

**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**



26 November 2025

Our Ref    Council 4 December 2025  
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To:    The Chair and Members of North Hertfordshire District Council

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN OF A**

**MEETING OF THE COUNCIL**

to be held in the

**COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERNON  
ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY, SG6 3JF**

on

**THURSDAY, 4TH DECEMBER, 2025**

at

**7.30 PM**

Yours sincerely,

Isabelle Alajooz  
Director – Governance

**\*\*MEMBERS PLEASE ENSURE THAT YOU DOWNLOAD ALL AGENDAS AND REPORTS VIA THE MOD.GOV APPLICATION ON YOUR TABLET BEFORE ATTENDING THE MEETING\*\***

## **Agenda**

### **Part I**

<b>Item</b>		<b>Page</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b>	
<b>2.</b>	<b>MINUTES - 2 OCTOBER, 13 NOVEMBER 2025</b> To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committees held on the 2 October and 13 November 2025.	5 - 30
<b>3.</b>	<b>NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS</b> Members should notify the Chair of other business which they wish to be discussed at the end of either Part I or Part II business set out in the agenda. They must state the circumstances which they consider justify the business being considered as a matter of urgency.  The Chair will decide whether any item(s) raised will be considered.	
<b>4.</b>	<b>CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS</b> <u>Climate Emergency</u>  The Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to achieving a target of zero carbon emissions by 2030 and helping local people and businesses to reduce their own carbon emissions.  A Cabinet Panel on the Environment has been established to engage with local people on matters relating to the climate emergency and advise the council on how to achieve these climate change objectives. A Climate Change Implementation group of councillors and council officers meets regularly to produce plans and monitor progress. Actions taken or currently underway include switching to green energy, incentives for low emission taxis, expanding tree planting and working to cut food waste.  In addition the council is a member of the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership, working with other councils across Hertfordshire to reduce the county's carbon emissions and climate impact.  The Council's dedicated webpage on Climate Change includes details of the council's climate change strategy, the work of the Cabinet Panel on the Environment and a monthly briefing on progress.  <u>Ecological Emergency</u>  The Council has declared an ecological emergency and is committed to addressing the ecological emergency and nature recovery by identifying appropriate areas for habitat restoration and biodiversity net gain whilst ensuring that development limits impact on existing habitats in its process.	

The Council has set out to do that by a) setting measurable targets and standards for biodiversity increase, in both species and quantities, seeking to increase community engagement, b) to work with our partners to establish a Local Nature Partnership for Hertfordshire and to develop Nature Recovery Networks and Nature Recovery Strategy for Hertfordshire and c) to investigate new approaches to nature recovery such as habitat banking that deliver biodiversity objectives and provide new investment opportunities.

#### Declarations of Interest

Members are reminded that any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda, should be declared as either a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or Declarable Interest and are required to notify the Chair of the nature of any interest declared at the commencement of the relevant item on the agenda. Members declaring a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest must withdraw from the meeting for the duration of the item. Members declaring a Declarable Interest, wishing to exercise a 'Councillor Speaking Right', must declare this at the same time as the interest, move to the public area before speaking to the item and then must leave the room before the debate and vote.

#### **5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

To receive petitions, comments and questions from the public.

#### **6. ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES**

31 - 34

To consider any items referred from other Committees. Any items referred to this meeting will be published as a supplementary document.

#### **7. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2026-30 REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – RESOURCES**

35 - 52

For Council to approve the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2026-30.

#### **8. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS**

To consider any questions submitted by Members of the Council, in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.11 (b).

#### **9. NOTICE OF MOTIONS**

53 - 56

To consider any motions, due notice of which have been given in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.12.

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## 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, 2nd October, 2025 at 7.30 pm

**PRESENT:** Councillors: Keith Hoskins MBE (Chair), Sadie Billing (Vice-Chair), Clare Billing, Tina Bhartwas, Daniel Allen, Amy Allen, Matt Barnes, Ruth Brown, Cathy Brownjohn, Val Bryant, Rhona Cameron, David Chalmers, Jon Clayden, Sam Collins, Mick Debenham, Elizabeth Dennis, Emma Fernandes, Joe Graziano, Dominic Griffiths, Steve Jarvis, Tim Johnson, Chris Lucas, Sarah Lucas, Ian Mantle, Nigel Mason, Bryony May, Caroline McDonnell, Ralph Muncer, Michael Muir, Lisa Nash, Sean Nolan, Steven Patmore, Louise Peace, Vijaiya Poopalasingham, Sean Prendergast, Martin Prescott, Emma Rowe, Claire Strong, Tamsin Thomas, Tom Tyson, 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), Robert Filby (Trainee 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 5 members of the public, including registered speakers.

#### 38 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

*Audio recording – 1 minute 53 seconds*

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ian Albert, David Barnard, Ruth Clifton and Paul Ward.

#### 39 MINUTES - 10 JULY 2025

*Audio Recording – 2 minutes 10 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 10 July 2025 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

#### 40 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

*Audio recording – 2 minutes 42 seconds*

There was no other business notified.

## 41 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

*Audio recording – 2 minutes 46 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.
- (6) The Chair reminded Members to respond to the Youth Democracy Day invite in November and encouraged them to spread awareness of the event to schools within their wards.

## 42 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

*Audio recording – 5 minutes 14 seconds*

The Chair invited the first Public Speaker, Ms Rosie Waters, Chief Executive Officer of North Herts Citizens' Advice Bureau to speak about their organisation. Ms Waters thanked the Chair for the opportunity and provided a verbal presentation which highlighted the following:

- They advised people on a range of issues including housing, debt, benefits, employment and they were active in every community across the district.
- 7,193 residents in North Herts had been helped by their services last year which was a 7% increase on the previous year.
- Their services had positive, lifechanging and sometimes lifesaving impacts and helped the Council to address their Thriving Communities priority.
- Many clients reported better mental and physical health after using their services.
- Their services significantly reduced demand for statutory public services.
- 1,380 people had been reached via their preventative workshops and events.
- They had worked to make their service more accessible and they supported digitally challenged residents to navigate increasingly online public services.
- Housing advice they provided had saved the Council an estimated £200,000.
- Their Energy Champion provided trusted information to residents and they had applied for grants to expand their green energy offer in this area.
- They offered value for money as every £1 invested returned an estimated £11 to residents and £18 in wider, socioeconomic benefits.
- Financial outcomes of £2.8 million had been achieved by their services.
- The previous Council grant had helped them to attract an additional £600,000 of funding from other sources.
- A new, multi-year grant from the Council would help them to maintain their capacity and develop their services further to improve the lives of residents and help the Council to achieve its priorities.

*N.B. Councillor Martin Prescott entered the Chamber at 19.37 and Councillor Sam Collins entered the Chamber at 19.41.*

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham
- Councillor Bryony May
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Sadie Billing

In response to questions, Ms Waters advised that:

- Residents could contact them through multiple channels including telephone, email and face-to-face and could also access their self-help online materials.
- They would reach those that did not already use their services through their communication strategy and increasing the comfortability of their services.
- Volunteer recruitment decreased dramatically after the COVID-19 pandemic and had not recovered to the same level since.
- To increase recruitment, they had made volunteering easier and more flexible.
- Young people were underrepresented in their client numbers and they would address this by improving their digital accessibility and engaging schools to introduce schemes such as their financial capability programme.
- The North Herts Cost of Living Alliance was a monthly meet up attended by partner organisations in North Herts as well as Officers from the Council Revenues and Benefits Team with the aim of working together to better help residents that were struggling with the cost of living.
- Disability benefit claims had reportedly increased.
- Housing issues in North Herts were more prevalent than in neighbouring districts and boroughs as housing affordability was becoming worse in their district.

The Chair advised Members that the North Herts Citizens' Advice Bureau AGM would be taking place on Thursday 23 October and that they were welcome to attend.

The Chair thanked Ms Waters for her presentation and invited the second Public Speaker, Ms Hannah Gray of North Herts CVS to speak about their organisation. Ms Gray thanked the Chair for the opportunity and provided a verbal presentation accompanied by visual slides, and highlighted the following:

- Their organisation supported volunteering, faith and social enterprise groups in North Herts to enrich life.
- They had 1200 representatives from local groups and charities in their network.
- Over 1000 hours of direct support had been given to these groups.
- Detailed advice had been given to organisations on their governance to ensure that they were compliant.
- Independent advice had been given to Baldock Community Association to ensure that Baldock Community Centre would provide a service in the future.
- They had set up a monthly CEO Network meeting as a space for CEOs to come together to share ideas, form partnerships and support each other in addition to a Volunteer Manager Network to aid volunteer recruitment.
- They held their Annual General Meeting and Funding Summit in September which enabled groups to meet with funding providers.
- An event on Local Government Reorganisation was organised by them and hosted by the Leader of the Council.
- Training provided by them helped to boost the skills, experience, knowledge and resilience of managers and volunteers.

- MPs were lobbied when the changes to National Insurance were introduced.
- Funding was obtained to build a social value calculator which would allow groups to better demonstrate the social value they provided for free.
- They ran multiple projects including GoVolHerts, Community Transport, Staying Connected, Reach out Hertfordshire, Breakaway Playschemes and Volunteering for Health which helped to drive volunteering in a variety of sectors.
- Council grant funding they received enabled them to fulfil their core services.
- They wanted to provide greater advocacy for groups, work with the Council to provide a conference for Community Centres and run even more events.

In response to a question from Councillor Daniel Allen, Ms Gray advised that the Social Value Calculator would be launched on 20 October and it was developed by the University of Hertfordshire but built for and by the voluntary sector in North Herts to ensure that it was simple and intuitive for all groups to use.

Councillors Tamsin Thomas and Ruth Brown put on record their thanks to North Herts CVS for their work.

*N.B. Councillor Ralph Muncer left the Chamber at 20.03 and returned at 20.06.*

The Chair thanked Ms Gray for her presentation and invited the third Public Speakers, Ms Myeesha Alam and Mr Mohammed Alam of North Herts Minority Ethnic Forum to speak about their organisation. They thanked the Chair for the opportunity and provided a verbal presentation accompanied by visual slides, and highlighted the following:

- Established in 1998, the forum was an umbrella organisation that provided services to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities and created a shared space for them to celebrate their heritage.
- They provided advocacy services, employability and skills development programmes, senior and youth services and health and wellbeing activities.
- They partnered with local authorities, consulted BAME groups, and acted as a hub to bridge the gap between communities.
- Their aim was to encourage newcomers to adopt and embrace British values, democracy, rule of law and tolerance of other communities while remembering their own culture.
- Their team was comprised of 3 staff, 10 trustees and many volunteers.
- Most of their projects ran on short-term funding from six months to a year but a small number operated on long-term funding sustained by donations.
- They worked in partnership with others such as Hertfordshire Constabulary who recognised them as a third-party reporting centre for hate crime.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor David Chalmers
- Councillor Jon Clayden
- Councillor Chris Lucas

In response to questions, Mr Alam advised that:

- They were a small charity based in Hitchin conducting activities across the district and Stevenage.
- Their core funding came from grants from the National Lottery Community Fund and the Council which they were grateful for. Additional funding was also received from Rowlands Foundation and Hertfordshire Community Foundation.
- Their Fundraising Team was comprised of two trustees and one volunteer.
- No reports of hate crime had been made to them in the last six months.



- Volunteer recruitment often came through previous users of their services who were confident enough to use the skills they had acquired.
- Activities were community based due to language barriers, however, they held some events with a mix of communities which were well attended.
- They used social media to promote community events and had received several donations from these to give to asylum seekers.

Councillor Tina Bhartwas noted that it would be of great benefit for all Members to engage with the events that the Minority Ethnic Forum held.

The Chair thanked the Public Speakers for their presentations.

