

# **NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

## **CABINET**

**MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICERS, GERONON ROAD, LETCHWORTH, SG6 3JF  
ON TUESDAY, 20TH MAY, 2025 AT 7.30 PM**

## **MINUTES**

**Present:** *Councillors: Daniel Allen (Chair), Val Bryant (Vice-Chair), Ian Albert, Amy Allen, Mick Debenham and Dave Winstanley.*

**In Attendance:** *Amy Cantrill (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Ian Couper (Director - Resources), Sarah Kingsley (Director - Environment), Susan Le Dain (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager) and Jeanette Thompson (Director - Governance).*

**Also Present:** *At the commencement of the meeting there were no members of the public.*

### **127 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

*Audio recording – 1 minute 11 seconds*

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Tamsin Thomas.

### **128 MINUTES - 18 MARCH 2025**

*Audio recording – 1 minute 22 seconds*

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

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 18 March 2025 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

### **129 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS**

*Audio recording – 2 minutes 3 seconds*

There was no other business notified.

### **130 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

*Audio recording – 2 minutes 7 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.
- (4) The Chair advised for the purposes of clarification that 4.8.23(a) of the Constitution did not apply to this meeting.

**131 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

*Audio recording – 3 minutes 9 seconds*

There was no public participation at the meeting.

**132 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES**

*Audio recording – 3 minutes 14 seconds*

The Chair advised that the item referred from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be taken with the respective item on the agenda.

**133 DECARBONISATION OF LEISURE CENTRES CONTRACT AWARD**

*Audio recording - 3 minutes 31 seconds*

Councillor Mick Debenham, as Executive Member for Environment, Leisure and Green Spaces, presented the referral from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, on behalf of the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny, on this item and advised that the Committee expressed the view that:

- There was concern about the increase in costs of the project over the past 18 months.
- The construction contract should ideally include protections against any further unforeseen costs related to extended closure of facilities.
- The Committee recognised the work done by officers and the project board to mitigate the impact of extended closures at the three leisure centres whilst the decarbonisation work was carried out.
- It was understood that no membership direct debit payments would be taken during the closures of the leisure centres.
- The communication plan should be proactive and used on all available media channels to ensure information was passed on to all customers.

In response to a question from Cllr Daniel Allen, Cllr Mick Debenham advised that at the recent Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting, a cross party of Members had voted unanimously to continue with the project.

Councillor Mick Debenham, as Executive Member for Environment, Leisure and Green Spaces, then presented the report entitled 'Decarbonisation of Leisure Centres Contract Award' and advised that:

- In February 2024 the Council was awarded £7.74 million grant funding from Salix for the decarbonisation works of the three leisure centres.
- This project included the extension of the gym at Royston Leisure Centre, refurbishment of the changing village at Royston Leisure Centre and conversion of the wet change at North Herts Leisure Centre into a change village.

- Cabinet were being asked to award the construction contract for the works to Willmott Dixon Construction Limited at a value of £15.890 million and to agree to increase the overall project budget to £16.271 million, to ensure a reasonable contingency was allowed for any unseen issues. The contracting sum and budget included a £110K contribution from Everyone Active
- Due to the requirement of the grant funding from Salix, early orders had been placed and therefore the spend to date was £6.709 million on this project.
- Everyone Active had provided an indicative figure for the revenue impact the Council would have to incur for closures of approximately £900K.
- Due to the scale of the project, there would inevitably be some disruption to customers whilst works were undertaken.
- Everyone Active would look to the redeployment of staff and other operational efficiencies where possible to reduce costs.
- A significant issue would be the 23-week partial closure of the Hitchin pool from 8am to 4pm Monday to Friday (with a two-week full reopening over Christmas) required to install insulation and solar PVs to the roof, as detailed in paragraph 8.8 of the report. The pool would reopen at 4pm to allow swimming lessons to take place and would also be fully open at weekends.
- Cabinet were being asked to consider extending the outdoor pool seasons at Letchworth to coincide with the indoor pool closures at Letchworth until early October and at Hitchin until the end of October to accommodate swimmers.
- This project would cut the emissions of the leisure centres by approximately two thirds.
- This decarbonisation project would not only ensure that the facilities remained fit for purpose for many years but would also take the Council a significant step towards reaching climate targets and a greener North Hertfordshire.

In response to questions from Cllr Daniel Allen, Cllr Mick Debenham advised that:

- There would be a 5% capital tolerance on the revised project budget, which could be used for contingency for any issues during the construction phase.
- The planned works of the Royston gym extension, the refurbishment of the Royston Leisure Centre change village and the North Herts Leisure Centre change village would be carried out during the planned decarbonisation closures of the leisure centres.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Dave Winstanley

Points raised during the debate included:

- The importance of holding discussions with the project board to ensure the Council was right to proceed with this project.
- It would be good to see an extension of lido sessions at Hitchin and Letchworth.
- This project would be kept under review by the project board as works progressed and the project board would keep Cabinet informed.
- This project would provide the Council with three leisure centres fit for many years to come with net zero emissions.
- Cabinet fully supported this project and wanted to thank everyone involved in making this happen.

**Tuesday, 20th May, 2025**

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

**RESOLVED:** That Cabinet:

- (1) Agreed to increase the project capital budget to £16.271 million.
- (2) Approved the extension of the lido seasons at both Hitchin and Letchworth as per paragraphs 8.13-8.14.
- (3) Approved the changes to the 2025/26 General Fund budget, resulting from the planned closures and extended opening of the lidos, a £937k increase in net expenditure.
- (4) Awarded the leisure decarbonisation construction contract to Willmott Dixon Construction at a value of £15.890 million.

**REASON FOR DECISIONS:** To enable Cabinet to review the progress of the leisure decarbonisation project, including spend to date and anticipated increases in capital budget expenditure, as well as revenue implications (loss of income during closures and net costs of extending outdoor pool opening), and approve the award of the construction contract to Willmott Dixon Construction.

The meeting closed at 7.49 pm

Chair