

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES

Meeting of the Council held as a Virtual Meeting
on Thursday, 9th July, 2020 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors: Terry Tyler (Chair), Val Bryant (Vice-Chair), Ian Albert, Daniel Allen, Kate Aspinwall, David Barnard, Judi Billing, John Bishop, Ruth Brown, Paul Clark, Sam Collins, George Davies, Steve Deakin-Davies, Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, Morgan Derbyshire, Jean Green, Simon Harwood, Terry Hone, Keith Hoskins, Mike Hughson, Tony Hunter, Steve Jarvis, David Levett, Ian Mantle, Jim McNally, Ian Moody, Gerald Morris, Michael Muir, Sue Ngwala, Sam North, Helen Oliver, Sean Prendergast, Mike Rice, Adem Ruggiero-Cakir, Val Shanley, Martin Stears-Handscomb, Claire Strong, Kay Tart, Richard Thake, Tom Tyson and Michael Weeks

IN ATTENDANCE: David Scholes (Chief Executive), Anthony Roche (Managing Director), Jeanette Thompson (Service Director - Legal and Community), Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), Melanie Stimpson (Democratic Services Manager), Isabelle Alajooz, Nurainatta Katevu (Legal Advisor) and Hilary Dineen (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager)

ALSO PRESENT: At the commencement of the meeting 3 members of the public, including registered speakers.

14 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Audio Recording – 15 seconds

The Chair welcomed everyone to this virtual Council meeting that was being conducted with Members and Officers at various locations, communicating via audio/video and online. There was also the opportunity for the public and press to listen and view proceedings.

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager gave advise on the following:

The protocol regarding remote /partly remote meetings had been circulated via the Members' Information Sheet and was available on the Council's website and therefore the information that would be delivered would be abridged to that previously given.

Attendance

The Committee Member and Scrutiny Manager undertook a roll call of Members, Officers and members of the public to ensure that they could hear and be heard.

Live Streaming

The meeting was being streamed live on the Council's You Tube channel and also recorded via Zoom. If live streaming failed the meeting would adjourn. If the live stream could not be restored within a reasonable period then the remaining business would be considered at a later date.

Please stay in view of the camera at all times

If for any reason the meeting was not quorate an Officer would notify attendees by interjecting the meeting. The meeting would adjourn immediately. Once the meeting was quorate the meeting would resume. If connection could not be restored within a reasonable period, then the remaining business would be considered at a later date.

Only Members present for the entire debate and consideration of an item were entitled to vote. If a remote Member lost connection the Chair may adjourn the meeting for a short period to enable connection to be re-established. If the Chair did not adjourn the meeting the Member would be deemed to have left the meeting at the point of failure and be deemed to have returned at the point of re-establishment. Only Members present for the entirety of debate and consideration of an item were entitled to vote.

Mobile phones and other noise emitting devices should be muted.

The mute button on tablets or computers should be muted unless speaking.

If a Member wished to speak they should use the raise hand button (located under participants).

When satisfied that there had been sufficient debate the Chair would request that the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager read out the recommendation that Members will be voting upon.

When requested to vote, voting would be via the Green tick for "Yes", Red Cross for "No" and Blue Raise Hand for "abstain" functions.

Part 2 Item

There was a Part 2 paper for the meeting this evening. Once Council had resolved to move into Part 2 the host would ask Members and relevant officers to join a Break Out Room which would need to be accepted. Members and Relevant Officers would then be automatically transferred to the Break Out Room where the Part 2 discussions would be held.

Once the Part 2 discussions had concluded Members would need to move back into the public part of the meeting. Whilst the part 2 discussions were happening the live stream of the meeting would have continued live on the You Tube channel with a holding message.

The Chair, Councillor Terry Tyler started the meeting proper.

15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio Recording – 8 minutes 14 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: Bill Davidson, Faye Frost, Gary Grindal, Lisa Nash and Carol Stanier.

16 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio Recording – 8 minutes 46 seconds

There was no other business notified.

