

## NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### MINUTES

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

**PRESENT:** Councillors: Daniel Allen (Chair), Chris Lucas (Vice-Chair), Ian Albert, Amy Allen, David Barnard, Matt Barnes, Clare Billing, Simon Bloxham, Ruth Brown, Val Bryant, Sam Collins, Mick Debenham, Elizabeth Dennis, James Denselow, Dominic Griffiths, Terry Hone, Keith Hoskins, Steve Jarvis, David Levett, Ian Mantle, Nigel Mason, Bryony May, Ian Moody, Gerald Morris, Ralph Muncer, Michael Muir, Lisa Nash, Sean Nolan, Louise Peace, Sean Prendergast, Claire Strong, Mandi Tandi, Richard Thake, Tamsin Thomas, Tom Tyson, Phil Weeder, Michael Weeks, Alistair Willoughby, Dave Winstanley and Daniel Wright-Mason

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), Susan Le Dain (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Tom Marsh (Electoral Services Manager), Callum Reeve (Democratic Services Apprentice), Anthony Roche (Managing Director), Jeanette Thompson (Service Director - Legal and Community) and Sjanel Wickenden (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)

**ALSO PRESENT:** There were no members of the public present.

#### 237 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

*Audio recording – 1 minute 39 seconds*

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Chris Hinchliff, Daniel Marsh, Terry Tyler, Cathy Brownjohn, Faye Frost, Tom Plate, Juan Cowell, Adam Compton and Raj Bhakar.

*N.B. Councillors Sean Prendergast and Chris Lucas entered the Council at 19.32*

#### 238 MINUTES - 28 SEPTEMBER 2023

*Audio Recording – 2 minutes 20 seconds*

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 28 September 2023 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

#### 239 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

*Audio recording – 3 minutes 14 seconds*

There was no other business notified.

#### 240 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

*Audio recording – 3 minutes 22 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 advised that the normal procedure rules in respect of debate and times to speak will apply.
- (5) The Chair advised that 4.8.23(a) of the Constitution did not apply to this meeting. A comfort break would be held at an appropriate time, should proceedings continue at length.
- (6) The Chair advised that tickets were now available to purchase for the Chair's Civic Event and Awards 2024, being held on Friday 1 March 2024.

## **241 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

*Audio recording – 6 minutes 0 seconds*

There was no public participation at this meeting.

## **242 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS**

*Audio recording – 6 minutes 7 seconds*

In accordance with Standing Order 4.8.11, one question had been submitted by the required deadline set out in the Constitution.

**(A) Health and Care Services in Royston**

***Councillor Matt Barnes to Councillor Elizabeth Dennis (Leader of the Council).***

“Following the Health and Care Act last year, NHS health and care services in Royston and surrounding villages have fallen under the remit of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Integrated Care System.

Please could the Leader update Members on the nature of any communications which have taken place between Council representatives and the Integrated Care Board – or the Integrated Care Partnership – since July 2022, on behalf of the residents of Royston?”

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis gave a response as follows:

“I think we have the bizarre situation that the alphabet soup end of whatever happens when the NHS is reorganised resulted in the anomaly of part of this district falling under a different integrated care system as a result of the way that care and commissioning works in that part of the NHS. So, I think firstly, it is important to note the reasons why Royston doesn't sit as part of the Hertfordshire and West Essex integrated care system. In terms of the specifics of the question, the Director for Housing and Environmental Health has been in communication

with the Chief Office Partnerships and Strategies of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough ICS and she is also aware that the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough ICS invited Herts and West Essex to work with them regarding the community engagement exercise that was carried out in Royston, which I know colleagues from across multiple parties have been really active on trying to encourage residents to engage with us to ensure that their voices and feedback are heard as part of the survey and focus groups which were run over the summer. These exercises will help inform a strategic fit document that will be produced by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough ICS, and we hope that will include an exercise around older adults and enhanced mental health and wellbeing support currently being funded actually by our Hertfordshire County Council's public health department. Colleagues will be aware of certain examples that have been funded via that part. For example, the men's health clubs that he been pioneered at Royston Leisure Centre. North Herts Council doesn't deliver any services directly from NHS own sites in Royston, but as I have indicated there is close working between health and care partners which does need to continue to ensure the high-quality services for residents across the district and just because Royston is not included within the Herts and West Essex's ICS doesn't mean that that body is falling to consider the needs of those residents either. In fact, at a meeting of the integrated care partnership this afternoon in Stevenage, I raised the point in respect of Royston with health colleagues and they are continuing to work jointly with colleagues in Cambridge and Peterborough. The Heartlands West Essex's ICB and ICS is significantly further ahead in terms of its development and strategy implementation than colleagues in Cambridge and Peterborough as well, so is ideally placed to help support the infrastructure that is over the border and I hope we can continue to work together to make sure that every single person in this district is supported and does have a voice when it comes down to their health".