#### **43 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES**

*Audio recording – 53 minutes 45 seconds*

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

#### **44 FIRST QUARTER CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REVIEW 2025/26**

*Audio recording – 53 minutes 53 seconds*

Councillor Daniel Allen, as Leader of the Council, presented Referral 6A from Cabinet and the report entitled 'First Quarter Capital Budget Monitoring Review 2025/26' and advised that:

- The report was presented to Cabinet to provide an update on the impact upon the approved Capital Budget for 2025/26.
- There was an estimated decrease in spend of £0.412M for 2025/26, and an estimated increase in spend of £1.446M in future years.
- The most significant budget change was the removal of £0.563M for the Solar for Business scheme.
- £0.250M would be reprofiled into 2026/27 for resurfacing Broadway Gardens and £0.122M into Phase 2 of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund.
- Paragraph 8.5 referred to a fully Government grant funded Warm Homes scheme that would provide energy efficiency improvements to 26 low-income households across North Herts.
- The Council were asked to approve £1.275M of funding for this across 3 years.

In response to a question from Councillor Matt Barnes, the Director – Resources advised that there would be no revenue impact from the removal of the Solar for Business scheme from the Capital Budget.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Val Bryant seconded the recommendations within the report.

*N.B. Councillor Nigel Mason left the Chamber at 20.27 and returned at 20.29.*

As part of the debate, Councillor Ruth Brown made the following points:

- Whilst the Warm Homes grant scheme and the additional funding for Phase 2 of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund were welcomed, the removal of the funding for the Solar for Business scheme was not as the introduction of the scheme had been investigated since 2019.
- The Council had declared a climate emergency, there were pressures on the Green Belt due to housing construction, and there was a lack of solar panels in industrial areas.

Councillor Ruth Brown proposed an additional recommendation to the motion that 'the Executive Member for Environment and Officers should conduct a lessons learnt exercise on the issues with the Solar for Business scheme to date and produce a concrete, fully costed plan to overcome these by the end of 2025 for inclusion in the 2026/27 Budget'. This amendment was seconded by Councillor David Chalmers.

The following Members took part in the debate on the amendment:

- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Steve Jarvis
- Councillor Mick Debenham
- Councillor David Chalmers
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Sam Collins
- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Jon Clayden

The following points were made as part of the debate on the amendment:

- The Administration had tried to engage businesses on the Solar for Business scheme, but it had not been successful.
- Being unable to make the scheme work while other local authorities had been operating it for several years reflected poorly on the Council.
- Extensive information was provided to businesses on the scheme and three businesses showed interest, however, none of them wanted to proceed.
- The scheme could have been implemented by one of the previous administrations at the Council.
- A Climate Emergency had been declared by the Council and the Solar for Business scheme would ensure that they were responding to that.
- The Opposition Budget Workshop would be a more appropriate place for budget discussions to take place and lessons learned from the scheme could also be discussed at the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.
- The Council should investigate the reasons that businesses had not taken up the scheme and work with communities and other Councils to ensure that any future green initiatives would be of more interest to businesses.
- It was disappointing that the Administration had decided to remove the scheme from the Capital Budget due to financial, rather than environmental reasoning.
- Delivering the scheme would be of great benefit to businesses in the district.
- Communication of the scheme should be investigated as not all business owners received information on the scheme when it was publicised.
- They should be encouraging more solar panel construction on buildings rather than open space which the scheme would help to do.

Councillor Ruth Brown replied to the debate on the amendment and made the following points:

- The Solar for Business scheme would require time and resources to set up, however, it could have both financial and environmental benefits once operational.
- Solar farms in open space were unpopular with residents, therefore, solar panel installation on industrial buildings would be preferable.
- Solar Together had already been a successful scheme, therefore, Solar for Business could be too.

In response to a question from Councillor Sadie Billing, Councillor Ruth Brown advised that there were other Councils that produced income from Solar for Business schemes but she could not provide examples of these.

Following a vote, the amendment was **LOST**.

As part of the debate on the original motion, Councillor Daniel Allen highlighted that cross-party discussions could have helped with the Solar for Business scheme and he was willing to work with opposition Members.

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

**RESOLVED:** That Council approved a capital budget of £1.275M (£0.319M in 25/26, £0.478M in 26/27 and £0.478M in 27/28) for the Government's new energy efficiency Warm Homes Scheme. This would be fully funded from Government grants as paragraph 8.5 of the report referred.

**REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:**

- (1) Council approved the capital budget each year, so any significant additions should be approved by Council.
- (2) Adding the budget to the capital programme allowed the Council to deliver a government funded scheme aiming to provide energy efficiency improvements to low income households with the aim of tackling fuel poverty and reducing emissions.

**45 NOTICE OF MOTIONS**

*Audio recording – 1 hour 14 minutes 44 seconds*

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

**(A) Use of Asylum Hotels in North Hertfordshire**

The Chair advised Members to refrain from referencing specific hotels in use for asylum accommodation both in and outside the district during the course of the motion.

Councillor Ralph Muncer proposed the motion as follows:

‘2025 has been the worst year ever for small boat crossings with over 30,000 people having crossed the Channel, meaning since the Labour Government came to power in July 2024, over 50,000 people have now crossed the Channel leaving the immigration policy of this Government in tatters.

The number of asylum seekers being housed in hotels is still higher than when the Conservative Government left office despite Labour pledging to end the use of asylum hotels.

According to a Home Office report, as of 30 June 2025, 156 asylum seekers are being housed in hotels in North Hertfordshire, with most being housed in Needham House Hotel in Little Wymondley, a location which is wholly unsuitable for this purpose and has resulted in Hertfordshire Constabulary attending the hotel on a regular basis.

The use of local hotels as long-term accommodation for asylum seekers is not a sustainable solution and places disproportionate pressures on local infrastructure and services, as well as threatening community cohesion.

Therefore, the Council resolves to:

- (1) Instruct the Chief Executive and Director – Governance to urgently assess the merits of seeking legal advice to prevent local hotels from being used as accommodation for asylum seekers, considering every option including the use of injunctions, stop notices and other planning enforcement mechanisms.

- (2) Instruct the Leader of the Council to write to the Secretary of State for the Home Department expressing this Council's concern about the use of hotels in North Hertfordshire for asylum seeker accommodation, requesting the Government close the remaining hotels currently in use for this purpose and do not open any further asylum hotels within the District, nor employ the use of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in North Hertfordshire for the purpose of providing accommodation to asylum seekers.
- (3) Instruct the Leader of the Council to write to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, calling on the Government to adopt the Conservative proposals to clarify in law and policy beyond doubt that such asylum hotels should always require a change of use application.
- (4) Reverse the decision of Council in September 2023 and withdraw from the City of Sanctuary's Local Authorities Network.'

Councillor Steven Patmore seconded the motion.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Nigel Mason
- Councillor Mick Debenham
- Councillor Clare Billing
- Councillor Alistair Willoughby
- Councillor Sean Prendergast
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Tim Johnson
- Councillor Sadie Billing
- Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham
- Councillor Keith Hoskins

The following points were made as part of the debate:

- Net migration had fallen 52% since its peak in 2024.
- Councillor actions had consequences and Members should encourage hope rather than hate given the outlook of the country.
- This motion was pandering to prejudices held by certain groups in society.
- Refugees had not significantly impacted the district as only 11 claims for permanent social housing had been granted to them in the last 4 years.
- Asylum seekers were not the problem as they were in desperate need of safety and removing accommodation for them would only increase their vulnerability.
- The Council should focus on real issues that residents faced and ensure a strong community where the vulnerable were supported.
- Reversing a commitment that had been voted overwhelmingly in favour for would show that the Council only held their values when it was convenient.
- The use of hotels as asylum seeker accommodation was due to the infrastructure collapse over many years and the Government had pledged to fix this already.
- Asylum seekers did not undermine communities, but the presence of hate did.
- Members had been elected to improve the lives of everyone in the district which included those that had arrived from overseas.
- Abandoning their commitment to the City of Sanctuary Network would isolate the Council from groups that had compassion for asylum seekers and show that the district was no longer a place of kindness, humanity and safety.
- The Council should work with the Government and its partners to find solutions.

- Hotels were not a long-term accommodation solution, but backing this motion would fuel fear, anger and division in the district.
- Members should consider the reasons that the Council originally joined the City of Sanctuary Network in 2023.
- The Council should continue to indirectly support asylum seekers through the facilitation of support for local groups.
- The motion was thinly veiled and passive aggressive.
- Asylum seekers were not a burden, they were people who needed safety.
- North Herts Minority Ethnic Forum was a brilliant example of a real community looking out for people.
- The district was a welcoming place irrespective of circumstances and backgrounds and there was a responsibility for Members to do better as leaders in their communities.
- Fearnhill School was the first school in Hertfordshire to be made a School of Sanctuary due to their work with students from disadvantaged countries.

Councillor Ralph Muncer replied to the debate and made the following points:

- Polling showed that many residents were concerned about this issue and it would be a dereliction of duty to ignore them, therefore, it was important that they discussed the issues raised to make them feel represented.
- The use of asylum hotels as a medium to long-term measure had been wrong.
- This was not a motion to deny support for genuine asylum seekers, it was to deter illegal boat crossings and smugglers that benefitted from this.

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

**RESOLVED:** That the motion was **LOST**.

**(B) Local Government Pension Scheme and Responsible Investment**

The Chair advised Members that the motion had been withdrawn and would be considered at a future meeting of Full Council and this was confirmed by Councillor Dave Winstanley as the proposer and Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason as the seconder.

*N.B. There was a break in proceedings following this motion and the meeting reconvened at 21.20. During the break Councillor Lisa Nash left the Chamber and did not return.*

**(C) Waste Service Rollout**

Councillor Caroline McDonnell proposed the motion as follows:

‘May 2025 saw the start of the new waste contract with Veolia, a shared service covering North and East Herts. Many residents in North Herts experienced problems and, worryingly, the process for resolving them has often been slow and confusing for residents and Members alike.

The chief concerns are:

- Ongoing missed collections despite reporting by residents and members
- Lack of crew knowledge of rounds including assisted collections
- “Narrow round” arrangements not continued
- Customer Services completely overwhelmed
- Inaccurate advice given to members e.g. on flats
- Inconsistent advice given to residents on multiple issues including side waste
- Blue-lid bins not delivered in time for roll-out
- Collapse of system for collecting communal bins

- System unable to cope with commercial and domestic waste at same property e.g. farms
- Member uncertainty about how to report problems and whether the portal works

North Herts Council believes that:

- The introduction of the new service could and should have been better managed and the above-stated problems prevented
- The Executive Member for Environment must accept responsibility for the shortcomings in the implementation of the new arrangements in North Herts which have unnecessarily caused inconvenience to many residents.

Therefore, Council resolves that:

- (1) The Executive Member for Environment makes a public statement apologising to all residents who have been unnecessarily inconvenienced by the failure of the service implementation. This should include writing apologies to all parish and town councils where avoidable problems such as those listed above have been identified.
- (2) The Executive Member works more closely with her counterpart in East Herts to ensure that they are giving the Shared Waste Service Manager and her officers a clear direction of travel and doing so with a common voice. This should entail scheduling meetings together in addition to the calendared briefings organised by officers.
- (3) The Executive Member takes responsibility for ensuring that all IT systems operate effectively and that coherent, accurate information is accessible wherever and whenever needed, including by Customer Services.
- (4) The Executive Member reports, as a matter of urgency, to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on actions taken, at a date to be agreed with the Chair.'