17 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio Recording – 8 minutes 50 seconds

(1) Audio Recording

The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council policy this meeting was being audio recorded as well as filmed. The audio recordings would be available to view on Mod.gov and the film recording via the NHDC YouTube channel.

(2) Climate Emergency

Members were reminded that this Council had declared a Climate Emergency. This was a serious decision and meant that, as this was an emergency, all of us, officers and Members have that in mind as we carry out our various roles and tasks for the benefit of our District.

(3) Declarations of Interest

Members were reminded to make declarations of interest before an item, the detailed reminder about this and speaking rights was set out under Chair's Announcements on the agenda.

(4) Rules of Debate

The Chair reminded Members that the normal procedure rules in respect of debate and times to speak would apply:

No speeches may be made after the mover has moved a proposal and explained the purpose of it until the motion has been seconded.

When seconding a motion or amendment, a Member may reserve their speech until later in the debate.

In accordance with the Constitution please could Members ensure that no speech exceeded five minutes without the consent of the Chair

(5) Order of Business

The Chair advised that he would take Items 1-8 as per the agenda. Item 9 would be introduced and then the meeting would go into Part 2 and consider Item 13. Following which the meeting would return to Part 1 to take the vote on Item 9 and consider items 10 and 11

(6) Charities

The Chair advised that his Charities for this year would be Victoria's Promise and Citizen's Advice North Herts.

Victoria's Promise was an organisation that supported young women through their diagnosis of cancer and beyond. They had supported his daughter Anna from her diagnosis to her passing.

Citizen's Advice North Herts provided valued services for the people of North Herts he had been in receipt of their support and advice some time ago.

The Chair declared that, in relation to a potential interest, that Ed Smith was his Son in Law, who now worked for Victoria Promise as a Fund Raising Manager following his daughter's passing. He had been advised that this did not cause an issue in terms of his support for Victoria's Promise this year.

Audio recording 13 minutes 1 second

The Chair invited Fiona Eastman and Ed Smith, Victoria's Promise, to address Council

Ms Eastman, CEO of Victoria's Promise, thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address Council and informed Members that:

- Victoria's Promise supported and empowered young women from 18 to 50 years through their journey with cancer at their most vulnerable and at end of treatment;
- She had herself been diagnosed with cancer at 30 and her daughter had lost her life at 29;
- They were based in Hampshire, but had receive funding to provide a service locally, with the aim to support women nationally;
- They were launching an app called VP Affinity that will enable young women to connect with each other;
- They hold live workshops;
- They aimed to have an ambassador in each county to fund raise and hold VP affinity events;
- They had found an ambassador for Hertfordshire who will fundraise in order to introduce support services in Hertfordshire;
- Women in this age category were starting careers or had young children. They have concerns for their families but needed somewhere to offload and receive emotional support;
- The more money raised meant more services could be provided.

The Chair thanked Ms Eastman for her presentation.

Audio recording – 18 minutes 24 seconds

Mr Ed Smith, Fund Raising Manager for Victoria's Promise, thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address Council and informed Members that:

- His wife, Anna was diagnosed in 2017 when their daughter was 6 months old;
- The family received support and Anna received support of VP Affinity;
- She met women who had an understanding and attended activities;
- She created bonds with people that she could talk to;
- Anna passed away in June 2018;
- Victoria's Promise had made a big difference to the whole family;
- He had started working as Fundraiser for Victoria's Promise in May last year;

The Chair thanked Mr Smith for his presentation.

Audio recording – 22 minutes 45 seconds

The Chair invited Rosie Waters, CEO of Citizens Advice North Herts, to address Council.

Ms Waters thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address Council and informed Members of the following:

- North Herts Citizens Advice had closed their offices in March, due to Covid-19;
- They were currently providing services remotely with volunteers working from home;
- They had provided services to 1,500 people during lockdown;
- They had been proactive by ringing vulnerable clients to see if they need anything;
- The main enquiries currently were regarding benefits, food banks and relationships;
- All workers were volunteers;
- They would soon have a limited opening of the offices in Letchworth, but maintain the remote services;
- The Government support funding for CAB mainly went to the national body;
- They expected requests for services to increase;
- They wanted to be even more accessible;
- They were proud and grateful to have been chosen as one of the Chair's Charities.

