



LEAD MEMBER FOR RESOURCES AND CLIMATE CHANGE

DECISIONS to be made by the Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change,
Councillor Nick Bennett

TUESDAY, 31 MARCH 2026 AT 3.00 PM

REMOTE MEETING VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

AGENDA

1. Decisions made by the Lead Cabinet Member on 2 March 2026 (*Pages 3 - 6*)
2. Disclosure of Interests
Disclosure by all Members present of personal interests in matters on the agenda, the nature of any interest and whether the Members regard the interest as prejudicial under the terms of the Code of Conduct
3. Urgent items
Notification of any items which the Lead Member considers urgent and proposes to take at the appropriate part of the agenda.
4. Write-off of Debts 2025/26 (*Pages 7 - 12*)
Report by the Chief Operating Officer
5. Dilapidations Settlement - St Marks House, Eastbourne (*Pages 13 - 16*)
Report by the Chief Operating Officer
6. Any non-exempt urgent items previously notified under agenda item 3
7. Exclusion of the Public and Press
To consider excluding the public and press from the meeting for the remaining agenda item on the grounds that if the public and press were present there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as specified in paragraphs 1 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), namely information which relates to one or more individuals and information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).
8. Write-off of Debts 2025/26 - Exempt Information (*Pages 17 - 46*)
Report by the Chief Operating Officer
9. Dilapidations Settlement – St Mark’s House, Eastbourne – Exempt Information (*Pages 47 - 50*)
Report by the Chief Operating Officer
10. Any exempt urgent items previously notified under agenda item 3

PHILIP BAKER
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23 March 2026

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LEAD MEMBER FOR RESOURCES AND CLIMATE CHANGE

DECISIONS made by the Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change, Councillor Nick Bennett, on 2 March 2026 at Remote Meeting via Microsoft Teams

Councillor Denis spoke on item 4 (see minute 53)

49. DECISIONS MADE BY THE LEAD CABINET MEMBER ON 22 JANUARY 2026

49.1 The Lead Member approved as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2026.

50. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

50.1 There were none.

51. URGENT ITEMS

51.1 There were none.

52. REPORTS

52.1 Reports referred to in the minutes below are contained in the minute book.

53. AWARD OF THE SCHOOL MEALS CATERING CONTRACT FOR PRIMARY, SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITY, SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND ACADEMIES

53.1 The Lead Member considered a report by the Chief Operating Officer.

DECISIONS

53.2 The Lead Member RESOLVED to:

- 1) Note the work undertaken regarding the future provision of school meals in East Sussex as set out in the report; and
- 2) Approve that the contract is awarded to the highest scoring bidder as set out at paragraph 2.6 of the supporting exempt report later in the agenda.

REASON

53.3 There is a consistent requirement for the school meals contract to deliver a high-quality bespoke menu, whilst continuing to provide schools and academies with value for money and a high level of service delivery and support. This standard is met by the highest scoring bidder. In the awarding of contract to the highest scoring provider, the Lead Member noted that a full competitive procurement exercise was undertaken and bids were scored against the evaluation criteria.

54. PLAYING FIELD ADJACENT TO THE TILLING GREEN COMMUNITY CENTRE - DECISION REGARDING DISPOSAL OF THE FREEHOLD INTEREST

54.1 The Lead Member considered a report by the Chief Operating Officer.

DECISIONS

54.2 The Lead Member RESOLVED to:

- 1) Review written offers submitted following the marketing of the 'Playing field adjacent to Tilling Green Community Centre' ('the Site') as set out in Appendix 1 to the exempt report; and
- 2) Note the change in external operating context and consequentially agree to retain the asset for alternative future use.

REASON

54.3 Whilst disposal of the site would represent a capital receipt to the Council, the potential future opportunities now available for the site are considered to be a preferable route to pursue.

55. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

55.1 It was RESOLVED to exclude the public and press from the meeting for the remaining agenda items on the grounds that if the public and press were present there would be

disclosure to them of exempt information as specified in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

56. AWARD OF THE SCHOOL MEALS CATERING CONTRACT FOR PRIMARY, SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITY, SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND ACADEMIES - EXEMPT INFORMATION

56.1 The Lead Member considered a report by the Chief Operating Officer which provided exempt information in support of an earlier item on the agenda.

DECISION

56.2 The Lead Member RESOLVED to note the exempt information in relation to an earlier item on the agenda.

REASON

56.3 The report contained exempt information in relation to an earlier item on the agenda.

57. PLAYING FIELD ADJACENT TO THE TILLING GREEN COMMUNITY CENTRE - DECISION REGARDING DISPOSAL OF THE FREEHOLD INTEREST - EXEMPT INFORMATION

57.1 The Lead Member considered a report by the Chief Operating Officer which provided exempt information in support of an earlier item on the agenda.

