

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, 22nd May, 2025 at 7.30 pm

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

IN ATTENDANCE: Amy Cantrill (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Faith Churchill (Democratic Services Apprentice), Robert Filby (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Susan Le Dain (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Anthony Roche (Chief Executive), Melanie Stimpson (Democratic Services Manager) and Jeanette Thompson (Director - Governance).

ALSO PRESENT:

At the commencement of the meeting approximately 5 members of the public were present.

1 ELECTION OF THE CHAIR OF THE COUNCIL FOR THE CIVIC YEAR 2025-26

Audio recording – 2 minutes 19 seconds

In the absence of the Chair, Councillor Tina Bhartwas, Vice-Chair of the Council, called for nominations for the position of Chair of the Council for the Civic Year 2025-26.

Councillor Ruth Brown nominated Councillor Keith Hoskins for the Chair of the Council 2025-26. This was seconded by Councillor Val Bryant and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Councillor Keith Hoskins was elected as Chair of the Council for the Civic Year 2025-26.

Councillor Keith Hoskins took the Chair then read and signed the Statutory Declaration of Acceptance of Office and took possession of the Chain of Office. Councillor Hoskins thanked the Council for his election as Chair and advised that his Consort for the year would be Cherry Lincoln.

Having been proposed by Councillor Keith Hoskins, as Chair, and seconded by Councillor Daniel Allen, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Council placed on record its sincere thanks and appreciation to Councillor Clare Billing for her service as Chair of the Council during the past year and also to her Consort Elizabeth Leonard for her help and support during her term of office.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 9 minutes 31 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Clare Billing, Claire Strong, Paul Ward, Dominic Griffiths, Caroline McDonnell, Tamsin Thomas and Tim Johnson.

3 ELECTION OF THE VICE-CHAIR OF THE COUNCIL FOR THE CIVIC YEAR 2025-26

Audio recording – 10 minutes 01 seconds

The Chair called for nominations for the position of Vice-Chair of the Council for the Civic Year 2025-26.

Councillor Matt Barnes confirmed the withdrawal of Councillor Sean Prendergast as nominee for the position of Vice-Chair of the Council.

Councillor Daniel Allen nominated Councillor Sadie Billing for Vice-Chair of the Council 2025-26. This was seconded by Councillor Val Bryant and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Councillor Sadie Billing was elected as Vice-Chair of the Council for the Civic Year 2025-26.

Councillor Sadie Billing then read and signed the Statutory Declaration of Acceptance of Office and took possession of the Chain of office. Councillor Billing thanked the Council for her election as Vice-Chair and advised that her Consort for the year would be Jasun Maughan.

4 MINUTES - 27 FEBRUARY 2025

Audio recording – 14 minutes 22 seconds

Councillor Keith Hoskins, 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 27 February 2025 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

5 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 15 minutes 20 seconds

N.B Councillor Sam Collins entered the Chamber at 19:50

- (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 congratulated all Councillors from across Hertfordshire who were successful in their election to the County Council in the recent elections. Specifically at North Herts, he congratulated Councillors Ian Albert, Tina Bhartwas, Alistair Willoughby, Ruth Brown, Steve Jarvis, Sean Prendergast, Chris Lucas, Ralph Muncer and David Barnard on their successful election or re-election.
- (7) The Chair reminded Members to complete their Register of Interest forms by the 31 May 2025.
- (8) The Chair reminded Members to complete their election expenses by 6 June 2025.
- (9) The Chair encouraged Members, Agents and Election Candidates to complete the post-election survey by the 31 May 2025.
- (10) On behalf of the former Chair, Councillor Clare Billing, the Chair confirmed the amount raised for her chosen charity, Sands, during the civic year 2024-25.
- (11) The Chair offered thanks to Penny Copestake, Chair's Secretary, on behalf of the former Chair of Council Councillor Clare Billing, and announced that a bouquet would be sent in recognition of her hard work and support. The Chair also advised that Penny would be retiring in July 2025 and wished her a very happy and well-deserved retirement.

The Group Leaders thanked Penny for her helpfulness and for the support she had provided them and wished her the best in her retirement.

- (12) The Chair advised that the Director – Place would be retiring shortly after more than 35 years of service at the Council and wished him a long and happy retirement.

The Group Leaders congratulated the Director – Place for his long career at the Council, starting as an Apprentice and working his way up to the position of Director. They all wished him a long and happy retirement.

- (13) The Chair advised that the Director – Governance would be retiring in July 2025 and wished her a long and happy retirement.

The Group Leaders thanked the Director – Governance for her dedication and professionalism during her career at the Council. They all wished her a happy and well-deserved retirement.

6 APPOINTMENT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER OF COUNCIL AND MEMBERS OF THE CABINET FOR 2025/26

Audio recording – 40 minutes 47 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Daniel Allen, Leader of the Council, to move the report regarding the appointment of the Deputy Leader and Members of the Cabinet for the Civic Year 2025-26, including Special Interest Member Champions.

