

## NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### MINUTES

Meeting of the Council held as a Virtual Meeting  
on Thursday, 24th September, 2020 at 7.30 pm

**PRESENT:** Councillors: Terry Tyler (Chair), Val Bryant (Vice-Chair), Ian Albert, Daniel Allen, Kate Aspinwall, Clare Billing, Ruth Brown, Paul Clark, Sam Collins, Bill Davidson, George Davies, Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, Morgan Derbyshire, Jean Green, Gary Grindal, Simon Harwood, Terry Hone, Keith Hoskins, Mike Hughson, Tony Hunter, Steve Jarvis, David Levett, Ian Mantle, Jim McNally, Ian Moody, Michael Muir, Lisa Nash, Sue Ngwala, Sam North, Helen Oliver, Sean Prendergast, Mike Rice, Adem Ruggiero-Cakir, Carol Stanier, Martin Stears-Handscomb, Claire Strong, Richard Thake, Tom Tyson and Michael Weeks

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Ian Fullstone (Service Director - Regulatory), Jeanette Thompson (Service Director - Legal and Community), Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), Vaughan Watson (Service Director - Place), Nurainatta Katevu (Legal Regulatory Team Manager), Reuben Ayavoo (Policy and Community Engagement Manager), Hilary Dineen (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager) and William Edwards (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)

**ALSO PRESENT:** At the commencement of the meeting Louise Symes, Aimee Jarmain and Ros Allwood.

### 33 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

*Audio Recording – 20 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 Chair invited the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager to explain how proceedings would work and to confirm that Members and Officers were in attendance.

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager undertook a roll call to ensure that all Members and Officers could hear and be heard and gave advice regarding the following:

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.

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.

Noise emitting devices should be muted and the mute button on the tablet or computer should be activated when not speaking.

If a Member wished to speak they should use the raise hand button and microphones would need to be unmuted before speaking.

If a Member had a closure motion, personal explanation or point of order, please interject the meeting and wait for the Chair to invite you to speak.

When requested to vote, voting would be via the Green tick for "Yes", Red Cross for "No" and Blue Raise Hand for "abstain" functions. To enable the votes to be counted, votes should not be cleared until requested to do so .

The Chair of the Council, Councillor Terry Tyler started the meeting proper.

### **34 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

*Audio recording – 7 minutes 29 seconds*

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors David Barnard, Judi Billing, John Bishop. Steve Deakin-Davies, Faye Frost, Gerald Morris, Val Shanley and Kay Tart.

Councillor Albert advised that Councillor Barnard's wife was seriously ill and asked that the Council's best wishes for a speedy recovery be placed on record.

### **35 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS**

*Audio recording – 8 minutes 27 seconds*

There was no other business notified.

### **36 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

*Audio recording – 9 minutes 49 seconds*

#### **(1) Mayor of Hertsmere – Councillor Cynthia Barker**

It was with great sadness that the Chair announced that the Mayor of Hertsmere, Councillor Cynthia Barker, passed away earlier this month.

A minutes silence was held in her memory.

#### **(2) Audio Recording**

The Chair announced 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.

(3) 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 had that in mind as we carried out our various roles and tasks for the benefit of our District.

(4) Long Service

The Chair advised that there were three acknowledgements of long Service. All of these officers were present at the meeting.

Louise Symes

Louise started with the Council as a policy planner in January 1995 having recently emigrated from Durban in South Africa where she worked as a planner for the south African Government.

Louise began as Principal Planning Officer in 2001 and took on the role of Projects Manager in 2005.

From 2000 to 2013 Louise was involved in preparing town centre strategies, and planning briefs and as well as being involved in the delivery of various town centre enhancement schemes which Members will be aware included Sun Street in Hitchin, Baldock High Street and Fish Hill Square in Royston.

Louise was instrumental in the Council winning a National Award for the Baldock High Street Project, the Horticultural Landscape and Amenity Award in 2009 under the Category Best Commercial Project. The Scheme was also awarded a certificate of Special Recognition at the 2010 National Civic Trust awards.

Louise has also been involved in the project to develop the Churchgate centre since 1999.

