

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, 4th December, 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, 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, Ralph Muncer, Michael Muir, Lisa Nash, Sean Nolan, Steven Patmore, Louise Peace, Vijaiya Poopalasingham, Sean Prendergast, Martin Prescott, Emma Rowe, Claire Strong, Tamsin Thomas, Paul Ward, Laura Williams, Alistair Willoughby, Stewart Willoughby, Claire Winchester, Dave Winstanley, Donna Wright and Daniel Wright-Mason.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Isabelle Alajooz (Director - Governance and Monitoring Officer), Amy Cantrill (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Ian Couper (Director - Resources), Susan Le Dain (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Anthony Roche (Chief Executive) and Melanie Stimpson (Democratic Services Manager).

ALSO PRESENT:

At the commencement of the meeting approximately eight members of the public.

52 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 22 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Caroline McDonnell, Sarah Lucas, Cathy Brownjohn, Rhona Cameron, Clare Billing and Tom Tyson.

53 MINUTES - 2 OCTOBER, 13 NOVEMBER 2025

Audio Recording – 1 minute 41 seconds

Councillor Keith Hoskins, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Daniel Allen seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meetings of the Committee held on 2 October and 13 November 2025 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

54 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 53 seconds

There was no other business notified.

55 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 35 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 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.

56 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 4 minutes 34 seconds

There was no public participation.

57 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Audio recording – 4 minutes 43 seconds

N.B. At the start of the Item, Councillor Martin Prescott declared an interest as he was the owner of a licensed business and left the Chamber for the duration of the debate and vote on referral 6A.

N.B. Councillor Sam Collins entered the Chamber at 19.37.

6B – Referral from Cabinet – Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025-2030

The Chair advised that referral 6B from Cabinet would be taken with the respective item on the Agenda.

6A – Referral from Licensing & Regulation Committee – Adoption of a Statement of Licensing Policy

Councillor Dave Winstanley, as Chair of Licensing & Regulation Committee, presented the referral from the Licensing & Regulation Committee and highlighted that:

- The policy needed to be adopted by January 2026 and would last for 5 years.
- The policy had remained mainly the same, as the existing policy was considered effective, with an update to data and some wording clarification.
- Links were made, in line with the Council's vision for licensing, to economic vitality and community wellbeing.
- Other updates were made to include references to drink spiking and the Women and Girls Safety Charter.

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

RESOLVED: That the Statement of Licensing Policy, as amended, was adopted.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

- (1) Licensing authorities are required to publish a policy every five years by virtue of section 5 of the Licensing Act 2003 ("the Act").
- (2) A new policy must be published by 7 January 2026 to comply with this statutory requirement.
- (3) The proposed policy builds on the success of the previous and existing versions of the policy, whilst reflecting legislative changes and the Council's priorities.
- (4) Responses to the public consultation were limited and raised no significant opposition to any of the proposals.

N.B. Councillor Martin Prescott returned to the Chamber at 19.38.

58 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2026-30

Audio recording – 8 minutes 18 seconds

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Resources presented the referral from Cabinet and the report and highlighted that:

- When the report was presented at Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, there was cross-party consensus with the proposed Strategy.
- The Strategy had been delayed to allow time to receive further clarification from central government regarding future funding.
- The Government published their funding policy statement on 20 November which has left fewer unknown figures from the original report; however, modelling of this kind can never be certain.
- Further clarity would come with the Local Government Settlement in late December 2025.
- After incorporating Business Rate gains and with Council Tax included the current estimate 2028/29 position would show a small increase in real terms.
- The Council had the pension triennial valuation results and due to the positive performance of the fund there would be a reduction in employer contribution by approximately £1.3 million per annum.
- It was therefore likely that a balanced Revenue Budget could be achieved with no, or minimal, savings.
- The Council should also have maintained a strong General Fund balance well above the minimum recommended level.
- The strategy set out in Appendix A follows the same format as previous strategies with specific references to Fair Funding Two, as well as the current uncertainty, which appeared to be reducing.
- The spread of £2.6 million on table one of Appendix A did not show worst- and best-case scenarios but two possible scenarios that could happen depending on government decisions.
- If savings were required, the Council would not look to make huge savings in 2026/27, but would make total savings by the end of 2028/29.
- The discretionary Council Tax scheme for those with terminal illnesses was being explored with Marie Curie.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Daniel Allen seconded.

