

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

MEETING HELD IN THE FOUNDATION HOUSE, ICKNIELD WAY, LETCHWORTH
GARDEN CITY ON TUESDAY, 26TH SEPTEMBER, 2017 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors Councillor Lynda Needham (Chairman), Councillor Julian Cunningham (Vice-Chairman), Jane Gray, Tony Hunter, David Levett, Bernard Lovewell, Ray Shakespeare-Smith and Michael Weeks*

In Attendance:

David Scholes (Chief Executive), Ian Couper (Head of Finance, Performance and Asset Management), Howard Crompton (Head of Revenues, Benefits and IT), Ian Fullstone (Head of Development and Building Control), Andy Godman (Head of Housing and Public Protection), Martin Lawrence (Strategic Housing Manager), Louise Symes (Strategic Planning and Projects Manager), Anthony Roche (Corporate Legal Manager) and Ian Gourlay (Committee and Member Services Manager)

Also Present: *Councillor Cathryn Henry (chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee), Simon Harwood, Martin Stears-Handscomb and 5 members of the public.*

26 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

27 MINUTES - 25 JULY 2017

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of Cabinet held on 25 July 2017 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and signed by the Chairman.

28 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

There was no notification of other business.

29 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

- (1) The Chairman announced that Members of the public and the press may use their devices to film/photograph, or do a sound recording of the meeting, but she asked them to not use flash and to disable any beeps or other sound notifications that emitted from their devices. In addition, the Chairman had arranged for the sound at this particular meeting to be recorded;
- (2) The Chairman reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question;
- (3) The Chairman asked that, for the benefit of any members of the public present at the meeting, Officers announce their name and their designation to the meeting when invited to speak.

30 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Cabinet was addressed by Councillors Martin Stears-Handscomb and Simon Harwood in respect of Play Areas in Hitchin.

Councillor Stears-Handscomb advised that when the Hitchin Committee was consulted on the Play Area proposals in the Green Space Strategy in March 2017, councillors of all parties expressed their concerns. Whilst the Committee understood the financial constraints the Council was under, Members were aware, particularly at a time when childhood obesity was such an issue, how important these local play areas were to residents.

Councillor Stears-Handscomb stated that he and Councillor Harwood were tasked by the Hitchin Committee to investigate the feasibility of retaining play areas (identified for closure) in Hitchin. They were asked to think outside the box. They looked at two possibilities:

1. As Cabinet Members were aware, the Council had only reluctantly sought to close these play areas and had asked officers to investigate whether there were local groups who would be willing to take over managing the play areas and to support them. They held a very interesting and useful meeting with Councillor Gray and the relevant officers. It was clear that not only were the play areas marked as 'Remove equipment & landscape back to green space' under threat, but also those marked 'Retain with limited investment' in the medium term. Finding a group willing to take all these over would be in the interests of the Council – particularly as the cost per play area would go up, the fewer play areas maintained. Councillor Harwood investigated how a group could be enabled and encouraged to do this both practically and financially and reported back. The Committee welcomed their report in this area and were concerned that the possibility was well promoted.
2. They were conscious that they, as local councillors, knew their local play areas in a way that councillors from other areas did not. Urban play areas were different from rural play areas. Had Hitchin had a parish or town council, this would be the sort of facility that would be provided by that council. Was there a way that, despite being unparished, the residents of Hitchin could pay for and retain their play areas? The answer was yes there was (though with some caveats and complications). Special expenses could be declared which applied to unparished areas in the same way that parish precepts were added to council tax. Councillor Stears-Handscomb met with the former Strategic director of Finance, Policy & Governance and Head of Finance, Performance & Asset Management to discuss the possibility and reported back to the Committee earlier in the year. The Committee also agreed to pursue this option, hence the Committee asked Councillors Stears-Handscomb and Harwood to make this presentation to Cabinet at the earliest opportunity, although Councillor Stears-Handscomb said there were caveats and complications. In further e-mail correspondence with the Head of Finance, Performance & Asset Management, it became clear that Special Expenses could not simply apply to some play areas, but would mean all play areas, so if the possibility of using special expenses was pursued then this would apply to all play areas. An added complication was that some of the play areas were in a parished area (i.e. Royston). While there were ways round this, as Special Expenses came within the capping regime, the Council would save precept if Royston Town Council took the responsibility for the play area contract in their area.