DECISION

57.2 The Lead Member RESOLVED to note the exempt information in relation to an earlier item on the agenda.

REASON

57.3 The report contained exempt information in relation to an earlier item on the agenda.

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Report to:	Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change
Date:	31 March 2026
By:	Chief Operating Officer
Title of report:	Write-off of Debts 2025/26
Purpose of report:	To seek Lead Member approval for writing off certain debts in excess of £10,000.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change is recommended to:

- 1) Approve the writing-off of 14 debts amounting to £308,272.83 in the Council's 2025/2026 accounts;**
- 2) Note that provision is made for bad and doubtful debts; and**
- 3) Note the current debt position and positive steps being put in place to make improvements.**

1. Background

Financial Appraisal

1.1 At Quarter 3, of 2025/2026, the County Council's net service budgets totalled £564.7m, after allowing for income of £804.0m. This income, after excluding Dedicated Schools Grant of £148.3m, comes from claims for specific grants and contributions from Government and other bodies as well as a variety of charges for services. This latter category includes charges for residential accommodation, domiciliary care, highways work, and rents. Some of the income is received in cash or in advance of the service being provided, but much is collected by raising an account on the debtor.

1.2 As is the case for all local authorities, some of the Council's anticipated income becomes uncollectable. To allow for this the Council's accounts have always included a "provision for bad and doubtful debts" which recognises that a proportion of outstanding debts at year end may not be collected. This provision is monitored each month and is reported as part of budget monitoring. The approximate bad and doubtful debt provision for 2025/2026 is estimated to be £6.0m; the final figure for 2025-26 will be calculated in April 2026 and reported through the closedown arrangements.

1.3 The County Council is committed to taking all appropriate recovery action before considering a debt for write-off to ensure that write-off is kept to a minimum. Work to review and streamline the debt recovery process is ongoing. Officers seek to learn lessons from debts that have previously been written off, and to ensure that there are robust systems and processes in place to recover debt promptly. However, it is inevitable that some debts will have to be written off. For the debt proposed for write-off in this report, despite efforts made to recover the outstanding sums, all routes have now been exhausted.

1.4 In cases where the County Council has been unable to enforce a County Court Judgment, notwithstanding any decision to write-off the debt, monies can theoretically still be recovered within 6 years of the judgment. With the permission of the court, this timeframe can extend beyond the 6-year limitation period where the debtor seeks credit and is required to discharge their debt to the Council before credit is advanced to them. Also, in cases of debtor liquidation, where a liquidator distributes the debtor's assets to discharge outstanding liabilities, it is possible for the County

Council to receive some of the outstanding monies, notwithstanding any decision to write-off the debt.

1.5 In accordance with the Councils Financial Procedure Rules, for write-off of debts over £10,000, approval of the Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change is required. This report is to advise the Lead Member of 14 debts over £10,000, totalling £308,272.83, that are recommended for write-off. In each case, all debt recovery actions have been exhausted, and it has been established that either the individual and/or estate had insufficient funds to repay their debts. Details of these debts are detailed in Appendix 1 of an exempt report at a later agenda item.

1.6 The total amount proposed to be written off for 2025/2026 is £733,863.99 including £425,591.16 worth of debts that, individually, amount to less than £10,000 and which have already been authorised in line with the Council's Financial Procedure Rules. This is an increase of £175,179.63 when compared to the total written-off in 2024/2025 (£558,684.36). While the total value has increased in cash terms, write-offs remain low as a percentage of total income collected (0.13%) and are broadly in line with historical trends, reflecting effective debt management and recovery processes.

2. Supporting Information

2.1 The table attached at Appendix 1 shows performance over the last few years.

2.2 The level of outstanding debt has continued to increase during the last financial year. At Quarter 3 of 2025/26 the value of aged debt over 5 months was £13.390m which is an increase of £4.035m compared with the 2024/25 outturn position of £9.355m. Although the bad and doubtful debt provision remains high and the level of outstanding debt continues to rise, the actual volume of debt requiring write-off remains comparatively low, reflecting the Council's sustained focus on recovery activity and strong controls over debt management.

2.3 Adult Social Care (ASC) debt represents most of the Council's debt collection activity with £34m invoiced for client contribution as of 13 February 2026. £12.96m (96.82%) of aged debt over 5 months at Quarter 3 of 2025/26 relates to ASC. However, the rise in outstanding debt has not resulted in an equivalent increase in write-offs, which have remained controlled. This demonstrates that, although more debt is entering recovery processes, the Council continues to convert a high proportion of debt into successful collection rather than write-off.

