

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

DECISION SHEET

Meeting of the Council held in the Council Chamber, District Council Offices, Gernon Road,
Letchworth Garden City, SG6 3JF
on Thursday, 19th September, 2024 at 7.30 pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sadie Billing, Cathy Brownjohn, Rhona Cameron, Keith Hoskins, Emma Rowe, Tamsin Thomas and Claire Winchester.

2 MINUTES - 11 JULY 2024

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 11 July 2024 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

3 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business notified.

4 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

- (1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be recorded.
- (2) The Chair reminded Members that the Council had declared both a Climate Emergency and an Ecological Emergency. These are serious decisions, and mean 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 Members of the ongoing Community Governance Review survey which was being conducted to look at parish arrangements. The survey was open until the 7 October 2024 and posters had been provided to Members to distribute in their wards.
- (7) The Chair invited Members to attend the Youth Democracy Day on Thursday 14 November and to email Committee Services with their availability and asked Members to promote the event to any school contacts.
- (8) The Chair advised Members that all residents were invited to take part in the Churchgate conversation to help shape the future vision of the Churchgate shopping area of Hitchin, via an online survey.
- (9) The Chair advised that the date for April Council had been confirmed as Tuesday 1 April 2025 and that Annual Council would take place on Thursday 22 May 2025.

- (10) The Chair informed Members that the Monitoring Officer had given dispensation to all Members to take part in any debate and votes in relation to the motions on 'Two Child Limited to Benefits' and Changes to the Winter Fuel Allowance' on the basis that they declare any such interest before the item was introduced and debated.

5 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

6 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

There were three questions submitted in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.11.

(A) Solar Farm Strategy

Councillor Ralph Muncer to Councillor Daniel Allen Interim Executive Member for Planning and Transport.

(B) Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework

Councillor Ralph Muncer to Councillor Daniel Allen, Leader of the Council.

(C) Environmental Crime Officers

Councillor David Barnard to Councillor Amy Allen, Executive Member for Recycling and Waste Management.

7 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

There were five motions submitted in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.12.

A) Provision of Affordable Housing and Infrastructure on Developments

RESOLVED: That Council instructed the Leader of the Council writes to the Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government setting out the Council's views and calling for the government to adopt a strategy that will prioritise increasing delivery of housing with appropriate infrastructure and to prioritise giving more power to Councils to build housing, in particular social and affordable housing.

B) Two Child Limit to Benefit Payments

RESOLVED: That Council:

- (1) Instructed the Leader of North Herts Council to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister indicating North Herts Council's strong belief that the two-child limit to benefit payments should be scrapped – which would help 2120 children living in North Hertfordshire.
- (2) Further instructed the Council Leader to write to all MPs covering the district of North Hertfordshire, asking them to commit their public support to the campaign to end the cruel two-child limit to benefit payments and ensure the number of children a family has is considered when a hardship grant is given out by the Council.

C) Proposed Expansion of London Luton Airport

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the new Leader of the Council writes again to the Secretary of State for Transport urging them not to grant a Development Consent Order, as well as stating that North Hertfordshire District Council continues to oppose any further expansion of London Luton Airport in the strongest possible terms, and remains of the opinion there are no conditions that can be applied to the application to make it acceptable.
- (2) Council further resolved that the new Leader of the Council writes to the Member of Parliament for Hitchin, the Member of Parliament for North East Hertfordshire and the Member of Parliament for Stevenage, urging them to call on the Secretary of State for Transport to reject the proposal allowing London Luton Airport to expand, as well as to use their role as an MP representing residents in North Hertfordshire to secure Parliamentary scrutiny of the proposed expansion.

