

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, 11th July, 2024 at 7.30 pm

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

IN ATTENDANCE: Anne Banner (Benefits Manager), Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), Jo Doggett (Service Director - Housing & Environmental Health), Jo Dufficy (Service Director - Customers), Ian Fullstone (Service Director - Regulatory), Sarah Kingsley (Service Director - Place), 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), Jeanette Thompson (Service Director - Legal and Community) and Sjanel Wickenden (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer).

ALSO PRESENT:

At the commencement of the meeting approximately 7 members of the public, including registered speakers.

17 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 58 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors David Barnard, Chris Hinchliff and Lisa Nash.

18 MINUTES - 23 MAY 2024

Audio Recording – 2 minute 36 seconds

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 23 May 2024 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

19 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 27 seconds

There was no other business notified.

20 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 33 seconds

- (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.

Further reminded Councillors of the requirement to complete the mandatory Code of Conduct training by 30 July 2024 and those that were re-elected needed to confirm their interests to the Monitoring Officer.

- (4) The Chair advised that the normal procedure rules in respect of debate and times to speak would apply.
- (5) The Chair advised that 4.8.23(a) of the Constitution applied to agenda items 15 and 16 and the corresponding referrals 8F and 8G. A comfort break would be held at an appropriate time, should proceedings continue at length.
- (6) The Chair thanked everyone involved in the General Election, specifically the Elections team. The Chair congratulated the three elected MPs covering the North Herts area and thanked those MPs that were unsuccessful in their re-election or who had stood down, for their service to North Herts as well as those that stood for election.

Councillor Daniel Allen thanked all those involved in the Election, the outgoing MPs for their hard work and congratulated the new MPs.

(7) Long Service Award – Kevin Abbiss

The Chair announced that Kevin Abbiss, Helpdesk Customer Services Team Leader, had been working at the Council for 40 years, and extended her gratitude to Kevin for his services to the Council.

The following Members paid tribute:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Amy Allen

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

It was:

RESOLVED: That the Council placed on record its sincere thanks and appreciation to Kevin Abbiss for his long and valuable service to Local Government

21 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 15 minutes 12 seconds

The Chair advised that she had invited Catherine Beach and Lynsey Moorley from her chosen charity SANDs, to make a presentation to Council. Ms Beach and Ms Moorley thanked the Chair for the opportunity and provided a presentation for Members, which included that:

- SANDs were a national charity that worked to save babies live and provide support to all those affected when a baby died.
- The charity aimed to amplify the voices of families and maternity staff, and funded research into 90 projects, working to improve maternity care and understand why babies die.
- The charity worked closely with Tommy's to improve maternity standards.
- They funded targeted research to ensure better NHS initiatives for bereavement care for all involved.
- SANDs offered workplace training for colleagues of those affected for their return to work.
- They provided support for parents and families via webinars, workshops, online forums and telephone helplines. Anyone affected could attend for support at no cost and for as long as required.
- There were 6 volunteers at the North Herts branch, and they worked closely with the Lister Hospital.
- There were monthly meetings held in Great Ashby and Stevenage, these were a safe space to talk and were staffed by bereaved parents.
- They had trained befrienders with the training regularly refreshed and there was support available through the SANDs national training helpline.
- There were quarterly family social gatherings in Hitchin where families could bring siblings and create memory jars or plant seeds as well as an annual Christmas party.
- Children requiring support were signposted to the 'Stand By Me' charity.
- They would like to encourage and recruit a male befriender to assist with their support for fathers.
- An annual memorial service was held in October 2023 to coincide with Baby Loss Awareness Week with the Chaplain from Lister Hospital and a performance from the hospital choir.
- They take part in the annual Christmas tree festival in Hitchin as well as many other funding raising events throughout the year.
- They were looking for a volunteer to help with their fund-raising activities.
- They worked closely with the Lister hospital and had a liaison officer who had regular meetings with the Bereavement Care Team. They would like to raise funds to improve the neo natal unit at Lister Hospital.
- There was a baby memorial garden at the QEII Hospital in Welwyn that required improvements, and therefore funding to enable this to happen.
- They would like to set up a clinic for Rainbow parents and specifically for those parents that have lost a child due to a medical termination.
- Family GPs were often unaware of SANDs and a campaign was required so that bereaved patients could be signposted for help.
- During the last Baby Loss Awareness Week, Lister Hospital was illuminated pink and blue and there was a global wave of light to remember lost babies.

- Parents do not always have a place to visit and remember their babies and they would like to build another memorial garden.

In response to a questions from Councillor Sadie Billing, Ms Beach advised that they worked closely with Tommy's and the Lullaby Trust and held local support groups with befrienders.

Ms Moorley advised that no other local baby loss charities held monthly meetings, and supported those affected via Facebook, emails, phone calls and these were places where parents were encouraged to share.