2.4 In terms of benchmarking, ASC debt remains relatively low compared with other Councils in the region. At Quarter 3 of 2025-26, East Sussex County Council has 23% of total social care debt (not subject to a deferred payment agreement) that is 60 days or more overdue as a percentage of total billed assessed fees and charges income, compared with the median for the South East region of 25.9%.

2.5 Debt recovery related to ASC client contributions can often take a long time due to circumstance of the debtors. For example, an ASC client may lack capacity to make decisions for themselves, and an appointee, deputy or power of attorney therefore needs to be established, or the debt forms part of the administration of an estate.

2.6 An ASC Debt Case Panel (the Panel) meets monthly to review complex and high value debt cases. The Panel makes decisions regarding appropriate next steps to recover debt with sensitivity and consideration of the clients or families concerned, and in accordance with the Care Act. In addition, the Panel has oversight of ageing debt cases to ensure that appropriate decisions are made before the 6-year limitation period expires and to share good practice.

2.7 During 2025/26 there has been an increase in income due in cases where Discretionary or Non-Discretionary Funding for ASC was being provided and has now ended. While the local authority was funding the care, costs could not be recovered as there was no legally authorised individual in place to manage the person's financial affairs. Operational improvements to case review processes have led to cases now being closed more promptly once a deputy or attorney is appointed, enabling cost recovery to begin sooner. In addition, several adults receiving funding

have sadly passed away, and recovery is now being pursued from their estates where appropriate. These factors have contributed to a higher level of income now becoming due. Non-payment of ASC client contributions has also continued to impact on the level of outstanding debt.

2.8 Recovery of debt continues to be a high priority. As part of ongoing improvement work a Debt Recovery Project has been initiated and progressed to review and improve the ASC debt recovery model. The objectives of the Debt Recovery Project are to ensure that service users understand and are supported to pay their assessed client contribution. This project is also focusing on establishing clear, visible pathways to support clients to pay their client contributions and to recover any debt that arises because of non-payment.

2.9 Recent work to review the ASC debt recovery model has strengthened understanding of how non-payment cases progress and where recovery activity has the greatest impact. Early engagement was found to lead to better outcomes, while delays reduce effectiveness and increase resource demands. The work also highlighted the need for a more targeted and proportionate approach to prioritising cases, improving confidence and consistency in decision-making. In addition, the review has supported clearer shared understanding between teams and improved visibility of process constraints, providing stronger assurance that recovery activity is focused appropriately and that debts considered for write-off have followed reasonable recovery routes.

2.10 A new Paperless Direct Debit project has been initiated and provisionally planned for implementation during the 2026/27 financial year. The project will streamline the process for adults to set up automated payments for their assessed contributions by removing the need for paper forms and simplifying the sign-up process. This is expected to increase Direct Debit uptake and reduce the number of missed or delayed payments. Overall, the improvement is likely to support more consistent income collection and help to mitigate further growth in non-payment of client contribution debt.

3. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendation

3.1 There is no prospect of recovering the 14 outstanding debts listed and therefore the Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change is recommended to:

- (i) Approve the write-off of these debts amounting to £308,272.83 in the Council's 2025/26 accounts;
- (ii) Note that provision is made for bad and doubtful debts; and
- (iii) Note the current debt position and positive steps being put in place to make improvements.

ROS PARKER
Chief Operating Officer

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Background Documents
None

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Performance History

Financial Year	Total Debtors £m	Provision for bad and doubtful debts		Write-offs		Write-offs as a % of income collected %	Net Improvement /(decline) in financial position **** £m
		£m	% of debtors	No. *	£m		
2025/26	**37.0	6.0	***16.22	629	0.73	0.13	(2.44)
2024/25	19.8	3.7	18.69	625	0.59	0.11	(0.78)
2023/24	42.5	3.1	6.42	820	0.61	0.13	(1.03)
2022/23	41.7	2.3	8.46	594	0.38	0.09	(0.77)
2021/22	10.8	1.49	12.74	901	0.42	0.11	(0.28)
2020/21	15.5	1.25	8.06	682	0.38	0.09	(0.12)
2019/20	11.9	1.19	10.0	888	0.32	0.09	0.13
2018/19	14.8	1.24	8.4	1,272	0.40	0.11	(0.10)
2017/18	12.0	1.26	10.5	410	0.28	0.08	0.06
2016/17	12.0	1.27	10.6	577	0.33	0.09	(0.15)
2015/16	15.2	1.21	8.0	594	0.24	0.07	0.20
2014/15	14.8	1.42	9.6	415	0.23	0.06	0.31
2013/14	17.3	1.20	6.9	645	0.76	0.20	(0.84)
2012/13	11.5	0.76	7.2	445	0.36	0.10	0.07
2011/12	13.6	0.87	6.4	281	0.28	0.08	(0.09)
2010/11	13.2	0.70	5.3	335	0.26	0.08	(0.23)
2009/10	8.9	0.42	4.7	431	0.31	0.15	(0.08)
2008/09	10.9	0.46	4.2	301	0.19	0.11	(0.24)
2007/08	14.8	0.23	1.6	183	0.18	0.09	0.29
2006/07	10.6	0.30	2.8	549	0.40	0.20	0.38
2005/06	14.5	0.55	3.8	965	0.53	0.30	0.11
2004/05	13.3	1.12	8.4	-	0.07	0.06	-

