

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL



6 April 2023

Our Ref Council/18 April 2023
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To: The Chair and Members of North Hertfordshire District Council

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN OF A
MEETING OF THE COUNCIL**

to be held in the

**COUNCIL CHAMBERS, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES,
GERNON ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY, SG6 3JF**

On

TUESDAY, 18TH APRIL, 2023 AT 7.30 PM

Yours sincerely,

Jeanette Thompson
Service Director – Legal and Community

****MEMBERS PLEASE ENSURE THAT YOU DOWNLOAD ALL AGENDAS AND REPORTS VIA THE MOD.GOV APPLICATION ON YOUR TABLET BEFORE ATTENDING THE MEETING****

Agenda **Part I**

Item	Page
1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE	
2. MINUTES - 23 FEBRUARY 2023 To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 23 February 2023.	(Pages 5 - 12)
3. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS Members should notify the Chair of other business which they wish to be discussed at the end of either Part I or Part II business set out in the agenda. They must state the circumstances which they consider justify the business being considered as a matter of urgency. The Chair will decide whether any item(s) raised will be considered.	
4. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS <u>Climate Emergency</u> The Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to achieving a target of zero carbon emissions by 2030 and helping local people and businesses to reduce their own carbon emissions. A Cabinet Panel on the Environment has been established to engage with local people on matters relating to the climate emergency and advise the council on how to achieve these climate change objectives. A Climate Change Implementation group of councillors and council officers meets regularly to produce plans and monitor progress. Actions taken or currently underway include switching to green energy, incentives for low emission taxis, expanding tree planting and working to cut food waste. In addition the council is a member of the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership, working with other councils across Hertfordshire to reduce the county's carbon emissions and climate impact. The Council's dedicated webpage on Climate Change includes details of the council's climate change strategy, the work of the Cabinet Panel on the Environment and a monthly briefing on progress. <u>Declarations of Interest</u> Members are reminded that any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda, should be declared as either a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or Declarable Interest and are required to notify the Chair of the nature of any interest declared at the commencement of the relevant item on the agenda. Members declaring a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest	

must withdraw from the meeting for the duration of the item. Members declaring a Declarable Interest, wishing to exercise a 'Councillor Speaking Right', must declare this at the same time as the interest, move to the public area before speaking to the item and then must leave the room before the debate and vote.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

To receive petitions, comments and questions from the public.

6. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

To consider any questions submitted by Members of the Council, in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.11 (b).

(Pages
13 - 14)

7. NOTICE OF MOTIONS

To consider any motions, due notice of which have been given in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.12.

(Pages
15 - 16)

8. ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Any items referred from other committees will be circulated as soon as they are available.

9. CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT REPORT

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – LEGAL AND COMMUNITY AND
THE MONITORING OFFICER

(Pages
17 - 42)

To propose changes to the Constitution.

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Public Document Pack Agenda Item 2

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES

Meeting of the Council held in the Council Chamber, District Council Offices, Gernon Road,
Letchworth
on Thursday, 23rd February, 2023 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors: Sam North (Chair), Daniel Allen (Vice-Chair), Ian Albert, Amy Allen, David Barnard, Simon Bloxham, Ruth Brown, Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, James Denselow, Morgan Derbyshire, Jean Green, Chris Hinchliff, Terry Hone, Keith Hoskins, Tony Hunter, Steve Jarvis, David Levett, Chris Lucas, Ian Mantle, Nigel Mason, Gerald Morris, Ralph Muncer, Michael Muir, Lisa Nash, Sean Nolan, Tom Plater, Richard Thake, Tamsin Thomas, Tom Tyson, Phil Weeder, Alistair Willoughby, Val Bryant and Terry Tyler

IN ATTENDANCE: Anthony Roche (Managing Director), Jeanette Thompson (Service Director - Legal and Community), Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), Tom Marsh (Electoral Services Manager) and Eleanor Hopcraft (Committee, Member & Scrutiny Officer)

ALSO PRESENT: At the commencement of the meeting approximately 2 members of the public, including registered speakers.

180 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2 minutes 1 second

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Carol Stanier, Kay Tart, Faye Frost, Juan Cowell, Sam Collins, Clare Billing, George Davies, Ian Moody and Raj Bhakar.

181 MINUTES - 19 JANUARY 2023

Audio Recording – 3 minutes 24 seconds

Councillor Sam North, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg seconded, and after a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 19 January 2023 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

182 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 19 seconds

There was no other business notified.

183 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 26 seconds

(1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council policy, the meeting would be audio recorded;

- (2) 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.
- (3) 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.
- (4) The Chair clarified the rules of debate for Members.
- (5) The Chair advised that for the purposes of clarification that 4.8.23(a) of the Constitution did not apply to this meeting.
- (6) The Chair advised that the Chair's Civic Event scheduled for 19 March 2023 had been cancelled.
- (7) The Chair advised that the North Herts Heroes Award Ceremony would take place on Friday 3 March 2023 and would be available to watch on the North Herts Council YouTube page.
- (8) The Chair advised that the Council meeting scheduled for 30 March 2023 had been moved to 18 April 2023.
- (9) The Chair asked Members to promote the requirement of Photo ID for voting using the flyers and posters provided

184 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 8 minutes 0 seconds

There was no public participation at this meeting.

185 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

Audio recording – 8 minutes 11 seconds

There were no questions submitted by Members.

186 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

Audio recording – 8 minutes 20 seconds

There were no motions submitted.

187 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Audio Recording – 8 minutes 26 seconds

8a) Referral from Cabinet on 31 January 2023 – Revenue Budget 2023/24

The Chair advised that this referral would be taken with Item 10 'Revenue Budget 2023/24'.

8b) Referral from Cabinet on 31 January 2023 – Investment Strategy (Integrated Capital and Treasury)

The Chair advised that this referral would be taken with Item 11 'Investment Strategy (Integrated Capital and Treasury)'.

8c) Referral from Overview and Scrutiny on 24 January 2023 – Women’s Safety Charter

Councillor David Levett presented the referral and advised that it was vital that the Council continued to support the work of the Community Safety Partnership and other partner agencies, particularly on the delivery of the Women’s Safety Charter.

Councillor Dennis-Harburg thanked Councillor Levett and those involved in the creation of the Women’s Safety Charter and commented that it would be an important piece of work for the Council.

Councillor David Levett proposed and Councillor Dennis-Harburg seconded, and after a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Council continued to support the work of Community Safety Partnerships and other partner agencies and work on the delivery of a Women’s Safety Charter alongside these agencies.

REASON FOR DECISION: To highlight and enable Full Council to consider the important work of the Community Safety Partnerships and other partner agencies as well as the delivery of a Women’s Safety Charter alongside these agencies.

188 PAY POLICY STATEMENT

Audio Recording – 11 minutes 45 seconds

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, Leader of the Council presented the item and advised:

- The Pay Award for 2023/24 was not yet agreed, the current statement was based on 2022/23 rate. Recommendation 2.2 sought delegation for the statement to be updated following the agreement of the Pay Award.
- NHDC were part of National Pay Negotiation, so were not allowed to make payments that are outside that pay bargaining.

In response to a question from Councillor Ralph Muncer, the Service Director – Resources advised that a pay offer had been submitted to the Unions and it was less than 12.7%, which would be covered by Councillor Albert under agenda Item 10 regarding the budget.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg proposed, Councillor Ruth Brown seconded, and after a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Council approved the 2023/24 Pay Policy Statement attached at Appendix 1.
- (2) That Council delegated authority for revisions made in year to the pay Policy Statement to the Service Director – Resources, in consultation with the Leader of the Council. Revisions which might arise in the year included changes in structure, changes to employment benefits, subsequent pay awards agreed nationally and new legislative requirements.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To comply with the requirements of Section 38 of the Localism Act 2011, Statutory Guidance issued under s40 and the Local Government Transparency Code 2015.

