

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HITCHIN COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE CHRISTCHURCH, BEDFORD ROAD, HITCHIN, SG5 1HF
ON TUESDAY, 28TH MARCH, 2023 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Councillor Ian Albert (Chair), Councillor Clare Billing (Vice-Chair), Val Bryant, Sam Collins, Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, James Denselow, Keith Hoskins, Chris Lucas, Nigel Mason and Richard Thake*

In Attendance: *Becca Edwards (Community Partnerships Officer) and Eleanor Hopcraft (Committee, Member & Scrutiny Officer)*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting approximately 8 members of the public, including registered speakers.*

102 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 26 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Raj Bhakar.

103 MINUTES - 8 DECEMBER 2022

Audio recording – 1 minute 37 seconds

Councillor Ian Albert, as Chair proposed and Councillor Keith Hoskins seconded, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 8 December 2022 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

104 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 3 seconds

There was no other business notified.

105 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 5 seconds

(1) 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.

106 HITCHIN BID - UPDATE

Audio recording – 2 minutes 18 seconds

The Chair invited Tom Hardy, Hitchin BID Manager, to present. Mr Hardy thanked the Chair, gave a verbal presentation and advised:

- The business plan was running until April 2024.
- Meetings were running about what businesses would like to see from the BID and their operations.
- Visit Hitchin was now being used for the public, BID was used for businesses.
- The BID were working with Andrew Figgis on the future of the prosperity fund and new funding options.
- Bench wood was being replaced around town, with bollards and railings being repainted.
- £12,500 H-Town Pounds were spent over Christmas, with around £6,000 still in circulation to spend in 34 independent businesses.
- A new community piano would be introduced into the marketplace on 8 April 2023 and would be spray painted.
- Action Hitchin would fundraise for future town projects.
- Rhythms of the World was now defunct and the working group would decide what to do with assets on 10 April 2023.
- The shop vacancy rate in Hitchin was 2%, with many lets seeming empty due to landlords using them as storage or earmarked for development.
- The Hitchin Information Centre was selling lots of merchandise, including Hitchin Football Club merchandise.
- Floral displays would be set up in the first week of June.
- The Christmas lighting application had been started. The catenary wires that hold up the lights needed replacing as they were found to be unsafe during inspection. The cost of replacement was estimated at £10k.
- Ghost walks were sold out until April, and were looking to add more dates alongside introducing historic walks.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Keith Hoskins
- Councillor Clare Billing
- Councillor James Denselow
- Councillor Nigel Mason
- Councillor Chris Lucas
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Sam Collins

In response to the questions, Mr Hardy advised:

- Shop vacancies were advertised on central commercial websites.
- Landlords had to decide if posters and wrapping could be put on their lets.
- There were 20 businesses on the waiting list for town units.
- The Poundland and M&Co unit was owned by an international company.
- The independent businesses in Hitchin did better than expected over the Christmas period, however increased bills and rent were challenges.

In discussion of the replacement of the catenary wires, Councillors Thake, Hoskins and Albert commented that they could be approached for some of their County Locality Budget to help with the costs.

107 HERTFORDSHIRE CONSTABULARY - UPDATE

Audio recording – 26 minutes 38 seconds

The Chair invited PS Guy Westwood of Hertfordshire Constabulary to present. PS Westwood thanked the Chair, gave a verbal presentation and advised:

- Hitchin Urban crimes for 2022/23 totalled 1,973 compared to 1,819 in 2021/22.
- North Hertfordshire crimes increased to 6,433 compared to 5,559 previously and County wide crimes totalled 75,459 crimes compared to 73,516 last year.
- Residential burglaries in Hitchin Urban decreased to 51 from 66 previously. North Hertfordshire and County had both seen an increase.
- The OWL system was being used to keep the public informed.
- Business and commercial burglaries had increased to 31 incidents from 27 last year in Hitchin Urban. North Hertfordshire and County had also seen an increase.
- Theft from motor vehicles in Hitchin Urban had increased to 81 incidents from 63 previously, with North Hertfordshire and County overall increasing.
- Motor vehicle thefts mostly comprised of catalytic converters, and the increase was likely caused by the increased prices of precious metals.
- Personal robbery in Hitchin Urban had decreased to 9 from 12 previously. North Hertfordshire had also seen a decrease to 28 from 33 last year.
- County wide had seen an increase in personal robbery and patrols had been increased.
- Violence against persons had decreased in Hitchin Urban to 660 from 664 previously. North Hertfordshire and County had also seen a decrease.
- Criminal damage in Hitchin Urban had increased to 314 incidents compared to 187 previously. Most incidents were in Bearton Ward, with work ongoing in the area and around the town.
- Criminal damage had also increased in North Hertfordshire and county wide.
- Shoplifting in Hitchin Urban had increased to 170 compared to 136 previously. North Hertfordshire and County had also seen an increase.
- Drugs possession incidents in Hitchin Urban had decreased to 67 compared to 85 previously. North Hertfordshire and County incidents had also decreased.
- Public order offences in Hitchin Urban had decreased to 120 from 131 previously. North Hertfordshire and County offences had also decreased.
- Possession of offensive weapons in Hitchin Urban had increased to 16 incidents from 14 last year. North Hertfordshire and County had decreased.
- The priorities were due to be renewed in April. The current priorities were residential burglary, speeding on St. Michael's and Stotfold Roads and anti-social behaviour in open spaces.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Richard Thake
- Councillor Sam Collins
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg
- Councillor Clare Billing
- Councillor Chris Lucas
- Councillor Val Bryant

In response to questions from Members, PS Westwood advised:

- There were 22 different crime ratings which made it difficult to break down crime data.
- There were no direct links to crimes and residents at the Lord Lister Hotel.
- School years groups were linked to shoplifting, access to alcohol which would fuel anti-social behaviour.
- County lines crimes were not as high as expected.
- One problem that came from Nitrous Oxide canisters was littering. As the effect of Nitrous Oxide was short, it was not expected to contribute anti-social behaviour.

- There were many different categories of theft, therefore figures were categorised into general for the Committee.
- Safety of women was discussed at the Priority Setting Forum. The priorities mentioned previously were set by surveying the County.

Members took part in a discussion around Violence against women in Hitchin and North Hertfordshire. The Chair concluded that this was an important concern, and that it would be taken as an action point for forthcoming meetings.

Members thanked PS Guy Westwood for his work on the Safer Neighbourhood Team, particularly for his work in Hitchin.

108 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 61 minutes 40 seconds

The Chair invited Becca Edwards, Community Partnerships Officer to update Members on budgets. Ms Edwards thanked the Chair, gave a verbal presentation and advised:

- The 2022/23 base budget was £11,000, with £775 carried forward from 2021/2022. This gave a total of £11,775.
- The grants awarded to date totalled £6,679, which left £5,096.
- The grant applications for the meeting totalled £3,981, which if awarded, would leave £1,205 to carry forward into 2023/24.
- At the time of the grant applications, the locality budgets were used up or inaccessible, and applicants were advised not to approach County Councillors for funding.

The Chair invited Mari Stevenson of Buzzworks to present. Ms Stevenson thanked the Chair, gave a verbal presentation and advised:

- Buzzworks was a non-profit charitable organisation set up in 2007.
- The education centre worked with a wide-range of groups to engage and educate on the environmental health and wellbeing of bees.
- The grant would go towards engagement, and inspire community importance of bees.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Sam Collins
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Clare Billing

In response to questions from Members, Ms Stevenson advised:

- A grant had been awarded to purchase a television screen, which would be linked to the cameras and microscopes.
- There were two types of hives at the education centre.
- The centre was based at Old Hale Way.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Clare Billing seconded, and following a vote it was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee allocated £932 to Buzzworks resources to help deliver educational sessions as outlined in paragraphs 8.1.1-8.1.4 of this report.

The Chair invited Karen Grant of Friends of Whitehill and Highbury Schools to present. Ms Grant thanked the Chair, gave a verbal presentation and advised:

- The organisation was a registered charity supporting Whitehill and Highbury schools.
- A priority for the organisation was to build community of schools, which was important post-pandemic.
- Current equipment was old and not fit for purpose.
- The funding application was for new gazebos, which would be needed for pre-loved uniform sales.

In response to the question from Councillor Sam Collins, Ms Stevenson advised that the organisation was working with other schools to arrange pre-loved uniform pop-ups over summer.