The Chair thanked Ms Beach and Ms Moorley for their presentation, and invited Mr Graham Fisher to present to Council his presentation regarding item 15 Land to the North of the Grange (LG1) – Strategic Masterplan Framework.

Mr Fisher thanked the Chair for the opportunity and provided a presentation for Members, which included that:

- It had been a long journey to get this item to Council.
- North Herts Officers had worked in collaboration with the applicant to achieve an exemplary scheme.
- The scheme would provide a modern-day extension to the Garden City.
- There had been an extensive programme of community consultation, and time had been spent listening to the concerns and ambitions of residents.
- The scheme was important to Letchworth Garden City and would create much need housing.
- The housing would be truly affordable.

The Chair thanked Mr Fisher for his presentation.

22 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

Audio recording – 31 minutes 29 seconds

N.B Councillor Steven Patmore left the Chamber at 20:15 and returned at 20:18.

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

(A) Legal Advice Received on the Waste Contract Award

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

'What legal advice has been given to this authority regarding the new Waste Contract, specifically the conflict of a three weekly residual waste collection with the draft Statutory Guidance on the Collection of Waste from Households October 2023 which is proposed to be made under Section 45AZE of the Environmental Protection Act 1990?'

Councillor Daniel Allen provided the following response:

'North and East Herts Councils received detailed legal advice from Sharp Pritchard regarding the draft statutory guidance to support the Council's decision making progress. The advice was provided as an appendix to the Part 2 report to both the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet'.

Councillor Ralph Muncer asked a supplementary question, as follows:

‘Does the Leader of the Council agree that by implementing a three weekly bin collection of residual waste, not only is this authority going against that statutory guidance and industry best practice, but it will impose upon our residents a worse service compared to that which they currently receive?’

Councillor Daniel Allen responded:

‘The Cabinet had regard for the draft statutory guidance in Appendix 6 and had taken that into account, the matters were set out in the part two report, there were reconfirmed the decision on the three-weekly collection. One thing I would say as you have mentioned ‘smelly waste’, which is a phrase that I hate and was given to us by the outgoing Government, households with ‘smelly waste’ would be allowed the opportunity for more frequent collections, if entitled. Other than that Councillor Muncer you have seen all the reasoning and it is all available to you’.

(B) Local Authority Flex Collect Scheme Rollout

Councillor Joe Graziano to Councillor Dave Winstanley, Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health:

‘Why is this authority unable to offer the full benefits of the ECO4 Plus LA Flex Scheme unlike other local authorities in the region including Watford Borough Council and Luton Borough Council?’

Councillor Dave Winstanley gave a response as follows:

‘Just a bit of background, ECO 4 is an acronym of Energy Company Obligation and it is an initiative where energy companies fund energy efficiency upgrades to qualifying private homes, the qualification criteria relates to low income or otherwise vulnerable households, homeowners. Under ECO 4, there is no Local Authority involvement, homeowners apply directly for that. Now ECO 4 Flex which is what the question relates to is an additional optional element which Local Authorities may choose to administer, the Local Authority can declare additional households as eligible for the funding, provided they meet the criteria under Eco 4. Now last year this Council instigated the setting up of an ECO 4 Flex scheme by partnering with an energy company, unfortunately however progress has stalled on this, Council resource constraints have also meant the capacity to investigate alternative options for a scheme have been severely limited. However, in recent weeks a potential alternative route has been found with the national energy foundation and we are hopeful that this can be progressed in the coming weeks so that a scheme can be set up’.

(C) Electric Vehicle Chargers in North Hertfordshire

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

‘What plans does the Council have to increase the number of Electric Vehicle Chargers in North Hertfordshire?’

Councillor Daniel Allen gave a response as follows:

‘North Herts Council Officers procured an EV Charge Point operator Blink Charging under a concession contract in 2023 to deliver and install 36 new sockets over 18 new EV charge points in car park across the four towns in Letchworth this would be at Hillshott car park, Hitchin in Bancroft Recreation and Woodside car parks, Baldock in the Twitchell car park and Royston in the Warren car park.

The contract is at no cost to the Council, it will be funded entirely by the charge point operator and a £135,000 capital grant fund from the Office of Zero Emission Vehicles which was awarded in September 2023. It is a requirement from the OZEV the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles grant that the EV Charge points must be available to residents without off street parking, each of the above mentioned car park are in Council ownership and the location chosen for the EV Charge points are within reasonable walking distance of residential properties located within an in close proximity to the town centres.

The concession contract also includes the replacement of the existing publicly accessible Genie Point charge point which are now 10 years old, and there are in the following Council car parks, the Lairage multi-storey car park in Hitchin and Woodside, the Garden Square multi-storey car park in Letchworth, the Twitchell car park in Baldock and the Civic Centre Town Hall car park in Royston. The contract also includes replacing two charge points for the Council fleet vehicles in the Garden Square multi-storey car park, and the provision of four new EV fleet vehicle charge points in the Lairage multi-storey car park. Officers have been working to finalise the contract with Blink Charging to install, manage and maintain the new and replacement charge points and it is near completion with expected roll out of the charge points starting in the Autumn with completion before March 2025 in order to comply with the requirements of the OZEV grant. Officers are working with the Communications team regarding full publicity over the installation of the new and replacement EV Charge points and I thank you for helping with that publicity.'