189 REVENUE BUDGET 2023/24

Audio Recording – 16 minutes 36 seconds

The Chair advised that he would invite Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, as Leader of the Council, to introduce the item and would then invite Councillor Ian Albert to present the report. The Chair noted that he had granted Councillor Albert permission to speak for longer than five minutes on this item.

The Leader of the Council made an introductory speech on the Revenue Budget 2023/24.

Councillor Ian Albert presented the Revenue Budget to Members, and proposed an additional recommendation to the Revenue Budget. This was seconded by Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg.

Councillor Claire Strong thanked Councillor Ian Albert for his speech, and noted some concerns regarding the Budget, including increase in parking charges, the renewal of waste and leisure contracts and funding for Churchgate.

The following Members also took part in the debate:

- Councillor Alistair Willoughby
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Nigel Mason
- Councillor Tom Plater
- Councillor Steve Jarvis
- Councillor Gerald Morris
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Chris Hinchliff
- Councillor Amy Allen
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg

Councillor Ian Albert commented that it was important that Member's Allowances increased. Playgrounds would not be closed under the budget. The administration wanted to work cross-party with the opposition and with residents to create a plan for Churchgate.

Having been proposed by Councillor Albert and seconded by Councillor Dennis-Harburg, the motion was put to a vote.

The results of the vote were as follows:

YES	:	23
ABSTAIN	:	2
NO	:	12
TOTAL	:	37

The individual results were as follows:

Cllr Sam North	ABSTAIN
Cllr Adem Ruggiero-Cakir	YES
Cllr Alistair Willoughby	YES
Cllr Amy Allen	YES
Cllr Chris Hinchliff	YES
Cllr Chris Lucas	YES
Cllr Claire Strong	NO
Cllr Daniel Allen	YES
Cllr David Barnard	NO
Cllr David Levett	NO
Cllr Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg	YES
Cllr Gerald Morris	NO
Cllr Ian Albert	YES
Cllr Ian Mantle	YES

Cllr James Denselow	YES
Cllr Jean Green	NO
Cllr Keith Hoskins	YES
Cllr Lisa Nash	YES
Cllr Mandi Tandi	NO
Cllr Michael Muir	ABSTAIN
Cllr Morgan Derbyshire	NO
Cllr Nigel Mason	YES
Cllr Philip Weeder	YES
Cllr Ralph Muncer	NO
Cllr Richard Thake	NO
Cllr Ruth Brown	YES
Cllr Sean Nolan	YES
Cllr Sean Prendergast	YES
Cllr Simon Bloxham	NO
Cllr Steve Jarvis	YES
Cllr Tamsin Thomas	YES
Cllr Terry Hone	NO
Cllr Terry Tyler	YES
Cllr Tom Plater	YES
Cllr Tom Tyson	YES
Cllr Tony Hunter	NO
Cllr Val Bryant	YES

As such it was:

RESOLVED: That Council:

- (1) Noted the position on the Collection fund and how it will be funded.
- (2) Noted the position relating to the General Fund balance and that due to the risk identified a minimum balance of £2.5million was recommended.
- (3) Noted the net revenue savings that are likely to be required in future years, combined with the Chief Finance Officer's commentary on the reliability of estimates and the resilience index.
- (4) Approved the revenue savings and investments as detailed in Appendix B.
- (5) Approved a net expenditure budget of £18.123m, as detailed in Appendix C.
- (6) Approved a Council Tax increase of 2.99%, which was in line with the provisions in the Medium term Financial Strategy.
- (7) Approved that the revenue investment for leisure centre condition surveys (as detailed in Appendix B, reference R13) and £10k of the consultancy and legal support for the leisure contract (as detailed in Appendix B, reference R37) is brought forward so that it can be spent in 2022/23.
- (8) Approved an additional revenue investment (for 2023/24 only) to create a Community Wealth Fund of £100k to support the local community in delivering projects that have wider community benefits.
- (9) Noted the staff resourcing issues that the Council faces, particularly in relation to planning and the strategic implementation of the Local Plan. Council further notes that Cabinet and the Head of Paid Service will look at options to make use of available resources (such as carry-forward of unspent salary budgets) to support the delivery of key Council functions and priorities.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure all relevant factors are considered in arriving at a budget and Council Tax level for 2023/24. To ensure that the budget is aligned to Council priorities for 2023/24 as set out in the Council Plan.

N.B Councillor David Barnard left the meeting at 20.56 and did not return.

190 INVESTMENT STRATEGY (INTEGRATED CAPITAL AND TREASURY)

Audio Recording – 100 minutes and 46 seconds

The Chair drew attention to the point raised by Councillor Michael Muir in the previous agenda item, and clarified that the line referring to Weston Hills, Baldock referred to a car park on Chalk Hills, Baldock.

The Chair invited Councillor Ian Albert, Executive Member for Finance and IT to present. Councillor Albert thanked the Chair and presented the report entitled 'Investment Strategy (Integrated Capital and Treasury)' and advised Members of the details included within the report.

The following Members asked questions

- Councillor Richard Thake
- Councillor Gerald Morris

In response to questions, the Service Director – Resources advised that:

- The decision concerning accounting standards was delegated to the Service Director – Resources.
- There was a similar payback on solar PV across all Leisure Centres.

Councillor Steve Jarvis provided details on the ways in which the Council was looking at future alternatives to gas boilers. He highlighted that some of the alternatives such as PV panels were not yet viable.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Dennis-Harburg seconded and after a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Council:

- (1) Approved the adoption of the Investment Strategy (as attached at Appendix A as amended), including the capital programme and prudential indicators. This incorporates the changes referenced in paragraph 5.4.
- (2) Approved the adoption of the four clauses in relation to the Code of Practice on Treasury Management (as detailed in Paragraphs 8.11 to 8.16).

REASONS FOR DECISION:

- (1) To ensure that the capital programme meets the Council's objectives and officers can plan the implementation of the approved schemes.
- (2) To ensure Council's compliance with the CIPFA code of practise on Treasury Management, the Local Government Act 2003, statutory guidance from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and the CIPFA Prudential Code. As well as determining and managing the Council's risk appetite in respect of investments.

The meeting closed at 9.26 pm

Chair

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**COUNCIL
18 APRIL 2023**

PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

In accordance with Standing Order 4.8.11(b), two questions were submitted by Members by the deadline date for questions set out in the Council's Constitution.

(A) Council Financial Information

Councillor David Levett to Councillor Ian Albert (Executive Member for Finance and IT)

'Please could you supply Council the information detailed below for the financial years
2017-2018
2018-2019
2019- 2020
2020-2021
2021-2022

Total Income Received by NHDC from any source
Total Expenditure by NHDC
Capital Reserves at year end
Revenue Reserves at year end
Value of Investments at Year End
Cash at Bank at year end
Total Overdue Unpaid Income

A written reply is acceptable.'

(B) Breach of the Code of Conduct Investigation and Withdrawn Sub-Committee Costs

Councillor Ralph Muncer to Councillor Ian Albert (Executive Member for Finance and IT)

'To ask the Executive Member for Finance and IT to detail to Council how much was spent on the Investigation and subsequent cancelled Standards Sub-Committee Hearing preparations into the Breach of the Code of Conduct by the Leader of the Council'

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COUNCIL
18 APRIL 2023

PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: NOTICE OF MOTIONS

The following motion has been submitted, due notice of which has been given in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.12.