D) Government Planning Reforms and Housing Target

RESOLVED: That Council resolves:

- (1) That the Leader of the Council writes to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government calling on the Government to:
 - (1.1) not increase the Housing Target for North Hertfordshire.
 - (1.2) Restore the Urban Uplift, ensuring cities and urban areas take their fair share of housing development, particularly as many of these areas already have the infrastructure to support additional development.
 - (1.3) Ensure infrastructure to support approved development is built prior to houses, thereby reducing the negative impact of development on existing communities, and ensuring local infrastructure is ready to provide for residents moving into new homes.
 - (1.4) Adopt a brownfield first approach to development, and provide greater protection for green belt land in North Hertfordshire.
 - (1.5) Not to amend paragraph 11(d) of the 2023 NPPF, which currently provides protection for North Hertfordshire as a local authority that has recently adopted a local plan but does not have a five-year housing land supply.
 - (1.6) Strengthen the rights of local residents to ensure they have a meaningful say when development is proposed within their communities.
 - (1.7) Not remove the emphasis and focus on 'beauty' and 'beautiful design' from the National Planning Policy Framework.
 - (1.8) Meaningfully engage with Local Planning Authorities on the New Town Scheme and – where proposed sites are put forward within an area – ensure that plans have local consent and that sufficient additional funding is in place to support already-stretched planning departments.
 - (1.9) Actively pursue reforms designed to ensure that a far greater proportion of planning applications – which continue to be approved under the existing policy framework – are actually built out by developers in a timely manner, recognising that this is the most effective way of meeting the Government's stated objectives.

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- (2) That the Leader of the Council writes to the Member of Parliament for Hitchin, the Member of Parliament for North East Hertfordshire and the Member of Parliament for Stevenage highlighting the opposition of Council to the Government's proposed planning reforms and housing targets, urging them to stand up against these proposals which would have a detrimental impact on residents and communities across North Hertfordshire.

E) Changes to the Winter Fuel Allowance

RESOLVED: That Council resolves:

- (1) That the Leader of the Council writes to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, urging a review of the decision to means-test the Winter Fuel Payment and asks the government to ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who do not claim Pension Credit, are protected from fuel poverty.
- (2) That the Leader of the Council writes to the Member of Parliament for Hitchin, the Member of Parliament for North East Hertfordshire and the Member of Parliament for Stevenage, urging them to ask the government to ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who do not claim Pension Credit, are protected from fuel poverty, as well as to press the government to reverse this decision which may impact 23,266 pensioners in North Hertfordshire.
- (3) To continue to encourage local efforts to promote Pension Credit uptake through council services and partnerships with local charities and community organisations to ensure that all eligible pensioners in North Hertfordshire are supported in claiming their entitlement.
- (4) To encourage Councillors to consider the 'Save the Winter Fuel Payment for Struggling Pensioners' petition being run by Age UK.
- (5) To acknowledge and understand that the financial blackhole that the previous 14 years of Conservative government has left our country in has an impact on the new government's financial decision-making, but that does not justify the withdrawal of the Winter Fuel Payment.

8 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

The Chair advised that the referrals from Cabinet and the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee would be taken with the respective item on the agenda.

9 MEMBER AND OFFICER INDEMNITY

RESOLVED: That Council authorised the amendments to the adopted Officer/ Member Indemnity & Insurance Policy as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

REASON FOR DECISION: The Council should have an up-to-date Policy in the event of legal action that arises when Officers and Members carry out official Council duties. The last update approved by Full Council was on the 24.09.2020.

10 COUNCIL PLAN AND PRIORITIES 2024-2028

RESOLVED: That Council:

- (1) Reviewed and approved the Council Plan with the four new Council Priorities as outlined below:
 - Thriving Communities
 - Accessible Services
 - Responsible Growth
 - Sustainability
- (2) Delegated authority to the Managing Director and Leader of the Council to approve any minor amendments to wording required as part of the design process.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: The Council Plan is a key element of the corporate business planning process, as a high-level strategic document it sets out the Council's Priorities for the next four years. As an overarching policy framework document, it guides and influences the use of Council resources; providing a focus for activities, plans, and services that the Council provide. The introduction to the plan highlights the link between the Council Plan and the Medium1Term Financial Strategy and service delivery plans.

11 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2025-30

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Council agreed the adoption of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2025-30, as attached at Appendix A.
- (2) That Council noted that the development and implementation of savings proposals were needed by April 2026 in order to start addressing the forecast shortfall in 2026/27 onwards.
- (3) That Council instructed the Executive Member for Finance and IT to prepare a range of feasible, quantified savings options including the increased use of shared services.
- (4) That engagement would take place with the Opposition Group Leaders and Finance leads on the process and specific options for any public budget consultation by June 2025.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: Adoption of a MTFFS and communication of its contents will assist in the process of forward planning the use of Council resources and in budget setting for 2025/2026 to 2029/2030, culminating in the setting of the Council Tax precept for 2025/26 in February 2025. Alongside the Council Plan, this will support the Council in setting a budget that is affordable and aligned to Council priorities.

