

## **Northern Rother District Councillors' Report November 2024.**

We shall be moving the following motion at the full Council meeting on 16 December beginning at 6.30 pm:

### **Winter Fuel Allowance and Protecting Pensioners from Fuel Poverty.**

This Council regrets the Government's decision to restrict the Winter Fuel Payment to pensioners in receipt of Pension Credit.

It notes:

the authoritative estimates by Age UK amongst others that not less than 2 million pensioners who badly need the money to stay warm this winter will not receive any help.

that this will face many elderly residents in Rother with a choice between heating their home and providing themselves with other essentials, with major consequences for their health

and agrees with the many charities and other bodies ranging from Age UK to the Countryside Alliance who have identified both the serious risks to health and the social injustice caused by this sudden decision and is profoundly concerned by not just the hardship but the genuine risks to life this will cause.

Council believes that the decision to use the pension credit mechanism to means test the Winter Fuel Payment, particularly at such short notice and without consideration of alternatives, for example treating the payment as taxable income, is not only deeply unfair, but poses serious risks to the health and well being of substantial numbers of Rother residents.

It acknowledges the work already undertaken by Council to promote Pension credit but believes that the Government has seriously underestimated the administrative and social barriers to take-up.

Council therefore asks the Government to withdraw its current proposal to withdraw the Winter Fuel Payment and as a matter of urgency to consider and implement one of the many alternatives suggested to them which will deliver both a fairer system and one better calculated to help the great number of those in fuel poverty who are not eligible for Pension Credit.

Further, it asks that the administrative process involved in claiming pension credit should be made much more user friendly.

The Leader of the Council is asked to make the case directly to the Government. In addition to making this case to Government, the administration should also promote this resolution with colleagues in the LGA.

### **Proposed changes to on-street parking charges**

East Sussex County Council wants to hear your views on proposed changes to on-street parking charges across Rother. The County Council says the proposals will enable them to manage parking demand and encourage the use of more sustainable transport in the district. The proposals include changes to pay-and-display costs, and parking permit charges, with a discount for disabled and low-emission vehicles.

If you wish to comment here is the link:

<https://consultation.eastsussex.gov.uk/economy-transport-environment/rother-tariff-consultation/>

## **Rye Sports Centre refurbishment.**

The Council had been successful in receiving a £650,000 grant from the Levelling Up Partnership (LUP) to refurbish Rye Swimming Pool and Leisure Centre facilities. This funding was allocated by the former Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) (now known as the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government).

The freehold for the sports centre and the car park is held by East Sussex County Council (ESCC); Rother District Council (RDC) holds a Licence/Management Agreement with ESCC for the swimming pool. The dry side was subject to a Joint Use Agreement between ESCC, Rye Academy and RDC. The Council's current contractor, Freedom Leisure (FL) operates both the swimming pool and dry side until 31 March 2026. Prior to this date, the operation of the Sports Centre could be handed over to Rye Recreation and Wellbeing Charitable Incorporated Organisation (the CIO). Rye Town Council (RTC) had also agreed in principle with ESCC officers to take on a lease of the Sports Centre and car park, subject to formal approval by ESCC, and in turn RTC will sublet to the CIO once all is agreed.

The final scope of refurbishment works was to be agreed with ESCC as the freeholder and completed in consultation with RTC and the CIO as potential future operators. DMA Maintenance Ltd, a local consultancy firm, has conducted a series of high-level surveys identifying areas that needed attention to make the facility fit for purpose and provide a strong foundation to begin planning the LUP funded refurbishment.

Following discussions and advice from East Sussex Procurement Hub and Wealden Legal Services, RDC intended to appoint DMA to complete further design and scoping work, compliant tender processes for contractors and overall project management to complete the improvements.

The LUP funding was to be allocated out of RDC accounts by no later than March 2025 and, as the project involved an extensive schedule of works, that may not be completed by the deadline. Any remaining funds after March 2025 would need to defray to a suitable third party to complete the agreed works. To deliver this project, delegated authority was therefore sought for the Head of Neighbourhood Services to procure consultants and contractors and to defray funds to third parties as required, in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services, Tourism and Joint Waste Contract, to deliver improvements to Rye Swimming Pool and Leisure Centre, utilising the £650,000 LUP funding.

Funding for solar panels to be installed on the roof of the leisure centre had been provided by a Sports England grant, which would help to decarbonise the building and reduce utility costs. Final figures were awaited on the scope of works before the Council could understand the split in funding between consultancy / management fees and the refurbishment.

RDC is currently offering the Garden Waste Collection Service for £40.50 for one bin (Normal cost is £81.00).

New Subscribers joining this current offer, which ends on the 31<sup>st</sup>. December 2024, will be eligible to receive their first bin at the reduced rate of £40.50, with all subsequent bins being charged at the normal rate (£66.00 for each additional bin). Subscriptions will be valid for the remainder of the 2024/25 subscription window ending on 14th July 2025.

To view more information and to subscribe to the service, please visit our [Subscribe to the Garden Waste Service webpage](#).

Please Note: Subscriptions started during this period will revert to the standard pricing and Terms and Conditions for the 2025/26 subscription period, which begins on 15th July 2025.

**Northern Rother District Councillors Tony Biggs and Tony Ganly**