The following Councillors commented and asked questions:

- Councillor Judi Billing;
- Councillor Paul Clark;
- Councillor Kay Tart;
- Councillor David Levett.

The Chair thanked Ms Waters for her presentation.

18 SREBRENICA COMMEMORATION

Audio recording – 32 minutes 25 seconds

Councillors Ruth Brown reminded Members that this was to remember those who had died in the Srebrenica genocide 25 years ago and read a contribution from Ned Cooper that reflected on how this event impacted young people today.

Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb addressed Council.

The Chair asked those present to join him in a minutes silence.

19 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 40 minutes 55 seconds

There were no presentations my members of the public.

20 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

a. Item referred from Cabinet 23 June 2020 – Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan

Audio recording – 41 minutes 6 seconds

The Leader of the Council presented the referral from Cabinet regarding the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan.

Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb moved the recommendations and Councillor Paul Clark seconded.

Councillor David Levett advised that a recommendation from Overview and Scrutiny Committee to Cabinet had been that Planning training be made compulsory for all Members and moved this as a motions. Councillor Claire Strong seconded the motion.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Judi Billing;
- Councillor Richard Thake;
- Councillor Martin Stears-Handscorn;
- Councillor Terry Tyler;
- Councillor Sam Collins

The Service Director - Legal and Community advised that historically it was recognised that there was a role for mandatory training. If Members failed to undertake mandatory training it then became a code of conduct issue.

Training undertaken due to sitting on a committee was different to training global membership. It was up to Council to make the decision.

Councillor David Levett amended his motion to:

That training be a requirement for elected Members who wish to take part in the planning process.

Councillor Claire Strong seconded the amended motion.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Helen Oliver;
- Councillor Paul Clark;
- Councillor Michael Weeks;
- Councillor Ruth Brown;
- Councillor Ian Mantle;
- Councillor Claire Strong;
- Councillor Sam Collins:

The Service Director Legal and Community reminded Members that Council was strictly speaking only considering the financial aspects of the report. She advised that the Learning and Development Champions were considering planning training and making a decision could restrict further motions within 6 months.

The debate continued with the following Members taking part:

- Councillor Ian Albert;
- Councillor Kay Tart;
- Councillor David Barnard;
- Councillor Kate Aspinwall;
- Councillor George Davies;

The Democratic Services Manager advised that, in her opinion, this should be referred to the Learning and Development Champions to consider.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Special Reserve be used to fund a small transformation team for a period of 18 months from October 2020, with an estimated total cost of £150k (£50k in 2020/21 and £100k in 2021/22);
- (2) That agreeing the specification for, and intended outcomes of, the transformation programme be delegated to the Leader, Deputy Leader, Executive Member for Finance and IT, Managing Director and Service Director Resources;
- (3) That training be a requirement for elected Members who wish to take part in the planning process.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To ensure that the Council responds to the matters identified within the CPC report, ensuring that the benefits of the CPC process are realised.

b. Item referred from Cabinet 23 June 2020 – Revenue Budget Outturn

Audio recording – 1 hour 22 minutes 26 seconds

The Executive Member for Finance and IT presented the referral from Cabinet regarding Revenue Budget Outturn.

It was moved by Councillor Ian Albert, seconded by Councillor Sam North and:

RESOLVED: That the net transfer to earmarked reserves, as identified in table 8, of £2.161million be approved.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

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

NB: At 21.01 the meeting was adjourned for a comfort break.

The meeting reconvened at 21.06 and the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager undertook a roll call of Members and Officers to ensure that they could hear and be heard.

c. Item referred from Cabinet 23 June 2020 – Investment Strategy (Capital and Treasury) End of Year Review

Audio recording – 1 hour 38 minutes 12 seconds

The Executive Member for Finance and IT presented the referral from Cabinet regarding Investment Strategy (Capital and Treasury) End of Year Review.

The following Members took part in the debate and asked questions:

- Councillor David Levett;
- Councillor Michael Weeks;
- Councillor Gerald Morris;
- Councillor Richard Thake.

