

## NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### MINUTES

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

**PRESENT:** Councillors: Clare Billing (Chair), Tina Bhartwas (Vice-Chair), Ian Albert, Daniel Allen, Amy Allen, David Barnard, Matt Barnes, Ruth Brown, Val Bryant, David Chalmers, Jon Clayden, Ruth Clifton, Sam Collins, Mick Debenham, Elizabeth Dennis, Emma Fernandes, Joe Graziano, Dominic Griffiths, Steve Jarvis, Tim Johnson, Chris Lucas, Ian Mantle, Nigel Mason, Bryony May, Caroline McDonnell, Ralph Muncer, Michael Muir, Lisa Nash, Sean Nolan, Steven Patmore, Louise Peace, Vijaiya Poopalasingham, Sean Prendergast, Martin Prescott, Claire Strong, Tom Tyson, Paul Ward, Laura Williams, Alistair Willoughby, Stewart Willoughby, Dave Winstanley, Donna Wright and Daniel Wright-Mason.

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Isabelle Alajooz (Legal Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer), Georgina Chapman (Policy & Strategy Team Leader), Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Callum Reeve (Electoral Services Assistant), Anthony Roche (Managing Director), Nigel Smith (Strategic Planning Manager), Melanie Stimpson (Democratic Services Manager) and Sjanet Wickenden (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer).

**ALSO PRESENT:**

*At the start of the meeting there were 3 members of the public.*

#### 37 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

*Audio recording – 2 minutes 18 seconds*

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

#### 38 MINUTES - 11 JULY 2024

*Audio Recording – 2 minutes 53 seconds*

*N.B. Councillor Mick Debenham entered the Chamber at 19:32 and Councillor Sam Collins entered the Chamber at 19:33.*

Councillor Clare Billing, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Daniel Allen seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**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.

#### 39 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

*Audio recording – 4 minutes 29 seconds*

There was no other business notified.

## 40 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

*Audio recording – 4 minutes 33 seconds*

*N.B. Councillor Dominic Griffiths entered the Chamber at 19:35 and left at 19:38.*

- (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.

## 41 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

*Audio recording – 9 minutes 39 seconds*

There was no public participation.

## 42 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

*Audio recording – 9 minutes 41 seconds*

*N.B. Councillor Dominic Griffiths returned to the Chamber at 19:40.*

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

(A) Solar Farm Strategy

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

'To ask the Interim Executive Member for Planning and Transport whether the administration will bring forward a Solar Farms Strategy for North Hertfordshire in response to a number of recent Solar Farm applications across the District?'

Councillor Daniel Allen provided the following response:

'Last week Cabinet approved the new Sustainability SPD to support the Local Plan. This includes additional guidance on matters we will take into account when considering applications for solar farms. This will also be considered through the Local Plan Review. If the proposals in the current consultation on the National Planning Policy Framework are brought forward, the Council will be expected to proactively identify sites for renewable and low carbon development when producing plans.'

Councillor Ralph Muncer asked a supplementary question, as follows:

'Does Councillor Allen agree that local communities, including those in North Hertfordshire, should have a meaningful say when these applications are brought forward or does Councillor Allen agree with his colleague the Chancellor of the Exchequer in that 'local communities should suck it up'?''

Councillor Daniel Allen responded:

'I agree with our planning board, whenever they make a decision that affects our residents. They are the ones that are there to make these decisions and I will support them on the decisions that they make.'

**(B) Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework**

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

'To ask the Leader of the Council if he will set out Council's response to the consultation on the Government's proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system?'

Councillor Daniel Allen provided the following response:

'Officers have drafted a technical response to the detailed questions in the consultation which will be finalised and submitted and reported in a future Strategic Planning Matters report to Cabinet. Any covering letter, political response or equivalent from the Council will be based upon the outcomes of the relevant motions that follow on from tonight's agenda.'

Councillor Ralph Muncer asked a supplementary question, as follows:

'Can I invite the Leader of the Council to join me in stating that North Hertfordshire is not a suitable location for a government mandated new town?'

Councillor Daniel Allen responded:

'No, because it would pre-empt any consultation or debate that we have as a Council, so no.'

**(C) Environmental Crime Officers**

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

‘To ask the Executive Member for Recycling and Waste how many Environmental Crime Officers are employed by Council to investigate offences such as Fly-tipping?’

Councillor Amy Allen provided the following response:

‘Two.’

Councillor David Barnard asked a supplementary question, as follows:

‘Would the Executive Member agree that there is an urgent need to employ extra support to this overburdened department either by employing an extra Environmental Officer or by employing a skilled Administration Support Officer who could take the pressure off of our existing Officers?’

Councillor Amy Allen responded:

‘I appreciate your question, actually I did pre-empt this after our conversation and as such I think it is really important to discuss these things especially when you have got our Officers in the field as they are. I did look into this and do a little investigation and had some conversations, and you are right we need to tidy up and find some resolution regarding the paperwork and the back office kind of stuff, that our Community Safety Officers have to deal with.

So, I hope to be working with Steve Cobb, to sort that out and alleviate some of the pressure and work on paperwork that is on our Community Safety Officers they can then actually be out in the field doing their job. As for the rest, I am not going to sit here and say yes we absolutely need another employee, but I will absolutely take your concerns on board and hopefully look into doing something like that in the future, because two people covering North Hertfordshire, it is a large area, and I really would like to try and find ways to make that better.’

**43 NOTICE OF MOTIONS**

*Audio recording – 19 minutes 21 seconds*

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

**A) Provision of Affordable Housing and Infrastructure on Developments**

Councillor Steve Jarvis proposed the motion as follows:

‘This Council notes that, despite the existence of unimplemented planning permission to build more than a million homes across England, the current government, like its predecessor, believes that making it easier for developers to get planning permission is the way to increase the availability of affordable housing.

The Council believes that increasing numbers of permissions, rather than focusing on building the right housing in the locations which are already identified for development will boost developers profits rather than meet the needs for affordable housing.