(A) Motion to Remove the Leader of the Council from Office

“Due to the recent report of the conduct of the leader of the council we the undersigned move that the leader of the council is removed from office

*Cllr David Barnard
Cllr Simon Bloxham
Cllr Adam Compton
Cllr Juan Cowell
Cllr George Davies
Cllr Morgan Derbyshire
Cllr Faye Frost
Cllr Jean Green
Cllr Terry Hone
Cllr Tony Hunter
Cllr David Levett
Cllr Ian Moody
Cllr Gerald Morris
Cllr Michael Muir
Cllr Ralph Muncer
Cllr Claire Strong
Cllr Mandi Tandi
Cllr Richard Thake
Cllr Michael Weeks”*

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COUNCIL
18 April 2023

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT REPORT

REPORT OF: THE SERVICE DIRECTOR LEGAL AND COMMUNITY & MONITORING OFFICER

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL: COUNCILLOR ELIZABETH DENNIS-HARBURG

COUNCIL PRIORITY: **People First**

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Further to the report in January 2023, this report covers proposed:

- changes of the Area Committees to Area Forums
- grant applications being considered by the Grants Panel
- change of meeting start time to 19:00 (except for those that already start during the daytime such as the Joint Staff Consultative Committee and Cabinet & Licensing Sub-Committees).
- removal of one of the scheduled meetings for Licensing & Regulation Committee
- amendment of the terms of reference for the Council Tax Setting Committee
- noting that Cabinet Panel on the Environment is to be the only remaining Panel for 2023

This is with the view to arranging a detailed Constitutional review by Members (via Member & officer Working Group), starting on or about July 2024 for Full Council consideration [in early 2025].

And

- appointment of an additional Deputy Electoral Registration Officer

2. RECOMMENDATIONS¹

That Full Council:

- 2.1. Approves the change of the Area Committees to informal Area Forums (set out in paragraphs 8.2-8.5) to commence with the new municipal year from May 2023;
- 2.2. [***That subject to the above decision***], approves of the principle that grant applications be considered by the District Wide Community Facilities Capital & Revenue Grants Panel (as set out in paragraphs 8.6-8.11);
- 2.3. Approves a start time of 19:00 for meetings (other than those which already meet in the daytime);
- 2.4. Notes that the Cabinet Panel on the Environment is the remaining Panel for May 2023;
- 2.5. Approves the amendments detailed in **Appendix A** (summarised at paragraph 8.14-8.18)

¹ Members are asked to take the recommendations to the vote separately

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1. To review and look at ways to improve engagement with the community; consider resource issues, reflect good decision-making practice, and keep the Constitution up to date.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1. In respect of recommendations 2.1-2.4 the status quo could be continued; however, these proposals follow consultation with all Group Leaders and specifically then the District Membership (44 Member response rate) and staff consultation. Therefore, these are issues that should be brought before the Membership for formal consideration. In terms of 2.5, Appendix A includes the appointment of a further Deputy Registration Officer (for Elections), and this proposal is to assist with Electoral Registration resilience, as well as some general Committee arrangements changes for two Committees, and therefore no other alternative options are included within the report.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1. Following the consultation mentioned in 4.1, the Leader and Deputy were initially consulted about matters relating to recommendations 2.1-2.4 in 2022 and early 2023. The Conservative Leader was also kept informed during monthly briefings. A copy of this proposed report (as a draft) was also circulated to the Group Leaders for comment on 22 March.
- 5.2. An email was sent to all Members on 30 January 2023 regarding various issues, followed by a MIS reminder on 9 February, with Members invited to complete an online survey regarding Area Forums, meeting times and better engagement, and any other comments or suggestions. 43 District Councillors completed the survey, and 1 commentary email was received. Their anonymised responses are at **Appendix B**. A clear majority (31/44) of those were in favour of changing the Area Committees to Area Forums and 22/44 were prepared to consider earlier meetings of 1800/18:30/19:00 (so for this purpose 19:00 has been chosen as a potential time). Other comments on grants, daytime meetings and Panels are also included. There are some wider engagement issues raised in that – and it would be useful to review those elements generally and how we can continue to engage better in the more comprehensive review from 2024 – when (if at least some of these proposals 2.1-2.3) have been implemented.
- 5.3. The rest of the proposed amendments at Appendix A are request-based (as identified) to facilitate the good administration of the Council.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision, it is a Full Council decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

Recommendations 2.1-2.4

- 7.1 The review of arrangements follows general considerations on how and when the Council has meetings / the increasing number of meetings arranged in the evening since 2019,

attendance of those meetings/ engagement considerations and staffing resourcing issues (see also Human Resource implications, paragraph 14).

Formal meetings/ engagement with the community

- 7.2 Since 2019, scheduled meetings for North Herts Council has increased from 68 (64 calendar plus extraordinary/ additional meetings) to 88 in 2020/21 (81 calendar plus extraordinary / additional), 101 in 2021/22 (93 calendar plus extraordinary / additional), and 93 in 2022/23 (85 calendar plus extraordinary/ additional meetings). In simple terms, since 2019 as compared with 22/23, meetings have increased by 37%, delivery of this schedule is with the same allotted resource – however with issues regarding staffing and retention this has been problematic (see paragraph 14). As well as staffing resource, it cannot be ignored that this also has an impact / expectation on the Membership to attend such meetings (especially when they are physically required to attend for formal meetings – see below and legal implications, paragraph 9).
- 7.3 Whilst *direct* comparisons with other Councils is not always straightforward, for those where the information was readily available/ supplied in Hertfordshire, this does not compare favourably² with, for example East Herts (57), Stevenage (65³), Welwyn Hatfield (62). The Council that had more was the County Council at 133. Whilst the North Herts figures after 2019 *also record the Panel meetings*, this applies to three of the Council figures above, including the County Council, which has a larger staffing resource and Membership. Therefore, North Herts has a very high level of meetings.
- 7.4 Start times of meetings are also covered in the table at 7.5, which is a separate proposal; *however, this is relevant when comparing the number of meetings arranged.*
- 7.5 The table of information sets out comparable information gathered below. Many of the above authorities not only have fewer meetings but start these earlier (which includes the County Council), which is of significance in terms of the potential engagement, resource impacts and Member involvement (and any decision making).

Local Government	Start Times	Latest Start Times	Number of scheduled meetings 2019/20	Number of scheduled meetings 2020/21	Number of scheduled meetings 2021/22	Number of scheduled meetings 2022/23 (as at December 22)
East Hertfordshire	19:00	19:00				57 inc panels
Hertsmere	18:30	19:30				
St Albans	19:00	19:00				
Stevenage	18:00	19:00				65 plus Working group -19
Three Rivers	19:00	19:00				
Watford	19:00	19:30				
Welwyn Hatfield	19:30	19:30				62 inc panels
Hertfordshire County Council	09:30	14:00				Total 133 inc all panels and extraordinaries (not including boards, other than Herts Growth Board as joint Committee).
East Cambridge District	16:30	18:00				
North Herts District Council			Total 68	Total 88	Total 101	Total 93 scheduled/ additional

² As at December 2022.

³ Stevenage had a number of working groups, but their Committee arrangements are different.

Public attendance/ engagement

- 7.6 With regards to public attendance at meetings, this is not officially recorded and is therefore anecdotal from staff and Members; however, other than certain meetings with key topics for e.g. Planning Control Committee, Overview & Scrutiny – Hitchin Town Hall, Council - Local Plan related, this is often non-existent. Where there is a formal Council, or Committee meeting, these legally have to be in person and public engagement in person.⁴ The public can either attend in person or view live or post a meeting via YouTube; they cannot engage/ participate in a formal meeting remotely following the Judicial Review challenge in 2021⁵ and subsequent legal advice post this. The public's ability to engage is also through more limited fixed early agenda item public participation speaking 'slots'.
- 7.7 The only exception to this is Licensing Sub-Committee 'hearings', which fall under different legal requirements. In additional informal non-decision-making bodies, such as Panels (or Forums, working groups) do not need to meet in person. These Sub-Committees and Panels have therefore continued to meet virtually since the withdrawal of the Covid flexibility Regulations⁶, effective from 7 May 2021.