Councillor Barnes asked a supplementary question, as follows:

"How will the Leader ensure that the views of Royston's residents will be listened to and their needs will be addressed?"

Councillor Dennis responded:

"I sit on the integrated care partnership and will continue to champion the needs of all residents in the Herts and West Essex space. As I said the Director of Housing and Environmental Health is also in communication with the Chief Officer at Cambridge and Peterborough as well, so we be continuing that ongoing work and continuing to lobby and ensure that people in Royston are represented. I think that all of us are acutely aware of the crisis in primary care within the NHS not just in this district, but across the entire country. I think there are things that this Council can continuing doing. I know that some Councillors in Royston have been working particularly hard around ensuring that certain NHS built assets like the Royston hospital are retained for public use and might potentially be utilised should the Cambridge and Peterborough ICS be minded to provide local primary services, such as a health hub, in the community and we all continue to work with our colleagues cross party and across all systems including the two ICSs covering the district and the county council to make sure that everybody is adequately represented. There are also creative things that we in local government are able to do to help support the health needs of our residents. Let's not forget that we are able to provide safe homes, active communities, opportunities for leisure and healthy activity. We already have healthy hub that we provide, I have referenced the men's club. There is outdoor gym that we have in place. So, this council is doing a considerable amount of work to support the health of all residents across the district, and we will keep on doing that".

## 243 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

*Audio recording – 12 minutes 57 seconds*

There were no motions received from Members for this meeting.

**244 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES**

*Audio recording – 13 minutes 5 seconds*

The Chair advised that the referral from Cabinet would be taken with the respective item on the agenda.

**245 REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS**

*Audio recording – 13 minutes 16 seconds*

The Electoral Services Manager presented the report 'Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations' and advised that:

- It was legal requirement for the Council to carry out a full review every five years.
- The Council needed to designate polling districts so all election types could be delivered.
- The review must account for boundary changes at both parliamentary and local elections.
- The review must be concluded in time for the publication of revised Register of Local Electors on 1 December 2023, to ensure there are functioning polling districts for the local elections in 2024 and the next General Election.
- The changes in the Elections Act 2022 had put extra pressure on the elections team.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor David Barnard
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Tamsin Thomas
- Councillor David Levett
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason

In response to questions, the Electoral Services Manager stated that:

- The elections team had consulted with Ward Councillors in Langley about the relocation of their polling station to a neighbouring parish.
- Interim reviews could be carried out in between the five-year review in a change of circumstance.
- Roughly 10% of the electorate of North Herts District would be impacted by polling station changes and these were mainly in urban areas, not rural.
- Polling cards would have the name and address of the new polling station clearly marked where there had been a change of location.
- The elections team would use social media and also the website for publicity of changes and they would also send SMS messages if the contact information was held for voters.
- The elections team would arrange for a notice to be put up on the door of an existing polling station ahead of an election, stating that it was no longer being used and providing details of the change of address.
- Consideration of residents with mobility needs had been taken in to account when decisions were made to change a polling station.
- Training would be provided to polling clerks and they would be able to assist voters who turn up at the wrong polling station.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Terry Hone
- Councillor Nigel Mason

Points raised in the debate included:

- The Willian Village Hall would be retained as the polling station for Willian.
- The change of polling station for Oughton Ward and Priory Ward in Hitchin was a good solution which was practical and would work well.
- This year would see lots of changes with new polling districts and new polling stations for many people, who were now able to vote for 2 or 3 candidates if they wished and also the introduction of the new voter ID requirement.
- Electoral Services would keep Members informed and would provide any support to Members if required.

Councillor Alistair Willoughby proposed and Councillor Ruth Brown seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That Council designated the Polling Districts and Polling Places as per the Returning Officer's Proposals attached as Appendix A to the submitted report, effective as of 1 December 2023.

**REASONS FOR DECISION:**

- (1) The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places. The next compulsory review was required to commence and conclude between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025 (inclusive).
- (2) However, as the Local Government Boundary Commission for England had implemented new district ward boundary arrangements for elections in May 2024, the Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations needed to reflect these new boundaries in the Register of Electors published annually on 1 December.

**246 CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT REPORT**

*Audio recording – 30 minutes 16 seconds*

The Chair advised that due to the large number of amendments received, which had not been notified to the whole Membership, he decided to defer this item to the next meeting of Full Council in January 2024.