It also notes that the government’s proposed changes to the NPPF would make it easier for developers in North Herts to obtain planning permission on speculative sites, particularly those in parts of the Green Belt, at a time when they should be delivering housing on the sites that are identified in the Local Plan.

It instructs the Leader of the Council to write 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 affordable housing with appropriate infrastructure, rather than increasing property developers' profits.'

Councillor Ruth Brown seconded the motion.

The Chair advised that there had been an amendment to this motion which had been proposed by Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason and seconded by Councillor Dave Winstanley and had been published as a supplementary document.

Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason proposed the amendment as follows:

'This Council notes that, despite the existence of unimplemented planning permission to build more than a million homes across England, the current government, like its predecessor, believes that making it easier for developers to get planning permission is a way to increase the availability of affordable housing.

The council believes that increasing numbers of permissions, rather than focusing on building the right housing in the locations which are already identified for development will boost developers profits, whilst not necessarily meeting the needs for affordable housing.

It also notes that the government's proposed changes to the NPPF would make it easier for developers in North Herts to obtain planning permission on speculative sites, including those in parts of the Green Belt.

It instructs the Leader of the Council to write 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.'

Councillor Dave Winstanley seconded the amendment.

During the debate on the amendment, Councillor Daniel Allen stated that whilst under joint administration the Council brought forward the 40% affordable housing scheme and that the Local Plan identified the right homes in the right places, right now.

Having been proposed and seconded and, following a vote the amendment was carried.

The following Members took part in debate on the amended motion:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Steve Jarvis

Points raised in debate included:

- That there was a need to build more affordable housing in London and the South East.
- Homes in urban areas in other parts of the country were not unaffordable.
- There were concerns that the views of the Council on this motion were ambiguous and vague.
- The planning reforms were disappointing and made it easier to obtain planning permission rather than addressing the issue of unbuilt housing developments.
- The 40% affordable housing and social housing was still unobtainable for many residents.

- There was a need for social housing.
- There should be incentives for developers to build developments that have already obtained planning permission, rather than cherry pick easy profitable sites.
- The reforms reduced the powers of Local Authorities.
- There was support for the affordable and social housing element of the reforms.
- Local Authorities should have more powers to provide social housing.
- The amendment removed the requirement for builders to build those developments that they had obtained planning permission for, and this was a major shortfall of the process.
- Providing affordable housing would not deal with the scale of the problem, there needed to be a different way.

Having been proposed and seconded, the amended motion was put to a vote, and it was:

**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) Motion on the Two Child Limit to Benefit Payments**

Councillor Chris Lucas proposed the motion as follows:

'In North Hertfordshire, 2120 children in 590 households are currently affected by the two-child limit to benefit payments. That is 7% of all children in the authority area. At the same time, 5270 local children are living in poverty.

Council strongly believes that the two-child limit to benefit payments is a cruel and harmful policy that should be scrapped. Research from the University of York has shown its introduction has had no positive impacts on employment and earnings. Instead, it has dragged thousands of local families into poverty.

Council notes that the Liberal Democrats have consistently opposed the two-child limit to benefit payments since it was introduced – calling for it to be axed in their 2017, 2019 and 2024 manifestos. Council notes with concern the stance of the Labour Government, who are committed to keeping the cap – going as far as suspending the whip from MPs who rebel against this position.

Council resolves to:

Instruct 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.

Further instruct 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.'

Councillor Tim Johnson seconded the motion.

The Chair advised that there had been an amendment to this motion which had been proposed by Councillor Nigel Mason and seconded by Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason and had been published as a supplementary document.

Councillor Nigel Mason proposed the amendment as follows:

'In North Hertfordshire, 2120 children in 590 households are currently affected by the two-child limit to benefit payments. That is 7% of all children in the authority area. At the same time, 5270 local children are living in poverty.

Council strongly believes that the two-child limit to benefit payments is a cruel and harmful policy that should be scrapped. Research from the University of York has shown its introduction has had no positive impacts on employment and earnings. Instead, it has dragged thousands of local families into poverty.

Council notes that the Liberal Democrats have consistently opposed the two-child limit to benefit payments since it was introduced – calling for it to be axed in their 2017, 2019 and 2024 manifestos. Council welcomes the new Labour government setting up a child poverty task force, and looks forward to working with central government to ensure its recommendations are effectively implemented.

Council resolves to:

Instruct 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.

Further instruct 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.'

Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason seconded the amendment.

The Chair clarified that as there were two amendments – the deletion of one sentence and the addition of another sentence - they would be considered individually and the deletion of 'Council notes with concern the stance of the Labour Government, who are committed to keeping the cap – going as far as suspending the whip from MPs who rebel against this position', would be debated first.

The following Members took part in debate on the amendment:

- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Matt Barnes
- Councillor Chris Lucas
- Councillor Sam Collins
- Councillor Alistair Willoughby
- Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham
- Councillor Tim Johnson
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason

Points raised in debate included:

- The Labour government should be judged on their actions and so far, these have been to suspend the whip for MPs that do not agree with this policy.
- Deleting the sentence would weaken the motion.
- The motion should be open and clear.
- The argument around this was for the benefit of political points.
- There was agreement regarding the removal of the two-child cap.
- It was the Government's position to review this when it was financially viable.
- The Council should have cross party agreement on the two-child cap.
- Was this about making a political point or about the two-child cap.

- Removing the line meant that Members would not upset their Labour bosses.
- The two-child cap was introduced by the Conservative government in 2017.
- The amendment was to remove an overtly political point.

Having been proposed and seconded and, following a vote, the amendment was lost.

Councillor Nigel Mason proposed the addition of the following 'Council welcomes the new Labour government setting up a child poverty task force, and looks forward to working with central government to ensure its recommendations are effectively implemented' and this was seconded by Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason.