As part of the debate, Councillor Paul Ward stated that:

- The final report had included an assessment of impact on the General Fund Reserve Balance, which was included at page 51, following a request at Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.
- There was a high degree of uncertainty in the financial outlook and indicated that in the positive case, at the proposed spending level and with no savings the Council would need to use 21% of general reserves and in the negative case that rises to 62%.
- However, this would still be above the minimum reserves levels of the Council in both cases.
- The Cabinet would need to consider what savings were required in the new year, having taken into account the priorities of residents.

Having been proposed and seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Council approved the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, as attached at Appendix A.

REASON FOR DECISION: Adoption of a Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and communication of its contents will assist in the process of forward planning the use of Council resources and in budget setting for 2026/2027 onwards, culminating in the setting of the Council Tax precept for 2026/27 in February 2026. Alongside the Council Plan, this will support the Council in setting a budget that is affordable and aligned to Council priorities.

59 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

Audio recording – 16 minutes 38 seconds

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

(A) Council Street Naming Policy for new developments

Councillor Joe Graziano to Donna Wright, Executive Member for Place:

'Please outline the Street Naming Policy of the Council for new developments within the district?'

Councillor Donna Wright provided the response, as follows:

'The Council's approach to street naming and numbering is set out on the Council website, and our Officers have followed the same process for many years. The applicant is asked to complete an online application and suggest potential road names; these suggestions are reviewed to make sure they are appropriate using published criteria. This includes making sure the suggested name will not cause confusion with existing road names in the area. Local Councillors in relevant town or parish Councils are consulted where there is agreement, or no objection and Officers confirm the name. Relevant bodies such as Royal Mail, utilities and County Council advised. Where agreement cannot be reached within the consideration period, the matter can be referred to the relevant Committee Forum.'

Councillor Joe Graziano asked a supplementary question, as follows:

'Where several residents who live in an area have a right to complain or object to road naming because it is not in the community interest or they have not been listened to what is the process if any? Is it time we have an updated policy based on discretion not based on outdated statute dating back to 1847?'

Councillor Donna Wright provided the response, as follows:

'The Council has no particular powers or process to rescind or change the name of a street once it has been agreed. The developer can be advised to pursue the matter further if they wish and if they voluntarily approach the council to review the name, to which they previously agreed then a new consultation can take place.'

(B) Expansion of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Councillor Ralph Muncer to Councillor Donna Wright, Executive Member for Place:

'To ask the Executive Member for Place what assessment has been made as to the benefits of expanding the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty across areas of North Hertfordshire?'

Councillor Donna Wright provided the response, as follows:

'For clarification areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are referred to as National Landscapes in national policy and legislation, I guess as outstanding and beauty are subjective terms. Natural England were leading a project to consider changes to the boundaries to the Chiltern National Landscape but they announced this review had been cancelled in May 2025. This was reported to all Councillors through the Members Information Service in May and Cabinet in June.'

In terms of the assessment of the benefits of expanding the boundaries, when the project was cancelled, Natural England advised they were hoping to share the evidence base which had been collated in due course, to inform other projects. We are waiting for this information to be shared to see if or how that evidence might support appropriate council policies or designations in our local plan review.'

Councillor Ralph Muncer asked a supplementary question, as follows:

'The planning reforms bought in by the government have made speculative development in North Hertfordshire more likely, as seen by recent applications in Codicote, St Ippolyts and Ickleford and the expansion of areas of Outstanding National Beauty into areas of North Hertfordshire would have given those areas in North Hertfordshire greater and much needed protection against inappropriate development. Therefore will she take the opportunity tonight to condemn the decision of the Government to withdraw the funding and pause this crucial project, and will she commit to writing to the secretary of state for the department for the environment, food and rural affairs to encourage the Government to unlock this funding and ensure that this project can go ahead as planned under the previous Conservative Government.'

Councillor Donna Wright provided the response, as follows:

'We share the disappointment that this project was cancelled. Let's be clear, Natural England was left with impossible choices because of the funding short fall inherited from the last Government. It is a shame that under their watch this proposal did not progress far enough to secure priority for completion. The good news is that our local MP Alistar Stratham is actively engaging with Natural England to push for environmental investment in our area and as a Council we are not standing still. We are looking at how the data gathered can inform on our next local plan with public consultation starting next year.'

(C) Impact on local water courses from London Luton Airport

Councillor Ralph Muncer to Councillor Donna Wright, Executive Member for Place:

'To ask the Executive Member for Environment what assessment has been made as to the impact of London Luton Airport on local water courses in North Hertfordshire, including our rare and internationally important chalk streams?'