Councillor Ralph Muncer asked a supplementary question, as follows:

'What is Council doing in order to increase the number of EV charges in our rural communities such as Codicote and Kimpton?'

Councillor Daniel Allen responded:

'I can give you a basic answer Councillor Muncer but, obviously having recently stepped into this position, I will give you a more in depth one, but the basic answer I can say is that we are working with Hertfordshire County Council, they have prepared and are adopting a county wide electric vehicle charging infrastructure strategy, one of the bug things to do with that are procuring suppliers to deliver EV charge points across the county and especially working for funding for, in 25 location within North Herts including outer urban locations, so that is something that is coming and I will give you a full answer very soon.'

(D) Planning Control Committee Agenda Management

Councillor Ruth Brown to Councillor Elizabeth Dennis, Chair of the Planning Control Committee:

'As Chair of the Planning Control Committee, what measures will you put in place, to prevent a repeat of the debacle of 13 June when the meeting ran on until 1am, in order to ensure that all future agenda items, including complex and contentious applications, such as the Bygrave solar farm, receive the proper consideration they deserve, with the guarantee of fair and robust decision-making?'

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis gave a response as follows:

'I am sorry that Councillor Brown feels that the Planning Committee meeting of the 13 June was a debacle or that there was an inadequate level of scrutiny, in fact I think the Members of the Committee did an excellent job scrutinising the multiple applications - that a lot of them were quite complex that particular evening and we also received some very positive feedback both from residents and applicants in respect of the Committees work that night, so I apologise again to Councillor Brown if she feels the Committee meeting was a debacle that evening but I don't think that our communities or those that we serve would necessarily agree in that regard.'

Thursday, 11th July, 2024

However, turning to forward planning as Councillor Brown is aware I contacted all permanent Members and Substitutes of the Planning Control Committee to ask for their view in respect of managing workloads, the flex that we could perhaps exercise with the Committee in terms of its start time and various other options. To date I have only received five responses to my request for feedback from Members, in order to help shape the Planning Control Committee in a way that is going to serve the residents of this district and facilitate all Members of the Committee to play as full a role as possible.

So those of you who have not responded to my email, you know who you are, please get back to me so that we can help make the Planning Control Committee a really great place and ensure that the robust decision making that did occur on the 13 June is able to carry forward and that we do not have to keep running meetings on late. I am also regularly receiving updates from our lead Planning Officer, sometimes weekly on the pipeline of work that is coming through to the Planning Control Committee, and what we do is we go through and check the deadlines for commercial applications and when they need to be heard at Committee as well as balancing the contentious applications and seeing where there is flex in the system in order to meet timelines and also deliver robust Committee scrutiny. That work will absolutely be ongoing to make sure that those agendas are manageable. In respect of the Bygrave Solar Farm I did specifically ask if the applicant would be happy to hold the application until a later meeting, especially bearing in mind the general election and that the application itself was likely to be politically contentious, the applicant was not minded to do so, it needed to be heard in terms of its commercial timelines so it went to that particular Committee, had we been able to move that to the subsequent Committee meeting, I think that we would have finished at a more sociable time. Ultimately the challenge that the Planning Committee faces is the massive amount of work that is coming our way, not just from items Members might be calling in because they have concerns or their residents are concerned but just the sheer volume that needs to be considered and decided at Planning Committee, so even after doubling up the number of meeting we have each year we still struggle to fit them in and having a meeting start at 7:30pm in the evening really does mean that unfortunately colleagues that we will run on quite late, other Councils meet during the daytime, look around the room the make up of this Council is such that I think some Councillors would struggle with daytime Planning meetings. So to all the five members that have responded to my request for feedback and suggestions to improve the Committee, thank you so much, again to those of you that have not please get back to me because as Councillor Brown has indicated I think there is a spot in the evening where effective decision making becomes more challenging and I need your feedback and participation so we can shape this to be a Committee that is really going to serve everyone's best interests.'

Councillor Ruth Brown asked a supplementary question, as follows:

'How does the Committee Chair propose to ensure that Committees time is used properly in future and not wasted by Members calling in items for spurious reasons?'