The following Members took part in debate on the amendment:

- Councillor Tim Johnson
- Councillor Chris Lucas
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Alistair Willoughby
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Matt Barnes
- Councillor Tina Bhartwas
- Councillor Tom Tyson
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor David Chalmers

Points raised in debate included:

- The amendment was unnecessary.
- It takes time to set up a task force and in the meantime, children remained hungry and in poverty.
- The amendment would read better as Government instead of new Labour Government.
- The task force would be in addition to the call to scrap the two-child cap.
- The task force should be welcomed and would help more than just those affected by the two-child cap.
- The amendment did not affect the requested resolution of the motion.
- The issue of child poverty needed to be addressed and the setting up of a task force was a positive way forward.
- No single policy could solve child poverty, the task force would however look at the root causes of child poverty.
- The task force would be a valuable addition to assist the prevention of child poverty.

Councillor Ruth Brown sought a further amendment to the amended proposal, the deletion of the words 'new Labour' which was accepted by the proposer and seconder of the amendment.

Having been proposed and seconded and, following a vote, the amendment was carried.

The following Members took part in debate on the substantive motion:

- Councillor Tim Johnson
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Matt Barnes

Points raised in debate included:

- The fact that the government had not scrapped this cap sent the wrong message, for a party founded on socialist principles.
- The two-child cap was aimed at parents but affected children.



- The policy was immoral and did not work.
- North Hertfordshire did not issue hardship grants.
- The two-child cap was a hateful policy.
- The policy discriminated disproportionately against women and larger families in the community and drove up the rate of child poverty.

Having been proposed and seconded, the substantive motion was put to a vote, and it was:

**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.

*N.B. Councillor Ruth Clifton left the chamber at 20:46 and returned at 20:49.*

### **C) Proposed Expansion of London Luton Airport**

Councillor Ralph Muncer proposed the motion as follows:

'On 24 May 2024, the then Secretary of State for Transport, The Rt. Hon. Mark Harper, delivered a written statement to Parliament announcing the deadline would be extended from 10 August 2024 to 4 October 2024 for a decision to be made regarding whether to grant a Development Consent Order (DCO) for the construction of a new passenger terminal and aircraft stands at London Luton Airport, thereby allowing passenger capacity to increase from 18 million per annum to 32 million.

The stated reason for this decision is as follows: "This is due to the General Election and to allow appropriate time for any new Secretary of State to consider the applications. The department will however endeavour to issue decisions ahead of the deadlines above wherever possible".

Following the General Election and the appointment of a new Secretary of State for Transport, a decision on whether to grant a DCO is now expected imminently.

Therefore, Council resolves that the Leader of the Council writes 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.

Council further resolves 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 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.'

Councillor Joe Graziano seconded the motion.

The Chair advised that there had been an amendment to this motion which had been proposed by Councillor Chris Lucas and seconded by Councillor Sam Collins and had been published as a supplementary document.

Councillor Chris Lucas proposed the amendment as follows:

‘On 24 May 2024, the then Secretary of State for Transport, The Rt. Hon. Mark Harper, delivered a written statement to Parliament announcing the deadline would be extended from 10 August 2024 to 4 October 2024 for a decision to be made regarding whether to grant a Development Consent Order (DCO) for the construction of a new passenger terminal and aircraft stands at London Luton Airport, thereby allowing passenger capacity to increase from 18 million per annum to 32 million.

The stated reason for this decision is as follows: “This is due to the General Election and to allow appropriate time for any new Secretary of State to consider the applications. The department will however endeavour to issue decisions ahead of the deadlines above wherever possible”.

Following the General Election and the appointment of a new Secretary of State for Transport, a decision on whether to grant a DCO is now expected imminently.

We note that Council agreed a similar motion proposed by Chris Lucas in January 2024 and the under the last government, the Conservative Secretary of State already agreed to increase the number of passengers at Luton Airport by 1 million from 18 to 19 million per year.

Therefore, Council resolves that the Leader of the Council writes once 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.

Council further resolves 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 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.’

Councillor Sam Collins seconded the amendment.

The following Members took part in debate on the amendment:

- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Alistair Willoughby
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Michael Muir

Points raised in debate included:

- It was only 11 months since the former Secretary of State approved the expansion of London Luton Airport to 19 million travellers.
- The administration, as with previous administrations opposed the expansion.
- The amendment made no difference to the actual motion.
- The motion should say ‘New Leader of the Council writes again’.

**Thursday, 19th September, 2024**

- This would be the last opportunity to oppose the expansion before the deadline in January 2025.
- This expansion would be a substantial increase and would affect residents.
- Resident concerns had previously been highlighted to the former MP, who had raised these concerns in parliament.
- This motion was heard every six months.
- The expansion would cause traffic chaos in Hitchin.

Councillor Claire Strong sought a further amendment to the amended proposal, the addition of the word 'new' before Leader of the Council and the removal of 'once' which was accepted by the proposer and seconder of the amendment.

Having been proposed and seconded and, following a vote, the amendment was carried.

*N.B. Councillor Lisa Nash left the Chamber at 21:04 and did not return.*

The following Members took part in debate on the substantive motion:

- Councillor David Barnard
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Sam Collins
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor Joe Graziano
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Claire Strong

Points raised in debate included:

- This would be the first opportunity to address the new Government and Secretary of State.
- The expansion should have been decided by May 2024 this was now delayed to January 2025.
- The expansion would result in the need to fly through the night, especially in the summer months.
- A cross party statement should be issued as well as objections from other Local Authorities.
- Money should be spent expanding the rail network instead of airports.
- There was mitigation for Luton traffic but nothing in the plan for east to west traffic.
- There would be an impact to the environment and increased pollution.
- The new Labour MP had refused to commit to objecting to the expansion.
- The expansion would be a disaster for North Herts residents.
- This was a long and protracted process.
- There was no mitigation for the challenges this expansion would create.
- Work should continue to ensure the best possible outcome for North Herts residents should the expansion be granted.
- Members should use all their contacts to ensure concerns were heard.
- There was already significant noise from 19 million travellers.
- The expansion would have a devastating effect on the wildlife and would increase light pollution in the district.
- Two of the three MPs for this area had confirmed that they were against the expansion.
- The east west transport links to Luton were insufficient and meant traveling into and out of London.
- The number of travellers from Luton Airport had been steadily creeping up for the last 29 years.
- There were other airports that could be expanded.