On behalf of Hitchin Committee, Councillors Stears-Handscomb and Harwood requested that Cabinet noted their efforts to find a group to manage play areas in Hitchin and that Cabinet followed up the possibility of using Special Expenses to secure the future of play areas in the preparation of the estimates for future years.

The Chairman thanked Councillors Stears-Handscomb and Harwood for their presentation.

During a period of Members' questions, Councillors Stears-Handscomb and Harwood clarified the following matters:

- Councillor Harwood understood that, if there were appropriately formed groups of residents then, as with any community group, they would be able to apply to the Area Committees for revenue grant funding to support their activities, dependent of course on them meeting the criteria set out in the Council's Grants Policy. The capital expenditure was a different matter, although again if the group(s) was/were properly constituted there was the possibility that they may be eligible for financial assistance in this regard, as well;
- Councillor Harwood acknowledged the work of officers in encouraging groups to come forward to maintain the play areas, but understood that no such group had come forward in Hitchin, and he wondered whether the details had not been publicised as widely as possible in the town. In addition, he felt that there may well be some hesitancy amongst interested parties in the bureaucracy required to form themselves into legally constituted organisations;
- In respect of special expenses, Councillor Stears-Handscomb was clear that these could not be used simply to reverse a decision of the Council. However, he considered that special expenses could be used, if the Council so wished, to secure those play areas that were not under immediate threat, but for which there were no plans to replace the equipment once it had gone beyond its useful life;
- Councillor Stears-Handscomb added that the issue of fairness had also come into his thinking, as special expenses could be used to even out things that were done in the villages, but not done in urban areas.

The Chairman asked the Head of Finance, Performance and Asset Management for clarification of special expenses, as her understanding was that, should Hitchin ask for them and the request was granted, then Hitchin would receive a Council Tax increase, with Baldock, Letchworth Garden City and Royston receiving a commensurate Council Tax reduction, but that the Council's overall Council Tax income would remain unchanged.

The Head of Finance, Performance and Asset Management stated that it was correct that special expenses did not create any additional resources, particularly as it would be proposed in future years to raise Council Tax at the Referendum capping level. If special expenses were applied to one area or a number of areas then they would need to be applied to all relevant areas (in this case to all areas which maintained play areas). In effect, the rural areas would see Council Tax decreases, and conversely the urban areas would see Council Tax increases.

31 ITEM REFERRED FROM OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 18 JULY 2017 - REPORT OF THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP ON THE COUNCIL'S MANAGEMENT OF LARGER PROJECTS

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee presented a referral from that Committee, made at its meeting held on 18 July 2017, in respect of the Report of the Task and Finish Group on the Council's Management of Larger Projects (Minute 24 refers). She commented that a number of the Task and Finish Group's original recommendations had been amended by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the meeting on 18 July 2017. Therefore, for ease of reference, she read out the 10 recommendations to Cabinet as follows:

Recommendation 1 – The Council needs to be more decisive about what it wants from larger projects and once it decides, it needs to get on with them.

Recommendation 2 – The Council should not introduce unnecessary complexity into its invitations to tender because it is unclear about its preferred outcome. It should decide what it wants and then invite bidders to tender for it.

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Recommendation 3 (as amended by the O & S Committee) – The Council's financial information should be comprehensive and presented in the form of a business plan so the extent of profits and losses can be easily understood.

Recommendation 4 (as amended by the O & S Committee) – When exception reports are produced by project boards, they should be circulated to all members of Council through the Members' Information Service or by e-mail and, unless they are confidential, made available to the public via the Council's website.

Recommendation 5 – Projects are constrained by the resources that the Council has available. Planning a substantial project on the basis that part of it will be done in a member of staff's spare time allows no contingency. The Council should ensure that large projects are properly resourced. If adequate resources are not available, the project should not begin until they are.

Recommendation 6 – The Council needs to have clear, documented objectives before it embarks on projects.

Recommendation 7 – Large scale projects should have a champion to drive them forwards.

Recommendation 8 – The Council should be more flexible about membership of project boards.

Recommendation 9 (as amended by the O & S Committee) – The Council should ensure there is meaningful consultation with the public prior to it finalising its plans; and make sure it continues to engage with the public throughout the life of the project.

Recommendation 10 – The Council should be mindful of the disadvantages of the Competitive Dialogue process and think very carefully before using it again in future projects.