Councillor Bryony May seconded the motion.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Dominic Griffiths
- Councillor Matt Barnes
- Councillor Amy Allen
- Councillor Bryony May
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Jon Clayden
- Councillor Laura Williams
- Councillor Joe Graziano
- Councillor Sam Collins
- Councillor Steve Jarvis
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Tim Johnson
- Councillor David Chalmers
- Councillor Keith Hoskins
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Tamsin Thomas
- Councillor Nigel Mason
- Councillor Sean Prendergast
- Councillor Claire Strong

- Councillor Tom Tyson

The following points were made as part of the debate:

- Not only had villages experienced problems with bin collections since the rollout, but towns such as Royston had too.
- The new three weekly collections had encouraged residents to recycle more.
- Due to more missed bin collections, the Customer Service Centre (CSC) had received more contacts and wait times to speak to a representative over the phone had become unreasonable.
- Despite the assurances of the Council, there had been a persistent lack of collections in some areas.
- In some cases, communal recycling bins had been incorrectly measured which had led to overflowing bins and presented health and hygiene hazards to the public.
- Crews had worked tirelessly under huge pressure to deliver the service and deserved thanks and support from Members rather than criticism.
- A change of this scale would always bring challenges and as anticipated, the rollout had initially led to more reports of repeat missed collections, however, the situation had improved after notes had been added to crew systems and guidance had been reinforced.
- After problems had been experienced with the merger of the former 'narrow rounds' with a round in East Herts, Veolia had aligned the properties of the narrow rounds back under the supervision of the Council which had led to a more stable service with the hope of further improvements.
- CSC had been busy but not overwhelmed due to the recruitment of extra staff and introduction of web forms leading up to the rollout.
- Call numbers to CSC were expected to return to normal in October.
- Due to a data error, some communal bin collections were wrongly scheduled but this had been corrected and interim weekly collections had been put in place.
- Council policy on side waste had not changed.
- Despite delays to the delivery of new bins due to system incompatibility issues, 97% of bins had been delivered to residents by 3 August.
- Missed bin deliveries were prioritised through a dedicated web form and residents that had not received their new bin were still able to recycle in the meantime through side waste or use of their side recycle box.
- Special data for mixed commercial and domestic properties had been updated and they had been monitored to ensure reliability.
- The Councillor Portal had remained operational for the course of the rollout, however, reduced staffing had caused a backlog of requests which they had been working to clear and return to normal.
- Residual waste had decreased 50-60% in comparison to earlier in the year which showed a strong shift to recycling.
- A detailed report on the rollout would be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on Tuesday 11 November.
- They would continue to work with their partners, Officers and residents to deliver a good service.
- For some Members, the rollout had generated the greatest number of resident enquiries and requests since they had been elected.
- Despite raising multiple cases on the Councillor Portal, missed communal bin collections in residential flats had not yet been addressed and no advice had been provided to those with communal bins prior to the rollout except for the generic information leaflets.
- Members recognised the sheer amount of work that had gone into this project and appreciated its aims. However, it was important for the Council to recognise that there were underlying problems with the service that needed to be resolved.
- Issues from the rollout could be investigated at the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

- It was recognised that the rollout had been complex, however, an apology should be issued to residents as there were long-standing issues which had not been resolved.
- Overall service for the waste collections had been good, however, there had been too many instances where the service had fallen short of standards.
- The rollout had been technically complex with the integration of the waste management system into their customer relationship management system which had required extensive collaboration across the Council but had yielded automated processes to assist CSC and decrease contacts from residents.
- The 'Find Your Bin Collection Day' app which had been developed to aid residents during the rollout had been used over 150,000 times.
- The motion would not resolve the cause of the problems.
- In some instances, issues raised by residents had been resolved within 24 hours.
- Given the opinions expressed by Members, the Council should issue the apology rather than the Executive Member for Environment.
- The increase in recycling resulting from the rollout had been positive.
- The motion asked the Council to do things that they were already addressing.
- The rollout had been a good initiative with positive feedback from some residents, however, instances where issues had not been resolved for 9 weeks was not acceptable.
- Overall, the rollout had been a success and they should not lose sight of that.
- Lessons needed to be learned from the teething problems that had been experienced from the service.
- Officers and the Executive Member for Environment should be commended for delivering the new service and dealing with problems where they had arisen.
- Distress had been caused by the lack of communal bin collections and the Council had an opportunity to take responsibility by acknowledging the shortfalls of the rollout and issue a heartfelt apology through this motion.
- Any big project such as this one could not be error free and missed bin collections had and would always be a continuous issue.
- Some residents had been unsettled by the change of collection days.
- Recycling advice on product packaging contradicted the guidance provided by the Council.

Councillor Amy Allen put on record her thanks to Officers in the Waste Team and Customer Service Team, in addition to the waste collection crews.

*N.B. Councillor Tina Bhartwas left the Chamber at 21.50 and returned at 21.54.*

In response to points raised in the debate, Councillor Amy Allen advised that companies could not change their product packaging on a local level and changing it nationally would mean that the packaging would become a contaminant in other local authorities that did not share the same recycling scheme as them.

In response to a question from Councillor Michael Muir, the Chair advised that questions would be answered by the Executive Member for Environment outside of the meeting.

Councillor Caroline McDonnell replied to the debate and made the following points:

- It was good to hear that there were wards who had experienced little to no problems with the rollout.
- Waste collection crews had been pleasant and perseverant where collection problems had occurred.
- Residents deserved to know that their complaints and frustrations had been heard by the Council through an apology.



In response to the debate, the Chair proposed an amendment to the motion that the Council made the public statement apologising to all residents rather than the Executive Member for Environment and this was accepted into the substantive motion by Councillor Caroline McDonnell as proposer and Councillor Bryony May as seconder.

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

**RESOLVED:** That the motion was **LOST**.

*N.B. Following this item, Councillors Cathy Brownjohn, Dominic Griffiths, Sarah Lucas, Martin Prescott and Tamsin Thomas left the Chamber at 22.18 and did not return.*

## 46 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

*Audio recording – 2 hours 47 minutes 4 seconds*

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

### **(A) Local Government Reorganisation Options**

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

‘To ask the Leader of the Council to outline the Administration’s preferred option for Local Government Reorganisation in Hertfordshire?’

Councillor Daniel Allen provided the following response:

‘At this point, the Administration did not have a preferred option for Local Government Reorganisation in Hertfordshire although I am sure a lot of individual councillors do. The Administration are waiting to receive all available evidence, information and proposals that will allow for a full assessment of the potential impacts. As with any significant decision, it is important that the councillors are able to consider the facts carefully, and there is a full debate at Full Council before any position is taken. Until then, it would be premature for the Administration to express a preference.’

Councillor Ralph Muncer asked a supplementary question, as follows:

‘Will the Leader of the Council guarantee his Members a free vote on the matter of Local Government Reorganisation at the meeting on the 13 November of this year?’

Councillor Daniel Allen responded:

‘It is an internal Labour matter that is not for discussion at Full Council.’

### **(B) Penalty Charge Notices – Free After 3**

Councillor Matt Barnes to Councillor Donna Wright, Executive Member for Place:

‘What advice has the Council received about issuing penalty charge notices for non-registration during the Free After 3 parking period in Royston?’

Councillor Donna Wright provided the following response:

‘The Parking Team has reviewed the Council’s Parking Contravention Codes with the British Parking Association and with other Local Authorities to identify which of the national codes might be mostly appropriately used, and a proposed approach for Royston is currently being reviewed by the Council’s Legal Team.’

Councillor Matt Barnes asked a supplementary question, as follows:

‘Have you considered removing the requirement altogether and simply counting cars with a clipboard and pen instead?’

Councillor Donna Wright responded:

‘I just want to state for clarification that the Council is not issuing fines after 3:00pm in Royston. People are being reminded to register for their session by way of a notice on their windscreens. We have been relying on voluntary registrations but this could not reliably tell us what proportion of parking sessions after 3:00pm this is capturing. The difficulty was that they needed to collect reliable and comprehensive data as this was part of the original agreement with Royston Town Council and Royston First BID. As Council will know, these two bodies have offered a total maximum subsidy of £35,000 for the Free After 3pm tariff to continue in 25/26 but it was agreed that the usage data had to be monitored to ensure that the Council doesn’t end up having to cover more of the costs. It wouldn’t be fair for Council Taxpayers in other parts of the district to subsidise Royston car parks, so we do need to strike a careful balance between fairly implementing the scheme in Royston but not incurring any extra costs for the Council. Unfortunately, the most accurate form of data was people registering for their free parking session. In the past, we have relied on manual survey data which is too ad-hoc and does not provide a consistent baseline. It does not capture the frequency of turnover within parking period and can only be taken at various points in time. So, recording the usage of data at machines was the most reliable and independent method. From experience elsewhere, we do know that during charging hours and where penalty charges are being issued, the vast majority of parking sessions are appropriately registered and recorded. But obviously, the final operational decision for Royston will have to be dependent on the outcome of the legal advice. It may be that we may just have to be clear to residents that if they don’t register for their after 3pm parking, the subsidy may not be viable in the long-term. Whatever approach is agreed, there will be clear communications and signage in all of the car parks.’

### **(C) Events on Council Land**

Councillor Chris Lucas to Councillor Mick Debenham, Executive Member for Regulatory:

‘Could the Executive Member for Regulatory advise what would the Council’s liability position would be if an event took place on North Hertfordshire District Council land without a licence and an injury occurred to a participant or member of the public?’

Councillor Mick Debenham provided the following response:

‘The event organiser was responsible for any public liability arising from an event that they run as well as any other liability such as employers’ liability. The event organiser should therefore ensure that they have appropriate insurance in place and that this insurance remains valid if they do not have a land license or any other appropriate permissions. North Herts District Council insurance would remain valid if an event took place on our land even if the event took place without a land license. That insurance would however, only cover our liability as property owners but it not there to cover any liability that the event organiser should be responsible for.’

Councillor Chris Lucas asked a supplementary question, following which, on the advice of Officers, the Chair ruled out a response from the Executive Member on the grounds of confidentiality.

**(D) Hitchin Lido Closure**

Councillor Louise Peace to Councillor Amy Allen, Executive Member for Environment:

'When the Leisure Centre Decarbonisation Project was discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in May, Councillor Mick Debenham left the Committee in no doubt that this was a challenging project. The Committee carefully examined the submitted paper. The proposed extended opening of the Hitchin Lido until the end of October was, to me, a crucial part of maintaining goodwill with centre users while the work was carried out. This proposal was agreed by Cabinet on May 20.

A decision has now been made to close the Hitchin Lido at the end of September. The press release regarding this decision does not refer to a named Officer or yourself as portfolio holder. What was the process for reversing the decision made at Cabinet?'

Councillor Amy Allen provided the following response:

'It is a huge undertaking and challenging project and thank you for pointing that out. It was the decision by the Project Board of which on it had two Cabinet Members. The decision was based on the fact that the original decision to extend the season was to counteract the fact that the indoor pool was going to be shut for the Decarbonisation Project, as we all know. Unfortunately, we had a few things pop up which meant that the work on the area of the indoor pool for the Decarbonisation Project has been delayed. With that in mind, we felt that having both the lido and the indoor pool open at the same time was somewhat counterproductive, especially considering the cost it takes to be running the pool in October, £16,000 by the way. We felt that it was quite reasonable to not extend the already extended season for the lido because the indoor pool was open.'

Councillor Louise Peace asked a supplementary question, as follows:

'At the Overview and Scrutiny meeting in May that was mentioned earlier, we were informed that the current estimated one-off loss of revenue for the closures across all three sites is approximately £900,000. This was a cost that the Council will have to bare as per the requirements of the Leisure and Active Communities Contract. Given that the Hitchin Lido would now not be heated in October and no staffing would be required, will the £16,000 loss of revenue be reviewed and can we have that money back?'