12 APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT AND RESERVE INDEPENDENT PERSONS

RESOLVED: That Council:

- (1) Appointed Nicholas Moss OBE as Independent Person, Patrick Hodson as Reserve Independent Person, and Stephen Tant as Reserve Independent Person.
- (2) Delegated to the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of Standards Committee, the decision (if the current Independent Person decides within term to resign/ unable to act/ no longer qualifies), to appoint one of the existing Reserve Independent Persons as the Independent Person and/ or to undertake any further recruitment, as may be required.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To ensure that the Council's Standards processes can operate in accordance with legislative requirements if one or both IP and Reserve IPs are unable to advise on a matter. This should also allow for a degree of succession planning/ training whilst experienced persons are in place.

13 FIRST QUARTER INVESTMENT STRATEGY (CAPITAL AND TREASURY) REVIEW 2024/25

RESOLVED: That Council approved:

- (1) A capital budget of £0.080M to fund the purchase and installation of a new chiller at the museum, paragraph 8.4 refers.
- (2) A capital budget of £1.920M (£0.96M in 24/25 and £0.96M in 25/26) for round 3 of the Local Authority Housing Fund. This would be fully funded from Government grants and housing provider contributions, paragraph 8.5 refers.
- (3) Bringing forward £0.008M of the backup and business continuity hardware capital budget (from 2025/26 to 2024/25) and reducing the 2025/26 budget to £0.057M.
- (4) Bringing forward £0.672M of leisure funding to allow upgrades to the fitness facilities in Hitchin to take place in this financial year, instead of next financial year. This would be made up of the £0.300M budget for Member Change and Relaxation Area Refurbishment, and £0.372M of the 2025/26 allocation of the budget for providing capital funding to our leisure provider.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) Cabinet is required to approve adjustments to the capital programme and ensure the capital programme is fully funded.
- (2) To ensure the Council's continued compliance with CIPFA's code of practice on Treasury Management and the Local Government Act 2003 and that the Council manages its exposure to interest and capital risk.

14 UPDATED CONTRACT PROCUREMENT RULES FOR 2024-25

RESOLVED: That Council:

- (1) Considered the proposed changes and adopted the new Contract Procurement Rules to take effect from-when the Procurement Act 2023 was implemented.
- (2) Delegated to the Service Director: Resources, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and IT, approval to make minor changes to the Contract Procurement Rules to support the full compliance with the Procurement Act 2023, with any such changes being communicated to all Members.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) The Contract Procurement Rules (CPRs) are part of the Council Constitution (under Section 20) and must be regularly reviewed and updated as part of the Council's governance and procurement review processes. This contributes to the Council's system of effective internal control.
- (2) The new CPRs reflect a significant update in line with the requirements of the Procurement Act 2023, incorporating detailed procedural guidance, and enhanced compliance and transparency measures. These changes aim to improve the efficiency, accountability, and effectiveness of the Council's procurement activities.

15 CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS MADE FOLLOWING TEMPORARY RESTRUCTURE

RESOLVED: That Council accepted the amendments made, detailed in section 8.1 of the report.

REASON FOR DECISION: There are current and ongoing capacity and resourcing issues with the Legal and Community directorate, specifically within the Legal Services team. Whilst the Service Director Legal and Community seeks to find solutions to those issues, in order to provide greater support and capacity for the Service Director it has been agreed to temporarily transfer the reporting line of Licensing and Community Safety teams to a different Service Director.

16 NOMINATION OF REPRESENTATIVES ON BALDOCK UNITED ALMSHOUSES CHARITY (OUTSIDE ORGANISATION)

RESOLVED: That Council approved and nominated Cllr Rhona Cameron as the fourth Member to the outside organisation the Baldock United Almshouses Charity.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

- (1) To comply with the provision of Standing Order 4.8.2(j) of the Council's Constitution.
- (2) To comply with the Constitutional requirement for the Baldock United Almshouses Charity to have four Councillors as Trustees.