Councillor Donna Wright provided the response, as follows:

'The development consent order for Luton Airport expansion was granted by the Secretary of State in April 2025 following an extensive examination which explored many issues including the potential impact on the chalk aquifer and chalk streams. A study on the possible effects on the water environment was completed and all evidence, and recommendations and the Secretary of States decisions are available to view on planning expectorates website.'

Councillor Ralph Muncer asked a supplementary question, as follows:

'An unpublished environment agency report has highlighted alarmingly high levels of toxic chemicals in and around water courses near major airports, with the highest PFAS levels being recorded at London Luton Airport, in light of this what steps have been taken by the Council to hold the Airport accountable and ensure that our local water courses are unpolluted and clean.'

Councillor Donna Wright provided the response, as follows:

'Our Council plan recognises the importance of districts chalk streams this includes the Rivers Hiz and Mim which are closest to the area effected by the development area for the airport expansion. Our sustainability priorities says we will support efforts to protect our chalk streams. The DCO is subject to judicial review and we are waiting the outcomes of these proceedings. The Impact of the chalk streams has been rigorously assessed and as a council we are committed to safeguarding these vital habitats and we will act based on the legal outcome.'

60 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

Audio recording – 25 minutes 15 seconds

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

Before motions were considered, Councillor Keith Hoskins, as Chair, proposed that Standing Orders 4.8.12(d) and 4.8.12(e) be suspended for the item 'Notice of Motions'. This was seconded by Councillor Sadie Billing and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Standing Orders 4.8.12(d) and 4.8.12(e) be suspended for the duration of Agenda Item 9 – Notice of Motions.

(A) Motion of No Confidence in the Leader of the Council

Councillor Ruth Brown proposed the motion as follows:

'This Council no longer has confidence in the Leader of the Council.'

As such Council resolves:

'That the current Leader of the Council is removed.'

Councillor David Chalmers seconded the motion Councillors Dominic Griffiths, Matt Barnes and Paul Ward confirmed that they were the three further signatories required for such a motion.

The following Members took part in the Debate:

- Councillor Dominic Griffiths
- Councillor Ralph Muncer

- Councillor Donna Wright
- Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason
- Councillor Matt Barnes
- Councillor Laura Williams
- Councillor Tamsin Thomas
- Councillor Steven Patmore
- Councillor David Chalmers
- Councillor Sadie Billing
- Councillor Joe Graziano
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Emma Fernandes
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor Amy Allen
- Councillor Nigel Mason
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Mick Debenham
- Councillor Dave Winstanley
- Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham
- Councillor Claire Winchester
- Councillor Daniel Allen

N.B. During the debate Councillor Dominic Griffiths left the Chamber and returned at 20:27, Councillor Joe Graziano left the Chamber and returned at 20:38, Councillor Ruth Clifton left the Chamber and returned at 20:41, Councillor Tina Bhartwas left the Chamber and returned at 20:45, Councillor Alistair Willoughby left the Chamber and returned at 20:45, Councillor Sean Nolan left the Chamber and returned at 20:46, Councillor Steven Patmore left the Chamber and returned at 20:47, Councillor Sean Prendergast left the Chamber and returned at 20:47.

Points raised during the Debate included that:

- Redebating the points of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) debate was not the point of this motion.
- Trust had been broken between the Leader of the Council and members of the opposition.
- The process of removing the current leader and electing a new leader would cost time and resources which was unnecessary.
- Of the eleven Hertfordshire councils, six of chose to submit the 4 unitary model on LGR to National Government.
- Regardless of the decision of the Council, the Government had the final say on LGR, so the decision taken at Cabinet was redundant.
- The Leader of the Council has given lots to the community in his time as Leader.
- Without an elected Leader, certain decisions cannot be made which would slow down all processes, including any decisions relating to LGR.
- The argument that four Unitary Authorities was the preference of the public was not relevant, given only 587 responses were received to the consultation, out of a population of 133,000 in the district.
- Under this Leadership the council has made strides towards being net zero by 2030.
- Difficult decisions had to be made as part of LGR - deciding to agree with the consensus of Council would have been the easy decision.
- The Leader had encouraged Cabinet members to have a sense of self pride and do the best they can within their roles as Executive Members.
- Trust once broken was hard to mend and telling the public about a private conversation between two Councillors has broken that trust in the Leader.
- A responsible Leader would have listened to Full Council. By not listening to Members, the Leader had demonstrated a lack of respect to fellow Members.