Councillor Amy Allen responded:

'I will have to talk to Sarah Kingsley and others about it and then I can get back to you with a properly substantive answer.'

The meeting closed at 10.32 pm

Chair

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# Public Document Pack

## NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### MINUTES

Meeting of the Council held in the Council Chamber, District Council Offices, Gernon Road,  
Letchworth, Herts, SG6 3JF  
on Thursday, 13th November, 2025 at 7.30 pm

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

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Isabelle Alajooz (Director - Governance and Monitoring Officer), Ian Couper (Director - Resources), 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) and Melanie Stimpson (Democratic Services Manager).

**ALSO PRESENT:** At the commencement of the meeting there were 2 members of the public, including registered speakers.

#### 47 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

*Audio recording – 1 minute 10 seconds*

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Clare Billing, Val Bryant, David Barnard, Rhona Cameron, Ruth Clifton, Elizabeth Dennis, Claire Strong, Stewart Willoughby and Tamsin Thomas.

#### 48 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

*Audio recording – 1 minute 31 seconds*

There was no other business notified.

#### 49 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

*Audio recording – 1 minute 35 seconds*

*N.B. Councillor Sam Collins entered the Council Chamber at 19.32.*

- (1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be recorded.
- (2) The Chair reminded Members that the Council had declared both a Climate Emergency and an Ecological Emergency. These are serious decisions, and mean that, as this was an emergency, all of us, Officers and Members had that in mind as we carried out our various roles and tasks for the benefit of our District.

- (3) The Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.
- (4) The Chair advised that the normal procedure rules in respect of debate and times to speak will apply.
- (5) The Chair advised that 4.8.23(a) of the Constitution did not apply to this meeting. A comfort break would be held at an appropriate time, should proceedings continue at length.
- (6) The Chair advised Members to encourage parish councils within their respective wards to respond to the consultation on Developer Contributions sent out by the Task & Finish Group before the deadline on 20 November 2025.
- (7) The Chair advised Members to submit their comments on the Polling District Review consultation by 30 November 2025 and that Full Council would designate polling places at the meeting in January.
- (8) The Chair encouraged all Members to attend Youth Democracy Day on 20 November 2025 and to direct any questions about the day to Committee Services.
- (9) The Chair advised Members that the Council would be supporting White Ribbon Day 2025 by holding a White Ribbon Pledge Event and Bake Sale on 25 November 2025 at the Council Offices and that all Members were welcome to attend.

## 50 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

*Audio recording – 5 minutes 41 seconds*

The Chair invited Mr Ben Smithson to provide Council with a verbal presentation on Item 5 – Local Government Reorganisation in Hertfordshire – Submission of Final Proposals. Mr Smithson thanked the Chair for the opportunity and highlighted the following:

- He wished to thank everyone involved with the development and assessment of the options for Local Government Reorganisation in Hertfordshire.
- The proposed boundaries in the option for four unitary authorities would move Arbury Ward into the East Unitary Authority and separate it from Baldock.
- This would remove the benefits of the four unitary option for Arbury Ward residents as both greater local representation and a truer alignment of physical geography would not be felt by them.
- Baldock formed part of the identity of Arbury Ward as many of its residents used services and undertook leisure activities there. They were also represented on the Baldock & Villages Community Forum.
- Many families had expressed their intention to leave if the four unitary option was chosen as their children would no longer be given priority places at The Knights Templar School in Baldock and would likely have to attend schools that were further away.
- This would lead to the loss of thriving communities and failure of local businesses.
- Arbury Ward residents would also lose their ability to influence how the expansion of Baldock would affect their area.
- Options that failed to balance populations while preserving communities should be ruled out.
- The Council should write to the Secretary of State to request boundary changes if the four unitary option was chosen.

In response to points raised in the verbal presentation, Councillor Daniel Allen advised that:

- The schooling system under the new unitary authorities had not yet been decided and children from one area could currently attend schools in others like those that lived in Great Ashby and attended schools in Stevenage.
- Should the four unitary option be the preferred option by Cabinet, it would be submitted with the current boundaries of North Hertfordshire, with a recommendation for a boundary review which residents would be able to have input on.

The Chair thanked Mr Smithson for his verbal presentation.

## **51 LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IN HERTFORDSHIRE - SUBMISSION OF FINAL PROPOSALS**

*Audio recording – 11 minutes 50 seconds*

The Chair advised that Council would debate the item and pass an indicative resolution that would express a preferred option and that Cabinet would be required to give due regard to any resolution passed by Council, but could not be legally bound by that resolution. Cabinet Members could participate in the debate and express a lawful preference but not commit in advance to follow the resolution of Full Council.

The Chair additionally advised that dual hatter County and District Council Members could also participate in the debate and express a lawful preference without unlawful predetermination in the debate at the Full Council meeting at Hertfordshire County Council on 19 November 2025.

To ensure that the Council met the required deadline for submissions on 28 November 2025, the Chair advised that the Cabinet decision on this item would be urgent and therefore not subject to call in. Formal notice of this, including the reasons for urgency had been published on the Council website.

The Chief Executive presented the report entitled 'Local Government Reorganisation in Hertfordshire – Submission of Final Proposals' and advised that:

- The submission document was a culmination of several months of work from local authorities across Hertfordshire and it was recognised that Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) had and would continue to impact workloads in the coming years.
- Authorities in Hertfordshire had remained united throughout discussions on LGR and the relationships built between them would help in the upcoming stages.
- A single submission document had been produced that met all the criteria set by the Government with options for two, three, and four unitary authorities contained within.
- It was acknowledged that each option would work better for some areas of Hertfordshire than others as they each had their advantages and disadvantages.
- Modernisation, better service delivery, removal of silos and resetting relationships with communities were just some of the potential benefits that could come from LGR.
- Shared ambitions that underpinned the submission were set out at paragraph 8.5 of the cover report.
- The six criteria that would be used by the Government to judge submissions were set out at paragraph 7.3 and they would be equally weighted.
- All options that met the criteria would go to statutory public consultation in 2026.
- The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) stated that the recent decision on LGR in Surrey would not be an indication of how decisions would be made on LGR elsewhere.
- The submission document was as accurate and evidence based as possible as the proposals were necessarily based on assumptions with detail to follow as explained in paragraph 8.8 onwards.

- Work on LGR would continue to evolve with the acknowledgement that the new unitary authorities would be responsible for future decision making once created.
- Community engagement on LGR options in Hertfordshire took place in September and was referenced within the submission document and summarised at paragraphs 8.14 and 8.15 of the cover report.
- Devolution was mentioned within the submission, however, MHCLG had made it clear that this would be a separate process despite their non-commitment to a timeline on this.
- In response, a collective letter from all local authorities in Hertfordshire had been sent to the Secretary of State as detailed at paragraph 7.9.
- Herts Leaders Group had committed to work together to implement the decision made by the Government in 2026, and a statement on this could be found within the submission.
- Work had already begun on the Transition Programme as detailed at paragraph 8.16 and Members would be kept updated on this as well as the public where relevant.
- The importance of LGR to Members was recognised, hence why the options had been brought to Council for debate and for an indicative resolution to be made.
- A decision on the preferred option would be taken at Cabinet on 19 November.

*N.B. Councillor Dominic Griffiths entered the Chamber 19.55.*

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor David Chalmers
- Councillor Amy Allen
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Sadie Billing
- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason
- Councillor Tom Tyson
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Matt Barnes
- Councillor Steve Jarvis
- Councillor Emma Fernandes
- Councillor Chris Lucas
- Councillor Jon Clayden
- Councillor Nigel Mason
- Councillor Donna Wright
- Councillor Joe Graziano
- Councillor Tim Johnson
- Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham
- Councillor Sam Collins
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Steven Patmore
- Councillor Claire Winchester
- Councillor Ian Mantle
- Councillor Emma Rowe
- Councillor Daniel Allen

The following points were made as part of the debate which for ease of comprehension have been summarised under the heading they refer to, rather than the order of the debate:

General:

- The Council should choose the model that provided clarity, stability and the best value for residents.



- LGR presented an opportunity for greater coordination and the improvement of services such as waste collection and disposal.
- The consultation was hardly representative of North Herts residents as only 587 responded with 390 having expressed a preference out of a possible 135,000 district population.
- Once representation through local government was lost, it could not be regained.
- It had not been possible to include all the financial details of each proposal in the consultation, therefore, residents had not been able to make informed responses.
- The consultation response rate had been approximately 0.6% in Hertfordshire and of this percentage, 7% came from councillors and staff, and nearly 25% stated that they knew a lot about LGR already which skewed the response towards those who were politically active and aware.
- There were less than two percentage points between those who expressed preference for the two unitary option and the four unitary option.
- Decisions of this magnitude should be made by Full Council, not Cabinet.
- A fixation on costs would mean a loss of service quality.
- Representation came from the quality of councillors, not the size of the authority.

Two unitary option:

- The two unitary option offered simplicity, financial resilience to sustain vital services, and a structure that would support the long-term ambitions of communities in North Herts.
- Residents had expressed their desire for less duplication, fewer layers and a system that was easier to understand which the two unitary option would provide.
- Financial and workforce pressures had intensified, and the two unitary option would allow investment into prevention and long-term infrastructure.
- Relationships with partners such as the NHS, Police and skills providers would be strengthened by the two unitary option and it would also provide the most robust platform for a strategic authority to secure funding from Devolution.
- Community forums, town and parish councils and neighbourhood partnerships would also be strengthened as they would become key partners in shaping services.
- Services would become standardised under the two unitary option and community voices would be erased.
- Two unitary authorities would provide the simplest, least disruptive approach and would deliver the same representation as three unitary authorities.
- More resources would be available in the two unitary option to create more area committees and strengthen town and parish councils.
- Two unitary authorities would cover areas that were too large and would not reflect communities.
- As detailed in the submission document, £366M would be saved over ten years by the two unitary option compared to the four unitary option that would lose £1M in the worst-case scenario over the same period.
- The payback period of the two unitary option would also be 7 years less than the four unitary option, which would present less of a financial risk.
- Current Council priorities such as Churchgate were not guaranteed to be a priority in a new unitary authority, especially if only two were formed.
- Representation would be fairer and more effective in the two unitary option when looking at councillor to ward ratios as some wards would have double the representation of others in the four unitary option which would create an imbalance.
- There would be a democratic deficit in the two unitary option as only one out of four North Herts towns would have a town council to provide local representation.
- The two unitary option would create the most centralised decision-making model.
- Tiers of governance and senior management would be removed in the two unitary option which could risk staff talent retention.
- Democracy and localism would not be lost if the unitary authorities covered a larger area as connectivity was greater than it had ever been before.

- While the two unitary option was financially attractive, it would be a bureaucratic nightmare.
- Fewer services would overlap in the two unitary option which would mean more consistent service delivery for Education, Highways and Planning, and more funding for frontline services where every pound mattered.
- Councillors would still be visible in communities and not simply disappear under the two unitary option.

Three unitary option:

- Population sizes would be unequal in the three unitary option and the opportunity to bring the garden cities together would be lost.