Councillor Ralph Muncer requested a recorded vote.

Having been proposed and seconded, the substantive motion was put to a vote, and the outcome of the recorded vote was:

VOTE TOTALS:

YES	41
ABSTAIN	0
NO	0
TOTAL	41

THE INDIVIDUAL RESULTS WERE AS FOLLOWS:

Cllr Clare Billing	YES
Cllr Alistair Willoughby	YES
Cllr Amy Allen	YES
Cllr Bryony May	YES
Cllr Caroline McDonnell	YES
Cllr Chris Lucas	YES
Cllr Claire Strong	YES
Cllr Daniel Allen	YES
Cllr Daniel Wright-Mason	YES
Cllr Dave Winstanley	YES
Cllr David Barnard	YES
Cllr Dominic Griffiths	YES
Cllr Donna Wright	YES
Cllr Elizabeth Dennis	YES
Cllr Emma Fernandes	YES
Cllr Ian Albert	YES
Cllr Ian Mantle	YES
Cllr Joe Graziano	YES
Cllr Jon Clayden	YES
Cllr Laura Williams	YES
Cllr Louise Peace	YES
Cllr Martin Prescott	YES
Cllr Matt Barnes	YES
Cllr Michael Muir	YES
Cllr Mick Debenham	YES
Cllr Nigel Mason	YES
Cllr Paul Ward	YES
Cllr Ralph Muncer	YES
Cllr Ruth Brown	YES
Cllr Ruth Clifton	YES
Cllr Sam Collins	YES
Cllr Sean Nolan	YES
Cllr Sean Prendergast	YES
Cllr Steve Jarvis	YES
Cllr Steven Patmore	YES
Cllr Stewart Willoughby	YES
Cllr Tim Johnson	YES
Cllr Tina Bhartwas	YES
Cllr Tom Tyson	YES
Cllr Val Bryant	YES
Cllr Vijaiya Poopalasingham	YES

Therefore, it was:

**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) 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.

*N.B. Councillor David Chalmers left the Chamber at 21:22 and returned at 21:24 after the conclusion of the vote.*

*N.B. Following the vote on this motion there was a comfort break and the meeting resumed at 21:36. During the comfort break Councillor Dominic Griffiths left the Council Chamber and did not return to the meeting.*

**D) Government Planning Reforms and Housing Target**

Councillor Ralph Muncer proposed the motion as follows, which had been amended subsequent to the agenda publication, as published as a supplementary document:

‘On 30th July 2024, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government made a statement to the House of Commons on changes to National Planning Policy.

The Government announced not only would it be re-introducing mandatory housing targets for Local Authorities, but that it would increase overall targets from 300,000 new homes per annum to approximately 370,000 per annum.

Under the Government’s proposed new method announced as part of changes to the National Planning Policy Framework, North Hertfordshire will be required to build 992 new homes per year, representing an increase of 9%.

Neighbouring authority Luton will see its housing target reduced by 22%, and as a result of the Government removing the urban uplift, major cities such as London, Liverpool and Birmingham will all see a reduction in their housing targets by up to 31%.

Following the adoption of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan in November 2022, 47% of land within the district is designated as Green Belt. The reforms of which are proposed by the Government will weaken protections for Green Belt land, and could result in inappropriate development taking place within the district, particularly in and around our rural communities.

As a result of our Local Plan having recently been adopted, North Hertfordshire currently does not need to provide evidence of a five-year housing land supply in accordance with the 2023 NPPF. However, the Government is proposing to remove this element of the 2023 NPPF, which means that should this proposed change come into force there would be a presumption in favour of sustainable development through the decision-making mechanism. The loss of this protection increases the likelihood of approval for major developments proposed within the district on sites not identified in the Local Plan.

The Government has also stated its ambition to build “a new generation of new towns” which will comprise of at least 10,000 homes. In order to identify potential locations for these ‘new towns’ a New Towns Taskforce has been created within the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government.

Therefore, Council resolves that:

- (1) 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) Not impose a New Town as part of the Government’s New Towns Scheme within the district of North Hertfordshire, as the district has already adopted a Local Plan that delivers on the housing need for North Hertfordshire, and the development of a Government New Town would put increased strain on already pressured local services.
- (2) 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.’

Councillor David Barnard seconded the motion.

The Chair advised that there had been an amendment to this motion which had been proposed by Councillor Matt Barnes and seconded by Councillor Ruth Brown and had been published as a supplementary document The published amendment was further amended and proposed by Councillor Matt Barnes as follows:

‘On 30th July 2024, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government made a statement to the House of Commons on changes to National Planning Policy.

The Government announced not only would it be re-introducing mandatory housing targets for Local Authorities, but that it would increase overall targets from 300,000 new homes per annum to approximately 370,000 per annum.

Under the Government's proposed new method announced as part of changes to the National Planning Policy Framework, North Hertfordshire will be required to build 992 new homes per year, representing an increase of 9%.

Neighbouring authority Luton will see its housing target reduced by 22%, and as a result of the Government removing the urban uplift, major cities such as London, Liverpool and Birmingham will all see a reduction in their housing targets by up to 31%.

Following the adoption of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan in November 2022, 47% of land within the district is designated as Green Belt. The reforms of which are proposed by the Government will weaken protections for Green Belt land, and could result in inappropriate development taking place within the district, particularly in and around our rural communities.