**247 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2024-29**

*Audio recording – 33 minutes 38 seconds*

Councillor Ian Albert presented the referral from Cabinet and the report entitled 'Medium Term Financial Strategy' and advised that:

- This was an important document that sets out the importance of plans for the medium term period.
- The medium term budget position and how the funding gap would be addressed was set out in Appendix A.
- The strategy set out the way existing services were maintained and the challenges going forward.
- There were pressures on the budget going forward and retendered contract costs may add to these pressures.
- The general fund was strong which gave the ability to deliver and balance the budgets by 2028-29.

In response to a question from Councillor Terry Hone, Councillor Ian Albert advised that the Council continue to consult with residents, on ways to address the funding gap and make decisions at the right time. Any proposals on commercial activity would be announced when formal proposals had been finalised, with the input from Overview and Scrutiny Committee as required, before presenting to Full Council for consideration.

As part of the debate, Councillor Ralph Muncer highlighted the cost implications for the Council if there were statutory or legislative changes. He noted it was important that any proposals were communicated effectively with both Members and residents and note the importance of the Overview and Scrutiny and Finance, Audit and Risk Committees in having oversight of any proposals.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Matt Barnes seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That Council adopted the Medium Term Financial Strategy, as attached at Appendix A.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** Adoption of a MTFs and communication of its contents will assist in the process of forward planning the use of Council resources and in budget setting for 2024/2025 to 2028/2029, culminating in the setting of the Council Tax precept for 2024/25 in February 2024. This will (alongside the existing Council Plan) support the Council in setting a budget that is affordable and aligned to Council priorities.

## 248 USE OF URGENCY IN RELATION TO CALL-IN FOR DECISION ON BUSINESS RATE POOLING

*Audio recording – 56 minutes 5 seconds*

*N.B. Ahead of this item, there was a break in proceedings and the meeting reconvened at 20.25.*

The Service Director - Resources, presented the report 'Use of Urgency in Relation to Call-In for Decision on Business Rate Pooling' and advised that:

- The urgency provision was due to the timing of the information required and the deadline for submitting the pooling application.
- The Constitution required that use of this urgency provision in relation to call-in be reported to the next meeting of Council.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Matt Barnes seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That Council noted the use of urgency provisions in relation to the Business Rate Pooling decision made on 9 October 2023.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** There were forecast significant gains for the Council from being part of a Business Rates Pool. The risks were considered to be low.

## 249 ELECTORAL SERVICES - SCALE OF FEES 2024/25

*Audio recording – 58 minutes 7 seconds*

*N.B. The Service Director - Legal and Community, left the Chamber for this item due a conflict of interest being the Deputy Returning Officer for the Council.*

The Service Director - Resources, presented the report 'Electoral Services – Scale of Fees 2024/25, and advised that:

- The report showed various fees which needed to be set for the elections in 2024-2025.
- Comments on the feedback where fees needed to be changed was detailed in Section 8.
- The rates for Poll Clerk, Porter, Administration and Canvassers would be set at £12.83 to be in line with the latest increase in the national living wage plus holiday pay percentage to ensure compliance with legislation.
- The scale of fees for uncontested elections in Parish, Community and Town Councils was detailed in Section 11 of Appendix A.
- Feedback for Parish, Town and Community Councils on proposals to introduce uncontested election fees was covered in Appendix B.

In response to a question from Councillor Dominic Griffiths, the Service Director – Resources stated that this was an annual report which sets fees for the coming year and is repeated each year.

As part of the debate Councillor Ralph Muncer noted that often rural residents felt left behind by the District Council and had to pay additional Council Tax to cover the Parish precept. Councillor Muncer noted that District Councils had a statutory responsibility to provide elections and the related administration costs and therefore these costs should be borne by the District Council.

In response to a question from Councillor David Levett, the Electoral Services Manager advised that Parish Council elections are spread out across three years, so were not all up for election at the same time.

Councillor Peace advised the Committee of a comment that she had received late from Holwell Parish Council which was not included in the paper. This was that Holwell had not had a contested election for many years and that the fee sounded rather high for a Parish Council of their size.

Councillor Alistair Willoughby proposed and Councillor Ian Albert seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That Council agreed the Scale of Fees for 2024/25 as set out in Appendix A to include the following amendments:

- Section 11 of Appendix A was updated to ‘Uncontested Parish, Town and Community Council Elections.’
- The rates for Poll Clerk, Porter, Administration and Canvassers to be set at £12.83 per hour.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To enable the Council to remunerate the Returning Officer and the staff employed to carry out tasks during electoral events and to be open and transparent regarding other payments.

The meeting closed at 8.36 pm

Chair