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis responded:

'So when Members ask to call in items, I discuss that with the Planning Officers and also with those Members involved, it may be that the Committee agreed with the Officers recommendations in respect of the two applications in Baldock that were heard at the following Planning Committee however, looking at the emerging National Policy that is coming through under this new government as well as having regard to our emerging policies and points within the NPPF on review I felt that it was appropriate for the Committee to consider whether or not it was in the public interest to reduce the amount of commercially viable space in one of our town centres and it is the role of the Committee to scrutinise and apply our local policies to the report and the decisions Officers are asking us to make so I do not think that, that was a waste of time and as I indicated had I been able to move some of the applications that were heard at the Committee meeting the previous week I absolutely would have some in order to balance the time that was spent across both of those meetings rather than as having a meeting that ran on to 1am the previous week.'

Not every item that a Member has to be called in, is relevant or carries a public interest argument with it, and I think that is the role of discretion in, when we are setting our agendas and we need to remember that while our Officers do provide us very good very high quality professional advice they are not always right and it is best sometimes for decisions to be scrutinised in public, rather than just being dealt with by a delegated decision.'

23 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

Audio recording – 50 minutes 10 seconds

There were no motions submitted in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.12.

24 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Audio recording – 50 minutes 15 seconds

N.B Councillor Ralph Muncer left the Chamber at 20:23 and returned at 20:25, Councillor Dominic Griffiths left the Chamber at 20:25.

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

25 KEY DECISIONS - LEADER'S ANNUAL REPORT ON CASES OF SPECIAL URGENCY

Audio recording – 52 minutes 3 seconds

N.B Councillor Nigel Mason left the Chamber at 20:28 and returned at 20:29.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Daniel Allen presented the report 'Annual Report on Cases of Special Urgency' and highlighted that:

- There had been two instances where special urgency was required in 2023-24.
- At the Cabinet meeting of the 27 June 2023, the Local Authority Housing Fund, round 2 scheme, was considered as a matter of urgency as a decision was required by the 5 July 2023.
- At the Cabinet Sub Committee (Local Authority Trading Companies Shareholder) meeting of the 19 March 2024 a Part 2 decision was required on the initiation of operations on the Broadwater Hundred Property Management Ltd, regarding Harkness Court, and the approval of a financial loan. Any delay on the approval of loan would have caused an increase in the project costs.
- In both instances the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was informed or agreed to the urgency, as required by the Constitution.

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

RESOLVED: That Council noted the report.

REASON FOR DECISION: To comply with Regulation 19 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 ("the Regulations").

26 DISREGARD OF WAR DISABLEMENT INCOME

Audio recording – 54 minutes 51 seconds

N.B Councillor Dominic Griffiths returned to the Chamber at 20:29

Councillor Ian Albert, Executive Member for Finance and IT, presented the report entitled 'Disregard of War Disablement Income' and highlighted that:

- The Council had a proud record for their support of war veterans, widows, those with war disablement and people that have been in the armed forces.
- Armed forces veterans were eligible for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.
- It was a policy of the Council to disregard any income over and above the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) when calculating housing benefit entitlements for war widows and those with war disablements. This report sought to formalise that policy, and was attached at Appendix B.
- If the policy was adopted and confirmed, the entitlement to housing benefit would be recognised and support would be given.

In response to a question from Councillor Jon Clayden, the Benefits Manager stated that they had one person in receipt of this disregard.

Councillor Ralph Muncer stated that this policy was strongly welcomed, and they were proud to support the armed forces covenant.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Val Bryant seconded and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Council adopted the policy at Appendix B.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

- (1) The Housing Benefit Regulations make provision for the first £10 of a war disablement or war widow's pension to be disregarded when calculating an applicant's income relating to an application for housing benefit. The cost of this disregard is fully reimbursed to the Council by government.
- (2) The legislation also allows the Council to disregard any other part of these pensions and this Council has wholly disregarded the payments for a number of years when calculating housing benefit or council tax reduction entitlement.
- (3) The Council's council tax reduction scheme is aligned to housing benefit regulations and disregards war disablement or war widow pension.

27 COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW TERMS OF REFERENCE

Audio recording – 1 hour and 47 seconds

N.B Councillor Emma Rowe left the Chamber at 20:33 and returned at 20:34.

The Democratic Services Manager presented the report entitled 'Community Governance Review Terms of Reference' and stated that:

- The report was being presented as a next stage, following the review of the district ward boundaries.

Thursday, 11th July, 2024

- The outcome of the district review resulted in the Council moving to whole Council elections and an increase in the numbers of Councillors along with changes to ward boundaries and names.
- The Community Governance Review (CGR) now focused on the electoral arrangements at Parish level.
- Following a review of warding arrangements by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England changes to the parish arrangements were required so that they remained fit for purpose and reflected local communities.
- There was an aspiration to formulate a Town Council for Hitchin.
- Royston Town Council were dissatisfied with the warding arrangements imposed by the Commission for Royston.
- It had been some time since the last CGR, the review would therefore cover the entire district and consult on a wide range of topics.
- Council was asked to agree the Terms of Reference in Appendix A to formally start the CGR.
- The proposed consultation questionnaire was attached as Appendix B.
- The questionnaire responses would be reviewed, and draft recommendations would be developed and discussed by a CGR Working Group, before being considered by Council.
- The review should be completed within 12 months.
- Any changes resulting from the CGR would be implemented ahead of the elections in May 2026.
- Additional funding was required for a consultant to assist with leading and coordinating the CGR.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Matt Barnes
- Councillor Alistair Willoughby
- Councillor Donna Wright