*The number includes all write-offs

**This is the aged debt report as at 1 February 2026 and will change significantly by 31 March 2026, as large debts are raised to the ICB at year end

***This will be completed when the aged debt totals are known after all old year cash is allocated in April 2026

****Total provision (£m) and write-offs (£m) compared to previous year, this will change when bad debt is calculated mid-April 2026

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Report to: Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change

Date of meeting: 31 March 2026

By: Chief Operating Officer

Title: Dilapidations Settlement – St Mark’s House, Eastbourne

Purpose: East Sussex County Council’s lease of St Mark’s House, Eastbourne terminated in August 2024. A schedule of dilapidations was served on the Council by the Landlord. This report sets out the approach to negotiations and recommends the process for settlement of the claim.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Lead Member is recommended to:

- 1) Agree that the Council seeks to settle the claim by mutual agreement in the first instance, as set out in paragraph 2.2 of this report; and**
- 2) Delegate authority to the Chief Operating Officer, in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer, to take all actions necessary to give effect to the recommendations in this report, including, but not limited to, approving the amount of any settlement.**

1. Background

1.1 East Sussex County Council (the Council) previously occupied St Mark’s House, Eastbourne (the Property) by way of a fully repairing and insuring commercial lease. The office building was used as the sole office base in Eastbourne for Children’s Services. The lease terminated on 30 August 2024 and the service was relocated to St Mary’s House, Eastbourne in 2024, following a review of the Council’s corporate office requirements.

1.2 A plan of the Property is attached as Appendix 1.

1.3 The Council had been in occupation of the Property since 2003, occupying under various leases. Most recently, in order to ensure continuity of the service, the Council entered into a short-term flexible lease agreement, effective from 6 October 2023. The terms of the lease enabled the Council to terminate the lease at any time on one month’s notice from April 2024. This ensured that the service could continue uninterrupted, whilst works were undertaken at St Mary’s House to make it suitable for co-occupation with the Children’s Services department. The obligations and covenants contained in the previous longer-term leases were largely replicated in the short-term lease, including the covenant for the Council to fully repair and maintain the Property.

1.4 After the Council vacated the Property, the Landlord served a Schedule of Dilapidations on the Council, setting out items they considered to be in disrepair. The Schedule set out estimated costings to put the property into a satisfactory condition, as required by the lease. The principles of the measure of damages for disrepair are established at common law and are governed by Section 18 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1927. In essence, the basic principle of dilapidations is to ensure that a landlord should not suffer financial loss as a result of a tenant not adhering to repair covenants contained within the lease. The Schedule also included a quantified demand for settlement, and the Council engaged a specialist dilapidations surveyor to consider the validity of the claim.

1.5 Since the Council vacated the Property the Landlord has undertaken works to the Property to convert it to a number of flats. The claim made should therefore reflect works not superseded by the conversion.

2 Supporting information

2.1 To minimise costs, the Council intends to resolve this matter by negotiation. The considerations made by the Council and informed by specialist consultants, are set out in a later exempt agenda item. It is therefore recommended that the Lead Member approves that the Council seeks to settle the claim by mutual settlement in the first instance.

2.2 If the parties are unable to agree a mutual settlement, the Landlord may issue court proceedings. The landlord can legitimately claim for interest, at the rate prescribed by the lease, and legal and expert fees. In addition to this, the Council will incur its own additional legal and expert fees. Determination of the matter by the court or via an alternative process such as mediation, may be more costly to the Council than settling the claim mutually, and the outcome is uncertain.

3 Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 The Council has taken appropriate professional advice with regard to the Landlord's dilapidations claim in respect of St Mark's House, Eastbourne.