Area Committees/ Area Forums

- 7.8 In respect of Area Committees, these are often preceded by Town Talks, where specific topics are discussed, and issues raised. Engagement varies in different areas and with different topics. As Members are aware, Area Committee meetings start at 1930, and there is limited legal ability to allow the sorts of flexibility, that you can achieve in informal meetings spaces, such as Town Talks, Forums, Panels etc. Most of the decision making is around small local grants – with the expectation that grant applicants attend the meeting to present their application in person. This means those travelling to the venue in the evening, and waiting to present to the Committee, and such process starting on or around 2000 on the agenda, which can be onerous for the applicants as well as the public. Transportation and costs can also be an issue and off-putting (as indeed can a more formalised meeting).
- 7.9 The proposals set out under section 8 below, therefore looks to engage differently, in terms of Area Forums, leading to a more flexible approach, with the benefit of potential hybrid or virtual meetings (for Members and public), topic-based engagement and less staffing resource.

Grants

- 7.10 Grant allocation is an executive function that can (see legal implications section 9) be awarded by Area Committees. If there is approval to move to Area Forums, then there are two options a) the Forums consider and recommend to the Executive Member (currently Community Engagement), or b) these are considered by the District Wide Community Facilities Grants Panel, who recommend to the Executive Member.

Meeting times/ numbers of meetings

- 7.11 In terms of meeting start times, those who were Councillors in 2020, will recall that as part of the Local Government Associations ('LGA') Peer Review of 2020, two specific Committees (Overview & Scrutiny and Planning Control Committee) were considered and the LGA Peers recommended that meetings should not be starting as late as 19:30; that

⁴ As per the then QCs advice Mr Peter Oldham – QC instructed in Hertfordshire County Council, Lawyers in Local Government and the Association of Democratic Services Officers (et al) -v- Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government [2021] EWHC1093 & Supplementary [2021] EWHC 1145 (Admin).

⁵ Hertfordshire County Council (above).

⁶ Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020

people are tired, late meetings did not make good decisions and that meetings should be brought forward rather than later:

“...There was a concern around individual personal effectiveness, accessibility, external public perception and health & safety / personal welfare of both members and officers from such excessively long and late meetings. Rather than late meetings, it was noted that working members at another council have chosen to bring meeting start-times forward to 5.20 p.m. to fit in with their professional commitments. Combined with good agenda-planning and an effective forward work-plan, this will avoid excessively late finishes.’

“Consider starting meetings earlier. Members and officers are not performing at their best at late night meetings after a full day’s work and there is an increased risk of challenge from applicants if it was perceived that an application had been rushed because of a long meeting.”

- 7.12 These were considered at the time and the above (and potential cut off times for meetings called a ‘guillotine’), however, they were not taken forward. Subsequently, however, meeting numbers have increased as indicated above and other issues, such as ways to engage and resources have come to the forefront.

Panels

- 7.13 Cabinet Panels were originally established following a Constitutional review in 2019/20 (which was informed by a Member/ officer working Group). In the report of 16 January 2020, it was identified that these could have workload impacts, and this would have to be carefully managed (as these involve several departments and officers). Having consulted the Leader and Deputy (and in the light of the feedback from Members in Appendix B), the most effective one appears to be the Cabinet Panel on Environment. Therefore, the decision to note is that this is the only Panel to be taken forward from May 2023 (see legal implications for the reason why this is to note).

Recommendation 2.5 - Appendix A

Section 8.2.3 Licensing & Regulation Committee -number of meetings

- 7.14 This concerns the number of meetings – currently it is stated that there shall be ‘at least two’.

Section 10 - Council Tax setting

- 7.15 This concerns the need or requirement to have a Council Tax Setting Committee decision on Council tax considered after Full Council as part of the Budget setting process.

Section 14 Proper Officer functions - Deputy Electoral Registration Officer (‘ERO’)

- 7.16 Currently the Council has one Deputy ERO (the Service Director: Legal & Community), to the ERO (the Democratic Services Manager). The Electoral Commission guidance⁷ is that the Council should ensure that it approves the appointment of one or more Deputy EROs who can carry out the duties and powers of the ERO if they are unable to act personally. Duties have recently increased due to the requirements of the Elections Act 2022; therefore, such an additional appointment has been requested.

⁷[what-resources-do-electoral-registration-officers-need-carry-out-their-role](#)

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1. The main proposed changes are detailed below. Members should note that the proposals are not linked – and should be considered separately. *There is no recommendation on daytime meetings*, although the Membership are aware that some formal meetings do currently take place during the day (Joint Staff Consultative Committee, and ad hoc regulatory and Cabinet Sub-Committee meetings).

Recommendation 2.1

Section 9 Area Committees to become informal Area Forums

- 8.2. Following consultation with Group Leaders and the Membership as a whole, the majority of those that responded to the consultation said that they were in favour of Area Committees becoming more informal Forums (31 cross party), although additionally there were those who said no, but were in favour of abolishing the Area Committees.
- 8.3. The proposal looks to replace the Area Committees with Forums, which can act in the same informal way as Town Talks. These Forums would be much more ‘People Focused’ engagement events. They would not have to observe the rigidity of the formal Committees meetings and there would be more opportunity to react to the concerns raised from the community. Councillors within the area could choose which concerns they take forward, invite presenters on specific topics and invite representatives from partners and outside organisations such as the Police to present local crime figures. The public could ask questions and this proposal presents the opportunity to create a dynamic and interesting format that the public would be more likely to, and comfortable attending.
- 8.4. It would allow meetings to be arranged at the agreed general time [currently 7.30 pm subject to the vote on recommendation 2.3]. The terms of reference would be largely very similar (albeit more flexible). The makeup of these Forums would be the same (local District Councillors for the area concerned), with an elected Chair and Vice. Meetings could be hybrid, or in person only; however, *Members should note that if so, then the DCO is the only venue that has the IT equipment to support live streaming of any meetings*. There is no additional budget for venues or hiring of equipment for hybrid meetings elsewhere, which can cost [£100-300 per meeting]. However, there is a fixed budget that could be more flexibly applied by the Community & Partnership team, who would be able to consider how best to / on occasion facilitate events within the local community at an accessible community venue to encourage participation on specific topics.
- 8.5. This would remove 20 formal meetings from the calendar of meetings. The Forum terms of reference would be finalised by the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Leader and Deputy after this Council meeting and before the election, as it is proposed that these are implemented from the post Annual Council cycle of meeting for 2023/24. These arrangements will be reviewed as part of the 2024 Working Group.

Recommendation 2.2

Grants – considered by an Area Forum or the central grants Panel

- 8.6. As things stand, community grant applications are either considered by the Area Committees, in between meetings by the Executive Member or the District Wide Grants Panel (District Wide Community Facilities Capital & Revenue Grants Panel –“the Grants Panel”), with referrals to the Executive Member for approval (as this is an Executive Function). The base budget for all the Area Committee grants is £41,700 (split Letchworth

£11,000; Hitchin £11,000; Royston & District £6,000; Southern Rural £8,700; and Baldock £5,000)

- 8.7. If the Area Committees become Forums, then there is a decision as to whether area grants are considered by the Forums or by the Grant Panel.
- 8.8. The Grants Panel originally considered capital applications, then a district revenue pot and also allocated various covid-related / community-based grants over the last few years. This Panel effectively undertakes the pre-Executive decision consideration prior to any Executive Member decision to make the grants, therefore would be a practiced body to consider all grant applications, be they local or District wide. Meeting start times vary (start times 1630-1900) and are real-time virtual ones. If the Grants Panel takes on the previous Area Committee grants, the number of meetings would be 4-5 per year and it would prevent applicants making unnecessary duplicated or similar local area applications. It would reduce the administrative burden for any applicant that wishes to make cross area applications and for the Community & Partnership staff.
- 8.9. The Grants Panel Membership can be made up of the Area Forum Chairs and Vice Chairs (total 10), to ensure Area representation. This would require minor revision to the Terms of Reference currently in place. If the decision is for the grants to go to the Grants Panel, any amendments needed to the Panel terms will be undertaken in consultation with the Leader and Deputy.
- 8.10. If the grant applications went to the Forums, then this would require reports (currently 20 per year) and some presentation to the Forum by the applicants. The applications would be later in the evening and whilst the presentations by applicants could be remote (where the Forum meeting was hybrid or virtual), it would negate the flexibility of the Forum ideal.
- 8.11. The officers' preference (for the budget size, administrative and organisational reasons as indicated above) is for these to be considered by the Grants Panel, and the recommendation is that the Grants Panel should consider the applications. Most Members in the survey appeared, however, to support grants being considered by the Forums. It is nevertheless, in this instance, proposed that this is centralised and at least trialled until the review for 2024/25, and this could revert to the Area Forum after that review, if it was felt that this approach was not working locally.
- 8.12. ***This consideration will only apply if the decision is to go to Area Forums.*** If the vote is in favour of Forums, and there is then the rejection of recommendation 2.2, ***then the default for the Forum's terms of reference will be that Area Forums will consider the grant applications.***