In response to questions, the Democratic Services Manager advised:

- The CGR would consider a wide range of topic as listed within the report. Any devoluted powers as a result of the creation of any new parish would be at a later stage of the process.
- Previous comments submitted to the Commission by Royston Town Council were included within the report for context. This consultation would allow anybody, including Royston Town Council, to submit response, which may differ from those previously submitted.,
- The Commission had put in place changes to Royston Town Council and Bygrave Parish Council. Should the recommendations be for changes to these areas, the Council would need to consult the Commission.

Councillor Ruth Brown agreed that wide scope changes were needed especially with the recent large developments in Royston and that the alignment of the electoral cycles would be cost efficient.

Councillor Ralph Muncer stated that as the last review was in 2006, a new review was long overdue. Parish Councillors had important roles, engaging with residents, and empowering the Communities, especially as their meetings tended to have greater public attendance.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Ruth Brown seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Council agreed the Terms of Reference for the Community Governance Review, signifying the formal start of the Review and commencement of the first stage consultation.

- (2) That Council approved the additional budget of £20k required for the use of the Association of Electoral Administrators consultancy service to assist with delivering the Community Governance Review.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: The Council is required to keep parish electoral arrangements under review. Following the LGBCE review of district electoral arrangements (Council size and warding patterns), it is necessary to review parish arrangements across the district to bring them into alignment, ensure they remain fit for purpose, and to ensure they continue to reflect local needs.

28 ANNUAL REPORT ON RISK MANAGEMENT GOVERNANCE 2023-24

Audio recording – 1 hour 15 minutes 46 seconds

N.B Councillor Mick Debenham entered the Chamber at 20:48.

N.B Councillor Martin Prescott left the Chamber at 20:49 and returned at 20:52.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Daniel Allen presented referral 8A from Cabinet and stated that the report was referred to Council to ensure that there was effective oversight.

Councillor Ian Albert, Executive Member for Finance and IT presented the report 'Annual Report on Risk Management Governance 2023-24' and stated that:

- The report highlighted the ongoing work on Risk Management over the last financial year and gave assurances to Council that it was operating effectively.
- A visual risk profile of key corporate risks was shown at paragraph 8.2.5 of the report.
- The high scoring service level risks were highlighted at paragraph 8.2.6 of the report.
- There had been a discussion at the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee (FAR) meeting regarding target risk scores, and in the future, these would be shown in more detail.
- The Senior Management Group carried out an exercise in relation to risks and specifically the risk of a cyber-attack. This had resulted in a cross-party Cyber Board being created and was highlighted in paragraph 8.5.3 of the report.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Steve Jarvis
- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor Claire Strong

In response to questions, Councillor Albert advised that:

- The report reflected the work of the previous Labour and Liberal Democrat administration.
- The Risk Group were reviewing emerging risks, and more details of these risks could be added to future reports.
- Recruitment risks were stated in paragraph 8.2.6 of the report and were classed as service level risks.
- The comments from FAR related to corporate risks, and future consideration could be given to service level risks as well, and whether these should be included as corporate risks.

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

RESOLVED: That Full Council noted the report.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

- (1) The responsibility for ensuring the management of risks is that of Cabinet, they are assisted by Finance, Audit and Risk Committee who monitor the effective development and operation of Risk Management.
- (2) The Risk Management Strategy and Financial Regulations determine that Council should have overall oversight of Risk Management.

29 INVESTMENT STRATEGY (CAPITAL AND TREASURY) END OF YEAR REVIEW 2023/24

Audio recording – 1 hour 25 minutes 48 seconds

N.B Councillor Paul Ward declared an interest due to his employment and left the Chamber and did not take place in the debate or vote.

N.B Councillor Alistair Willoughby left the Chamber at 21:00 and returned at 21:01, Councillor Emma Fernandes left the Chamber at 21:00 and returned at 21:02.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Daniel Allen presented referral 8B from Cabinet and stated that:

- There had been a reduction in the capital spend of £4.12M with the majority, £2.85M, being moved to the 2024/25 capital spend programme.
- £1.5M of the Local Authority Housing fund had not been required.
- The Council generated £2.94M of investment interest throughout the year, which was significantly more than budgeted.
- Repayment of £200K on borrowing had been made, with an outstanding balance of £347K, it was noted that there was a premium for repaying this loan early.