The Cabinet considered the recommendations one by one. Recommendations 1, 2, 4, 6, 7 and 10 were supported. Recommendations 3, 5, 8 and 9 were amended for various reasons. It was therefore

RESOLVED: That, in respect of the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group on the Council's Management of Larger Projects:

(1) Recommendations 1, 2, 6, 7 and 10, and Recommendation 4, as amended by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, be supported;

(2) Recommendation 3, as amended by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, be further amended to read:

“The Council's financial information should be comprehensive and presented in an appropriate form that may be easily understood”;

(3) Recommendation 5 be amended with the removal of the second sentence, to now read:

“Projects are constrained by the resources that the Council has available. The Council should ensure that large projects are properly resourced. If adequate resources are not available, the project should not begin until they are.”

(4) Recommendation 8 be re-drafted to reflect the Council's Constitutional position on Project Boards as follows:

“The Chief Executive appoints the Lead officer for the Project Board, who will chair and choose the membership in consultation with the Leader of the Council. Membership

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will take into account the number of Members/Officers, the risk and/or profile of the project and the skills and experience that will benefit the project (this list is non exhaustive). It may include external support. Membership usually includes appropriate Cabinet members"; and

- (5) Recommendation 9, as amended by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, be further amended to read:

"The Council should ensure there is meaningful consultation with the public prior to it finalising its plans; and make sure it continues to inform the public throughout the life of the project."

REASON FOR DECISION: To respond to the Recommendations of the Task and Finish Group and Overview & scrutiny Committee regarding the report on the Management of the Council's Larger Projects.

32 STRATEGIC PLANNING MATTERS

The Executive Member for Planning and Enterprise presented the report of the Strategic Director of Planning, Housing and Enterprise informing Members of the current position regarding the Duty to Co-operate with neighbouring authorities; Other Local Plans and Examinations; North Hertfordshire Local Plan; Neighbourhood Plans; Government announcements; and Ongoing Policy work. The following appendices were submitted with the report:

Appendix A – Copy of NHDC response to Central Bedfordshire Local Plan Regulation 18 consultation; and

Appendix B – Copy of NHDC response to Uttlesford Local Plan Regulation 18 consultation.

In respect of Duty to Co-operate, the Executive Member for Planning and Enterprise advised that, since June 2017, Memoranda of Understanding had been agreed and signed with the Greater Cambridge and Peterborough LEP, and St. Albans District Council under delegated responsibility to the Head of Planning and Building Control, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Enterprise. Others that were in the process of being agreed and signed were with Aylesbury Vale District Council and Luton Borough Council

With regard to other Local Plans and Examinations, the Executive Member for Planning and Enterprise reported as follows:

- Central Bedfordshire - The Regulation 18 consultation on the Central Bedfordshire Council draft Local Plan closed on Tuesday, 29 August 2017. The North Hertfordshire District Council response was attached at Appendix A to the report;
- Uttlesford - Uttlesford District Council had recently undertaken their Regulation 18 stage consultation on their Local Plan, which closed on Monday, 4 September 2017. Again, North Hertfordshire District Council had submitted a response to this consultation, which was attached at Appendix B to the report;
- Luton - The Inspector's report on the examination into the Luton Borough Council Local Plan 2011-2031 had now been published. The Inspector had concluded that, with the recommended main modifications to the Plan, the Luton Local Plan satisfies the various legal requirements, and had found the Plan to be sound. Luton Council would consider this report and adoption of the Plan at a future Council meeting;
- Stevenage – Stevenage Borough Council was awaiting the Inspector's report on the modifications to its Plan following the Examination held earlier in 2017;
- East Hertfordshire - East Hertfordshire District Council had submitted its Local Plan to the Secretary of State for Examination on 31 March 2017. Stage 1 would take place from 3 to 12 October 2017 and the Stage 2 sessions were scheduled run from 7 to 10 November 2017; and

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- Welwyn Hatfield - Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council had submitted their Local Plan to the Secretary of State for Examination on 15 May 2017. Stage 1 would take place on 21 September 2017 (and 22 September 2017, if required). The Stage 2 sessions were scheduled to run from 24 October 2017 to 3 November 2017.