In response to a question from Councillor Matt Barnes, Councillor Daniel Allen advised that the new Executive Member position of Local Government Reorganisation/Devolution would help Cabinet to ensure the Council was prepared for the future changes to local government. The government would be making decisions following the next deadline of 28 November 2025 and this new Cabinet position would provide the extra support needed to assist with the increased workload.

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

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the appointment of the Deputy Leader of the Council for the Civic Year 2025/26 was noted as Councillor Val Bryant.
- (2) That the Members appointed as Executive Members of the Cabinet for 2025/26 and the areas for which they will be responsible, as detailed in Appendix A, published as a supplement, was noted (and that appropriate amendments to section 14 and the constitution generally, was made to reflect those appointments).
- (3) That the Special Interest Member Champions for 2025/26, their purpose and role, as detailed in Appendix A, published as a supplement, was noted.
- (4) That the respective Group Leaders were appointed as the Learning and Development Champions for 2025/26, as outlined in paragraph 8.6.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To comply with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000 and Sections 4.8.1 (a) (vii), 5.2 and 5.3.4 of the Council's Constitution.2.3 for information purposes.

7 APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS OF COMMITTEES, JOINT COMMITTEES AND PANELS FOR 2025/26

Audio recording – 47 minutes 47 seconds

The Chair noted that the Liberal Democrat Group Leader had advised of the following appointment, subsequent to those published:

- Councillor Tina Bhartwas as Substitute on the Planning Control Committee

The Group Leaders were invited by the Chair to appoint members to the remaining vacancies.

The Group Leaders informed the Chair that they would advise the Proper Officer of the appointments at a later date.

The Chair invited Councillor Daniel Allen, Leader of the Council to move the report regarding the appointment of Members of Committees, Joint Committees and Panels for the Civic Year 2025-26 and advised that recommendation 2.2 of the report was no longer required and had been withdrawn.

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

RESOLVED:

- (1) That, for 2025/26, the seats allocated to each political group on the Committees to which Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 applies and the seats allocated to each political party on the bodies to which Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 does not apply, as set out in Appendix A of the report, provided as a supplement, as amended, was noted.
- (2) That, for 2025/26, Members were appointed to the various Committees and other bodies in accordance with the wishes of the individual political groups, as detailed in Appendix B to this report, provided as a supplement, as amended, with the addition of:
 - Councillor Tina Bhartwas as Substitute on the Planning Control Committee
- (3) That, for 2025/26, each political group leader was appointed to the Community Governance Review Working Group, as detailed in 8.6 of the report.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To comply with the provisions of Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

8 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRS AND VICE-CHAIRS OF COMMITTEES FOR 2025/26

Audio recording – 51 minutes 38 seconds

The Chair noted that the Liberal Democrat Group Leader had advised of the following appointment, subsequent to those published:

- Councillor Keith Hoskins as Chair of the Employment Committee.

The Conservative Group Leader made a request to nominate Councillor Elizabeth Dennis as Chair of the Planning Control Committee and this was seconded by Councillor Martin Prescott.

Councillor Daniel Allen advised that this would be not possible as Cllr Dennis was not a member of the Planning Control Committee.

The Chair confirmed that Councillor Elizabeth Dennis could not be nominated for Chair of the Planning Control Committee as she was not a member of that committee.

In response to a question from Councillor Matt Barnes, the Director – Governance advised that there was no reason to preclude a Member from being Chair of the Planning Control Committee if they were married to the Executive Member for Place (ie Planning). Both should conduct themselves in a professional manner, and in respect of the Chair of Planning Control Committee – that was a quasi-judicial Committee, so each planning case should be dealt with in an open and transparent manner and considered on its individual merits.

The Chair invited Councillor Daniel Allen, Leader of the Council to move the report regarding the appointment of Chair and Vice-Chairs of Committees for the Civic Year 2025-26.

A vote was taken as two nominations had been received for the position of the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Councillors Ralph Muncer and Claire Winchester. Councillor Martin Prescott proposed Councillor Muncer and Councillor Steven Patmore seconded. Councillor Ruth Brown proposed Councillor Winchester and Councillor Chris Lucas seconded.

A vote was taken as two nominations had been received for the position of the Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Councillors Martin Prescott and Jon Clayden. Councillor Ralph Muncer proposed Councillor Prescott and Councillor David Barnard seconded. Councillor Chris Lucas proposed Councillor Clayden and Councillor David Chalmers seconded.

A vote was taken as two nominations had been received for the position of the Vice-Chair of the Planning Control Committee - Councillors Martin Prescott and Emma Fernandes. Councillor Ralph Muncer proposed Councillor Prescott and Councillor David Barnard seconded. Councillor Daniel Allen proposed Councillor Fernandes and Councillor Val Bryant seconded.