Councillor Ian Albert, Executive Member for Finance and IT presented the report 'Investment Strategy (Capital and Treasury) End of Year Review 2023/24' and stated that:

- Council was asked to approve the annual report and the changes to the investment strategy with regards to the Lloyds Call Account.
- The changes to the capital spend were highlighted in table 2 and 3 of the report.
- The completed capital schemes were detailed in paragraph 8.6 of the report.
- Table 4 of the report detailed the funding for the Capital Programme.
- A full review of the capital spend, and the matching priorities, would be carried out prior to the setting of the 2025 -26 budget.
- The Council generated £2.941M of interest this year, which was £1.6M more than forecasted, all investments were made in line with the investment strategy.
- There was an outstanding amount of £347K for borrowing, however this was on a fixed rate for a fixed period of time and a premium would be incurred if repaid early.
- There was an investment strategy change regarding the Lloyds Call Account and this was detailed in paragraph 8.19 of report.

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

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Council approved the actual 2023/24 prudential and treasury indicators.
- (2) That Council noted the annual Treasury Report for 2023/24.

- (3) That Council approved a change to the Investment Strategy allowing investments to be placed on Lloyds Call Account so the combined total of Current Account and Call Account is up to £5M.

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.

30 REVENUE BUDGET OUTTURN 2023/24

Audio recording – 1 hour 33 minutes 4 seconds

N.B Councillor Paul Ward returned to the Chamber at 21:05

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Daniel Allen presented referral 8C from Cabinet and stated that the report informed Council of the summary position on revenue income and expenditure for the financial year 2023/24.

Councillor Ian Albert, Executive Member for Finance and IT presented the report 'Revenue Budget Outturn 2023/24' and stated that:

- The report informed Cabinet and Council of the summary position on revenue income and expenditure for the financial year 2023/24.
- There had been a decrease in spending of £1.94M.
- Council was asked to transfer £2.028M to earmarked reserves as highlighted in table 9 of the report.
- The Revenue Budget was reviewed every quarter by Finance, Audit and Risk Committee (FAR) and then by Cabinet.
- The significant variances for the year were detailed in table 4 of the report.
- The summary variances for the whole year were attached as Appendix A.
- There had been a higher than expected return from interest rates and this formed part of the increased year end general fund balance and was detailed in table 7 of the report. It was not anticipated that these returns would continue.
- There were some uncertainties regarding the change of government and the revenue income for future years.
- The Council was in a strong position to manage the budget and to meet the challenges of setting the budget for 2025-26.

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

RESOLVED: That Council approved the net transfer to earmarked reserves, as identified in table 9, of £2.028million.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

- (1) Members are able to monitor, make adjustments within the overall budgetary framework and request appropriate action of Services who do not meet the budget targets set as part of the Corporate Business Planning process.
- (2) Changes to the Council's balances are monitored and approved.

N.B. Following the conclusion of this item there was a short break in proceedings and the meeting reconvened at 21:20, Councillor Ruth Clifton did not return.

31 LAND TO THE NORTH OF THE GRANGE (LG1) - STRATEGIC MASTERPLAN FRAMEWORK

Audio recording – 1 hour 48 minutes 8 seconds

N.B Councillor Ian Mantle declared an interest due to his appointment as the Council Representative on the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation and left the Chamber and did not take place in the debate or vote.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Daniel Allen presented referral 8F from Cabinet and the report 'Land to the North of the Grange (LG1) – Strategic Masterplan Framework' and stated that:

- The site was an allocated development in the adopted Local Plan, site LG1 policy SP15 for the building of 900 homes and supporting infrastructure, and this required a Masterplan to be completed.
- The Masterplan had been produced by the applicant in collaboration with Council Officers and advisors following guidelines and procedures.
- This was a strategic site and was positively referred from Cabinet.

The following Members took part in debate:

- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Daniel Allen

Points raised in debate included:

- The applicant had worked in consultation with Officers, North Herts College and the Local Enterprise Partnership.
- There were added extras in the Masterplan, including agreements regarding apprenticeships, cooperative housing and community land.
- Work would be ongoing with Officers to integrate the development into the Grange estate.
- This was a landscape led development that was above the expected standards and would provide 40% open space.
- The site exceeded the required Biodiversity Net Gain requirement.
- The development met most of the sustainability principles and work was ongoing on the remaining principles.
- There would be 40% of affordable homes for Letchworth and the community.
- The Heritage Foundation helped in the development of the plan.
- There had been many events to encourage dialogue with the Grange and Norton communities and from these it was apparent that most residents were in favour of the development.
- The Ecological and Environmental emergencies had been considered when developing this plan.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Ruth Brown seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Strategic Masterplan Framework for Land to the North of the Grange (LG1), attached at Appendix A, is approved and adopted as a material planning consideration for relevant planning decisions relating to the site.

REASON FOR DECISION: To facilitate the delivery of a strategic site within the Council's adopted Local Plan. To accord with policy requirements of the Local Plan.