Louise became the Strategic Planning & Projects Manager in 2012 and has been involved in the Council's Local Plan submission.

In her current role as Strategic Infrastructure & Projects Manager, Louise took on the role of Parking – which she sees as a new and interesting challenge particularly with changes in technology.

The Chair congratulated and thanked Louise for her service to the Council.

Aimee Jarmain

From humble beginnings in Leisure Services, as a support assistant for parks and gardens, Aimee then joined the Revenues & Benefits department a year later as a benefits officer. Shortly after attaining her IRRV Technical qualification, Aimee became a Senior Benefits Officer and managed a team of benefit officers responsible for front line benefit services.

In the latter part of 2003, Aimee joined the Technical Team within Revenues & Benefits department as a Senior Technical officer, responsible for monitoring and management of the benefit subsidy grant. Placing context on this, Aimee has overseen over £542 million in central government subsidies to date.

Aimee has dedicated her career to providing much needed support for others, the authority and remains a highly valued member of her team and other stakeholders.

The Chair thanked Aimee for her service and all the hard work over these years.

#### Ros Allwood

NHDC has been extremely fortunate to have Ros Allwood at the helm of North Herts Museum Service and for her service over the last 25 years.

In this time, her ability to develop high level personal contacts with the Lottery Fund and Arts Council, along with her talent for partnership working and creating joint projects with other museums, allowed the team to punch well above their weight as a regional museum service. This has helped the district to benefit from grant funding and donations, which without Ros, would simply not have been possible.

As a leading expert on the artist Ratcliffe, Ros unearthed and acquired long lost works of art, which were now a valued part of North Herts Museum collection. She has also frequently beaten the odds, achieving ambitious fundraising targets at extremely short notice in order to purchase items at auction which might otherwise have been lost from public view forever.

She should be extremely proud of all she has achieved so far in her career and perhaps most notably, her integral role in the creation of the new North Herts Museum. It is safe to say that without Ros' knowledge and expertise, the district would not be benefitting from such a well thought out and beautifully presented museum. The district owes her a huge debt of gratitude for all of her selfless efforts and many late nights spent working at the office to realise this project over many years.

More recently, Ros spearheaded the successful efforts to secure the internationally significant Rembrandt in Print Exhibition, which was seen by over 10,000 visitors and which really set the tone for the standard of exhibitions that our new facility now allows us to bring to the district for display.

When asked for their contributions to this presentation, her team were full of praise for her abilities and leadership, with one individual in her team surmising: 'After 29 years working in Local Government I can honestly say she is the best boss' which tells you all you need to know about the respect and fondness her team have for her as an exemplary NHDC staff member and as an individual.

Her 25 years of service at NHDC have been a huge asset to the organisation and we are very grateful for all of her work.

The Chair proposed and Vice-Chair seconded that:

That the Council place on record its sincere thanks and appreciation to Louise Symes, Aimee Jarman and Ros Allwood for their long and valuable service to Local Government.

Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb paid tribute to Louise, Aimee and Ros. He stated that they demonstrated what a fantastic team of staff were at NHDC and the great service given to the Council.

Councillor Paul Clark congratulated Louise, Aimee and Ros and thanked them for their dedication and service to the Council. He paid tribute to the officers.

Councillor David Levett congratulated Louise, Aimee and Ros. He stated that they demonstrated the amount of valuable experience that is available to support Members and the Council.

Upon the vote it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the Council place on record its sincere thanks and appreciation to Louise Symes, Aimee Jarman and Ros Allwood for their long and valuable service to Local Government.

At the invitation of the Chair, Ros Allwood thanked the Council for the kind words and asked all Councillors to visit the District Museum.

(5) 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.

(6) Rules of Debate

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

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 no speech to exceed five minutes without the consent of the Chair

(7) Comfort Break

If the meeting was still in progress at 9pm, a comfort break would be called at an appropriate place.

(8) Order of Business

There were two referrals from Cabinet that included Part 2 reports - 5 b and c. These would be taken at the end of the meeting.

In addition Item 8 would be taken immediately after Item 4.

