designated areas of the Borough where there is evidence of high HMO concentration or community disruption.*
- Commission a report from the Planning Policy and Housing teams to identify priority zones for Article 4 designation, based on HMO density, housing complaints, and infrastructure strain, and takes note that any A4 Direction for HMOs would have to come forward as part of the new Borough Plan and be based on evidence and be part of an overall housing needs assessment.*
- Engage in public consultation with residents, landlords, and stakeholders to gather views on the impact of HMOs and the proposed Article 4 Direction.*



- *Request a briefing from the Home Office and Serco regarding the number and location of asylum seekers housed in residential properties within the Borough, and the criteria used for placement.*
- *Call on the Government to provide greater transparency and local authority input into asylum accommodation decisions, and to ensure that housing used for asylum seekers meets all safety and licensing standards.*
- *This Council writes to the Government to ask that people seeking asylum be allowed to work while their claims are being processed.*
- *With the growing number of protests taking place in this Borough this Council writes to the Police and Crime Commissioner to ask for further funding to tackle this issue.*

*This motion seeks to balance the need for affordable housing with the preservation of community character and public confidence in local governance.*

**Councillor S. Hey seconded the amendment.**

**A recorded vote on the amendment was taken as follows:**

FOR: Councillors J. Bonner, A. Bull, S. Dhillon, W. Hancox, S. Hey, P. Hickling, B. Hughes, T. Jenkins, N. King, C. Phillips, K. Price, B. Saru, C. Smith, T. Venson and C. Watkins

AGAINST: Councillors M. Bird, J. Clarke, J. Collett, T. Cooper, S. Croft, L. Cvetkovic, M. Etienne, J. Gutteridge, J. Hartshorn, A. Khangura, S. Markham, W. Markham, B. Pandher, M. Walsh, and K. Wilson.

ABSTENTIONS: Councillors M. Kondakor, R. Roze and M. Wright

**The vote on the amendment was tied, in this event the Mayor Councillor Bhim Saru has the casting vote.**

The Mayor Councillor Bhim Saru voted FOR the amendment.

The amendment was carried and became the substantive motion.

**Councillor M. Kondakor moved the following amendment.**

*This Council resolves to:*

- *Ask government to speed up asylum decisions, allow asylum seekers to work while claims are processed, and provide proper support to councils impacted.*
- *Demand an end to the practice of placing asylum seekers into unsupported HMOs with no consultation or community support.*
- *Establish a Cabinet led committee to review the planning and licensing of HMOs, consider an Article 4 Directive, and strengthen monitoring and licensing, funded by fairer HMO fees.*
- *Focus Council resources on stronger environmental and housing enforcement, protecting both residents and asylum seekers.*
- *Improve engagement and communication with local communities, to build trust and cohesion.*
- *Request urgent meetings with the Police and Crime Commissioner, Serco and other providers, and local support organisations, involving Cabinet and a cross-section of councillors.*

**Councillor R. Roze seconded the amendment**

**An adjournment was taken at 8pm to allow councillors to consider the amendment.**

**The meeting resumed at 8.18pm**

**A vote was taken on the amendment.**

**The amendment was lost.**

**Councillor W. Hancox moved the procedural motion to suspend standing hours to allow the meeting to continue beyond the three hour limit until the business of the meeting has been concluded.**

**Councillor C. Watkins seconded the procedural motion**

**A vote was taken**

**The procedural motion was carried.**

**A recorded vote was taken on the substantive motion as follows:**

FOR: Councillors J. Bonner, A. Bull, S. Dhillon, W. Hancox, S. Hey, P. Hickling, B. Hughes, T. Jenkins, N. King, C. Phillips, K. Price, B. Saru, C. Smith, T. Venson and C. Watkins

AGAINST: Councillors M. Bird, J. Clarke, J. Collett, T. Cooper, S. Croft, L. Cvetkovic, M. Etienne, J. Gutteridge, J. Hartshorn, A. Khangura, S. Markham, W. Markham, B. Pandher, M. Walsh, and K. Wilson.

ABSTENTIONS: Councillors M. Kondakor, R. Roze and M. Wright

**The vote on the amendment was tied, in this event the Mayor Councillor Bhim Saru has the casting vote.**

The Mayor Councillor Bhim Saru voted FOR the amendment.

**The substantive motion was carried.**

It was **RESOLVED** that this Council

- a) begins the process of exploring the feasibility of an Article 4 Direction across designated areas of the Borough where there is evidence of high HMO concentration or community disruption.
- b) commissions a report from the Planning Policy and Housing teams to identify priority zones for Article 4 designation, based on HMO density, housing complaints, and infrastructure strain, and takes note that any A4 Direction for HMOs would have to come forward as part of the new Borough Plan and be based on evidence and be part of an overall housing needs assessment.
- c) engages in public consultation with residents, landlords, and stakeholders to gather views on the impact of HMOs and the proposed Article 4 Direction.
- d) requests a briefing from the Home Office and Serco regarding the number and location of asylum seekers housed in residential properties within the Borough, and the criteria used for placement.
- e) calls on the Government to provide greater transparency and local authority input into asylum accommodation decisions, and to ensure that housing used for asylum seekers meets all safety and licensing standards.
- f) this Council writes to the Government to ask that people seeking asylum be allowed to work while their claims are being processed.

- g) with the growing number of protests taking place in this Borough this Council writes to the Police and Crime Commissioner to ask for further funding to tackle this issue.

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Mayor