As a result of our Local Plan having recently been adopted, North Hertfordshire currently does not need to provide evidence of a five-year housing land supply in accordance with the 2023 NPPF. However, the Government is proposing to remove this element of the 2023 NPPF, which means that should this proposed change come into force there would be a presumption in favour of sustainable development through the decision-making mechanism. The loss of this protection increases the likelihood of approval for major developments proposed within the district on sites not identified in the Local Plan.

The Government has also stated its ambition to build "a new generation of new towns" which will comprise of at least 10,000 homes. In order to identify potential locations for these 'new towns' a New Towns Taskforce has been created within the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government.

Therefore, Council resolves that:

- (1) 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.
- (2) 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.’

Councillor Ruth Brown seconded the amendment.

The following Members took part in debate on the amendment:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Steve Jarvis
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Sam Collins
- Councillor Alistair Willoughby

Points raised in debate included:

- That the Liberal Democrats supported building 10K of homes in the district.
- The Labour Government was happy to roughshod over local communities and planning inspectors to achieve their housing quota.
- The amendment proposed that North Herts engaged with the Government regarding any new towns, but did not commit to building a new town.
- North Herts should engage with the Government, residents and Planning authorities on this matter.
- Soon there would be nowhere to extend too and therefore new towns should be considered.
- Letchworth Garden City was a new town.
- New towns had infrastructure build for the purpose.
- When considering new towns, work should commence with adjacent authorities instead of in isolation.
- The opinions of local residents, and parish councils were not taken into consideration at the moment, and it was doubtful these reforms would help.
- This should not be ruled out as there might be benefits to the wider region.
- The motion had some relevant matters.

Having been proposed and seconded and, following a vote, the amendment was carried.

The following Members took part in debate on the substantive motion:

- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor David Barnard
- Councillor Ruth Brown



- Councillor Ralph Muncer

Points raised in debate included:

- The question that really needed addressing by a government policy was how houses were built and how to remove any barriers to building them.
- There were a lot of approved sites that had yet to be built on.
- There were Councils where a Section 62A decision had been imposed with extant planning permission but never built and this was a fundamental issue.
- There needed to be a way to get Britain building.
- Some of the new proposals in the NPPF provided greater clarity and certainty.
- Resolution 1.5 of the motion did not achieve the overall objective of the motion to protect North Herts and the adopted Local Plan.
- Paragraph 76 of the NPPF should not be removed as it offered protection to those Local Authorities who had a recently adopted Local Plan.
- The motion was not a helpful tool in providing a response to the reforms.
- Anyone could submit a response to the consultation.
- A development of 2100 new homes, with infrastructure and health facilities should constitute a new town.
- New housing should be developed in the right places.
- North Herts was in danger of becoming an overspill for London.
- There should be incentives for business and employment opportunities to level up in the Midlands and the North.
- The motion addressed some of the planning reform concerns.
- The proposed increase to North Herts housing target was 90 homes.
- Residents were not always aware that developer contributed to local infrastructure, partly due to the time it takes to implement services.
- Brownfield site should be built on first however, this tended to be a more expensive option for developers.
- North Herts should not move away from their emphasis on beauty and design.
- There was a 22% reduction in the housing needs for Luton and this should lead to the removal of the east of Luton development site.
- Infrastructure should be in place before developments commenced.

Councillor Ralph Muncer requested a recorded vote.

Having been proposed and seconded, the substantive motion was put to a vote, and the outcome of the recorded vote was:

VOTE TOTALS:

YES	21
ABSTAIN	0
NO	20
TOTAL	41

THE INDIVIDUAL RESULTS WERE AS FOLLOWS:

Cllr Clare Billing	NO
Cllr Alistair Willoughby	NO
Cllr Amy Allen	NO
Cllr Bryony May	YES
Cllr Caroline McDonnell	YES
Cllr Chris Lucas	YES
Cllr Claire Strong	YES
Cllr Daniel Allen	NO

Cllr Daniel Wright-Mason	NO
Cllr Dave Winstanley	NO
Cllr David Chalmers	YES
Cllr David Barnard	YES
Cllr Donna Wright	NO
Cllr Elizabeth Dennis	NO
Cllr Emma Fernandes	NO
Cllr Ian Albert	NO
Cllr Ian Mantle	NO
Cllr Joe Graziano	YES
Cllr Jon Clayden	YES
Cllr Laura Williams	NO
Cllr Louise Peace	YES
Cllr Martin Prescott	YES
Cllr Matt Barnes	YES
Cllr Michael Muir	NO
Cllr Mick Debenham	NO
Cllr Nigel Mason	NO
Cllr Paul Ward	YES
Cllr Ralph Muncer	YES
Cllr Ruth Brown	YES
Cllr Ruth Clifton	YES
Cllr Sam Collins	YES
Cllr Sean Nolan	NO
Cllr Sean Prendergast	YES
Cllr Steve Jarvis	YES
Cllr Steven Patmore	YES
Cllr Stewart Willoughby	NO
Cllr Tim Johnson	YES
Cllr Tina Bhartwas	YES
Cllr Tom Tyson	YES
Cllr Val Bryant	NO
Cllr Vijaiya Poopalasingham	NO

Therefore, it was:

**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.
- (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**

Further to the dispensation from the Monitoring Officer, the following Members declared an interest due to being in receipt, or previously being eligible for the Winter Fuel Allowance:

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Stewart Willoughby
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Ian Mantle
- Councillor Steve Jarvis
- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Michael Muir
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor David Barnard

Councillor Ralph Muncer proposed the motion as follows, which had been amended subsequent to the agenda publication, as published as a supplementary document:

'The Government laid the Social Fund Winter Fuel Payment Regulations 2024 before Parliament on 22 August 2024, which come into force on 16th September 2024, unless either the House of Commons or House of Lords pass a motion to annul the Statutory Instrument.

Under the Regulations, from winter 2024/2025, households in England and Wales will no longer be entitled to the Winter Fuel Payment unless they receive Pension Credit or certain other means-tested benefits as announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The Government has failed to carry out a full impact assessment or public consultation, despite Age UK estimating that 2 million pensioners who badly need the money to stay warm this winter will not receive it.