## 37 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

*Audio recording – 28 minutes 26 seconds*

There were no presentations by members of the public.

**38 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES**

**5a Item Referred from Cabinet: 21 July 2020 - Risk Management Update**

*Audio recording – 32 minutes 47 seconds*

The Executive Member for Finance and IT presented the referral from Cabinet regarding Risk Management Update.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed, Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb seconded and it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the Annual Report on Risk Management be noted.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To enable Council to consider recommendations made by Cabinet.

**5b Item Referred from Cabinet: 21 July 2020 - Covid-19 Financial Impacts**

*Audio recording – 3 hours 19 minutes 4 seconds*

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

*This referral was considered following consideration of the Part 2 report of the same name.*

The Executive Member for Finance and IT presented the referral from Cabinet regarding Covid-19 Financial Impacts.

Councillor Ian Albert propose, Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb seconded and it was:

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That Council notes the forecast impact of Covid-19 in comparison to available reserves and confirms that these reserves will be used to fund the impact. This means that an emergency budget is not required;
- (2) That Council approves that £350k is added to the Capital Programme for the resurfacing of the top deck of the Lairage Car Park, Hitchin;
- (3) That Council approves an addition to the Investment Strategy that would allow the Council to provide a loan to Hertfordshire Building Control of £65k, if it is required.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To ensure that the financial impacts of Covid-19 are recognised and make the necessary changes to allow the Council to manage its budgets.

**5c Item Referred from Cabinet: 21 July 2020 - Covid-19 Leisure Contracts Recovery**

*Audio recording – 3 hours 24 minutes 56 seconds*

*This referral was considered following consideration of the Part 2 report of the same name*

Prior to the item being considered Councillor Claire Strong declared a declarable interest in that she was a member of Archers, Hitchin which was operated by SLL. She advised that she would not take part in the debate or vote.

Prior to the item being considered Councillor Jim McNally declared a declarable interest in that he was a member of North Herts Leisure Centre which was operated by SLL. He advised that he would not take part in the debate or vote.

The Executive Member for Environment and Leisure presented the referral from Cabinet regarding Covid-19 Leisure Contracts Recovery.

The following Member asked questions:

- Councillor Richard Thake.

The Service Director – Legal and Community and the Leader of the Council responded to the questions asked.

Councillor Simon Harwood called for a recorded vote.

Councillor Steve Jarvis proposed, Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb seconded and following a recorded vote it was:

**RESOLVED:** To provide financial support to Stevenage Leisure Limited (SLL) on an Open Book basis from 20 March 2020 up to at least 31 March 2021. The support provided would only cover losses relating to the Council's contracts, and will not cover central overheads. SLL would be required to take all reasonable actions to minimise the value of any losses. The actual value of the support required will depend on SLLs income recovery but will be capped at a maximum of £1.8m.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To seek approval for the SLL recovery plan and a phased approach toward recovery allowing flexibility through delegation, to ensure business continuity for the leisure contracts and for them to survive beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

The votes recorded were:

**For:**

Councillors: Ian Albert, Daniel Allen, Kate Aspinwall, Clare Billing, Ruth Brown, Val Bryant, Paul Clark, Sam Collins, Bill Davidson, Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, Gary Grindal, Keith Hoskins, Mike Hughson, Steve Jarvis, Ian Mantle, Lisa Nash, Sue Ngwala, Helen Oliver, Sean Prendergast, Adem Ruggerio-Cakir, Carol Stanier, Martin Stears-Handscomb, Terry Tyler and Tom Tyson.

**Total: 24**

**Against:**

Councillors: George Davies, Morgan Derbyshire, Jean Green, Simon Harwood, Terry Hone, Tony Hunter, David Levett, Ian Moody, Michael Muir, Mike Rice, Richard Thake and Michael Weeks.

**Total: 12**

**Abstain:**

Councillor Sam North.

**Total: 1**

**5d Item Referred from Employment Committee: 25 August 2020 - Returning Officer/Electoral Registration Officer**

*Audio recording – 37 minutes 37 seconds*

Prior to consideration of the item Melanie Stimpson, Democratic Services Manager, left the meeting and was not present for the duration of this item.