Four unitary option:

- The four unitary option would replicate senior structures, statutory functions and have more disaggregation and fragmentation which would lead to higher public spending and this was indefensible when residents already faced cost of living struggles.
- Members should listen to residents as they favoured the four unitary option which would keep their communities intact.
- North Herts had different priorities, challenges and communities to those in other areas of Hertfordshire which the four unitary option recognised.
- The central authority in the four unitary option would start with a £22M budget deficit in year one and it was not guaranteed that the Government would assist with this.
- Boundaries changes in the four unitary option would be problematic as Royston would be affected and the A10 corridor would rely heavily on vehicle use rather than active travel which contradicted the Climate Emergency declared by the Council.
- The four unitary option would provide balance as it would be big enough to maintain resources to deliver services but be small enough to preserve community connections and keep decision making accountable.
- Arbury Ward residents would be separated from services in Baldock, Letchworth and Stevenage in the four unitary option and if Cabinet chose this, it would confirm that they did not care for those residents.
- Territory transfer in the four unitary option was merely to ensure a balance of numbers and had nothing to do with communities.
- Community connections would not be reflected in the four unitary option as areas like Royston and Cheshunt in the eastern authority had very few similarities.
- Even with dramatic cuts, the central authority would not be able to deliver statutory services as it was likely that it would be bankrupt within ten years.
- The central unitary authority would contain 35% of the most deprived areas in Hertfordshire, the highest number of children looked after or with special needs and disabilities and households on social housing wait lists, and the highest requirements for social care which would put unsustainable pressure on services and residents.
- If Cabinet did not back the will of Council, there would be questions of the Administration to deliver for the people of North Herts.
- The four unitary option would safeguard the shared ambition for high quality services.
- Three or four unitary authorities would compete rather than collaborate and weaken their ability to facilitate regional growth and attract investment.
- Economic growth through tech industries along the A1 corridor would be encouraged by the four unitary model.
- Smaller councils would make decision making more visible and responsive and make councillors more accessible.
- The four unitary option would be a half-way house between the two unitary option and the current local government structure in Hertfordshire.
- Assumptions had been made in the submission document to favour the financial modelling of the two unitary option such as the transition costs which had been equally

weighted across all options when they were likely to be less in the three and four unitary options.

- Service delivery was not the main purpose of a local government, it was about making decisions for the community and bringing local ideas into this which the four unitary option would allow the most of.
- Baldock would be split from nearby rural communities that relied on it for everyday services and choosing the four unitary option would weaken these community networks.
- Even with a generous settlement from the Fair Funding Review, the four unitary option would have a gap in finances which rising care demands and inflation would push further.
- Stronger representation in the four unitary option was not true as area committees where local decisions could be made would still be present in the two unitary option.
- Residents had expressed a clear preference for four unitary authorities both in the consultation and in-person as it would keep power local.
- Dacorum, Broxbourne and East Herts had all backed the four unitary option which showed the decision was not political and that common ground could be found when finding the best solution for residents.
- The four unitary option would be based on district wards rather than county divisions which had much smaller footprints, meaning that councillors would be closer to their communities.
- It would also be more practical, fair and rooted in the communities that councillors served.

Councillor Laura Williams, as proposer, replied to the debate and made the following points:

- All options were viable, deliverable and offered real benefits to residents as backed by the facts and figures in the submission document.
- They supported the four unitary option as preferred by residents and all Members should do the same.
- The options for two and three unitary authorities contained boundaries based on current County Council division which provided a lack of representation in some areas.
- Disaggregation had been costed but aggregation had not been factored properly, therefore, basing a decision on the financial assumptions was problematic.
- This resolution was just the beginning of LGR and Members should work together to ensure a successful transition once a decision was made by the Government on LGR in Hertfordshire next year.

In response to points raised in the debate, the Chief Executive advised that it was the collective decision of all eleven Hertfordshire Leaders to withdraw the option for one unitary authority.

Having been proposed and seconded and, following a vote (a recorded vote having been requested for recommendation 2.2 only), it was:

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That Council noted the content of the report and the draft Hertfordshire submission document at Appendices A - E which formed the proposed collective submission to Government on Local Government Reorganisation.
- (2) That Council indicated its support for a preferred option, to be considered by Cabinet as part of its deliberations on 19 November 2025, was to submit the proposal and identify a two unitary option as preferred.

**REASON FOR DECISIONS:** On 5 February 2025, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution wrote to all leaders of two-tier councils to formally invite them to develop proposals for a single tier of local government in their counties. Cabinet is legally responsible for deciding whether, and in what form, to respond to this invitation. However, in order to ensure transparency and give all councillors the opportunity to contribute, Full Council was invited to debate the matter and to indicate a preferred option. This indicative, nonbinding vote will be considered by Cabinet as part of its formal decision-making process on 19 November 2025.

VOTE TOTALS:

A (preference for two unitary option)	:	24
B (preference for three unitary option)	:	0
C (preference for four unitary option)	:	17
D (no preference)	:	1

Cllr Ian Albert	C
Cllr Amy Allen	C
Cllr Daniel Allen	C
Cllr Matt Barnes	A
Cllr Tina Bhartwas	A
Cllr Sadie Billing	C
Cllr Ruth Brown	A
Cllr Cathy Brownjohn	C
Cllr David Chalmers	A
Cllr Jon Clayden	A
Cllr Sam Collins	A
Cllr Mick Debenham	C
Cllr Emma Fernandes	C
Cllr Joe Graziano	A
Cllr Dominic Griffiths	A
Cllr Keith Hoskins	D
Cllr Steve Jarvis	A
Cllr Tim Johnson	A
Cllr Chris Lucas	A
Cllr Sarah Lucas	C
Cllr Ian Mantle	C
Cllr Nigel Mason	C
Cllr Bryony May	A
Cllr Caroline McDonnell	A
Cllr Michael Muir	A
Cllr Ralph Muncer	A
Cllr Lisa Nash	A
Cllr Sean Nolan	C
Cllr Steven Patmore	A
Cllr Louise Peace	A
Cllr Vijaiya Poopalasingham	C
Cllr Sean Prendergast	A
Cllr Martin Prescott	A
Cllr Emma Rowe	A
Cllr Tom Tyson	A
Cllr Paul Ward	A
Cllr Laura Williams	C
Cllr Alistair Willoughby	C
Cllr Claire Winchester	A
Cllr Dave Winstanley	C
Cllr Donna Wright	C
Cllr Daniel Wright-Mason	C

The meeting closed at 10.15 pm

Chair

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<b>Item No</b>	<b>Referred from:</b>	<b>Licensing &amp; Regulation Committee</b>
<b>6A</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>13 October 2025</b>
	<b>Title of item:</b>	<b>Adoption of a Statement of Licensing Policy Required by Virtue of Section 5 of the Licensing Act 2003</b>
<b>To be considered alongside agenda item:</b>		<b>Referral only</b>

The report considered by Licensing and Regulation Committee at the meeting held on 13 October 2025 can be viewed here: [Agenda for Licensing and Regulation Committee on Monday, 13th October, 2025, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council](#)

**RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:** That the Statement of Licensing Policy, as amended, be adopted.

**REASONS FOR REFERRAL:**

- (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.

*Audio recording – 1 hour 1 minute 08 seconds*

The Licensing and Community Safety Manager presented the report entitled ‘Adoption of a Statement of Licensing Policy Required by Virtue of Section 5 of the Licensing Act 2003’ and advised that:

- A new Licensing Policy was required to be considered by this Committee, before adoption by Full Council.
- The government had launched a consultation on changes to the Licensing Act, which may require a review of this proposed new Policy, but it was not expected that these would be especially onerous changes, as some of the proposals were already covered in the Policy.
- There were no significant changes proposed from the previous Policy, as it was felt that it currently worked well.
- The Council had never lost a licensing appeal and the Policy, as well as training provided, was important in maintaining this.
- A vision for licensing across the district had been included in the Policy, but many other changes were to tidy up the Policy following recent hearings.
- There was clarification on noise nuisance added, confirmation that CCTV was not required in all licensing situations and the conflict between licensing and planning policy had been resolved.

- The Policy continued to promote virtual Sub-Committee hearings as the default position, with the ability to hold in person for specific cases.
- The summarised consultation responses were included at Appendix A, alongside Officer comments, and the full responses to the consultation were included at Appendix B.
- There were no major changes to the Policy following the consultation.
- The proposed Policy was included at Appendix C.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Tim Johnson
- Councillor Ian Albert

In response to questions, the Licensing and Community Safety Manager advised that the reference to the weight applied to the contribution of the Environmental Health officer was to strike a balance between lack of formal evidence and still allowing an expert opinion to be considered. However, it was agreed that the word 'substantial' would fetter the discretion of the Committee and could be amended.

Councillor Amy Allen proposed the recommendations and Councillor Ian Albert seconded.

As part of the debate, Councillor Ruth Brown proposed an amendment to remove the final sentence from paragraph D11.10 of the Policy at Appendix C. This was seconded by Councillor Sean Prendergast.

Councillor Amy Allen confirmed, as proposer, that she would accept the amendment into the substantive motion. This was confirmed by Councillor Ian Albert, as seconder, and, following a vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee:

- (1) Considered the responses to the public consultation.
- (2) Supported the proposed Statement of Licensing Policy attached as Appendix C, with an amendment to remove the final sentence from paragraph D11.10.

**RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:** That the Statement of Licensing Policy, as amended, be adopted.

**REASONS FOR REFERRAL:**

- (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.



<b>Item No</b>	<b>Referred from:</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>
<b>6B</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>19 November 2025</b>
	<b>Title of item:</b>	<b>Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2025-2030</b>
<b><i>To be considered alongside agenda item:</i></b>		<b>Agenda Item 7</b>

The report considered by Cabinet at the meeting held on 19 November 2025 can be viewed here: [Agenda for Cabinet on Wednesday, 19th November, 2025, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council](#)

**RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:** That it:

- (1) Approves the Medium-Term Financial Strategy as attached at Appendix A amended.

**REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION:** 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.

*Audio recording 33 minutes 17 seconds*

The Chair invited Councillor Sean Nolan, as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Nolan advised that there had been discussion around:

- Focusing on looking ahead and the uncertainty associated with dealing with the next five years.
- The variances in the future for the Council finances which would influence funding going forward, as detailed in the agenda supplement.
- The forecast budget gap for 2029/30 and the different levels of potential funding.
- The uncertainty around the impact of costs which would be incurred with the Local Government Reorganisation and Churchgate projects.
- It was welcomed that the Council Tax Reduction Scheme was considering a reduction in charges for those with debilitating illnesses.

In response to a question from Councillor Daniel Allen, the Director – Resources advised that Fair Funding 2.0 and the setting of the new three-year funding formula were intertwined and the Council was still waiting for more information on this.

In response to a question from Councillor Amy Allen, Councillor Nolan advised that the criteria for ‘debilitating illnesses’ had been defined by the Marie Curie Charity as people with terminal illnesses.

Councillor Ian Albert, Executive Member for Finance and IT, presented the report entitled 'Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025-2030' and advised that:

- The Council was expecting to receive details of the three-year settlement before Christmas.
- This Medium-Term Financial Strategy followed the same format as previous strategies and was set out in Appendix A.
- Details of possible scenarios which resulted in a difference of £2.6 million forecast funding were set out in Table 1 of Appendix A.
- The Council was in a good position with strong General Fund reserves and the budget workshops looked at key priorities going forward.
- The comments from the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee regarding additional resources that would be required for the LGR and Churchgate projects would be taken on board.
- The Council needed to have a deliverable budget in line with the Council Delivery Plan.
- The staff pension scheme was in a healthy condition.
- The Council effectively had £19.6 million of reserves which demonstrated well managed Council funds with prudent use of these funds for residents.
- An addendum had been published as a supplementary document to the report.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Donna Wright

In response to questions, Councillor Albert advised that:

- Budget workshops were a useful tool to look at key priorities and feedback from the residents budget survey was also considered.
- The Medium-Term Financial Strategy was looking at the General Fund Reserves of the Council.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Donna Wright seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:** That it:

(1) Approves the Medium-Term Financial Strategy as attached at Appendix A amended.

**REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION:** 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.

<b>COUNCIL 4 DECEMBER 2025</b>
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<b>*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT</b>
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**TITLE OF REPORT: MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2026-30**

REPORT OF: *Director: Resources*

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: *Resources*

COUNCIL PRIORITY: SUSTAINABILITY

**1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report recommends the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2026/27 to 2029/30 to guide and inform the Council's Business Planning Process. The four year period of the MTFS reflects the timelines related to Local Government Reorganisation.