In relation to the North Hertfordshire Local Plan, the Executive Member for Planning and Enterprise advised that the Examination Inspector had published the timetable and schedule of matters for consideration at the Examination. The sessions would be held during the weeks commencing 13, 20 and 27 November 2017, and during the week commencing 11 December 2017. All sessions would be held at the Icknield Centre in Letchworth Garden City. Everyone who had made a representation would be contacted by the Programme Officer and provided with the details and guidance notes for the hearing sessions.

In respect of Neighbourhood Plans, the Executive Member for Planning and Enterprise explained that the Council, in consultation with Pirton Parish Council, had appointed an independent examiner into the Pirton Neighbourhood Plan. The Examination will be undertaken during October 2017 and was anticipated to be dealt with by written representation. The Council was in the process of providing all necessary documentation to the examiner. As previously reported, consultation on the Wymondley Neighbourhood Plan had taken place between 23 June 2017 and 4 August 2017. Responses were received from approximately 30 individuals and organisations. Officers were in the process of collating the representations received which would then be made available to view on the Council's website. Once collated, these would be considered by an independent examiner.

With regard to Government announcements, the Executive Member for Planning and Enterprise advised that the Government had published its latest consultation paper on the Housing White Paper. It stipulated that, as from March 2018, the method of calculating a Local Authorities Objectively Assessed Need for housing growth should be based on a standard formula (which should be based on Office of National Statistics figures). For North Hertfordshire, there was therefore the potential for a further 40% increase in the number of dwellings required to be built in excess of those already identified in the Local Plan. However, those Local Authorities who had progressed their Local Plans up to Examination Stage would be allowed to rely on the housing figures set out in their published Plans.

The Executive Member for Planning and Enterprise answered a number of Member's questions on the report.

RESOLVED: That the report on Strategic Planning Matters be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To keep the Cabinet informed of recent developments on strategic planning matters and progress on the North Hertfordshire Local Plan.

33 FIRST QUARTER REVENUE MONITORING 2017/18

The Executive Member for Finance and IT presented the report of the Head of Finance, Performance and Asset Management in respect of the First Quarter Revenue Budget Monitoring 2017/18.

The Executive Member for Finance and IT pointed out an error in Table 2 of the report, in that the heading in the final column of the table should read "2018/19" and not "2017/18".

The Executive Member for Finance and IT referred to some of the significant variances in Table 2, including Parking – Penalty Charge Notice income; Housing Benefit - Contribution to bad debt provision in respect of benefit overpayments income; and Careline – Net Direct Trading Expenditure.

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In relation to Careline – Net Direct Trading Expenditure, the Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health questioned whether or not information concerning Careline's Trading Account, which was potentially commercially sensitive as it operated in a competitive environment, should be included in future Revenue Monitoring reports. The Executive Member for Finance and IT undertook to arrange a meeting with him, the Head of Finance, Performance & Asset Management and Head of Housing & Public Protection to discuss this matter in more detail.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report be noted;
- (2) That the changes to the 2017/18 General Fund Budget, as identified in Table 2 and Paragraph 8.2 of the report, and involving an increase in net expenditure of £208,000, be approved; and
- (3) That the changes to the 2018/19 General Fund Budget, as identified in Table 2 and Paragraph 8.2 of the report, and involving an increase in net expenditure of £158,000, be noted, and that these be incorporated into the draft Revenue Budget for 2018/19.

REASON FOR DECISION: To monitor and request appropriate action of Directorates who do not meet the budget targets set as part of the Corporate Business Planning process; and to ensure that changes to the Council's balances are monitored and approved.

34 TREASURY MANAGEMENT FIRST QUARTER 2017/18

The Executive Member for Finance and IT presented a report of the Head of Finance, Performance and Asset Management in respect of the First Quarter Treasury Management Monitoring 2017/18. The following appendix was submitted with the report:

Appendix A – Treasury Management Update – June 2017.

The Executive Member for Finance and IT advised that the current forecast was that the amount of investment interest expected to be generated during the year is £327,000. This was an increase of £60,000 on the original budget.

RESOLVED: That the position of Treasury Management activity as at the end of June 2017, as set out in the report, be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure the Council's continued compliance with CIPFA's Code of Practice on Treasury Management and the Local Government Act 2003, and to ensure the Council manages its exposure to interest and capital risk.