The Chair of the Employment Committee, Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb, presented the referral from the Employment Committee regarding the Returning Officer/Electoral Registration Officer.

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

**RESOLVED:** That Melanie Stimpson be appointed to the roles of Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To appoint to the roles of Returning Officer/Electoral Registration Officer.

Melanie Stimpson re-joined the meeting.

**5e Item Referred from Cabinet: 15 September 2020 - Council Plan and Objectives 2021-2026**

*Audio recording – 40 minutes 39 seconds*

The Leader of the Council presented the referral from Cabinet regarding the Council Plan and Council Objectives 2021-2026.

He thanked the Policy and Community Engagement Manager and his team for the work they had put into this report.

Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb proposed, Councillor Paul Clark seconded and it was

**RESOLVED:** That the following documents be adopted:

- Appendix A – Council Plan 2021 -2026;
- Appendix B – Proposed Actions;
- Appendix C – Achievements (including the Addendum).

**REASON FOR DECISION:** The Council plan is a key element of the corporate business planning process, as a highlevel strategic document it sets out the Council's priorities for the next year. As an overarching policy framework document, it guides and influences the use of Council resources; providing a focus for activities, plans and services the Council provide. The draft Council plan has reflected the amendment to the first overarching Council Objective.

**5f Item Referred from Cabinet: 15 September 2020 - Medium Term Financial Strategy**

*Audio recording – 43 minutes 56 seconds*

The Executive Member for Finance and IT presented the referral from Cabinet regarding the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed, Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb seconded and it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021-26 as attached at Appendix A be adopted.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** Adoption of a MTFs and communication of its contents will assist in the process of forward planning the use of Council resources and in budget setting for 2021/2022 to 2025/2026, culminating in the setting of the Council Tax precept for 2020/21 in February 2021.



**39 APPOINTMENT OF RESERVE INDEPENDENT PERSON (& CONFIRMATION OF EXISTING APPOINTMENTS)**

*Audio recording – 54 minutes 52 seconds*

Councillor Ruth Brown, Vice-Chair of the Standards Committee presented the report entitled Appointment of Reserve Independent Person (& Confirmation of Existing Appointments together with the following appendix:

- Appendix A - Selection Criteria.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Sam North;
- Councillor David Levett;
- Councillor Paul Clark;
- Councillor Michael Weeks;
- Councillor Sam Collins;
- Councillor Ruth Brown;
- Councillor Simon Harwood.

Member comments included:

- That the requirement for Independent and Reserve Independent Persons to live in the District should be relaxed in future.

The Service Director – Legal and Community and Monitoring Officer reiterated that if appointment were not confirmed, it would leave the Council with only one untrained person, which would place the Council in a difficult position.

Councillor Ruth Brown proposed the recommendations and Councillor Martin Stears-Handscorn seconded.

Councillor North asked for each recommendation to be voted upon separately.

Councillor David Levett called for recorded votes.

Following discussion it was agreed that one vote would be taken in respect of recommendations 2.1, 2.3 and 2.4, with a second vote being taken regarding recommendation 2.2.

Following recorded votes it was:

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That John Richardson be appointed as Reserve Independent Person;
- (2) That the continuing appointment of Nicholas Moss as Independent Person and Peter Chapman Reserve Independent Person be confirmed;

Appointments under (1) and (2) be on the basis of a fixed term of up to 4 years (two-years, with delegation to the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chair/ Vice Chair of Standards Committee to extend for a further two years.

- (3) That the appointment of Stephen Bubb as Deputy Reserve Independent Person be ceased.

- (4) That it be delegated to the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chair/Vice Chair of Standards Committee the decision (in the event that the current Independent Person decides within term not to continue/ no longer qualifies), to appoint one of the existing Reserve Independent Persons as the Independent Person and/ or to undertake any further recruitment as may be required.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To ensure that the Council's Standards processes can operate in accordance with legislative requirements in the event that one or both of the IP and ResIP are unable to advise on a matter. The recommendation on term is one that reflects the Committee on Standards in Public Life's (CSPL) recommendation. This should also allow for a degree of succession planning/ training whilst experienced persons are in place.