3.2 The Lead Member is therefore recommended to approve that the Council seeks to mutually agree the settlement of the claim with the Landlord in the first instance to limit the Council's exposure to additional risk and cost.

3.3 Additionally, the Lead Member is recommended to delegate authority to the Chief Operating Officer, in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer to take all actions necessary to give effect to the recommendations in this report, including, but not limited to, approving the amount of the settlement, the estimate for which is detailed in an exempt report later on the agenda.

ROS PARKER
Chief Operating Officer

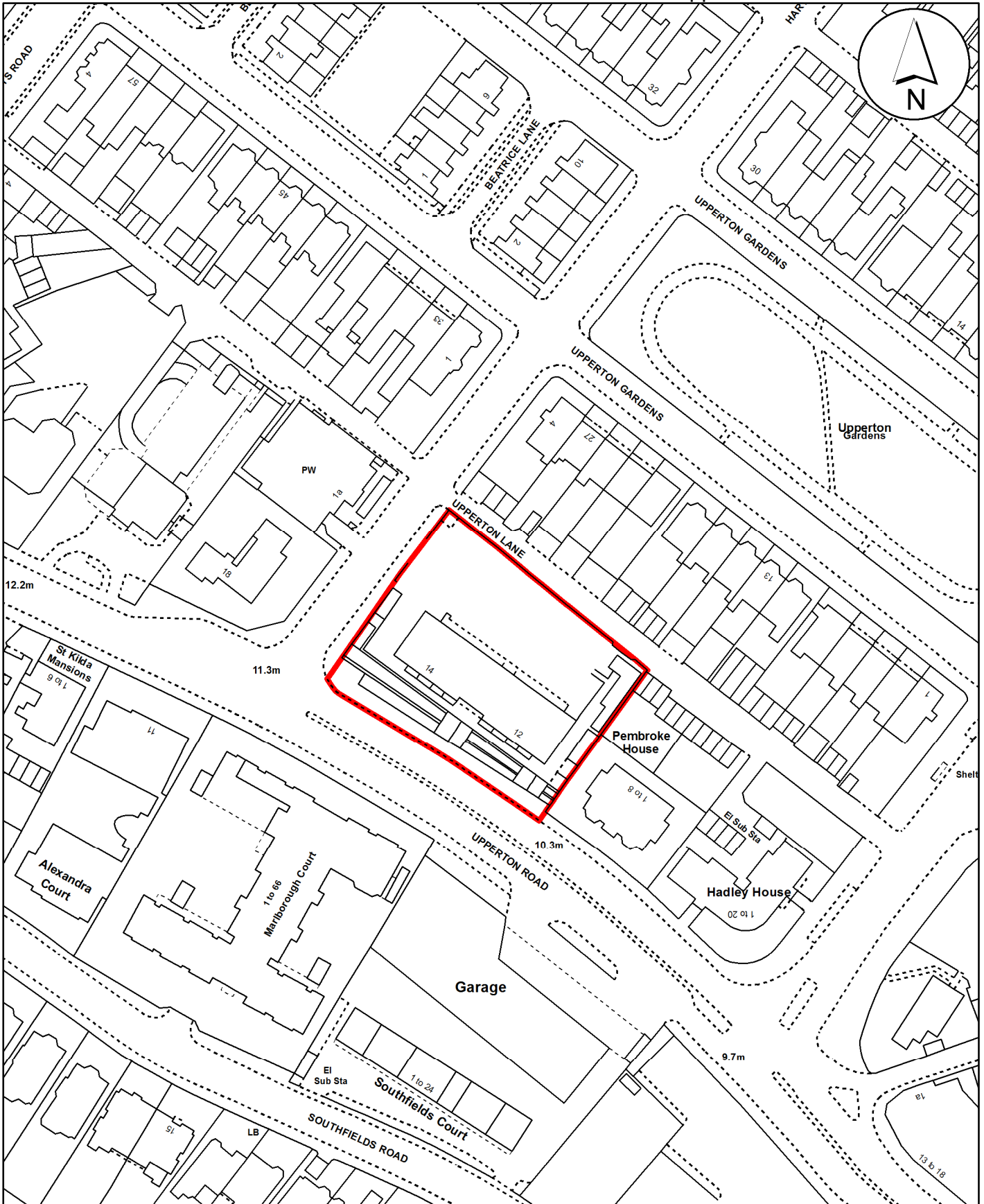
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LOCAL MEMBERS

Councillor Pat Rodohan

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None



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Agenda Item 8

By virtue of paragraph(s) 1, 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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