32 NORTH STEVENAGE STRATEGIC MASTERPLAN FRAMEWORK

Audio recording – 1 hour 56 minutes 38 seconds

N.B Councillor Ian Mantle returned to the Chamber at 21:28.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Daniel Allen presented referral 8G from Cabinet and the report 'North Stevenage Strategic Masterplan Framework' and stated that:

- The site was an allocated development in the adopted Local Plan, site NS1 policy SP16 for the building of 900 homes and supporting infrastructure, and this required a Masterplan to be completed.
- The Masterplan had been produced by the applicant in collaboration with Council Officers and advisors following guidelines and procedures.
- The draft masterplan had been subject to public consultation.
- The Masterplan had been referred from Cabinet.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Tom Tyson
- Councillor Jon Clayden
- Councillor Alistair Willoughby
- Councillor Matt Barnes
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Steve Jarvis
- Councillor Sam Collins

In response to questions, the Strategic Planning Manger advised:

- An Outline Planning application had been submitted for this site and was under consideration. The Masterplan was for consideration prior to the determination of the application, and this was in-line with policy, Should the Masterplan be approved, it would provide the design framework and be used as consideration in determining the application.
- The applicant and Officers were already working on the design code, the Masterplan was the second of six stages of the code.
- The street width was not considered in the Masterplan and would be reviewed at a later design stage.
- Shopping habits had changed post Covid and there was evidence that a retail provision would not be viable on the site, but there would be a retail provision provided on the adjacent site. This site would have a focus on Community functions.
- There would be a Community Hub on the site, and health had been identified as a potential use pending NHS commitment.
- There had been a public consultation last spring at Stevenage Rugby Club and the draft Masterplan was available online.
- There had been meetings with stakeholders to discuss the Masterplan.
- It was no longer perceived as practical to plant dense conifers as a boundary and a mixture of trees, hedgerows and planting was now encouraged.
- Along with the adjacent site a new community would be built, with links to Stevenage including bus routes and a cycle network. However, each site would have a distinct character.
- There would essentially be one access point from North Road, with the potential to form a loop with the Stevenage site, thus forming two access points.

- Highways had approved the access points using transport modelling and pending a further transport assessment. The modelling concentrated on movements by car, bicycles and on foot.
- The transport modelling had been completed by the District Council through the County Council. It was expected that any applicant would also complete their own assessment at a later date.
- There would be as many active traffic connections as possible, with networks into Stevenage, this would be further explored at the next design stage.
- It was expected that the applicant would make contributions to traffic projects in the area.

The following Members took part in debate:

- Councillor Dominic Griffiths
- Councillor Dave Winstanley
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Tom Tyson
- Councillor Sam Collins
- Councillor Matt Barnes

Points raised in debate included:

- There were concerns regarding only one access point to the site and the sheer weight of traffic which would use Junction 8 of the A1(M).
- The Masterplan was striving for the highest level of Biodiversity Net Gain.
- There were a number of outstanding issues, particularly with the infrastructure.
- The vast majority of residents would be reliant on their cars, and this would lead to further congestion in the area.
- The site needed more links to the adjacent site.
- The site was approved in the Local Plan, and more housing was needed in the North Herts area.
- Some of the issues would be resolved at the next design stages.
- The site should have been considered alongside, or together with, the adjacent site as a cross boundary Masterplan.
- There had been a lack of community engagement.
- There were concerns regarding the potential of a management company for the site.
- The Masterplan was policy compliant on affordable housing.
- There would be retailers on the Stevenage side of the development.
- The Masterplan respected nearby Gravely village.
- It did not feel like there was a coherent extension to the Stevenage site.
- There was a lack of facilities within the site.
- The Masterplan should be rejected, and changes made regarding the concerns raised in this debate.

In response to points raised in debate, the Service Director – Regulatory stated that if the motion was not supported the framework would be further considered by the project board alongside the developer, and presented again to a future Cabinet meeting, advising of any possible changes.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Mick Debenham seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the motion was lost.

33 FINANCE, AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

Audio recording – 2 hours 29 minutes and 36 seconds

Councillor Sean Nolan presented referral 8D from the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee and the report entitled 'Finance, Audit and Risk Committee Annual Report 2023-2024' and thanked Officers including the Service Director – Resources, the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer, the Independent Member and former Committee Members for their support and debate over the 2023-24 Civic Year.

Councillor Sean Nolan proposed and Councillor Daniel Allen seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Council noted the Annual Report of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee as attached at Appendix A.

REASON FOR DECISION: To provide Full Council with assurance as to the effectiveness of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.

34 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

Audio recording – 2 hours 31 minutes and 37 seconds

N.B Councillor Dominic Griffiths left the Chamber at 22:04.

Councillor Val Bryant presented the report entitled 'Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2023-2024' and advised that there were no legal, financial or risk implications from the report and that, as recommended by the recent Peer Review, a Scrutiny Officer was now in place and the Committee was looking forward to working with them.