35 FIRST QUARTER CAPITAL MONITORING 2017/18

The Executive Member for Finance and IT presented the report of the Head of Finance, Performance and Asset Management in respect of the First Quarter Capital Programme Monitoring 2017/18. The following appendices were submitted with the report:

Appendix A – Capital Programme Summary 2017/18 onwards; and
Appendix B – Capital Programme Detail including Funding 2017/18 onwards.

The Executive Member for Finance and IT referred to the Scheme Timetable Revisions set out in Table 2 of the report. He commented that the revised estimate for Community Facilities Refurbishment was based on a forecast of the number of applications in each year and the time lag between the grant being approved and costs being incurred. In respect of the Royston Civic Centre redevelopment, he confirmed that there was no longer the need for this project. As the project was GAF funded, it would be requested that this resource be

reallocated to the Transport Plans budget given that there were likely to be projects emerging from these in the near future.

With regard to Table 3 of the report concerning Changes to Capital Schemes commencing in 2017/18, the Executive Member for Finance and IT explained that the refurbishment of the District Council Offices (DCO) project costs had slightly increased due to enhanced works to the Reception area and to enable Careline to move into the DCO from Harkness Court in Hitchin.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the forecast expenditure of £15.139million in 2017/18 on the Capital programme, as set out in Paragraph 8.2 of the report, be noted, and the changes detailed in Table 3 of the report, which resulted in a net decrease of the working estimate of £0.217million, be approved;
- (2) That the changes to the Capital Programme for 2018/19 and onwards as a result of the revised timetable of schemes detailed in Table 2 of the report, increasing the estimated spend in 2018/19 by £5.234million (re-profiled from 2017/18), be noted, and that these be incorporated into the draft Capital Programme for 2018/19 onwards; and
- (3) That the position of the availability of capital resources, as detailed in Table 4 of the report, and the requirement to keep the Capital Programme under review for affordability, be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To approve revisions to the Capital Programme, and to ensure that the Capital Programme is fully funded.

36 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2018/2019

The Executive Member for Finance and IT presented a report of the Head of Revenues, Benefits and IT in respect of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) 2018/19.

The Executive Member for Finance and IT advised that should the Council wish to change the CTRS for 2018/19 then it would need to carry out a public consultation exercise. Historically, where the Government had changed regulations relating to Housing Benefit matters, the Council had sought to replicate this as far as possible through the CTRS.

The Executive Member for Finance and IT drew attention to Section 8 of the report, which proposed two minor changes to the proposed CTRS for 2018/19, namely the Disregard of Capital and Income Payments for Bereavement Support Payments; and the Disregard of Payments made by the London Emergencies Trust and the We Love Manchester Emergency Fund. It was anticipated that neither of these minor changes would impact on the overall operation of the CTRS. A public consultation exercise would be undertaken, but would be a fairly low key exercise.

The Executive Member for Finance and IT referred to the charts in Paragraphs 7.7 and 7.8 of the report, which showed that the number of claimants under the CTRS had reduced from 9,100 in 2013/14 to 7,350 in 2017/18.

The Executive Member for Finance and IT explained that there would be risks going forward, in terms of the impact of Universal Credit, and the extent to which Hertfordshire County Council might wish to increase its Council Tax precept. The current £660,000 scheme surplus would be retained to safeguard against further claims.

In respect of proposed Recommendation 2.6 of the report, it was agreed that the word "increase" be changed to "amend".

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the current position relating to the current and previous financial years on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) be noted;
- (2) That there be no substantive changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2018/19;
- (3) That Cabinet is minded to recommend to the Council at its Meeting on 18 January 2018 that changes be made to the CTRS to implement the following to ensure the consistency of the Scheme with other welfare benefit changes:
 - That capital and income payments of Bereavement Support Payments should be disregarded for the purposes of CTRS; and
 - That any payments made by the London Emergencies Trust (LET) or the We Love Manchester Emergency Fund (WLMEF) should be disregarded for the purposes of CTRS,and that the Head of Revenues, Benefits & IT should carry out the necessary public consultation;
- (4) That the Executive Member of Finance and IT be consulted on the content of the consultation questionnaire;
- (5) That it be noted that the level of Scheme funding to be allocated to Parish, Town and Community Councils will be the same as 2017/18; and
- (6) That Cabinet considers at its meeting on 19 December 2017 whether there is scope to amend the value of awards, taking into consideration any knowledge at the time on likely Council Tax increases for 2018/2019.