As a result of Labour's policy, 23,266 pensioners in North Hertfordshire face losing their winter fuel allowance, which not only risks leaving many pensioners across the district in financial hardship without the support they need, but will disproportionately affect the health and well-being of our poorest older residents.

Whilst some pensioners currently in receipt of the Winter Fuel Payment may not require it, many thousands across North Hertfordshire sit just above the cut-off for Pension Credit and will now lose their allowance.

Therefore, 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 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. Encourages Members to sign the 'Save the Winter Fuel Payment for Struggling Pensioners' petition being run by Age UK.'

Councillor David Barnard seconded the motion.

The Chair advised that there had been an amendment to this motion which had been proposed by Councillor Alistair Willoughby and seconded by Councillor Nigel Mason and had been published as a supplementary document.

Councillor Alistair Willoughby proposed the amendment as follows:

'The Government laid the Social Fund Winter Fuel Payment Regulations 2024 before Parliament on 22 August 2024, which come into force on 16th September 2024, unless either the House of Commons or House of Lords pass a motion to annul the Statutory Instrument.

Under the Regulations, from winter 2024/2025, households in England and Wales will no longer be entitled to the Winter Fuel Payment unless they receive Pension Credit or certain other means-tested benefits as announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The Government has failed to carry out a full impact assessment or public consultation, despite Age UK estimating that 2 million pensioners who badly need the money to stay warm this winter will not receive it.

As a result of Labour's policy, 23,266 pensioners in North Hertfordshire face losing their winter fuel allowance, which not only risks leaving many pensioners across the district in financial hardship without the support they need, but will disproportionately affect the health and well-being of our poorest older residents.

Whilst some pensioners currently in receipt of the Winter Fuel Payment may not require it, many thousands across North Hertfordshire sit just above the cut-off for Pension Credit and will now lose their allowance.

Therefore, 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.'

Councillor Nigel Mason seconded the amendment.

The following Members took part in debate on the amendment:

- Councillor Nigel Mason
- Councillor Matt Barnes
- Councillor Tim Johnson
- Councillor Ralph Muncer

Points raised in debate included:

- There was no statute of limitations in politics and the slate did not get wiped clean with a change of government.
- No motions had previously been moved for public spending cuts made by a Conservative Government.
- The Winter Fuel Payment was a lot of money to those that needed it.
- Eligible household should be encouraged to claim Pension Credits and work had commenced to publicise this benefit.
- Consideration should be given to pensioners that now had to think about either eating or heating their home.

Having been proposed and seconded and, following a vote, the amendment was carried.

Councillor Steve Jarvis stated that the universal payment of the Winter Fuel Payment included payments made to millionaires and perhaps steps should have been taken so that the richest pensioners were denied the payment.

Councillor Steve Jarvis sought an amendment to the substantive motion, the addition of the words 'but that does not justify the withdrawal of the Winter Fuel Payment' to the end of resolution 5.

Councillor Sam Collins seconded the amendment and, following a vote, the amendment was carried.

The following Members took part in debate on the substantive motion:

- Councillor David Barnard
- Councillor Louise Peace
- Councillor Daniel Allen

Points raised in debate included:

- There were other ways to raise money.
- Many pensioners relied on the payment.
- Pensioners that lived on less than the living wage were denied the payment.
- North Herts Benefit Officers could identify those pensioners entitled to Pension Credits and point them towards Citizens Advice to assist with their applications.
- No funding has been made available to support agencies to help pensioners making Pension Credit claims.
- A social media campaign has been launched to make Pensioners aware of their entitlement to Pension Credits and this would be promoted at Councillor surgeries.

Having been proposed and seconded, the substantive motion was put to a vote, and it was:

**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.

#### 44 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

*Audio recording – 3 hours 5 minutes 41 seconds*

*N.B. Councillors Sam Collins and Sean Prendergast left the Chamber at 22:36 and did not return.*

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

#### 45 MEMBER AND OFFICER INDEMNITY

*Audio recording – 3 hours 6 minutes 37 seconds*

The Deputy Monitoring Officer presented the report entitled 'Member and Officer Indemnity' and stated that:

- The updates were required to reflect current needs and to ensure compliance with relevant legislation.
- The policy offered protection to Officers and Members when they were acting in their official capacities.
- There was clarification of the indemnities provided for Members and Officers when attending and representing external bodies.
- The policy provided assurances to Members and Officers that they would not be personally liable when acting within the scope of their role.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Val Bryant seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**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.

#### 46 COUNCIL PLAN AND PRIORITIES 2024-2028

*Audio recording – 3 hours 8 minutes 40 seconds*

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Daniel Allen presented the referral from Cabinet and the report entitled 'The Council Plan and Priorities 2024-2028' and stated that:

- The report highlighted the visions and starting priorities of key projects.
- This report aligned with the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and the Council Delivery Plan.
- The Overview and Scrutiny Committee suggested a diagram to explain the relationship between the Plan and the MTFS, and this would be incorporated in the design process.
- A workshop took place in June attended by members of the administration, the leadership team and key Officers to share key priorities and aspirations for the next 4 years. They reflected on previous achievements and evaluated the required resources for the key projects.
- There would be a smaller working group formed to oversee the progression of the Plan.
- A further workshop was held in July to narrow down the priorities and to select key project and initiatives.
- The Plan had been drafted in August and reviewed by the working group and the leadership team.

- The Plan was reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and whilst no formal amendments were recommended, they suggested the addition of performance indicators and timeframes for initiatives. It was noted that these details would be available in the Council Delivery Plan and the MTFs.
- The Overview and Scrutiny Committee suggested that more context was required regarding 'Net Zero' and that more information about supporting business and economic development should be provided. The Enterprise team have provided information regarding these requests.
- Cabinet reflected on the suggestions from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and felt that should the Plan be approved then any suggestions could be incorporated at the design stage.
- Cabinet made no formal amendments to the recommendations.
- Should Council approve this item, the Plan would then be formatted and designed with minor amendments being approved by the Managing Director and the Leader of the Council.