Recommendation 2.3

Earlier meetings

- 8.13. Members will note the recommendations of the earlier LGA Peer review and those from the survey result indicated that 22 of those who responded would be prepared to accept an earlier meeting. Whilst the Members names have not been included, this was cross party and those from varying working backgrounds. A slightly earlier meeting of 19:00 would correspond to most of the other Councils in Hertfordshire and if necessary, could be trialled until the review of the arrangements which would start in or around July 2024.

Recommendation 2.4

Panels

- 8.14. Nothing further to add to paragraph 7.

Recommendation 2.5 Appendix A

Section 8.2.3 – Licensing & Regulation Committee

- 8.15. Historically one meeting was schedule, which was increased to ‘at least two’ on or about 2019. This second meeting has not been required and is therefore cancelled due to lack of business. Any additional business meeting could be arranged in consultation with the Chair and therefore it is proposed to reduce this down to one, once again.

Council tax setting section 10

- 8.16. As the Council meeting that sets the District budget has moved to late February, it is now possible for that meeting to also set the overall Council Tax (as it takes place after the County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner) have set their precepts. There are two options, one is that the Council Tax Setting Committee takes the decision on setting the overall Council Tax, *unless the decision can be taken by a meeting of Full Council*. The second option set out is that that Council will always set Council Tax and narrow what Council Tax setting Committee will do. The proposal is the former, however, in the event that the Membership proposed that the latter is considered then that will be the one that is put to the vote. Proposed alternative wording is set out in **Appendix A**.

Section 14 Proper Officer/ Deputy ERO function

- 8.17. As indicated above, the Council should ensure they have sufficient Deputy EROs to undertake duties. The new Elections Act 2022 has increased the requirements and obligations on the ERO (for example in relation to voter ID and overseas voters). Any Deputies appointed should have the skills and knowledge required to carry out the functions that they have been assigned. The proposal is to appoint the Electoral Services Manager as another Deputy ERO.
- 8.18. Unlike Returning Officers, the ERO cannot appoint a deputy themselves, unless according to the Electoral Commission, this has been delegated to the ERO, or in their absence or vacancy this can be undertaken by the Proper Officer who appointed the ERO (i.e. the Service Director Legal & Community). No such delegation to the ERO is currently in place, therefore in addition to the appointment of the Electoral Services Manager, and the delegation to appoint any further (appropriately qualified) Deputy EROs is sought. Such a delegation would align with the Returning Officer (‘RO’)s current statutory ability to appoint Deputy ROs and provides for greater flexibility.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

General

- 9.1. Full Council’s terms of reference include “approving or adopting the Policy Framework”. The Policy Framework includes the Constitution.
- 9.2. Section 37 Local Government Act 2000 requires the Council to have in place a Constitution and to keep that under review. The Local Government Act 2000 section 9P sets out the requirements of a local authority’s Constitution, including the requirements to prepare it and keep it up to date and the requirement to make it available for public inspection.

Committees/ grants/ Panels

- 9.3. In respect of formal Committees, legal requirements apply under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972, in respect of arranging and holding of meetings (summons to such a meeting, set time and place, agenda/ reports and availability of such reports).
- 9.4. A local authority cannot hold such meetings in a hybrid or virtual form as confirmed by the Judicial Review case (*Hertfordshire County Council, Lawyers in Local Government and the Association of Democratic Services Officers (et al) -v- Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government [2021] EWHC1093 & Supplementary [2021] EWHC 1145 (Admin)*). Further advice was then obtained from the then QC involved in the case (Peter Oldham) and the advice was that Members and the public would need to attend in person if they wished to ‘participate’, i.e. both would need to be physically present at the Committee to do so.
- 9.5. Decision making is reserved to formal Committees/ Full Council and Cabinet, other informal bodies can act as consideration and recommendation stages. Decisions on Grants are executive functions and can be taken by the Executive (Leader, Executive Member or Cabinet), Area Committees or by Officer. Such decisions cannot be taken by informal bodies, as per the provisions of section 9E Local Government Act 2000 (‘Discharge of functions: general).
- 9.6. Cabinet Panels are executive non decision making in nature and therefore a decision on discharge of any such related function falls to the Leader, as per 9E above.

ERO

- 9.7. Section 52 Representation of the People Act 1983 — Discharge of registration duties, provides
- (2) Any of the duties and powers of a registration officer may be performed and exercised by any deputy for the time being approved [...]³, by the council which appointed the registration officer, and the provisions of this Act apply to any such deputy so far as respects any duties or powers to be performed or exercised by him as they apply to the registration officer.*
- (3) In England and Wales, any acts authorised or required to be done by or with respect to the registration officer may, in the event of his incapacity to act or of a vacancy, be done by [or with respect to]⁴ the proper officer of the council by whom the registration officer was appointed.*
- (4) It shall be the duty—*
- (a) in England, of a district council or London borough council,...*
to assign such officers to assist the registration officer as may be required for carrying out his functions under this Act.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are currently hire costs for 3 venues for the Area Committees of circa £3.5K per annum. This could be applied more flexibly for engagement of the public in Area Forums, where the meetings are undertaken virtually / hybrid / in person fashion mixed topics approach.
- 10.2 Staff that attend evening meeting can apply for a fixed payment and Committee staff / or those dealing with IT related matters, are paid overtime. A reduction in staff involved in the formal meetings would lead to a reduction of such payments (estimate at circa £2K).

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. Ensuring the Council has appropriate governance arrangements in place is an important risk mitigation measure. The Council's Constitution is a fundamental part of those governance arrangements.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. Otherwise, no specific equality issues identified.
- 12.2 Area Forums will be able to meet in person, hybrid or virtually although in the first two instances if these are to be live streamed/ YouTube'd these will have to be held in the DCO Council chamber. Informal meetings will be of benefit for those who face difficulties accessing venues / unwilling or unable to access transport.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 The Social Value Act and "go local" requirements do not apply to this decision as this is not a procurement exercise or contract.

14. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 Formal staff Consultation was undertaken on proposed changes to Area Committee start times (to make these later) in September – October 2022. It had been informally proposed by some Members that these Committees start later in the evening (20:00 or 20:30). All staff (and Eastern Unison representations) rejected the proposal, and having discussed this with the Leader and Deputy Leader, no further action was taken. In the light of the strong and unanimous response received there is no recommendation for change by Members to later meetings.
- 14.2 One of the proposals during the above consultation, from the then Community Engagement team (now **Community & Partnerships**) was for the Area Committees to become Forums, which would allow for more flexibility, and they could be arranged and run by that team, rather than two teams being involved. The Committee Services team were in favour of this proposal as part of the consultation. Note that a comment was made in Appendix B relating to the officer commitment to engagement/ team and the reorganisation recently. Prior to the February 2023 reorganisation there was a Team Leader and three officers and there will now be a Team Leader with four Community & Partnerships officers – so the resource has in fact been expanded to provide an overall team approach across the District.
- 14.3 Committee Services currently arrange and support the Area Committees with the Community & Partnership team. The former has suffered severe recruitment and retention issues since 2019, never being fully staffed. This year there will continue to be issues with staffing / outstanding post covid leave / and use of staffing for the preparation of the elections in 2024 (which the Committee Services team have traditionally assisted with). As part of the consultation responses and exit interviews with those leaving, the lateness of meeting times was cited as one of the reasons that staff did not wish to continue. The

proposals would reduce the formal meetings down by at least 20, which even with that and Panel reduction would bring the Council in better alignment with the other District/ Borough Councils in section 7.5. A slightly earlier meeting time would also assist with staff welfare and wellbeing and align more effectively with other Councils.

15. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 Informal meetings allow for a more flexible approach and virtual / hybrid meetings support the Council's green agenda and declared Climate Change emergency.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 Appendix A – schedule of proposed changes.
- 16.2 Appendix B – Member survey results.

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 17.1 Constitution & Panels see webpage <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/council-constitution>

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Proposed Constitutional Changes

Appendix A

Area/ issue and who raised	Current Constitution Reference	Proposed Changes/ Reason
Section 8		
<p>Section 8.2.3 Licensing & Regulation Committee -number of meetings</p> <p>Raised by Licensing and Community Safety Manager</p>	<p>8.2.3 Meetings There shall be at least two (2) regular meeting of the Committee per year:-</p>	<p><u>Proposed wording:</u> 8.2.3 Meetings There shall be at least one (1) regular meeting of the Committee per year:-</p> <p>Reason To meet current business requirements of the Committee.</p>
Section 10		
<p>Council Tax Setting Committee</p> <p>Raised by Service Director: Resources</p> <p>PLEASE NOTE ALTERNATIVE PROPOSALS – Option A put forward, unless Members propose Option B and that will be put to the vote.</p>	<p>10.2.1 Terms of Reference The Council will appoint one Council Tax Setting Committee for the purpose of setting the Council Tax Base and the Council Tax. The Committee will have the responsibilities as set below. (a) Set the Council Tax Base in accordance with the Local Authority (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 2012; (b) Set the Council Tax in accordance with Chapter III & IV of the Local Government Finance Act 1992; (c) Approve the non-domestic rating income (NNDR1) Return. 10.2.5 Proceedings of the Council Tax Setting Committee. There shall be a minimum of two regular meetings of the Committee in each year. In addition, extraordinary meetings may be called from time to time, as and when</p>	<p>Proposed wording option A: 10.2.1 Terms of Reference The Council will appoint one Council Tax Setting Committee for the purpose of setting the Council Tax Base and the Council Tax <u>unless the decision can be taken by a meeting of Full Council</u>. The Committee will have the responsibilities as set below, <u>where required</u> (a) Set the Council Tax Base in accordance with the Local Authority (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 2012; (b) Set the Council Tax in accordance with Chapter III & IV of the Local Government Finance Act 1992; (c) Approve the non-domestic rating income (NNDR1) Return. 10.2.5 Proceedings of the Council Tax Setting Committee.</p>

Area/ issue and who raised	Current Constitution Reference	Proposed Changes/ Reason
	<p>appropriate. An extraordinary meeting may be called by the Chair of the Committee or by the Proper Officer if they consider it is necessary or appropriate.</p>	<p><i>There shall be a minimum of two usually be one (1) regular meetings of the Committee in each year. In addition, extraordinary meetings may be called from time to time, as and when appropriate. An extraordinary meeting may be called by the Chair of the Committee or by the Proper Officer if they consider it is necessary or appropriate.</i></p> <p><u>OR Alternative Proposed wording option B</u></p> <p>10.2.5 Proceedings of the Council Tax Setting Committee. <i>There shall be a minimum of two usually be one (1) regular meetings of the Committee in each year. In addition, extraordinary meetings may be called from time to time, as and when appropriate. An extraordinary meeting may be called by the Chair of the Committee or by the Proper Officer if they consider it is necessary or appropriate.</i></p> <p>10.2.2 Specific Functions <i>The functions of the Council Tax Setting Committee are to set the Council Tax Base and to set the overall level of Council Tax for the following financial year taking into account the precepts of all Major and Local Precepting Authorities. The Committee also approves the information</i></p>

Area/ issue and who raised	Current Constitution Reference	Proposed Changes/ Reason
		<p><i>submitted to the Government about non-domestic rate income, as required by the NNDR1 form.</i></p> <p><i>10.2.3 Membership</i> <i>No more than five members shall be appointed to the Council Tax Setting Committee. The Chair shall be appointed at the annual meeting of the Council.</i></p> <p><i>10.2.4 Quorum</i> <i>The Quorum for a meeting of the Council Tax Setting Committee shall be three voting members of that Committee.</i></p> <p><i>10.2.5 Proceedings of the Council Tax Setting Committee.</i> <i>There shall be a minimum of two usually be one regular meetings of the Committee in each year. In addition, extraordinary meetings may be called from time to time, as and when appropriate. An extraordinary meeting may be called by the Chair of the Committee or by the Proper Officer if they consider it is necessary or appropriate.</i></p>
Section 14		
Proper Officer functions - Deputy Electoral Registration Officer ('ERO')	S.9 Registration Officer Democratic Services Manager /Service Director: Legal & Community	<p>Proposed new wording: <i>Ability under s52(2)&(3) to appoint a further Deputy or in the temporary absence or</i></p>

Proposed Constitutional Changes

Appendix A

Area/ issue and who raised	Current Constitution Reference	Proposed Changes/ Reason
		<i>vacancy an appropriately qualified ERO or Deputy ERO.</i>
	-	<i>New line:</i> <i>Deputy Registration Officer</i> <i>Electoral Services Manager</i>

Would you be content for virtual / hybrid Area Forums, instead of Area Committees?	If you are happy with the idea of Area Forums, would you like grant applications to go to Area Forum meetings (virtually) and make recommendations on these to the Executive Member, or for these to a central panel?	Would you be happy for any Committee or Council meeting to start earlier, and if so:	Could any meeting start in the daytime	If yes, which meetings would you be happy to start in the daytime?	Do you have any other suggestions regarding meetings / removal of any Committees or arrangement you believe we can provide in a different and or more community engaging or efficient way?
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1	No	Grants to still go to Area Forum	6:00pm;	Yes	Licensing, FARC	I do not believe that remote meetings help community engagement, in fact if anything, the opposite. We need to find ways of meeting members of the community face to face with something useful to discuss. Councillors' surgeries seem to achieve this and could provide some discussion points.
2	Yes	Grants to still go to Area Forum	No;	No		My concern about earlier meeting times is that it could limit the choice of members to those who are available in the daytime - not full time workers or those with child care commitments. I think that it is important that we have members from diverse backgrounds and age groups. Have we looked at the makeup of these committees?
3	Yes	Grants to still go to Area Forum	7:00pm;	No		<p>I'm a 'younger' Councillor with a full time job, I work proactively to recruit more and more diverse Candidates, and am on the 'more active' and 'more willing' side when it comes to proactively supporting group business from the back bench. I find these recommendations somewhat demoralising as my hope as a new Councillor, motivated to become a councillor, and be content as a backbencher, was because of local community engagement. My hope was that my future contributions could be part of reinvigorating our community engagement, to make the surgeries, committee meetings, town talks more of a success. This feels like a death by a thousand cuts as I understand the presence of town in district council life has been whittled away continuously.</p> <p>Pros:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Merging the Committee Meetings and Town Talks makes sense. You could arrange the agenda so the more procedural business proceeds/succeeds the town talk aspect. 2. Moving to a forum model also strongly appeals if it retains what powers the Area Committees have left and enables the agenda to be more dynamic, engaging and relevant to our residents. Enabling hybrid meetings is fantastic. 3. Reducing unnecessary procedure/bureaucracy always a win. <p>Cons:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Bringing more meetings into the day reduces the opportunities for full-time employed members and particularly those with London commutes. Any of the proposals should have an equalities review. A number of our active members, and active bank benchers, are full timers, new/newer, and will be looking for opportunities to deepen their practice as Councillors through committee roles, leadership opportunities etc. This will further privilege part time and retirees participation. 5. In particular, if we're merging Town Talks with Committee meetings, I do think they need to be hybrid not virtual. Otherwise we're structurally excluding our older residents. I appreciate uptake is low...but there's a