The MTFS details a high level of uncertainty in our future funding, but that this should be resolved by the end of December. There will need to be an adapt as we go through the budget setting process.

The MTFS supports and is supported by the Council Plan. This reflects that the Council can only deliver priorities and projects that it can afford and should prioritise its spending around delivering its priorities.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1. That Council approve the Medium Term Financial Strategy, as attached at Appendix A.

**3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 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.

**4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 4.1 The Council needs to have a strategy for setting its budget to ensure that it meets its statutory duty to set a balanced budget over the medium term, and ensure that spend is prioritised towards delivering statutory services and its strategic aims (as set out in the Council Plan).
- 4.2 In line with the Financial Management Code (published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy), the Council aspires to set a longer-term financial

strategy (e.g. 10 years) that considers the various risks and plans scenarios to deal with them. However, this MTFS deliberately takes a shorter-term view, which reflects the impact of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). The LGR timelines would mean that this Council would no longer exist from April 2028, but we need to consider the impact of our financial position on the successor Authority.

## **5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS**

- 5.1 The Executive Member for Resources has been consulted in developing this Strategy.
- 5.2 No direct external consultation has been undertaken in the preparation of this report. However, over the Summer, we did a budget survey. The results of that consultation will be considered as part of the budget setting process. A brief summary is included in Appendix A.
- 5.3 As in previous years, Member workshops are being held in November to discuss budget proposals and priorities in advance of them being considered by Cabinet. Due to the intentional delay to preparing this MTFS, those workshops also took place prior to this report being considered.

## **6. FORWARD PLAN**

- 6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

## **7. BACKGROUND**

- 7.1 The Council is required to set a balanced budget each year. This can include using reserves if this is affordable over the medium term. The Council therefore sets a Medium Term Financial Strategy each year to help determine the approach that it will take to setting the detailed budget for the following year. This explains why the period of the MTFS is different to the period covered by the Council Plan. However they strongly align in terms of the actions required to deliver a medium-term balanced budget.

## **8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS**

- 8.1 The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is attached as Appendix A. It details the uncertainties and assumptions used to estimate our future finances. It notes that the high uncertainty over our future funding will be resolved by the end of December. This means that there will be a need to adapt as go through the budget setting process.
- 8.2 Our reserves can be used in a managed way to support the implementation of savings required. But they can not be used in the medium term without a plan to achieve a balanced budget.
- 8.3 Council are asked to approve the wording of the MTFS (as per Appendix A). The Communications Team will then work on improving the presentation (e.g. images, colour) prior to it being published on our website.
- 8.4 At Finance, Audit and Risk Committee there was a discussion on the impact on General Fund reserves of the two funding scenarios presented in the MTFS, if no further savings

were identified and delivered. This information was provided to Cabinet and included at Appendix B to this report.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 Cabinet's terms of reference include at 5.7.38 the power, by recommendation "to advise the Council in the formulation of those policies within the Council's terms of reference". Council's terms of reference include at 4.4.1(b) "approving or adopting the budget". The MTFS is part of the budget setting process. Paragraph 2.7 of the Council's Financial Regulations (Section 19 of the Constitution) details that "[t]he Medium Term Financial Strategy ... require[s] approval by Full Council".
- 9.2 Councillors are reminded of the requirement, under section 30 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, to set a balanced budget prior to the commencement of the financial year in question; and also that the Local Government Act 2003 requires the Chief Finance Officer to report on the robustness of estimates and the adequacy of reserves allowed for in the budget.

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 Revenue financial implications are covered in Appendix A.
- 10.2 The main purpose of the Medium Term Financial Strategy is to consider the revenue funding, income and expenditure for the Council. This includes considering the revenue implications of capital expenditure.

## **11. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 Good Risk Management supports and enhances the decision-making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.
- 11.2 The key risks within the budget assumptions are referred to in Appendix A.
- 11.3 There are financial and reputational risks involved in arriving at a balanced budget against the uncertainty surrounding levels of government funding. We seek to mitigate the risks through the use of the established corporate business planning process and early involvement of members in the process.

## **12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2 The MTFS attempts to align resources to the delivery of the Council Plan, which sets the corporate objectives. Through its corporate objectives the Council is seeking to address equality implications in the services it provides and through the remainder of the Corporate Business Planning Process will carry out Equalities Impact Assessments for relevant efficiency or investment options.

### **13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS**

- 13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report.

### **14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that directly apply to this report.
- 14.2. The MTFS attempts to align resources to the delivery of the Council Plan, which sets the corporate objectives. Through its corporate objectives the Council is seeking to address the impacts of climate change in the services it provides and through the remainder of the Corporate Business Planning Process will carry out Environmental Impact Assessments for relevant efficiency or investment options.

### **15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 15.1. The MTFS makes assumptions in relation to pay inflation. As the actual rate of inflation will be subject to national pay bargaining, the actual costs will depend on the results of those negotiations. The budget also makes assumptions around funding for increments. Whilst the MTFS references our pay competitiveness, the budget does not currently make any allowance for any costs that could be incurred in addressing this (e.g. pay increases above inflation).
- 14.2. The delivery of projects to deliver council objectives depends on having adequate people resources with the requisite skills.
- 14.3. The development of budget proposals will take up staff time. As they are developed these budget proposals will identify the ongoing impact on staff.

### **16. APPENDICES**

- 16.1. Appendix A- Medium Term Financial Strategy 2026-30
- 16.2. Appendix B- Potential General Fund balance forecasts

### **17. CONTACT OFFICERS**

- 17.1. Ian Couper, Service Director: Resources [ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk); ext 4243
- 17.2. Antonio Ciampa, Accountancy Manager [Antonio.ciampa@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:Antonio.ciampa@north-herts.gov.uk), ext 4566
- 17.3. Natasha Jindal, Deputy Monitoring Officer, [natasha.jindal@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:natasha.jindal@north-herts.gov.uk)
- 17.4. Ellie Hollingsworth, Policy and Strategy Officer, [ellie.hollingsworth@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:ellie.hollingsworth@north-herts.gov.uk), ext: 4220

### **18. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 18.1. None

North Herts Council

Medium Term Financial Strategy  
2026-30

**Purpose of the Strategy**

This strategy sits alongside the Council Plan. It sets out our financial forecasts over the next five years and how we will manage the funding that we think we will have available, to deliver as much as we can, in line with our priorities.

Our Council Plan covers the period until the next set of Council elections, so is from 2024-28. It is good practice for a financial strategy to take a longer-term focus, usually at least 5 years. The Government has announced a plan for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), which would see this Council cease to exist from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2028. We would be replaced by a Unitary Council (combining District and County Council services) over a wider (yet to be determined) geographical area. This means that more focus is put on the period up to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2027 but maintaining a longer-term view over 2 years beyond then (up until the end of 2029/30) to assess any impacts that our finances would have on our successor Council. It also provides coverage in case of any delay to the LGR timelines.

For the period of overlap with the Council Plan, the intention is that the two documents are aligned.

**Delivering our Vision and Priorities**

Our vision and priorities are set out in detail in our Council Plan.

Our vision is “working with you for a fairer, greener North Herts.

To support that our priorities are Thriving Communities, Accessible Services, Responsible Growth and Sustainability.

Most of the money that we spend is on delivering statutory services (about two thirds of our net spend). We will always look to deliver these services in line with our priorities. Even as our funding has continued to reduce, we have tried to maintain our ability to offer discretionary services that are linked to our priorities. Our forecasts include scenarios where we will need to further reduce our costs in the future. This would mean that difficult decisions will need to be taken. If faced with that choice, we will make those decisions in line with our priorities, and taking into account what residents told us in the budget survey.

Our Council Plan includes our ambitions for North Herts. Some of the ideas may be dependent on identifying funding or developing a sustainable business case.



## Future funding

We have delayed this strategy to try and base it on increased certainty over our future funding. But at the time of writing this, we do not yet have that certainty.

Over the summer, Government consulted on a new funding formula for Local Government. This is known as Fair Funding 2.0.

Some of the aims of the Fair Funding review are:

- Multi-year settlements to support planning for the future (initially 3 years from 2026/27 to 2028/29).
- Fewer funding streams, especially those that require a bidding process.
- Better targeting of money where it is needed, including a focus on deprivation and prevention.
- Reflecting the relative costs of delivering services in different areas.
- Adjusting the funding needed by the ability to raise Council Tax.

The overall process for setting Government funding (which includes the Business Rates that can be retained) is set out below:



The consultation document did not provide any indicative allocations but provided information that meant that experts in the field of Local Government finance could estimate the impact. Those experts were also able to have discussions with officials at the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government to provide verification. We commissioned information from LG Futures to support our response to the consultation. Through their work supporting all Hertfordshire Councils on LGR, we also now have access to forecasts from another company, Pixel. Initial indications (from those that had seen the results from both) were that there was a significant difference between the LG Futures and Pixel models. But looking at the results for North Herts, the differences are not that significant. The LG Futures model allows us to easily see the impact of changing assumptions which were specifically stated as being subject to consultation. By far the most significant one of these is whether social care grants are treated as part of the general funding pot to be allocated or kept outside to be allocated on a more specific social care formula. Making it part of the overall funding pot means that we get a very small share of it. But as it is such a large amount of grant, that very small share is significant.

This table shows the relative difference in funding that the Social Care assumption could make:

<b>Estimated Government Funding (including retained Business Rate baseline) £m</b>	<b>2026/27</b>	<b>2027/28</b>	<b>2028/29</b>
With Social Care in baseline	6.51	7.00	7.46
Without Social Care in baseline	5.64	5.26	4.86
Difference	(0.87)	(1.74)	(2.60)

The Fair Funding Review does not affect the Council Tax we can raise. The expectation is that the cap will be retained at up to 3% without a local referendum. Our Council Tax income is also affected by growth in properties in the district, the impact of our Council Tax reduction scheme (CTRS) and our collection rate. Based on the latest data our Council Tax base (which includes property growth and CTRS impacts) is slightly up on our previous forecasts. We would retain our collection rate (how much of the Council Tax we are owed ultimately gets paid) at 99%.

As part of Simpler Recycling, Government require that all Councils collect food waste on a weekly basis from April 2026. Whilst we already collect food waste weekly, it is still a new burden, and we have previously expected that we would receive additional funding for the ongoing cost. Our forecasts will now assume that this be contained within the Fair Funding outcomes.

For 2025/26 we have guaranteed income of £1.435 million in relation to Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR). EPR is where producers have to pay for the cost of collection and disposal of packaging material. The funding is then passed on to Councils. This means that the cost of packaging materials should be borne by the end customers of those goods (through slightly higher prices) rather than the general Council taxpayer. The latest forecast for the amount we will receive in 2025/26 is about £300k more than the guaranteed amount, although half of that increase relates to being recompensed for the costs of taking part in a flexible plastic collection trial. The EPR funding is not within the scope of the Fair Funding formula. The aim of EPR is to encourage reductions in packaging waste so over time the payments we receive should slowly decrease. Reductions in packaging waste that needs to be collected will not reduce our costs as collection costs are priced based on number of households, not volumes collected. It is possible that net costs could go up as some of the recyclable material that we collect generate an income, which is linked to volumes. We will need to forecast how much our EPR payments will be in future years. We will base this on a 20% reduction each year.

We are expecting a policy statement on Fair Funding soon. It is unlikely to give us any actual funding amounts. It may provide more information that would allow the Local Government funding experts to further refine their models. The provisional Local Government finance settlement will be announced in mid-December. At that point we will know what our funding will be for the next 3 years.