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

RESOLVED: That the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Committees (except Community Forums) for 2025/26 be appointed in accordance with the details set out in Appendix A to the report, provided as a supplement, as amended, with the addition of:

- Councillor Claire Winchester as the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Councillor Jon Clayden as the Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Councillor Emma Fernandes as the Vice-Chair of the Planning Control Committee
- Councillor Keith Hoskins as the Chair of the Employment Committee.

REASON FOR DECISION: To comply with the provisions of Standing Order 4.8.1(a)(ix) of the Council's Constitution.

9 ADJOURNMENT

Audio recording – 1 hour 3 minutes 35 seconds

The meeting of the Annual Council was adjourned at 20:33 to allow meetings of each Community Forum to convene to elect Chairs and Vice-Chairs for the Civic Year.

The meeting of the Annual Council reconvened at 20:41.

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

Audio recording – 1 hour 11 minutes 42 seconds

The Chair invited the Leader of the Council to move the Annual Report on Cases for Special Urgency for the Civic Year 2024-25.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Matt Barnes seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the report was noted.

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

11 APPROVE A PROGRAMME OF ORDINARY MEETINGS FOR THE COUNCIL FOR THE CIVIC YEAR 2025/26

Audio recording – 1 hour 13 minutes 14 seconds

The Chair invited the Leader of the Council to move the report in respect of the Programme of Ordinary Meetings of the Council for the Civic Year 2025-26.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Ralph Muncer seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Calendar of Meetings for 2025/26, as attached as Appendix A, was approved.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable Members to agree a programme of ordinary meetings of the Council for 2025/26.

12 NOMINATION OF REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS AND OTHER BODIES FOR 2025/26

Audio recording -1 hour 14 minutes 23 seconds

The Chair advised of the following nominations to those published in Appendix A.

- Councillor Emma Rowe – Baldock Community Association
- Councillor Emma Rowe – Baldock United Almshouses Charity
- Councillor Tina Bhartwas – Citizens Advice North Herts
- Councillor Tina Bhartwas – Hertfordshire Health Scrutiny Committee Substitute
- Councillor Tina Bhartwas – Letchworth Civic Trust
- Councillor Tina Bhartwas – North Herts Centre for Voluntary Service

The Chair confirmed the withdrawal of Councillor Mick Debenham as nominee to the London Luton Airport Consultative Committee, which would instead be Councillor Emma Fernandes.

The Chair confirmed the withdrawal of Councillor Sean Prendergast as nominee to the Jackman's Community Association.

The Chair confirmed that the nomination of a representative for the Howard Garden and Daycare Centre would be decided at a later date.

The Chair invited the Leader of the Council to move the report in respect of the Nomination of Representatives on Outside Organisations and Other Bodies for 2025-26 as set out in Appendix A.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed, as amended, the uncontested nominations in Appendix A be approved. This was seconded by Councillor Nigel Mason.

Votes were subsequently conducted on each contested nomination, as highlighted in Appendix A of the report, except for Jackmans Community Association and with the addition of Letchworth Civic Trust. The results recorded for these contested positions are included as below:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the list of nominations of representatives on Outside Organisations and Other Bodies for 2025/26, as set out in Appendix A to the report, provided as a supplement, was approved, as amended, with the exception of the Howard Garden Social and Daycare Centre, with confirmation that:
- The Council's representatives to Baldock Community Association be Councillors Alistair Willoughby, Stewart Willoughby and Emma Rowe.
 - The Council's representatives to Baldock United Almshouses Charity be Councillors Alistair Willoughby, Stewart Willoughby, Rhona Cameran and Emma Rowe.
 - The Council's representatives to Citizens Advice North Herts be Councillors Tina Bhartwas, Bryony May and Vijaiya Poopalasingham.
 - The Council's representatives to Grange Fellowship Community Association be Councillors Tina Bhartwas, Emma Fernandes and Ian Mantle.
 - The Council's representative to Hertfordshire Health Scrutiny Committee be Councillor Jon Clayden and the Substitute representative be Councillor Tina Bhartwas.
 - The Council's representatives to Hitchin Educational Foundation be Councillors Keith Hoskins, Donna Wright, Claire Strong, Ian Albert and Daniel Wright-Mason (as per the appointments made at the Annual Council meeting in 2024 which in respect of this body is a 4 year term of office).
 - The Council's representatives to Jackmans Community Association be Councillors Tamsin Thomas, Sadie Billing and Mick Debenham.
 - The Council's representatives to Letchworth Civic Trust be Councillors Tina Bhartwas, Emma Fernandes and Daniel Allen.
 - The Council's representative to London Luton Airport Consultative Committee be Councillor Emma Fernandes.
- (2) That Political Group Leaders would notify the Democratic Services Manager of nominations to the remaining vacancies or any changes to the existing representatives on outside organisations.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To comply with the provisions of Standing Order 4.8.1(b)(iv) and (v) of the Council's Constitution.

The meeting closed at 9.01 pm

Chair