Would you be content for virtual / hybrid Area Forums, instead of Area Committees?	If you are happy with the idea of Area Forums, would you like grant applications to go to Area Forum meetings (virtually) and make recommendations on these to the Executive Member, or for these to a central panel?	Would you be happy for any Committee or Council meeting to start earlier, and if so:	Could any meeting start in the daytime	If yes, which meetings would you be happy to start in the daytime?	Do you have any other suggestions regarding meetings / removal of any Committees or arrangement you believe we can provide in a different and or more community engaging or efficient way?
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					democratic deficit there. 6. Town often feels missing, the powers of the area committees - I understand have been reduced. For residents, much of their affinity is with town, the District is purely administrative. Where is the forum for that?
4	No	Grants to still go to Area Forum	6:00pm;	No	The changing of meetings to daytimes means that becoming a Cllr is less likely for the majority of working age people. To engage the community more perhaps moving area committees to weekend. But definitely taking them outside the council chamber and into the community.
5	No	Grants to go to a district panel, which has all the Area Forum Chairs as members	No;	No	Personally, I would abolish area committees as they serve little purpose other than to approve grants and therefore I support the idea that this responsibility could be discharged via a District wide Grants Committee. Whilst I acknowledge the differences proposed between an Area Committee and an Area Forum I don't believe this would improve engagement between Members of the Public and the Council and therefore I'm not supportive of this proposal. I know the Council holds a "pop-up Surgery" every month in Town Centres. This type of engagement is visible and accessible to residents as well as being informal when compared to a meeting, and therefore I feel we should look to build on this idea. In Rural Area's, the Council should think about strengthening relationships with Parish Council's. In Kimpton, Parish Council meetings are better attended than the Southern Rural Committee and is a forum for discussion and debate on a variety of local issues. The briefing we receive from the Constabulary during the area committee is very helpful however, we could invite them to present and take questions from Members at a Meeting of Full Council. Whilst I would be open having a discussion about moving the start time of meetings to 19:00, I'm against moving Statutory Committee meetings from an evening to during the day as for those Members who work Full Time this would be inconvenient.
6	Yes	Grants to still go to Area Forum	No;	No	Whilst I understand that we need an Audit Committee I really do not see why we need the other functions of Finance Audit and Risk.
7	Yes	Grants to still go to Area Forum	6:30pm;6:00pm;7:00pm;	Yes	Any - providing it doesn't disadvantage any member from attending I do appreciate the difficulties which all organisations have of encouraging greater and more diverse public participation particularly with the demands on peoples time and availability. All we can do is to continue to be as responsive and accommodating as possible to changed circumstances.
8	Yes	Grants to still go to Area Forum	6:30pm;7:00pm;	No	Ability to use a budget for larger hall/room bookings across an area to make meetings more accessible in person.

Would you be content for virtual / hybrid Area Forums, instead of Area Committees?	If you are happy with the idea of Area Forums, would you like grant applications to go to Area Forum meetings (virtually) and make recommendations on these to the Executive Member, or for these to a central panel?	Would you be happy for any Committee or Council meeting to start earlier, and if so:	Could any meeting start in the daytime	If yes, which meetings would you be happy to start in the daytime?	Do you have any other suggestions regarding meetings / removal of any Committees or arrangement you believe we can provide in a different and or more community engaging or efficient way?
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9	Yes	Grants to still go to Area Forum	No;	Yes	The above mentioned ones. Anything in which we are trying to engage the public needs to be done in evenings. This includes Full Council, Panels, Cabinet and Planning.	No
10	Yes	Grants to go to a district panel, which has all the Area Forum Chairs as members	7:00pm;	Yes	Standards, licensing, any committee which meets infrequently and working members could realistically use flexible hours to facilitate. Avoid school run times.	Area Forums at Chairs' discretion should be able to meet in person from time to time when this is felt to be of benefit for effective engagement.

Would you be content for virtual / hybrid Area Forums, instead of Area Committees?	If you are happy with the idea of Area Forums, would you like grant applications to go to Area Forum meetings (virtually) and make recommendations on these to the Executive Member, or for these to a central panel?	Would you be happy for any Committee or Council meeting to start earlier, and if so:	Could any meeting start in the daytime	If yes, which meetings would you be happy to start in the daytime?	Do you have any other suggestions regarding meetings / removal of any Committees or arrangement you believe we can provide in a different and or more community engaging or efficient way?
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11	Yes	Grants to go to a district panel, which has all the Area Forum Chairs as members	7:00pm;	No		<p>Town talks are an idea but can get hijacked by one issue visitors, which would require managing. Never been to Hitchin TT, but when we tried it in Letchworth as an area committee it failed because no one was bothered or had heard and when we had one with visitors it was on one issue alone and they left after voicing their opinion.</p> <p>Stop the need for getting a sub in advance. There are times when a member is delayed/unable to make it at short notice and I cannot see why it is essential to give advanced warning.</p> <p>If there are decisions to be taken you must have politically balanced meetings.</p> <p>Disagree that there is little time to interact when not in person. If they are registered to talk, they can interact. Which leads me on to time limits for speeches. This must be abolished and the sense of the chair person used. Time limits must be a guide. There is no worse way to make a visitor feel like they are being ignored, uncared for etc, when you shut them off after 5 minutes or sometimes less (but then give councillors and advocates longer as well).</p> <p>You can't start any earlier. I for one and I know others work 9 to 5 ish and a start at 6 would tend for me anyway to be worse than a late night. I don't think we are too late most of the time apart from planning. The best idea is coming now (even though I say so myself) put all Councillors on planning and rotate on a fortnightly basis. Two meetings a month with group A, B, C etc and we take it in turns. Put less on the agenda and give people time to discuss and voice concerns/opinions etc. The obvious downside is officer time, but if they can be rotated and virtual, that's a little help for them.</p>
12	Yes	Grants to still go to Area Forum	7:00pm;	No		Not currently.

Would you be content for virtual / hybrid Area Forums, instead of Area Committees?	If you are happy with the idea of Area Forums, would you like grant applications to go to Area Forum meetings (virtually) and make recommendations on these to the Executive Member, or for these to a central panel?	Would you be happy for any Committee or Council meeting to start earlier, and if so:	Could any meeting start in the daytime	If yes, which meetings would you be happy to start in the daytime?	Do you have any other suggestions regarding meetings / removal of any Committees or arrangement you believe we can provide in a different and or more community engaging or efficient way?
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13	No	Grants to go to a district panel, which has all the Area Forum Chairs as members	7:00pm;	Yes	Only licensing subcommittees, which is what happens at the moment. The reason being that there are normally members of the public, Police, legal representatives. officers and members. Also, these meetings can take several hours and it would not be practical for them to start in the evening. This should not change.	I do not have a problem with abolishing area committees. I sit on the cabinet panel on the environment. I do not think it serves any purpose. It's just a talking shop for a few of the two or three usual members of the public. It has no power. It does not really engage with the public. Other the members of the public did initially attend and subsequently lost interest. I guess they are all a waste of members and officers time and money.
14	Yes	Grants to still go to Area Forum	No;	Yes	Standards and Licensing are infrequent and could therefore be held in the daytime	We could rationalise the Cabinet Panels!
15	No	Grants to go to a district panel, which has all the Area Forum Chairs as members	No;	Yes	FAR, O & S	The newly formed Cabinet Panels are superfluous as they have no decision making powers at all.

