

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERONON ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY
ON TUESDAY, 21ST SEPTEMBER, 2021 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg (Chair), Councillor Paul Clark (Vice-Chair), Ian Albert, Amy Allen, Judi Billing, Sam Collins, Steve Jarvis and Ian Mantle*

In Attendance: *Anthony Roche (Managing Director), Jeanette Thompson (Monitoring Officer), Jo Dufficy (Service Director – Customers), Steve Crowley (Service Director – Commercial), Reuben Ayavoo (Policy and Community Engagement Manager), Andrew Mills (Service Manager Greenspace), Nigel Smith (Strategic Planning Manager), Chloe Gray (Commercial Team Leader), Chris Jefferey (Customer Services Manager), William Edwards (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager)*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting there were no members of the public.*

32 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2 minutes 40 seconds.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Gary Grindal.

Apologies for absence were also received from Deputy Executive Members Ruth Brown, Adem Ruggiero-Cakir, Carol Stanier and Nigel Mason. As Deputies, their attendance was not required at this meeting and would not be reflected in their attendance record.

At the start of the meeting Councillor Sam Collins was absent.

33 MINUTES - 20 JULY 2021

Audio Recording – 3 minutes 20 seconds.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg proposed, Councillor Paul Clark seconded and it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 20 July 2021 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

34 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 25 seconds.

There was no other business notified.

35 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 30 seconds.

- (1) The Chair welcomed those present at the meeting, especially those who had attended to give a presentation;
- (2) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded;
- (3) Members were reminded that this Council had declared a Climate Emergency. This was a serious decision and meant that, as this was an emergency, all of us, officers and Members had that in mind as we carried out our various roles and tasks for the benefit of our District.
- (4) The Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and 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.
- (5) The Chair advised that Item 8 – Council Plan would be considered before Item 7 – Customer Service Strategy.
- (6) The Chair advised that there was a Part 2 item to be taken at this meeting and they intend to move the meeting in to Part 2 session to consider the confidential report prior to taking the Part 1 report of the same item

36 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 5 minutes 40 seconds.

There was no public participation at this meeting.

37 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Audio recording – 5 minutes 50 seconds.

6a. Referral from FAR - First Quarter Review Monitoring Report 2021-22

The Chair advised this referral would be taken with Item 10.

6b. Referral from FAR - First Quarter Investments Strategy (Capital and Treasury) Review 2021-22

The Chair advised this referral would be taken with Item 11.

6c. Referral from FAR - Medium Term Financial Strategy

The Chair advised this referral would be taken with Item 12.

6d. Referral from O&S – Customer Service Strategy 2021-2026

The Chair advised this referral would be taken with Item 7.

38 CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY

Audio Recording – 16 minutes 50 seconds.

The Service Director – Customers presented the report entitled Customer Service Strategy along with the following Appendices:

- Appendix A – Customer Service Strategy 2021-2026
- Appendix B – Customer Care Standards

The Service Director – Customers advised that the title of the report should be amended to extend the period covered from 2021-2026 to 2021-2027 in line with the Council Plan.

Councillor David Levett, Chair of Overview and Scrutiny, presented referral 6d and drew attention to points including:

- The Customer Service Strategy was a necessary document laying out a clear strategy;
- It was important to ensure that customer service did not lose sight of customers that did not use digital platforms and that traditional means of contact should remain options.

The following Members took part in debate:

- Councillor Judi Billing
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Steve Jarvis
- Councillor Paul Clark

Points raised by Members included:

- Referring to residents as 'customers,' was somewhat uncomfortable and it was important to remember that many of the people who came in to contact with the Council had no choice (as consumers) to work with a different provider;
- It was essential to champion customer service across the whole organisation rather than see it as the sole preserve of the customer services centre, and this strategy would inform the senior leadership team and councillors;
- The Fair Collection Policy was relevant to good customer service and should be referenced in the strategy
- There should be some mechanism to quantify the achievement of the targets set out in this strategy
- It was clear that the success of this strategy did not mean achieving those goals by 2027 but as an ongoing process of continual improvement

In response to points raised the Service Director – Customers advised that the Fair Collection Policy was referenced on Page 23 of the Strategy.

In response to points raised the Managing Director advised that the Customer Service Strategy would be included in staff training and induction and advertised to staff by the communications team, and would feed in to the review of the organisational values and behaviours in light of the new Council Plan and new ways of working.

On the vote it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the title of Appendix A – Customer Service Strategy 2021-2026 be amended to extend the date range by one year in line with the Council Plan.
- (2) That Cabinet adopt the following documents:
 - Appendix A - Customer Service Strategy 2021-2027 (as amended)
 - Appendix B - Customer Care Standards
- (3) That Cabinet agree to delegate any minor changes in relation to the Customer Service Strategy and the Customer Care Standards to the Service Director – Customers in consultation with the Executive Member for the Customer Service Centre (The Leader).