In response to a question from Councillor Matt Barnes, the Policy and Strategy Team Leader stated that a response to actions raised at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been sent to the Scrutiny Officer and those details would come out through the budget and service delivery process.

The following Members took part in debate:

- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Matt Barnes
- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Daniel Allen

Points raised in debate included:

- It was just the headlines that had changed.
- The Plan lacked any ambition, and some of the projects had already been progressed through the previous joint administration.
- The plan did not discuss bin collection which was a priority.
- It was disappointing that the reasonable recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny had not been incorporated.
- The Plan did not set out the clear challenges that the Council faced.
- The Council had difficult decisions to make due to the uncertainties of Local Government funding however, this was not detailed in the Plan.
- The Plan did not reflect that the Council had a minority administration.
- The Plan was ambiguous and vague.
- There was no definition for Net Zero.
- The debate at the Overview and Scrutiny was meaningful and there were areas that required more tangible ambitions.
- The wording used in the Plan meant that key project could be achieved without any benefit to residents.
- The Plan should explain what the Council would achieve for residents.
- The Plan should have measurable targets.
- The Plan gave an overview and the MTFs explained some of the key projects in more detail.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Val Bryant seconded and, following a vote, it was:



**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.

#### 47 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2025-30

*Audio recording – 3 hours 21 minutes 50 seconds*

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Daniel Allen presented the referral from Cabinet and stated that:

- The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) was a guide to help the business planning process and would be used when setting the budgets for 2025-26 and beyond.
- Ideally the MTFS would be for a period longer than 5 years however, due to many funding uncertainties, this strategy was for the next 5 years. The strategy may be amended should further funding information be obtained.
- The Council could only deliver those projects that were affordable as stated in the Council Plan.

Councillor Ian Albert, Executive Member for Finance and IT presented the report 'Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025-30' and stated that:

- The report focussed on expenditure, income and funding, due to the funding uncertainties, the strategy was only for 5 years.
- There was a pay award pending with no current agreement.
- The budget for 2025-26 would be set in February 2025, and was likely to include the use of reserves.
- The Council had higher than expected treasury returns and excess retained business rates, which would help balance some of the 2025-26 budget.
- There would be a public consultation in Summer 2025 on spending priorities with the information being used to help form the budgets for 2026-27 and 2027-28.
- The Council had an excellent record with its shared services.
- There were uncertainties regarding future government funding.
- The Local Government Association had been lobbying for additional funding and for spending reviews.
- There was a need to make significant savings over the 5 years.
- The majority of the budget was spent on delivering statutory services.
- The strategy included how the budget was set and the pressures and options used when prioritising spending.
- Councillor Paul Ward had proposed amendments to the recommendation which had been published as a supplement. Two of those - A and B had been accepted.

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- The third amendment recommendation C proposed by Councillor Ward highlighted the importance of cross party working to deliver the best outcomes for the residents.
- Savings were not about cutting crucial services.
- There were difficult financial decisions to be made and this policy was a step in the right direction.
- Work would be required on an ongoing basis to balance budgets and generate income.
- There would be a review of parking charges and the costs for collecting garden waste.
- The Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) had been more successful than anticipated and had cost more than forecasted, in the long term this would need to be reviewed.
- Working was ongoing to improve staff recruitment and retention.
- The new waste collection contract had been awarded and thanks were given to Councillors Amy Allen and Tom Tyson and Officers, for their hard work.

Councillor Ian Albert accepted the additional recommendations A and B that Councillor Paul Ward had proposed as published as a supplementary document.

Councillor Ian Albert subsequently proposed an alternative to recommendation C to read 'to engage with the Opposition Group Leaders and Finance leads on the process and specific options for any public budget consultation by June 2025'.

Councillor Paul Ward accepted the amended recommendation.

*N.B Councillor Ruth Clifton left the Chamber at 22:55 and did not return, Councillor Bryony May left the Chamber at 22:58 and did not return.*

The following Members took part in debate:

- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor Ralph Muncer

Points raised in debate:

- The MTFs was very detailed and highlighted an unsustainable financial future.
- Savings of £1.8M were required in 2026-27 and £2.5M for years 2027-28 onwards.
- The savings equated to 12% of the predicted budget.
- There had been a 46% decline in funding since the 2010s.
- Forming a Hertfordshire Unitary Authority would deliver savings.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Daniel Allen seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**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 MTFs 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.

#### 48 APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT AND RESERVE INDEPENDENT PERSONS

*Audio recording – 3 hours 36 minutes 6 seconds*

*N.B. Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham left the Chamber at 23:06 and did not return.  
Councillor Jon Clayden left the Chamber and returned at 23:09.*

*N.B. Councillor Caroline McDonnell left the Chamber at 23:08 and returned at 23:10,  
Councillor Tom Tyson left the Chamber at 23:08 and returned at 23:11 and Councillor Steven Patmore left the Chamber at 23:08 and returned at 23:10.*

Councillor Alistair Willoughby presented the report entitled 'Appointment of Independent and Reserve Independent Persons' and advised that:

- The reasons for the Standards Committee having an Independent Persons and the duties undertaken by the Independent Person were highlighted in paragraph 8.2 of the report.
- An Independent Person was appointed for a 4 year term.
- There was a high level of interest in the role and 17 applications were received, this resulted in 8 people being shortlisted.
- To be appointed as an Independent Person the applicants had been required to complete an application form, attend an interview and supply satisfactory references.
- The relevant work history for the applicants was detailed in paragraph 8.1 of the report.
- Appreciation was given to the two outgoing Reserve Independent Persons, John Richardson and Peter Chapman.