Would you be content for virtual / hybrid Area Forums, instead of Area Committees?	If you are happy with the idea of Area Forums, would you like grant applications to go to Area Forum meetings (virtually) and make recommendations on these to the Executive Member, or for these to a central panel?	Would you be happy for any Committee or Council meeting to start earlier, and if so:	Could any meeting start in the daytime	If yes, which meetings would you be happy to start in the daytime?	Do you have any other suggestions regarding meetings / removal of any Committees or arrangement you believe we can provide in a different and or more community engaging or efficient way?
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16	Yes	Grants to go to a district panel, which has all the Area Forum Chairs as members	7:00pm;	Yes	Licensing but this relies on having members who are available during the day. FAR is the subject of the peer review and could be revamped so it is just audit so could be a day time meeting or early evening say 5 start but again depends on members availability Standards should be evening	Get rid of the panels - should have task and finish groups or review groups that look into a topic and end up with actions that are achievable for the Council to implement rather than just talking and thanking those who attended for coming . Area committees to be replaced by single grants Committee meets twice in civic year - Sept and March. Area Committees to be replaced by a 2 forums - North and south . 5 Area committees is just too many to resource.
17	No	Grants to still go to Area Forum	No;	No		if we wish to be inclusive and maximise our pool of potential Councillors we need to avoid daytime meeting and those sufficiently early in the evening to deter working members. To be most effective, Area Committees have to be a genuine community activity and attract as wide a range of attendees as possible. I am not convinced that moving on-line does that. Whilst it may make access easier for some sections of our community it will deter other. A concerted and imaginative effort to promote knowledge of Area Committees and encourage attendance would be welcome. I suspect we would be horrified if we knew few members of the community are aware of their existence. [Question 3 above needs to be struck out since it is loaded - if you answer 'no' to Q2 you should not be required to answer Q3.]
18	No	Grants to still go to Area Forum	No;	Yes	Licensing Sub-Committee	Area Committees and Town Talks should start slightly later to accommodate residents returning from work.
19	No	Grants to still go to Area Forum	7:00pm;	Yes	Licensing & Regulatory	No

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20	Yes	Grants to still go to Area Forum	No;	No	Flexible area forums are a good idea. Hybrid meetings are also a good solution but I realise government legislation does not allow this.
21	Yes	Grants to still go to Area Forum	No;	Yes	That would vary for me as I work full time but can adjust my working day if enough notice
22	Yes	Grants to still go to Area Forum	No;	No	Area forums - good idea, should be in person or hybrid.
23	Yes	Grants to go to a district panel, which has all the Area Forum Chairs as members	7:00pm;	Yes	Standards and licensing
24	Yes	Grants to still go to Area Forum	7:00pm;	No	Combining the Area Committee and Town Talk is a good idea and ensures consistency - there needs to be a mechanism for deciding the focus which will engage residents, I think a lot of that will be trial and error. It also shouldn't duplicate discussion that happens at other council meetings e.g. the cabinet panels. Any changes to start times should be trialled. There are pros and cons to bringing the meeting times earlier in the day. I can see benefit in starting at 7pm and seeing how that works.
25	Yes	Grants to go to a district panel, which has all the Area Forum Chairs as members	No;	Yes	Whichever have members with no daytime commitments
26	Yes	Grants to still go to Area Forum	7:00pm;	Yes	Licensing & Regulatory
27	Yes	Grants to go to a district panel, which has all the Area Forum Chairs as members	6:00pm;6:30pm;	No	Any topics/areas of interest to be shared via social media and to hold special in forum meetings but generally virtual. This still makes it inclusive to those who would prefer to attend face to face.
28	Yes	Grants to still go to Area Forum	7:00pm;	No	Have community groups "own" the agenda of one meeting a year
29	Yes	Grants to still go to Area Forum	No;	No	No

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30	Yes	Grants to go to a district panel, which has all the Area Forum Chairs as members	No;	No		<p>For me, I feel that meetings starting during the day preclude Councillors in full time employment taking part in those meetings. This is unfortunately not very democratic and lowers the talent pool of people able to attend committees. This would also make a number of Councillors who are of working age disengage from the processes at the Council or prevent them for running to stand on the Council.</p> <p>I actually feel that holding area panels in a less formal setting is a good idea, with recommendations going to a central body to vote on, as long as the area panels views are always agreed with. problem with this however is you may find some area panels over ruled by Councillors who do not represent those areas.</p> <p>Community engagement is clearly an issue at North Herts, [officer] was doing a fantastic job but his post being removed seems counter productive to the aims of this survey. The only way you are going to have genuine community engagement is vitally important you bring the community to be involved in decision making processes.</p> <p>As an example, North Herts recently allocated £18,000 to help Royston Town centre, but no information was given to the public. I discussed it at Royston Town Council but the public's ideas would have been really useful on this. this wasn't possible with such a short turn around time. although the Town Council will certainly be able to do more next year.</p> <p>With the budget now set for next year, perhaps we could see a steer from the Council on what funds are being spent in each area, to ask residents if this is a good use of tax payers cash or not and actually allow people to put in bids for certain projects / ideas that will help areas other than Hitchin.</p>
31	Yes	Grants to still go to Area Forum	No;	No		Other than going virtual, I believe the committee system is fit for purpose.
32	Yes	Grants to still go to Area Forum	No;	Yes	FARC.	<p>Could Full Council have an informal element to allow public to engage remotely?</p> <p>Earlier meeting starts is a major issue for those who commute, especially with the very unreliable rail service.</p>
33	Yes	Grants to go to a district panel, which has all the Area Forum Chairs as members	6:00pm;	No		<p>Area committees going on tour. Environment panel to go to some places. Understand that there is virtually zero carbon emissions being on Zoom. Would like to see some changes with not all meetings being on Zoom or in the Council Chambers.</p>
34	Yes	Grants still to go to Area Forum	No;	No		No
35	Yes	Grants still to go to Area Forum	7pm	Yes	Down to availability	No

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36	No	Grants to go to area committees	No;	Yes	Licensing & Regulatory; Standards Committee	More town talks with area committees (don't have to be on the same night). No issue with virtual meetings, but restricted by law & regulations. Wouldn't have a problem with virtual area committees but we aren't allowed to do that. Area committees should look at Grant requests, but smaller numbers go to a local committee.
37	Yes	Grants to go to a district panel, which has all the Area Forum Chairs as members	No;	No		The ability to join all meetings via Zoom if on holiday.
38	No	Grants still to go to Area Forum	7pm	No		Some of the Panels are just talking shops.
39	Yes	Grants still to go to Area Forum	6pm onwards	No		Holding meetings in the local areas - to get the public to attend more.
40	Yes	Grants still to go to Area Forum	6:30pm onwards	No		Area Committees work and local people attend. If move to virtual would still like occasional in person meetings.
41	No	Grants still to go to Area Forum	No;	No		Keep Area Committees, don't start meetings earlier than 7:30pm as limiting to people who work. It would mean you can't stand as a District Councillor if you work, and it also limits people that come to speak at meetings.
42	No	Remain as is	7pm	No		Nothing
43	Yes	Grants still to go to Area Forum	No;	No	N/A	Panel discussions are less engaging for the community.
44	Yes	Via email	-	-	-	<p>My initial thought after reading this was regarding the public interaction and viewing. I am very confident that the public's knowledge of when these meetings take place is exceedingly low. They are poorly advertised (if at all) and so my first comments would be around how to increase communication regarding our meetings to the masses. I appreciate that they are readily and freely available on the NHC website, the amount of clicks needed to navigate to the list or meetings schedule is perhaps proving inhibitive. Is there any way we could get a report on hits to the specific page? Would it be worth having a short cut from the NHC home page or the landing page? Maybe the use of social media sites may prove of more value.</p> <p>I would also agree with you about attendance at grant meetings being the exception, although I would hardly say "well attended"</p> <p>Just FYI, in Baldock, we use Facebook to advertise the next Baldock Area Committee and Town Talks, along with posters we distribute ourselves. The attendance of which is very much dependant on the subject/s on the agenda. As an example, at a meeting we had jst before Christmas, we discussed a planning application for a homeless shelter in town. This created such interest that we had residents queuing out the door because the room was so full. So perhaps subject matter could be a factor in increasing attendance.</p>

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