REASON FOR DECISION: To decide on whether or not there will be changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2018/2019, thereby enabling the required public consultation to be carried out.

37 PROPOSALS REGARDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION ACT 2017

The Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health presented a report of the Head of Housing and Public Protection in respect of proposals regarding the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The following appendix was submitted with the report:

Appendix 1 – Powerpoint slides from Andy Gale Housing Consultant.

The Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health advised that the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which would come into effect on 1 April 2018, was the most significant change to homelessness legislation in the last 40 years. It was expected to result in a doubling of applications to local authorities for homelessness assistance, for the reasons set out in the report.

The Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health stated that a similar scheme had been operating in Wales for a short time had seen a 26% increase in the number of homelessness applications, but the expectation for England was that this percentage would be much higher.

The Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health explained that the challenge for local authorities would be a significantly increased officer workload. However, the Government was providing NHDC with a flexible homeless support grant (£124,459 for

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2017/18 and £140,930 for 2018/19) to assist with the process. The funding situation after 2018/19 was currently uncertain, although may well be dependent upon the levels of success in the first two years. In addition, transitional “new burdens” funding had been earmarked for a two year period starting in 2018/19, with NHDC’s allocation expected to be in the region of £50,000 to £70,000.

The Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health commented that the report sought the Cabinet’s approval to allocate the aforementioned funds. He referred to the Table set out in paragraph 10.2 of the report, which showed that the proposal was to split the funding between increased in-house officer capacity (£186,800) and a rough sleeper outreach project (£70,000). A major objective would be to endeavour to source and maintain a supply of private rented sector accommodation for the homeless, although it was acknowledged that this could prove very challenging.

The Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health, assisted by the Head of Housing and Public Protection and Strategic Housing Manager, answered a number of Members’ questions on the report.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the proposed measures outlined in Section 8.3 of the report, so as to enable the Council to prepare for the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and discharge its new duties as regards the prevention and relief of homelessness, be approved;
- (2) That the Head of Housing and Public Protection, in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health, be delegated the power to deploy any unallocated Flexible Homelessness Support Grant in order to best meet increased demand for homelessness services;
- (3) That the Head of Housing and Public Protection, in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health, be delegated the power to deploy new burdens funding when it becomes available; and
- (4) That the housing services base budget for 2017/18 and beyond be amended, so that the current annual allocation of £6,000 for project work be reallocated to support homelessness prevention activity,

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Council, acting in its capacity as the Local Housing Authority (LHA), to deploy its resources to best effect in order to meet the legal obligations contained within the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

38 BUSINESS RATES PILOT AND BUSINESS RATES POOLING

The Executive Member for Finance and IT presented the report of the Head of Finance, Performance and Asset Management in respect of an invitation from the department of Communities and Local Government for Authorities to become Business Rates retention pilots; and the option for applying to be part of a Business Rates Pool.

The Executive Member for Finance and IT advised that the Government was currently running Business Rates retention pilots in some metropolitan areas, and had now issued an invitation for local authorities on a county wide basis to become pilots. There had been discussions between the Hertfordshire Chief Executives and Chief Financial Officers, who had considered that Hertfordshire should submit a bid. All 11 local authorities in Hertfordshire had to agree to the submission of a bid.

The Executive Member for Finance and IT further advised that for 2 of the last 3 years the Council had participated in a Hertfordshire Business Rates Pooling arrangement, the effect of which had meant that NHDC had been able to retain a slightly higher percentage of the

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Business Rates growth than if it had operated outside of the Pool. This had proven to be a not insubstantial contribution to the Council's Revenue Budget at the end of each year.

The Executive Member for Finance and IT explained, however, that it was not possible to be part of a pilot and a pool, but that it was possible to apply for both. In view of the fact that that the pilot bid needed to be submitted to the Government by 27 October 2017, the report recommended that delegated authority be given to apply for a Business Rates retention pilot and/or a Business Rates Pool.

RESOLVED: That the Head of Finance, Performance and Asset Management, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and IT, be delegated authority to decide whether NHDC should be part of the application for a Business Rates pilot and/or a Business Rates pool.

REASON FOR DECISION: To secure potential financial benefits for NHDC and Hertfordshire as a whole, and to ensure that bids are made within the stipulated timescales.

The meeting closed at 9.56 pm

Chairman at the meeting on
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