Councillors, Matt Barnes and Daniel Allen thanked Councillor Val Bryant for her work with the Committee over the last year.

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

RESOLVED: That the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2023/2024 as attached at Appendix A was noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable Council to consider and comment on the report of the Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the work of the Committee in the 2023/2024 Civic Year.

35 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Audio recording – 2 hours 34 minutes

Councillor Ruth Brown presented the report entitled 'Annual Report of the Standards Committee' and advised of the following, that:

- The Standards Committee had a busy year, with changes to the Member Planning Code of Good Practice and the updated the Councillor Complaints Handling Procedure.
- Thanks was given to the Independent and Reserve Independent Persons, the Monitoring Officer and the Deputy Monitoring Officer for their support to the Committee.
- The number of complaints decreased last year.
- Complaints were reviewed and, if required, investigated by Officers and the Independent Person.

Councillor Alistair Willoughby thanked the Standards Committee for their work and the Independent Persons, the Monitoring Officer and the Deputy Monitoring Officer for their support.

Councillor Daniel Allen reminded Councillors that there was mandatory Code of Conduct training to be completed.

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

RESOLVED: That Council received and noted the Annual Report, as Appendix A.

REASON FOR DECISION: In line with recommended good governance practice to report the work of Standards Committee to the full Membership, to promote and maintain high standards of conduct and to demonstrate a strong commitment to ethical values.

36 LEISURE INVESTMENTS AND DECARBONISATION PROJECT

Audio recording – 2 hours 38 minutes 13 seconds

Councillor Mick Debenham, the Executive Member for Environment, Leisure and Green Spaces presented referral 8E from Cabinet and the report 'Leisure Investments and Decarbonisation Project' and stated that:

- The Council secured £7.7M of funding for this project in February 2024 for Solar PV panels and Air Source heat pumps for the three Leisure centres. Match funding of £3.06M had also been secured.
- The leisure centres contributed to 45% of the carbon emissions by the Council, and this project would generate a carbon saving of 60% as stated in paragraph 8.1 of the report.
- The Council had declared a Climate Emergency, and this would be the most significant project to reduce the carbon footprint of the Council.
- Willmott Dixon had produced a feasibility report for the project, and they had identified some technical issues which had increased the project costs, these were detailed in paragraph 8.6 of the report.
- There was a termination fee for two of the leisure centres Combined Heat and Power Units (CHP) and this was highlighted in paragraph 8.10 of the report.
- The cost for the Royston gym extension had increased and this was detailed in paragraph 8.15 of the report and related to the requirement to build the extension to net zero carbon standards.

The following Members took part in debate:

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

Points raised in debate included:

- The project would not be affordable without the government funding.
- The gym extension would generate revenue and benefit residents.
- The Royston Learner Pool was not a viable project currently. However, the business case should be reviewed at a later date.

Thursday, 11th July, 2024

- This project and the Royston Learner Pool were discussed at length by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- The Royston Learner Pool project should be revisited should funding become available.
- The project would reduce carbon emissions and show a commitment to achieving the net zero target.
- Officers were actively looking for other funding options for the Royston Learner Pool.
- The termination fee was disappointing.
- The use of a Quantity Surveyor would hopefully drive down the project costs and improve how the project would be managed.
- Officers proactively found and secured the funding for this project.

Councillor Mick Debenham proposed and Councillor Daniel Allen seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Council approves an increase in capital expenditure of £2.4m into the capital programme for the decarbonisation work to the three leisure centres. The overall budget will be profiled across 2024/25 and 2025/26.
- (2) That Council approves an increase in the capital budget of £250k for the Royston Leisure Centre (RLC) gym extension, to ensure the extension is built to net zero carbon standards.
- (3) That Council approves revenue expenditure of up to £757k for termination and removal fees of the gas CHPs at North Herts Leisure Centre and Hitchin Fitness and Swimming Centre. This would be funded from General Fund reserves.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) In May 2019, North Herts Council passed a climate emergency motion. This declaration asserted the council's commitment toward climate action beyond current government targets and international agreements. This is currently pursued through the North Herts Climate Change Strategy 2022-2027 which sets out what the council will aim to do to reduce its own carbon emissions to achieve Carbon Neutrality for the Council's own operations by 2030 and a Net Zero Carbon district by 2040.
- (2) Gas use from our leisure centres is a significant contributor towards the Council's own emissions. In 2022-23, gas use across the three leisure centres accounted for 1,428 tonnes CO₂e. This equates to 45% of the Council's Scope 1-3 emissions. Taking action to replace gas heating for our leisure centres with low carbon alternatives is the single most effective action we can take towards meeting our target of being carbon neutral by 2030.
- (3) There is currently a capital allocation in the 2024/25 budget to build a gym extension at Royston Leisure Centre.

The meeting closed at 10.22 pm

Chair