REASON FOR DECISION: To adopt the new Customer Service Strategy.

39 COUNCIL PLAN AND PRIORITIES 2022-2027

Audio Recording – 6 minutes 30 seconds.

The Policy and Community Engagement Manager presented the report entitled Council Plan and Council Priorities 2022-2027 along with the following appendices:

- Appendix A – Council Plan
- Appendix B – Council Plan 2022-2027 (updated)

He drew attention to points including:

- Appendix B was a visual mock-up of the draft plan meant to reflect the new design approach; the substantive content was better reflected in Appendix A
- Cabinet was being asked to review the Plan and make recommendations to Council
- The Plan had been drafted by a working group of Officers and Members with input from the public liaison group, peer authorities and service directors
- The three Council Priorities together formed the overarching vision of the Council Plan as follows: “We put people first and deliver sustainable services, to enable a brighter future together,”
- The new Council priorities were expanded upon as follows; ‘People first,’ referring to putting residents, staff, councillors and other partners at the heart of everything the Council does; ‘sustainability,’ referring to delivering relevant and sustainable services with environmental responsibility and sound financial planning at their centre; and ‘brighter future together,’ referring to the long term plans to deliver the best outcomes for residents and the economy of the District.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg advised that the design and presentation of the Council Plan in the supplement had been revised and presented to Cabinet to demonstrate the commitment to people-first government, and that the current layout made the Plan more accessible.

The following Members asked questions and took part in debate:

- Councillor Steve Jarvis
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Judi Billing

Points raised included:

- The theme and direction of the Plan was determined but the final draft and specific wording was still under review
- The Council Plan was a strategic priorities document which would dovetail with the Medium Term Financial Strategy and other documents and represented policy standing at the forefront of decision making
- The Plan set clear project and timeframes for delivery of those
- The public consultation around the future of Charnwood House was a success and the issue of potential refurbishment was a consideration for the Council in future
- The Customer Service Strategy was one of those daughter documents beneath the Council Plan.

The Monitoring Officer advised that if Cabinet recommended approval of a document to Council the document should be in its final form as the issue could not be revisited within 6 months of its presentation to Council.

The Managing Director advised that an additional recommendation be made to Council to delegate the finalising of the text of the Plan to the Leader and Managing Director.

Councillor Judi Billing highlighted that it would be preferable that such a recommendation would be to delegate the finalising of the text of the Plan to the Leader, Deputy Leader, and Managing Director.

On the vote it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Cabinet reviews and recommends the approval of the Council Plan (Appendix A) to Full Council with the three new Council Priorities as outlined below:
 - People First
 - Sustainability
 - A Brighter Future Together
- (2) That Cabinet recommends to Council to delegate any minor changes in relation to the Council Plan to the Managing Director in consultation with Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council.

REASON FOR DECISION: To provide an overarching policy framework document, to guide and influence the use of Council resources; providing a focus for activities, plans and services the Council provide.

40 QUARTERLY RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE

Audio Recording - 35 minutes 45 seconds.

The Executive Member for Finance and IT, Councillor Ian Albert, presented the Quarterly Risk Management Update.

Following the vote it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet notes the update on Corporate Risks in the quarter, namely:

- There were no formal reviews of Corporate Risks in the last quarter
- The Discussion at Risk Management Group (RMG) relating to Delivery of the Waste Collection and Street Cleansing Services Contract Corporate Risk, with no change to the risk score
- The reviews of Planning Corporate risks are to be delayed pending receipt of the Planning Inspectors report
- The proposal to archive the Delivering the NHDC Climate Change Strategy service risk.

REASON FOR DECISION: The responsibility to ensure the management of corporate risk is that of Cabinet.

41 FIRST QUARTER REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2021/22

Audio Recording – 36 minutes.

The Executive Member for Finance and IT, Councillor Ian Albert, presented the report entitled First Quarter Revenue Budget Monitoring 2021/22 and referral 6a from the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.

His presentation included:

- The report summarised the variances in this quarter namely the continuing impact of COVID-19 and the impact of the waste contract;
- Some of the COVID-19 variances are for the first quarter only e.g relating to parking;
- A new budget estimate was presented in table 6;
- The estimate was prudent and provided there were no further periods of restrictions a more positive forecast could be provided for the second quarter;
- There had been positive pickup on parking in the District, which demonstrated that while this budget was more prudent than necessary at this stage a cautious approach was correct;
- An update on the position of the Stevenage Leisure contract would be presented in quarter two after the impact of the summer period could be assessed;
- It had been a Council priority to ensure adults and children in the District could continue to access leisure centres and services e.g aqua-education and it was encouraging to see that swimming lesson memberships had reached pre-covid levels;
- The report referred to the potential for a Business Rates Pool and the Hertfordshire authorities were obtaining advice on the risk and benefits of such a pool;
- The deadline for applications was 8 October hence a delegated decision was requested.