The recorded votes were as follows:

Resolutions (1), (3) and (4)

**For:**

Councillors: Ian Albert, Daniel Allen, Clare Billing, Ruth Brown, Val Bryant, Paul Clark, Sam Collins, George Davies, Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, Morgan Derbyshire. Jean Green, Gary Grindal, Simon Harwood, Terry Hone, Keith Hoskins, Mike Hughson, Tony Hunter, Steve Jarvis, David Levett, Ian Mantle, Jim McNally, Ian Moody, Michael Muir, Lisa Nash, Sue Ngwala, Sam North, Helen Oliver, Sean Prendergast, Mike Rice, Adem Ruggiero-Cakir, Carol Stanier, Martin Stears-Handscomb, Claire Strong, Richard Thake. Terry Tyler, Tom Tyson and Michael Weeks.

**Total: 37**

**Against:**

**Total: 0**

**Abstain:**

Councillor Bill Davidson.

**Total: 1**

Resolution (2)

**For:**

Councillors: Ian Albert, Daniel Allen, Clare Billing, Ruth Brown, Val Bryant, Paul Clark, Bill Davidson, George Davies, Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, Morgan Derbyshire. Jean Green, Gary Grindal, Simon Harwood, Terry Hone, Keith Hoskins, Mike Hughson, Tony Hunter, Steve Jarvis, David Levett, Ian Mantle, Jim McNally, Ian Moody, Michael Muir, Lisa Nash, Sue Ngwala, Helen Oliver, Sean Prendergast, Mike Rice, Adem Ruggiero-Cakir, Carol Stanier, Martin Stears-Handscomb, Claire Strong, Richard Thake. Terry Tyler, Tom Tyson and Michael Weeks.

**Total: 36**

**Against:**

**Total: 0**

**Abstain:**

Councillors: Sam Collins and Sam North

**Total: 2**

#### 40 APPOINTMENT OF PARISH/ TOWN REPRESENTATIVES TO STANDARDS COMMITTEE

*Audio Recording – 1 hour 20 minutes 14 seconds*

Prior to consideration the item Councillor Richard Thake declared a declarable interest in that one of the potential appointees was a family friend. He advised that he would not take part in the debate or vote, however would remain in the meeting.

Councillor Ruth Brown, Vice-Chair of the Standards Committee, presented the report entitled Appointment of Parish, Town Representatives to Standards Committee together with the following appendices:

- Appendix A - Recommended Appointees;
- Appendix B - Selection Criteria.

Councillor Ruth Brown proposed, Councillor Martins Stears-Handscomb seconded and it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the co-optee appointment(s) to the Standards Committee (set out in the appendix A be confirmed.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** The terms of reference for Standards Committee provide for up to four (minimum two) non-voting co-optees from Parish/ Town or Community Councils. There are currently three vacancies.

#### 41 MEMBER AND OFFICER INDEMNITY

*Audio recording – 28 minutes 32 seconds*

The Executive Member for Finance and IT presented the report entitled Member and Officer Indemnity together with the following appendices:

- Member and Officer Indemnity – Addendum;
- Appendix A - Member and Officer Indemnity (with tracked changes).

Councillor Ian Albert proposed, Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb seconded and it was:

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That amendments to the adopted Officer/ Member Indemnity & Insurance Policy be authorised.
- (2) That the Returning Officer (RO) / Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) be granted an indemnity, under the provisions of the Local Authority (Indemnity for Members and Officers) Order 2004, to cover as far as the law allows, for any uninsured personal liability arising from the appointments.
- (3) That in the case of fines which exceed £100k in relation to the RO/ERO post, which are not insurable, are not subject to referral to Full Council for consideration (except for 7(1) of the Policy).

**REASON FOR DECISIONS:**

- (1) Under Delegated Decision on 12 October 2017, the Policy approved by Full Council on the 18th day of July 2013 was amended and approved. The Policy needed to be reviewed and amended slightly to reflect current insurance arrangements and the Council's requirements in compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018.

- (2) The Council should have an up to date Policy, in the event of legal action that arises when Officers and Members carry out official Council duties.