In response to a question from Councillor Laura Williams, Councillor Willoughby stated that a wider diversity of applicants was desired and that 2 females were shortlisted for interview. However, one did not accept the interview invitation and one failed to attend the interview. There would be some work around attracting a more diverse pool of applicants prior to advertising the role again in the future.

Councillor Muncer stated that he looked forwarded to working with the appointees and marvelled at their experience.

Councillor Daneil Allen stated that Nicholas Moss was a fantastic choice as were the other appointments and reiterated the need for diversity.

Councillor Ruth Brown stated that she was confident of the selection process and thanked those who stepped down. The role of Independent Person was important as they supported Councillors when complaints were made.

On behalf of the Council, the Chair placed on record its sincere thanks and appreciation to John Richardson and Peter Chapman for their valuable service to the Standards Committee.

Councillor Alistair Willoughby proposed and Councillor Ralph Muncer seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**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 Independent Person and Reserve Independent Persons are unable to advise on a matter. This should also allow for a degree of succession planning/ training whilst experienced persons are in place.

#### 49 **FIRST QUARTER INVESTMENT STRATEGY (CAPITAL AND TREASURY) REVIEW 2024/25**

*Audio recording – 3 hour 44 minutes 53 seconds*

*N.B Councillor Paul Ward, having declared an interest due to his employment and left the Chamber at 23:15 and did not take place in the debate or vote.*

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Daniel Allen presented the referral from Cabinet.

Councillor Ian Albert, Executive Member for Finance and IT presented the report 'First Quarter Investment Strategy (Capital and Treasury) Review 2024/25' and stated that:

- Work was ongoing regarding a capital budget review prior to the budget setting process for 2025-26.
- Appendix B of the report highlighted the much higher than anticipated treasury returns due to the current high interest rates and cash balances.
- Additional capital was required for the replacement of the Museum chiller and this was detailed in paragraph 8.4 of the report, and was critical for the preservation of Museum artifacts.
- Notification had been received regarding capital funding of £1.92M for round 3 of the Local Authority Housing Fund. The project would be fully funded and consisted of 10 properties and was detailed in paragraph 8.5 of the report.
- A request was made to move £8K of the business hardware capital budget from 2025/26 into 2024/25 and this was detailed in paragraph 8.9 of the report and could lead to a saving of £4K.
- The referral 8C from Cabinet highlighted the request to move forward the upgrade at Hitchin Gym from the 2025/26 budget to this current year 2024/25. This would enable the works to be completed earlier and cause less disruption to members.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Daniel Allen seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**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) 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.

**50 UPDATED CONTRACT PROCUREMENT RULES FOR 2024-25**

*Audio recording – 3 hour 50 minutes 56 seconds*

*N.B Councillor Paul Ward returned to the Chamber at 23:21.*

*N.B. Councillor Ralph Muncer left the Chamber at 23:21 and returned at 23:23.*

Councillor Sean Nolan presented the referral from the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee and stated that:

- There had been a focus on the new thresholds and what was considered a major contract, assurances were given that current major contracts would still be under the old rules.
- There would be no financial impact from the new rules, just some process changes.
- There would be minor changes to the contract penalty clauses.
- Any pipeline notices would need to be advertised a year in advance of any expected contracts.

Councillor Ian Albert, Executive Member for Finance and IT presented the report 'Updated Contract Procurement Rules for 2024/25' and stated that:

- The Cabinet Office had confirmed a change to the go live date and it was now intended to be in February 2025.
- There was a new National Procurement Policy Statement (NPPS) expected that was essential to the Procurement Act and would align with Government policies.
- Council was being asked to adopt the Contract Procurement Rules (CPR) document which would then be ready for the go live date.
- It was proposed that any minor changes to the Contract Procurement Rules would be approved by the Service Director – Resources and the Executive Member for Finance and IT, any major changes would come back to Council for approval.
- Work was ongoing to review the Go Local Policy and this would establish clear links between that the Go Local Policy and the Social Value Policy.

The Service Director – Resources stated that:

- The Recommendations had been changed to reflect the change in implementation date. Recommendation 2.1 was amended to read, to take effect from when the Procurement Act 2023 was implemented.
- A new Recommendation 2.2 was added to allow for any delegated minor changes.
- The Appendix detailed the changes to the Contract Procurement Rules.
- The delay allowed further analysis of the changes and the impact on Officers.
- The delay would enable work to commence on reviewing the Go Local Policy to ensure it aligned with any new Government policies, and that it was refreshed to interact with the Social Value Policy.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Sean Nolan seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**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.

## 51 CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS MADE FOLLOWING TEMPORARY RESTRUCTURE

*Audio recording – 3 hour 57 minutes 03 seconds*

The Deputy Monitoring Officer presented the report entitled 'Constitutional Amendments Made Following Temporary Restructure' and stated that there had been a Delegated Decision from the Managing Director on the 25 July 2024 regarding the temporary restructure and that this was detailed in paragraph 8.1 of the report.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Dave Winstanley seconded and, following a vote, it was:

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

**REASON FOR DECISION:** There were 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.

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

*Audio recording – 3 hour 58 minutes 31 seconds*

The Democratic Services Manager presented the report entitled 'Nominations Of Representatives on Baldock United Almshouses Charity (Outside Organisation)' and stated that the reasons for the election of a fourth member were set out in the report.

**Thursday, 19th September, 2024**

In response to a question from Councillor Alistair Willoughby, the Managing Director stated that only Members that were remunerated by Baldock United Almshouses Charity needed to declare an interest.

Councillor Nigel Mason nominated Councillor Rhona Cameron as the fourth Member to the outside organisation the Baldock United Almshouses Charity. This was seconded by Councillor Daniel Allen.

Councillor Ralph Muncer nominated Councillor Michael Muir as the fourth Member to the outside organisation the Baldock United Almshouses Charity. This was seconded by Councillor David Barnard.

A vote was taken regarding the two nominations and, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That Council approved and nominated Councillor 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.

The meeting closed at 11.33 pm

Chair