On the vote it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Cabinet note this report.
- (2) That Cabinet approves the changes to the 2021/22 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.2, a £560k increase in net expenditure.
- (3) That Cabinet notes the changes to the 2022/23 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.2, a total £226k increase in net expenditure. These will be incorporated in the draft revenue budget for 2022/23.

- (4) That Cabinet delegates to the Service Director: Resources (in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and IT) authority to enter in to a Business Rate Pooling arrangement (if available) if it is estimated that it will be in the financial interests of the Council.

REASON FOR DECISION: That Members are able to monitor, make adjustments within the overall budgetary framework and request appropriate action of Services who do not meet the budget targets set as part of the Corporate Business Planning process.

42 **FIRST QUARTER INVESTMENT STRATEGY (CAPITAL AND TREASURY) REVIEW 2021/22**

Audio Recording – 41 minutes.

The Executive Member for Finance and IT presented the report entitled First Quarter Investment Strategy (Capital and Treasury) Review 2021/22 along with referral 6b from Finance, Audit and Risk Committee along with the following Appendices:

- Appendix A - Capital Programme Detail including Funding 2021/22 onwards
- Appendix B - Treasury Management Update

In his presentation the Executive Member for Finance and IT drew attention to points including:

- The Executive Summary in the report set out the key points
- Table 4 showed that borrowing would be necessary if capital reserves were fully spent but the majority of spending related to property acquisition and development and borrowing was not anticipated;
- Cabinet was recommended to approve the changes to the 2021/22 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.2, a £560k increase in net expenditure;
- Additional expenditure was forecast relating to the laptop rollout project for staff.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Cabinet notes the forecast expenditure of £16.169million in 2021/22 on the capital programme, paragraph 8.3 refers. This includes approval of the additional spend for laptop purchases and drainage at Coombes Community Centre.
- (2) That Cabinet approves the adjustments to the capital programme for 2021/22 onwards as a result of the revised timetable of schemes detailed in table 2, increasing the estimated spend in 2022/23 by £0.312million.
- (3) That Cabinet notes the position of the availability of capital resources, as detailed in table 4 paragraph 8.6 and the requirement to keep the capital programme under review for affordability.
- (4) Cabinet is asked to note the position of Treasury Management activity as at the end of June 2021.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

- (1) Cabinet is required to approve adjustments to the capital programme and ensure the capital programme is fully funded.

- (2) To ensure the Council's continued compliance with CIPFA's code of practice on Treasury Management and the Local Government Act 2003 and that the Council manages its exposure to interest and capital risk.

43 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Audio Recording – 43 minutes 30 seconds.

The Executive Member for Finance & IT, Councillor Ian Albert, presented the report entitled Medium Term Financial Strategy along with following appendices:

- Appendix A – MTFS 2022-2027
- Appendix B – MTFS 2022-2027 (updated)

The Executive Member for Finance & IT additionally presented item 6c. Referral from FAR - Medium Term Financial Strategy. His presentation highlighted points including:

- Budget allocations in his strategy were driven by the Council's priorities and were devised in relation to the Council Plan
- The revised design of the strategy made it more readable and accessible and an enhanced form of the visual layout would make the document easily understandable to the public via the website
- The strategy made provision for the continuing impact of COVID-19 and recovery through 2022/23 and 2023/24 though the necessity and length of these provisions would be kept under review
- The strategy estimates provision for a savings total of £1.8 million by the five year mark and set out how to identify and deliver savings to the Council including the role of the budget challenge process and the place of public consultation in financial strategy was also considered by the strategy
- In the context of continual 1-year funding settlements from central government it was difficult for any administration to develop a long term financial strategy
- A more long term and detailed funding settlement and an idea of how new funding formulae work would make the process of long term planning easier.
- He endorsed the strategy and commented that it was a prudent, priority driven document which would help the administration deliver on its plans.

Leader of the Council, Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, advised that the strategy was readable and accessible as far as could be achieved with a financial document of this length and that it sat as a daughter document of the Council Plan demonstrating the relationship between policy supported by budget; she also noted that one year funding settlements were a continued difficulty for local governments.

On the vote it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet recommend to Full Council the adoption of the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022-27 as attached at Appendix B in the supplementary agenda to this item.