#### 42 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2019/20

*NB: A comfort break was taken at 8.54 pm*

*The meeting resumed at 9.00pm*

*Audio recording – 1 hour 30 minutes 28 seconds*

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

Councillor David Levett, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee presented the report entitled Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2019/20 together with the following appendix:

- Appendix A – Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for 2019/20.

Councillor David Levett proposed, Councillor Kate Aspinwall seconded and it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2019 - 2020 as attached at Appendix A be noted.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To enable Annual Council to consider the report of the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the work of that Committee in the 2019/20 Civic Year.

#### 43 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

*Audio recording – 1 hour 43 seconds*

In accordance with Standing Order 4.8.11(b), three questions were submitted by Members by the deadline date for questions set out in the Council's Constitution.

(A) Direct Debit take up for Garden Waste Collection Service

Councillor David Levett to Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg (Executive Member for Recycling and Waste).

“What percentage of direct debit has been taken up by our residents for garden waste collection this year, now operational?”

The Executive Member for Recycling and Waste responded:

At the moment, because we are not at the official start date of the new subscription period, which is 1 October, the data is still quite fresh and fluctuating quite rapidly. From the data they have been able to access there have been 700 people signed up via direct debit.

The total number of people who have subscribed for the coming year was 17000. At the moment direct debit was quite a small percentage of total sign ups. We are going to do a wider exercise of digging into the data and understanding what our residents want around direct debits or to just click and pay every year as their needs dictate. Now we are in the final week before the new subscription starts we are starting to see an increase in the daily subscriber numbers, especially now we have started running the social media campaigns.

If you check back in a couple of weeks time, I will be able to give a bit more data around percentages and different customer types and which brackets they are fitting in.

Councillor David Levett asked the following supplementary question:

Bearing in mind that the direct debit number is a very small percentage, do you believe that this could be down to the problems for members of the public setting up direct debits with Urbaser, which many of us have had reports of. Also having reports of difficulty making payments and getting through. Also many people seem to have received two bin stickers which is causing some concern. Do you believe that impacts on the way that people are subscribing?

The Executive Member for Recycling and Waste Management responded:

At this point in time it is too early for us to know for certain the reason why we have seen a relatively small number of our customer base opting to go with direct debits, obviously there are going to be a number of different reasons. For example some people want to have a garden waste service, but are on a 6 or 12 month fixed term tenancy, so clearly for them, they might not want to tie themselves into a direct debit.

You referenced some problems with the web site. There was a deliberate soft launch over the summer this year in order to try to avoid the problems that we saw the first year, when the previous administration had this system up and running. Any issues seen have been some technical regulatory things to do with Barclays who are our payment service provider. There were one or two small issues with moving the web site from the previous provider to the new one and getting that all set up to offer the new customer facing portal. As each issue cropped up it was tackled and resolved by the website provider, officers and Urbaser, usually with 24 hours. Anecdotally, I don't think the website is going to be the main barrier. It could have been an issue for some people wanting to sign up for direct debits. This is a piece of work we can do post project completion, when undertaking the lessons learnt exercise, so that we can understand and make things better for subscriptions next year and for any other service that we might shift over to this kind of format.

You referenced the duplicate stickers. This was an issue with Permiserve, the company that provides the stickers. They had a problem with their system and it decided to run duplicates. This has been picked up and they are doing a rectification piece of work. I don't know how many people are affected, but have been told that it is not a large and substantial number. That is completely separate from the direct debit issue.

(B) Council Special Reserve Fund

Councillor Morgan Derbyshire to Councillor Ian Albert (Executive Member for Finance and IT).

“Huge pressures are now being placed on the Councils special reserve fund, could the Executive member advise as to the current situation?”

The Executive Member for Finance and IT responded:

As I said earlier regarding the Medium Term Financial Strategy, the real issue is the Government's failure to deliver on its promise that they would adequately fund local authorities during the pandemic, rather less than the pressure in the special reserve.

The balance on the special reserve at the beginning of the year was £1.175 million. The terms of the use of the reserve are now maintained for any special finance pressures, such as pump priming initiatives for shared services, changes in working practice, major contract renewals, unexpected contract variation, supporting and response to and reducing the impact of major incidents and other financial pressures.