Councillor Sam Collins proposed and Councillor Nigel Mason seconded, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee allocated £459 to Friends of Whitehill and Highbury Schools towards four gazebos as outlined in paragraphs 8.1.5-8.1.9 of this report.

The Chair invited the Community Partnerships Officer to present on behalf of Red Media Love CIC, who thanked the Chair, gave a verbal presentation and advised:

- Red Media Love CIC was a media company, specialising in films and exhibitions.
- The CIC had been to the Committee previously for £2,500 grant.
- The applicant was unable to attend and did not provide a written statement.
- The Singh Sabha football exhibition was due to take place between 8 August 2023 and 3 September 2023.

In response to the question from Councillor Ian Albert, the Community Partnerships Officer advised that Community Partnerships had advised the applicant to approach other sources of funding, including Kick It Out. The applicant had decided not to approach other sources.

The following Members took part in discussion:

- Councillor Sam Collins
- Councillor Clare Billing
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg
- Councillor James Denselow
- Councillor Richard Thake
- Councillor Keith Hoskins
- Councillor Ian Albert

Following discussion Councillor Sam Collins proposed to defer the grant application to a later meeting of the Committee. This was seconded by Councillor James Denselow, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the grant application from Red Media Love CIC be deferred to a later meeting of the Committee, so that further funding can be explored by the applicant with the support of Officers.

109 GRANT APPLICATIONS AND COMMUNITY UPDATE

Audio recording – 89 minutes 40 seconds

The Community Partnerships Officer presented the report entitled 'Grant Applications and Community Update' and advised that:

- The Community Partnerships team had been supporting a network of asylum seekers in Hitchin. Many local groups were involved to support families.
- The Community Conference held last week was a very positive event.
- The North Hertfordshire Heroes Awards took place at the beginning of March, with five people from the district being recognised. The event was available to view on the North Herts Council YouTube channel.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed, Councillor Clare Billing seconded, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Committee agreed that any unspent funds from the 2022/23 financial year be allocated to the Hitchin Area Committee budget for the 2023/24 period.
- (2) That the Committee endorsed the actions taken by the Community Engagement Team to promote greater community capacity and well-being.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) To ensure Members are kept informed of the work of the Community Engagement Team.
- (2) This report is intended to inform Members of the financial resources available to the Committee. It draws attention to the current budgetary situation by assisting in the effective financial management of the Area Committee's budget. This ensures that all actions are performed in line with the Authority's Financial Regulations, the Council's Constitution, and the guidance of the Grants Policy as agreed by Cabinet in July 2021.
- (3) The awarding of financial assistance to voluntary organisations and the use of discretionary spending allows the Committee to further the aims of the Council Plan.

110 CHURCHGATE PROJECT UPDATE

Audio recording – 91 minutes 35 seconds

The Chair advised Members that a briefing note covering the progress of the Churchgate Projects had been sent out prior to the meeting and invited Councillor Keith Hoskins to present this to the Committee. Councillor Hoskins advised that:

- The Council was in the process of looking to appoint advisors.
- The survey responses were collated and should be available soon.
- An advisory group would be set up by 4 May 2023.

In response to the question from Councillor James Denselow, Councillor Hoskins advised that historical consultations and themes could be included on the Churchgate page on the North Hertfordshire District Council website.

111 WARD MATTERS AND OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS - MEMBERS' REPORTS

Audio recording – 94 minutes 59 seconds

The Chair reminded Members to complete the Outside Bodies Survey sent out by Committee Services. If Members were appointed to multiple organisations, a survey would have to be filled out for each organisation.

Tuesday, 28th March, 2023

The Chair advised that Members were invited to the Hitchin Town Twinning Reception on 19 May 2023 at the Museum.

Councillor Chris Lucas noted that a homeless woman was outside of the venue. Councillor Val Bryant provided an update on the situation and advised that support had been offered by the Council.

112 POSSIBLE AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Audio recording – 97 minutes 47 seconds

Councillor Richard Thake commented that the Hitchin BID Light display was of great importance to the town, and Committee should consider offering support for new equipment.

Audio Recording of Meeting

The meeting closed at 9.19 pm

Chair