## Our previous funding forecasts

Our current year (2025/26) budget includes the following funding forecasts for future years:

<b>Funding by source by year, amounts in £m</b>	<b>2026/27</b>	<b>2027/28</b>	<b>2028/29</b>	<b>2029/30</b>
Council Tax	14.09	14.58	15.10	15.63
Government Grant and retained Business Rates	4.42	3.93	3.42	2.89
Extended Producer Responsibility	1.44	1.44	1.44	1.44
Council Tax Support to Parishes	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
<b>Net Total</b>	<b>19.91</b>	<b>19.91</b>	<b>19.91</b>	<b>19.91</b>
Add: Temporary Accommodation element of Homeless Prevention Grant *	0.37	0.37	0.37	0.37
<b>Revised Total</b>	<b>20.28</b>	<b>20.28</b>	<b>20.28</b>	<b>20.28</b>

\* This grant is added in as expected that it will form part of base funding in the Fair Funding formula, so means the total will be comparable to Fair Funding estimates.

## Revising our funding forecasts

The table below assumes the following:

- Council Tax income to be based on the latest tax base with a 0.99% collection rate, with 0.5% annual tax base growth and 2.99% rate increases. The tax base growth is a net figure as some of the growth will be used to fund the additional costs of the new properties (e.g. waste collection).
- EPR at the 2025/26 guaranteed level with a 20% decrease per year.
- Any previously announced New Burdens funding will be rolled in to Fair Funding (including Simpler Recycling).
- We will continue to budget for Business Rates at the baseline level, i.e. do not assume any growth (noting that growth will be less likely as the baseline level will be reset).
- Provide a range for Fair Funding based on whether Social Care grants are included or excluded.
- Amounts to grow by inflation at 2% for 2029/30.
- For now, assume that Council Tax support to parishes continues, although a choice could be taken to provide notice that this will cease.

<b>Funding by source by year, amounts in £m</b>	<b>2026/27</b>	<b>2027/28</b>	<b>2028/29</b>	<b>2029/30</b>
Council Tax	14.15	14.65	15.16	15.69
Fair Funding impact (including Temporary Accommodation element of Homeless Prevention Grant)	5.64 to 6.51	5.26 to 7.00	4.86 to 7.46	4.96 to 7.61
Extended Producer Responsibility	1.15	0.92	0.74	0.59
Council Support to Parishes	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
<b>Total</b>	<b>20.90 to 21.77</b>	<b>20.79 to 22.53</b>	<b>20.72 to 23.32</b>	<b>21.20 to 23.85</b>

## Our General Fund reserves

Our latest forecast (Quarter 1 Revenue Monitoring report) is that our General Fund balance at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026 will be £14.8 million. That involves using £1.27 million of our General Fund during 2025/26 to support our revenue spend, alongside £2.86 million of other reserves. That reflects a combination of spend that has been carried forward from previous years, as well as an underlying budget gap. The underlying budget gap is from wanting greater certainty over our future funding before committing to significant budget reductions.

As detailed in the year end revenue monitor for 2024/25, the gain on Business Rates from the release of provisions at the end of 2024/25 is expected to be received in 2026/27. The release of provisions helped the Council achieve a surplus over previous estimates for the year of £2.3million. In addition, the pooling gain

from the Council being part of a Business Rates Pool in 2024/25 meant that the Council was able to retain £1.5million more of this surplus than if the Council had been outside the Pool. The pooling gain reduced the transfer required to the General Fund to cover the cost of the business rates levy from the business rates grant held in earmarked reserve, the balance of which can be used to help balance the budget.

We are required to make sure that we have a certain level of reserves when we set our budget. This is to provide protection against known and unknown risks. This includes us being able to react to changes in demand and any emergencies that may arise. Our allowance of known risks is based on estimating the monetary impact of an event happening and applying a percentage to this, based on the likelihood of it happening (high, medium or low). Our allowance for unknown risks is based on 5% of net expenditure and 3% of budgeted income (excluding Housing Benefit). For 2025/26 this gave a minimum balance of £2.6m. It is assumed that there will need to be some growth in this minimum level to reflect inflation, so a minimum of £3m will be assumed. Our reserves are well above this minimum recommended level, and even more so when the extra Business Rates gains are added in.

### **Revenue and Capital spend**

Revenue is what we spend on day-to-day activities. It includes staffing and payments to suppliers to deliver services. It also includes income from fees and charges where the user pays for some or all of the cost of the service. This strategy is mainly focused on revenue spend.

Capital is what we spend on the buying, creating and maintaining our assets. Assets are things that can be used for more than one year, and include land, buildings and vehicles.

Most of our funding is revenue and can be used for either revenue or capital spend.

Where we sell surplus assets we receive a capital receipt and that funding can only be used to fund new capital spend. We are not expecting any large capital receipts and are expecting that we will need to reduce our forecasts (compared with last year's budget) as we go through the detailed budget setting process. We also sometimes get capital grants, that can only be used for capital spend.

There are revenue costs that are linked to capital spend. We have moved to a position where we have a need to borrow to fund our capital programme, as we have used up all our capital reserves. This is a normal position for Councils to be in, and there are provisions that allow us to borrow to fund capital spend. We cannot borrow money to fund revenue spend. When we set our Treasury Strategy as part of the 2026/27 budget we will need to determine if we are going to use internal or external borrowing. It is likely that we will continue with our current approach of borrowing internally. This means that we use the cash that we hold to fund capital spend. The costs of capital spend then come from the lost interest that we would have earned from investing that cash and the need to charge a Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP). In essence, the MRP spreads the cost of a capital asset over its expected useful life. For the purposes of this Medium-Term Financial Strategy, we assume that there will be no significant changes in treasury or MRP costs compared to those included in the 2025/26 budget forecasts. This is partly based on there being no defined proposals for significant increases in capital spend. This will be reviewed as part of the detailed work in setting the 2026/27 budget.

### **Our revenue budget forecasts for 2026/27 onwards**

The revenue budget that was set by Council in February 2025 included the forecasts below for net spend in 2026/27 onwards. This excludes the savings that were marked as tbc and therefore had not been identified. It includes the addition of the Community Safety Officer post that was agreed at the budget meeting.

<b>Amounts in £m</b>	<b>2026/27</b>	<b>2027/28</b>	<b>2028/29</b>	<b>2029/30</b>
Forecast spend	22.40	22.71	22.70	22.77

As part of setting the 2026/27 this will be fully reviewed. But as part of updating this strategy the following assumptions are considered/ updated.

## Temporary Accommodation element of Homeless Prevention Grant

The Temporary Accommodation element of the Homeless Prevention Grant has been a specific grant, and therefore netted off against the expenditure in that service area. As detailed above the intention is that this grant will be rolled in to general funding. So the service budget will need to be increased to reflect the loss of direct grant funding. This is a pressure of £370k each year.

## Budget monitoring updates

Since the budget was set in February 2026, we have had budget monitoring reports for Q3 2024/25, end of year 2024/25 and Q1 2025/26. These reports identified the following ongoing budget impacts:

Amounts in £m	Estimated ongoing impact (excluding carry-forwards)
Q3 2024/25 report	0.076
End of year 2024/25 report	(0.361)
Q1 2025/26 report	0.314
<b>Total impact</b>	<b>0.029</b>

## Inflation and cost of living impacts

In August the Bank of England Monetary Policy Committee cut the UK interest rate to 4% (from 4.25%). Whilst the current rate of inflation is above the 2% target, the Committee's report forecasts that inflation will drop to the 2% target during 2027. It is then forecast to stay at that level.

## Pay inflation and pay competitiveness

The pay claim for 2025/26 was agreed at 3.2%. The NJC Trade Unions have not yet submitted a pay claim for 2026/27. Our current forecasts are based on 2% pay inflation from 2026/27 onwards. It is proposed that this assumption is changed to 3% for 2026/27 and 2027/28. This is to reflect that:

- General inflation will remain above the 2% target over that period.
- Increases in the National Living Wage are likely to create pressure on our pay levels. This will have the greatest impact on those at the bottom of the pay scales, but we have to be mindful on maintaining pay differentials.
- There have been periods of below inflation pay rises in Local Government, which the Unions will seek to try and address.

We have started work on assessing our pay competitiveness against our Councils. This uses an LGA pay benchmarking tool, but it has been difficult to ensure that we are getting like for like comparisons. Jobs between different Councils will never be exactly the same, but it is important to try and get the best matches. It is hoped that a recent improvement to the tool will allow us to make more progress. Any decision on pay increases that fall outside the NJC process, would need to consider affordability and any constraints from the LGR process. For the purposes of this strategy, an additional pay increase will not be assumed. We will still continue to work on promoting our non-pay benefits.

## Contracted services inflation

Our contracts have a mix of inflation increases built into them. Some of our larger contracts use a basket of inflation indicators. Others will just be linked to general inflation. It is proposed that 3.8% inflation is assumed for 2026/27 (current CPI, August 2025 value), then 3% for 2027/28 and then 2% thereafter. For those contracts that have more specific inflationary measures, it is assumed that over time these will be strongly aligned to general inflation.

## Increases in fees and charges, and impact on demand/ability to pay

It has previously been decided that parking charges should be modelled on assuming a 2% increase each year. That is not a target increase, and actual increases will need to consider managing demand, cost of provision, encouraging modal shift away from private car use and supporting the vitality of town centres. This assumption of a 2% increase will be retained. The work on annual uplifts has now been brought forward so that they will be applied from April each year.

Garden waste went back to being an annual charge from April 2025 onwards. This was set at £55 for 2025/26. For this purpose of this strategy, it is assumed that it will increase in line with inflation (i.e. 3.8% for 2026/27, 3% for 2027/28 and then 2% thereafter) but rounded to the nearest pound. The decision on the charge will be taken by Cabinet. It is assumed we will continue with having a concessionary discount for those that are less able to pay.

We have seen a drop in the number of trade waste and recycling customers, but projected income is still in line with budget. Therefore, it is currently assumed that the overall market can bear an increase in costs in line with inflation. This may be from selling additional recycling services. This will be reviewed prior to April each year by reviewing market conditions, and actual increases may be higher or lower.

Where fees and charges are set by regulation (e.g. planning fees) then the Council will set charges in line with those regulations. The assumption is that any ancillary charges will be increased in line with increases in general fees and charges.

All other fees and charges provide a relatively low amount of income. The target is that these fees and charges should recover the full cost of provision. Costs of provision are generally likely to increase with pay inflation. Therefore, the assumption will be that prices should increase in line with pay inflation estimates.

Our current assumption is that increases at these levels would not affect demand. For most of our services we seek payment in advance of receiving the service, so we are also not expecting an increase in levels of overdue debt.

### **Eligibility for Council Tax Reduction Scheme**

The Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) determines who is eligible for a discount on their Council Tax bill. For pensioners there is a mandatory scheme set by Government. For working age residents, we can determine how any discounts are determined.

We moved to a banded scheme for working-age CTRS eligibility in April 2023. During the first year (2023/24) this resulted in an increase in the total value of support that was being provided. Since then the value of support has stabilised. The cost of CTRS is reflected through changes in the tax base as it reduces the number of properties eligible to pay Council Tax. It is assumed that there will not be any further impact on the tax base from CTRS. Following some work by Marie Curie, we plan to look at helping those in poverty with a terminal illness. Our current expectation is that this can be covered through our existing discretionary support. All these assumptions will be kept under review as CTRS eligibility is uncertain.

### **Pension costs**

The latest triennial valuation (for March 2022) was completed before the 2022/23 budget was set. That valuation set our pension contribution rates for the three years up until 2025/26. Current forecasts for 2026/27 onwards are also based on that valuation. We expect to get our funding results by December, which will set our contribution rates for the next three years (2026/27 to 2028/29). We will update the forecasts when we have these. Indications have been that we could see a decrease in these costs.