After the conclusion of the debate, under Standing Order 4.8.16(d), Councillor Ralph Muncer requested that the vote take place via ballot. This request was supported by Councillors Claire Strong, Joe Graziano, Steven Patmore, Michael Muir, Martin Prescott and David Barnard.

Having been proposed and seconded, and following a ballot vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the current Leader of the Council was removed.

VOTE TOTALS:

YES	:	25
ABSTAIN	:	1
NO	:	19

Following the result, Councillor Daniel Allen thanked the Officers at the Council for their dedication to delivering for residents and the Chief Executive for his leadership and support. He reassured members of the public that services and progress would still be delivered by the Council.

Following the removal of the Leader of the Council, the Chair called for nominations for Leader of the Council. There were no nominations proposed and therefore it was advised that this item would be presented to an Extraordinary Council meeting on Tuesday 13 January 2026.

N.B. At 21:18 the was a comfort break and the meeting reconvened at 21:30. During the break Councillors Dominic Griffiths, David Barnard and Lisa Nash left the Chamber and did not return to the meeting.

(B) The Local Government Pension Scheme & Responsible Investment

Councillor Dave Winstanley proposed the motion as follows:

'North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) and its staff contribute toward the Hertfordshire Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) which is managed through Hertfordshire County Council's Pension Committee (HPC). The overwhelming majority of past and present NHDC staff are scheme members.'

The Hertfordshire LGPS directly, or indirectly via the ACCESS pool, holds and therefore benefits from shareholdings or funds that have underlying shareholdings, in companies that profit from conflict through the manufacturing of weaponry, and military technology and are alleged to be used in atrocities internationally today.

It also invests in various corporate entities which according to an International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling and subsequent United Nations opinion, are associated with human rights violations and international crimes.

It has been calculated that just under £100 million of the £6 billion pension fund is invested in these companies.

Residents expect councils to invest public funds in ways that are ethical, responsible and transparent.

This motion requests that HPC withdraw any links - through these investments - to supporting war, weapons manufacturing, military technology, or any other business activities that breach international law.

Council therefore resolves:

1. To instruct the Acting Leader of the Council to write formally to the Pensions Committee of Hertfordshire County Council to:
 - a. Express our concerns above, and request that under its fiduciary duty, it takes action to divest from all pension fund investments in companies that profit from the manufacture of weapons and military technology used contrary to international law, and from any companies found to be profiting from business activity which is illegal under international law.
 - b. Request the Hertfordshire Pension Fund to apply Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) standards to not just directly held managed funds but also pension fund assets pooled with ACCESS.
 - c. Request that the Hertfordshire Pension Committee will regularly disclose details of all holdings (including directly managed and those pooled with ACCESS) annually for the public to see that the fund is complying with International Law.
2. Council further instructs that at the next scheduled review of North Hertfordshire District Council's own Investment Strategy; the review specifically considers how to align with the above investment principles.'

Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason seconded the motion.

The following Members took part in the Debate:

- Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason
- Councillor David Chalmers
- Councillor Vijiya Poopalasingham
- Councillor Sean Nolan
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Donna Wright
- Councillor Ian Albert

Points raised during the Debate included that:

- Other pension providers already comply with ethical investment practices.
- This would not result in weakening the pension as there was evidence that ethical investment was also fiscally responsible.
- Legal obligations should be met in all aspects of the Council's responsibility.
- Money invested by the Council should meet the ethical standards of the Council, including the pension scheme.

N.B. Councillor Emma Rowe declared an interest due to the employment of a close relative and did not take part in the vote.

N.B. Councillor Paul Ward declared an interest due to his employment and did not take part in the vote.

Having been proposed and seconded, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Council

1. Instructed the Acting Leader of the Council to write formally to the Pensions Committee of Hertfordshire County Council to:
 - a. Express our concerns above, and request that under its fiduciary duty, it takes action to divest from all pension fund investments in companies that profit from the manufacture of weapons and military technology used contrary to international law,

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and from any companies found to be profiting from business activity which is illegal under international law.

- b. Request the Hertfordshire Pension Fund to apply Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) standards to not just directly held managed funds but also pension fund assets pooled with ACCESS.
- c. Request that the Hertfordshire Pension Committee will regularly disclose details of all holdings (including directly managed and those pooled with ACCESS) annually for the public to see that the fund is complying with International Law.

2. Instructed that at the next scheduled review of North Hertfordshire District Council's own Investment Strategy; the review specifically considers how to align with the above investment principles.

The meeting closed at 9.48 pm

Chair