REASON FOR DECISION: Adoption of a MTFS and communication of its contents will assist in the process of forward planning the use of Council resources and in budget setting for 2022/2023 to 2026/2027, culminating in the setting of the Council Tax precept for 2022/23 in February 2022. This will (alongside the Council Plan) support the Council in setting a budget that is affordable and aligned to Council priorities.

44 STRATEGIC PLANNING MATTERS

Audio Recording – 50 minutes.

The Executive Member for Planning, Councillor Paul Clark, and the Executive Member for Enterprise, the Arts and Transport, Councillor Sam Collins, presented the report entitled Strategic Planning Matters along with Appendices A-D.

The Executive Member for Planning highlighted points including:

- The Inspector's Report on the emerging Local Plan was further delayed; the last assurance given was 'autumn,' which had since been updated to 'November,'
- Work on the new settlement was going ahead in conjunction with Councillors and officers in East Hertfordshire

The Executive Member for Enterprise, the Arts and Transport highlighted points including:

- The expansion of Luton Airport was not in the best interests of the area;
- Consultations were included in paragraphs 8.1.3-8.1.5 of the report;
- Paragraphs 8.1.6-7 reiterated the importance the Council places on walking and cycling to create sustainability in active transport across the area;
- The Herts Links project funded by Herts County Council was substantially delivered by a North Herts Council officer, Daniel Washington, who was thanked for his hard work;
- Railway timetabling was covered at 8.2.0: GTR and LNER had suspended changes to the timetable in May 2022 and postponed them to 2023
- Cuts to rail services in the area are unacceptable and the Council would not support them;
- The Council further requested that LNER start serving Hitchin with long distance trains.
- Royston and Hitchin were delivering active travel plans as part of the sustainable travel towns project.

The following Members asked questions and made comment:

- Councillor Judi Billing
- Councillor Ian Mantle
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg

In response to points raised Councillor Clark advised that it was the intention to incorporate the LCWIP and transport plans in to the masterplanning process.

On the vote it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report on strategic planning matters be noted.
- (2) That the correspondence in Appendices A to D be noted and endorsed by Cabinet.

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

45 WILBURY HILLS CREMATORIUM PROJECT

N.B this item was take after the conclusion of the private session.

Audio Recording – 1 hour 18 minutes.

The Executive Member for Environment and Leisure, Councillor Steve Jarvis, presented the report entitled The Future of the Wilbury Hills Crematorium Project and highlighted the following:

- The Council had been unsuccessful in securing the necessary planning permission for the Wilbury Hills Crematorium Project and the project was no longer viable;
- The report recommended that other options be investigated

Councillor Steve Jarvis proposed and on the vote it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet (having taken into account the matters set out in the Part 2) approves the ceasing of the Crematorium project at Wilbury Hills Cemetery and allow officers (Commercial and Greenspace teams) to investigate alternative, commercial opportunities for this site, whilst continuing the current letting arrangement with the tenant. If approved, commercial options will be presented to Cabinet by March 2022.

REASON FOR DECISION: Following the outcome of the Public Inquiry in February 2021 there is a need to consider future options at Wilbury Hills Cemetery, Letchworth site.

46 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Audio recording – 1 hour.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg proposed, Councillor Paul Clark seconded and on the vote it was:

RESOLVED: That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).

47 WILBURY HILLS CREMATORIUM PROJECT

N.B There is no audio recording of the Part 2 session. The meeting moved in to Part 2 one hour in to the public recording.

The Executive Member for Environment and Leisure, Councillor Steve Jarvis, and the Executive Member for Enterprise, the Arts and Transport, Councillor Sam Collins, presented the report entitled the Future of Wilbury Hills Crematorium Project along with Appendix A - Top level options appraisal regarding the future of the crematorium project at Wilbury Hills Cemetery, Letchworth Garden City.

The following Members asked questions and participated in debate:

- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Steve Jarvis
- Councillor Sam Collins
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg
- Councillor Ian Mantle

Tuesday, 21st September, 2021

In response to points raised the Service Manager – Greenspace advised that the current lease was worth £900 a year and while the Council had the option to terminate at any time it would be prudent to do so after harvest time to avoid incurring costs via loss of earnings from the current leaseholder.

In response to points raised the Service Director – Commercial advised that the report outlined top-level options under consideration and the recommendation of the report would allow the commercial team to explore alternative uses for the site. Any specific schemes would then be brought to Cabinet in detail for approval.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet note the report and to take into account the additional information provided that will allow an informed decision to be made based on the recommendation in Part 1 on this item.

REASON FOR DECISION: Following the outcome of the Public Inquiry in February 2021 there is a need to consider future options at Wilbury Hills Cemetery, Letchworth site.

The meeting closed at 8.54 pm

Chair