The adoption of the Council's Local Plan means that there will be large new developments in the District. The precise timing of these developments is not known, and may be affected by the impacts of continuing high interest rates.

As these sites go through the planning process, they will generate significant planning income. Some of the capacity to deliver these has already been included in previous staffing growth bids. There will also be additional internal and external resource required. Where possible, the cost of short term external resources, and to a limited extent the internal resources, will be met through Planning Performance Agreements. However, these are voluntary agreements and cannot be required. The forecast cost of longer-term internal resources is forecast to be less than the additional income generated.

We will attempt to develop a prudent estimate of additional planning income over the next 4 years. This will reflect that the income is only earned when the application is determined, and not when we initially receive the fee income. Where there are over-achievements in early years, these will be put into a central reserve to enable the smoothing of any shortfalls in later years. When prudent, any balance in the reserve will be released back to the General Fund. The reserve will not be used to directly fund additional planning expenditure. There will be a need for additional resource in the medium-term, but this will be covered through the normal budget process.

### **Capacity to deliver our priorities**

Our Council Plan sets out our vision and priorities for 2024-28. The Council Plan will continue to be supported by our Council Delivery Plan.

The projects in the Council Delivery Plan for 2025/26 have been subject to prioritisation, and there are fewer of them. However there are still risks around delivery, particularly in relation to finances and Officer capacity. This is part of the reason why the Council Delivery Plan is reviewed on a quarterly basis by Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet.

The table below details those projects that are in the current Council Delivery Plan (as reported to Cabinet in September 2025) and any further projects specifically referenced in the Council Plan. The table shows the financial implications of those projects in 2026/27 onwards:

Project	Resources
Churchgate area regeneration	The current spend to get to a viable scheme is being funded from the income generated by the current Churchgate leases and additional approved budget. Project Management is from the Enterprise Team, with specific support from a part-time project manager. Ultimately it is expected that a significant capital budget will be required, but not yet at a stage where this can be quantified.
Waste and street cleansing contract	Expected to be completed in 2025/26.
Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme- Leisure Centres	Revenue and capital budgets have been agreed and are monitored regularly. Project management from the Leisure and Active Communities Manager with some additional external support. Expected to be substantially completed in 2025/26.
Decarbonisation of Council Buildings Phase 2	Capital budget approved. The impact on ongoing running costs will be refined throughout the project. Project Management from Climate Change and Sustainability Project Manager.
Engaging the community on our finances and how we spend our money	Focus of the project is on making decisions in relation to our budget. There are no direct financial implications. Project Management from Director- Resources.
Local Plan Review	Assumed that this will be delivered from existing resources, including use of specific reserves. Project Management from the Strategic Planning Team.
Digital Transformation	Staffing resource is coming from Customer Services and IT. The projects may deliver some net savings, alongside process improvements for customers and staff. As the amount is uncertain these are not budgeted for at this stage.
Pay on exit parking	Expected to be completed in 2025/26.
Engaging the community on our finances and how we spend our money	Expecting to deliver from existing staff resources and using existing Council communication tools. Being led by Communications and Finance teams.
King George V Skate Park	Expected to be completed in 2025/26.
Oughtonhead Weir	Expected to be completed in 2025/26.
Town Centre Strategies	Assumed that this will be delivered from existing resources, including use of specific reserves. Project Management from Strategic Planning Projects Team..
Residential/ Public EV charging	Expected to be completed in 2025/26.
Achieving net zero Carbon emissions	Our leisure centres make up around 45% of our scope 1-3 emissions. The Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme therefore supports significant progress towards net zero. Within the new waste contract, all vehicles under 7.5 tonnes will be electric. We have budget provision for using HVO fuel in the larger waste vehicles. The phase 2 decarbonisation budget includes the Town Hall and Museum, North Herts Learner Pool and District Council Offices. There are not currently any other specific capital budgets allocated for carbon improvements. There is also no budget allocated for off-setting costs.
Local Government Reorganisation	This has been very resource intensive in supporting the development of the options proposal document, alongside the consultant support. It is expected that this will continue and likely to need additional resource in key support areas (e.g. IT and HR). The initial funding from Government has all been used. There will need to be additional budget allocated as part of the 2026/27 budget process, although this will be time-limited.



Projects are generally managed by relevant Officers, in addition to their core role. This creates the potential for delays.

There is not currently any resource allocated for any new projects that are not listed above.

### Our future spend forecasts and resultant budget gap

Bringing together the above assumptions gives the following spend forecasts over the next 4 years. This is then compared with the estimated range of funding for each year to give a forecast funding gap.

<b>Amounts in £m</b>	<b>2026/27</b>	<b>2027/28</b>	<b>2028/29</b>	<b>2029/30</b>
Forecast spend from 2025/26 budget	22.40	22.71	22.70	22.77
Temporary Accommodation Grant	0.37	0.37	0.37	0.37
Budget monitoring impacts	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03
Change in pay inflation	0.40	0.80	0.80	0.80
Change in contract inflation	0.30	0.60	0.60	0.60
Change in fees and charges inflation	(0.20)	(0.40)	(0.40)	(0.40)
<b>Revised forecast spend</b>	<b>23.30</b>	<b>24.11</b>	<b>24.10</b>	<b>24.17</b>
Forecast funding range	20.90 to 21.77	20.79 to 22.53	20.72 to 23.32	21.20 to 23.85
<b>Forecast budget gap</b>	<b>1.53 to 2.40</b>	<b>1.58 to 3.32</b>	<b>0.78 to 3.38</b>	<b>0.32 to 2.97</b>

### Addressing our funding gap

The table above shows that our financial position will be highly dependent on the outcome of the Fair Funding review. In 2028/29 the budget gap could be as low as around £0.8million, but could be as high as around £3.4million. Note that these are only estimates and the outcome of the Fair Funding review could be outside of the range that has been presented. The funding from Extended Producer Responsibility is only an estimate. On the expenditure side this is currently only a high level assessment, which will be refined as we go through the budget process.

It is difficult to commit to a package of savings to address the higher funding gap, when the lower funding gap is so much smaller. As a result of the level of savings we have delivered previously, most of the efficiency savings have been taken and remaining savings are likely to require changes to service levels.

**What do we mean by savings?**

We refer to the likely need for savings to balance our budget. Savings could mean any of the following:

- Being able to deliver our existing services at a lower cost. The use of technology and automation may enable to do this in some areas. But generally, the savings that we have delivered across a number of years have been through efficiencies, meaning that there are fewer opportunities left.
- Being able to generate additional income from services that we are able to charge for, less any costs in providing that additional level of service.
- Being able to generate income from commercial activities. The opportunities to do this are limited by economic conditions and government policy. We also need to make sure that these activities are in line with our priorities.
- As capital expenditure comes with a revenue cost, reviewing our capital programme to ensure it reflects priorities and is deliverable.
- Reducing the level of services that we provide, or no longer providing services that we are not required to provide. Whilst we would always want to avoid this, we have to consider the overall sustainability of our Council.

Over June and July, we asked residents to help us shape our future budget decision-making by sharing their thoughts on the services they value and their future priorities via our first-ever budget consultation.

The aim of the consultation was to gauge residents' views and use the findings to aid our decision-making rather than make any concrete decisions on future services. The consultation focused on those services which are paid for through our general funding rather than those that are fully covered by fees and charges.

559 residents responded who told us their top five services in terms of importance to them were: 1) Waste collection & recycling; 2) Parks and greenspaces; 3) Street cleaning; 4) Community safety and environmental crime; and 5) Environment health. In terms of their thoughts on balancing our future budgets, they told us that they would rather we find ways new ways to fund our existing services rather than reduce the frequency or quality of the services we provide. We will use the results from this survey when we consider savings options.

We have a high level of reserves, which in the short-term can be used to help balance the budget whilst we develop and deliver savings proposals. This is not a medium-term solution, as we have a legal requirement to set a balanced medium-term budget. We also should not see Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) as a barrier to this as it is due to take place within that medium-term time horizon. We should have an implementable plan to deliver a balanced budget. Where savings are required, some of those may need to be delivered after LGR, but they are a viable option for a new Unitary Council to adopt.

Our level of reserves means that we have some financial capacity to:

- Deliver required savings in a way that seeks to manage the impact on our residents.
- Provide additional short-term resource to support the LGR process- both internally and contributions to work across Hertfordshire.
- Ensure that key projects are progressed, especially where there is an advantage to that happening in advance of LGR.

The above is dependent on having a plan that achieves a balanced budget. Ongoing costs and any potential redundancy costs (including where they will fall on the new Unitary Authority) must be fully considered, and avoided as much as possible.

## Potential General Fund Balance forecasts

This information was produced following a question in advance of the meeting from one of the Members of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee. It was referenced at that meeting, and was then shared with all Members of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, and included as an addendum to the Cabinet report.

The table below starts with the forecast budget gap table from the Medium Term Financial Strategy. It then looks at the reserves that are available to support General Fund expenditure as detailed in the Strategy and the 2025/26 budget. It then combines these to look at the impact on reserves of the positive and negative case for our future funding, assuming that the Council does not deliver any savings. This is against a likely recommended (by Chief Finance Officer) minimum General Fund reserve balance of £3 million.

<b>Amounts in £m</b>	<b>2026/27</b>	<b>2027/28</b>	<b>2028/29</b>	<b>2029/30</b>
Forecast spend from 2025/26 budget	22.40	22.71	22.70	22.77
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Budget monitoring impacts	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03
Change in pay inflation	0.40	0.80	0.80	0.80
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Forecast funding range	20.90 to 21.77	20.79 to 22.53	20.72 to 23.32	21.20 to 23.85
<b>Forecast budget gap</b>	<b>1.53 to 2.40</b>	<b>1.58 to 3.32</b>	<b>0.78 to 3.38</b>	<b>0.32 to 2.97</b>

General Fund balance b/f	14.8
Business Rate gains from releasing provision	2.3
MHCLG reserve previously forecast to be used (26/27 and 27/28)	2.5
Equivalent reserves balance to support General Fund expenditure	19.6

<b>Positive case on future funding</b>	<b>2026/27</b>	<b>2027/28</b>	<b>2028/29</b>	<b>2029/30</b>
Equivalent General Fund b/f	19.6	18.07	16.49	15.71
In-year budget gap	1.53	1.58	0.78	0.32
Equivalent General Fund b/f	18.07	16.49	15.71	15.39

<b>Negative case on future funding</b>				
Equivalent General Fund b/f	19.6	17.2	13.88	10.5
In-year budget gap	2.40	3.32	3.38	2.97
Equivalent General Fund b/f	17.2	13.88	10.5	7.53

In the negative case, the overall reserves are still above the minimum level in 2029/30 but have reduced by over 60%, and are about 1.5 years away from going below the minimum level.

<b>COUNCIL 4 DECEMBER 2025</b>
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<b>PUBLIC DOCUMENT</b>
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**TITLE OF REPORT: NOTICE OF MOTIONS**

The following motion has been submitted, due notice of which has been given in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.12.

To be moved by Councillor Dave Winstanley and seconded by Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason:

**The Local Government Pension Scheme & Responsible Investment**

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 c£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 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.**

<b>COUNCIL 4 DECEMBER 2025</b>
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<b>PUBLIC DOCUMENT</b>
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**TITLE OF REPORT: NOTICE OF MOTIONS**

The following motion has been submitted, due notice of which has been given in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.12.

To be moved by Councillor Ruth Brown and seconded by Councillor David Chalmers, and further signed by Councillor Matt Barnes, Councillor Tom Tyson and Councillor Paul Ward.

**Motion of No Confidence in the Leader of the Council**

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

**As such Council resolves:**

- 1. That the current Leader of the Council is removed.**

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