In response to questions the Executive Member for Finance and IT advised:

- That investments with other Boroughs and Councils would be kept under review.

The Service Director - Resources advised:

- Investments with Councils were at zero risk as no Council had failed, but this would be kept under review.
- That the figures in the report and appendices were correct;
- That the pie chart in Appendix B – Annual Treasury Management Review showing the spread of investment balances as at 31 March 2020 would be reviewed for accuracy.

It was moved by Councillor Ian Albert, seconded by Councillor Sam North and:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the actual 2019/20 prudential and treasury indicators be approved:
- (2) That the annual Treasury Report for 2019/20 be noted.

REASON FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) Cabinet is required to approve adjustments to the capital programme and ensure the capital programme is fully funded.
- (2) To ensure the Council's continued compliance with CIPFA's code of practice on Treasury Management and the Local Government Act 2003 and that the Council manages its exposure to interest and capital risk.

21 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Audio recording – 1 hour 54 minutes 46 seconds

Councillor Judi Billing, Chair of the Standards Committee, presented the report entitled Annual Report of the Standards Committee and drew attention to the following:

- There should be certain standards of conduct no matter what level of Local Government;
- There were a proliferation of codes of conduct, which brought confusion, Therefore welcome the opportunity to consult on a national code.;
- The Standards Committee were better when chaired by the Independent Persons;
- She thanked the Independent Persons, Monitoring Officer, Deputy Monitoring Officers and Vice-Chair of the Committee.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor David Levett.

It was moved by Councillor Judi Billing, seconded by Councillor Ruth Brown and:

RESOLVED: That the Annual Report of the Standards Committee be noted.

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

22 CONSTITUTIONAL (INCLUDING FINANCIAL REGULATION) CHANGES TO FOLLOWING TIER 1 & 2 RESTRUCTURE

Audio Recording – 2 hours 2 minutes 43 seconds

The Service Director - Legal and Community & Monitoring Officer presented the report entitled Constitutional (Including Financial Regulation) Changes to Following Tier 1 & 2 Restructure.

It was moved by Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb, seconded by Councillor Paul Clark and:

RESOLVED: That the proposed amendments set out under 8.1 & 8.3 be approved. Such changes to come into effect on 18 July 2020.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure the Constitution reflects the new senior management structure and any necessary updated approval process.

23 VOLUNTARY REDUNDANCY

Audio recording – 2 hours 20 minutes 36 seconds

NB: This item was considered after the Part 2 item (Minute 27 refers).

The Leader of the Council presented the report entitled Voluntary Redundancy.

It was moved by Councillor Stears-Handscomb, seconded by Councillor Paul Clark and:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the proposed voluntary redundancy, the details of which are presented in the Part II Report be approved;
- (2) That the use of the Special Reserves to fund the redundancy costs be approved.

REASON FOR DECISION: To meet the financial challenges to the Council in light of reducing Government support and assist in meeting the budgetary requirements in the long term.

24 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

Audio recording – 2 hours 21 minutes 25 seconds

There were no questions from Members.

25 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

Audio recording – 2 hours 21 minutes 59 seconds

There were no motions considered.

26 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 - 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).

27 VOLUNTARY REDUNDANCY

This Item was not audio recorded

NB: This item was considered prior to the Part 1 item (Minute 23 refers).

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager undertook a rollcall to ensure that Members could hear and be heard.

The Leader of the Council presented the Part 2 report entitled Voluntary Redundancy.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor David Levett;
- Councillor Sam North.

The Chief Executive responded to questions asked.

RESOLVED: That the information contained in the Part 2 report entitled Voluntary Redundancy be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To meet the financial challenges to the Council in light of reducing Government support and assist in meeting the budgetary requirements in the long term.

28 CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Audio recording – 2 hours 22 minutes 27 seconds

The Chair informed Members that this was David Scholes, Chief Executive, last meeting as would be leaving NHDC on 18 July 2020.

He asked Members to show their appreciation and thanks to David for his time as Chief Executive with three cheers.

The meeting closed at 9.55 pm

Chair