So for this year the following amount are forecast: Full Council have approved the use of the reserve for costs in relation to redundancy, which will provide ongoing revenue savings and further details as in the Part 2 report from the July Council meeting. Following recommendations from the cross party grants panel just under £74,000 of grants have been allocated to community groups to help them to support our residents, this amount will have increased after the meeting yesterday. This has been welcomed by organisations and some of the presentations received from those groups have shown this support has been well received. The current forecast is that we will spend about £150,000 on grant this year, although that will depend on the applications received.

We are funding the Commercial Manager and Commercial Officer posts for this year totalling £100,000, this decision was confirmed by full Council as part of the 2020/21 budget setting process. We are funding a small Transformation team, as agreed at full Council in July and separately there is a full Council decision from 2018. That we would spend up to £130,00 on a valuation process for proposals in relation to Churchgate prior to a final decision, £43,000 has been spent to date on that.

To conclude, the current forecast is that the balance on the reserve at the end of the year will, in fact, be around £700,000. So we will still have about 2/3 of that special reserve still left and the terms of that special reserve are quite broad and in assessing our sustainability in the Medium Term Financial Strategy, as discussed earlier on in the agenda, the balance of this reserve will be considered alongside our general fund balance. The general fund has of course been hit by the impact of Covid-19 and the shortfall in funding from Government. Hope that answer has helped, more than happy to discuss this with you separately if you would like to.

(C) Splash Parks

Councillor Tony Hunter to Councillor Steve Jarvis (Executive Member for Environment and Leisure).

“Bearing in mind the delayed opening of our splash parks this year, could the Executive member advise as to whether any consideration was given to extending the closure date this season?”

The Executive Member for Environment and Leisure responded:

The simple answer is yes, but I probably need to provide you with the background. As you know the splash parks were unable to open in July and when they did open, in order to open them in a satisfactory, Covid secure way, it was necessary to do quite a lot of things that we had not done in previous years, not least that whereas there are usually two members of staff supervising four sites, this year the Baldock site we were unable to open for technical reasons relating to the operation of the equipment, we then had to put two staff on each of the sites that we did open. Those staff were all hire on fixed term contracts and there was various equipment that needed hiring fixed term as well.

Towards the end of the period we considered whether or not there was scope for extending the opening period, but it became apparent that many of the staff that had been hired were either going to or returning to university very shortly after the end of their contract and they were unwilling to extend, so it would have meant recruiting and training new staff for a short extension.

Normally the utilisation of the splash parks drops off quite considerably once schools return. Inevitably, having made the decision, the day after they closed was one of the warmest days for some considerable time, that is one of the vagaries of the English summer.

Having made the decision that we were essentially going to close them on the normal date, it really wasn't practical to extend it at short notice. That is one of those things that is regrettable, but there wasn't a viable alternative.

Councillor Tony Hunter asked the following supplementary question:

I am grateful to the Executive Member for the answer and that it is now in the public domain. I have been asked by a number of local Councillors as to whether any thought had been given to extending the period.

Obviously the weather conditions for the last few years for September and early October have been exceptionally good and I wonder of the Executive Member could review the budget and the opening times for the forthcoming seasons, hopefully with things back to normal in the forthcoming years.

The Executive Member for Environment and Leisure responded:

I think that is a very interesting suggestion. I think you are absolutely right that the weather is frequently better in September than it is in August, or it has been in the last few years. I would be quite interested in investigating that. There is a question as it usually drops off when children go back to school, but that is something I am prepared to look at to see if it is feasible for future years.

#### 44 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

*Audio recording – 1 hour 56 minutes 30 seconds*

Two motions had been submitted, due notice of which had been given in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.12.

##### A. Protecting the public's say in the planning process

Councillor Paul Clark proposed the following motion, which was seconded by Councillor Ian Mantle:

That this Council notes:

1. The publication by Government of the White Paper, 'Planning for the Future' on 6 August 2020, which set out proposals on reforms to the planning process for the future.
2. That the vast majority of planning applications are given the go-ahead by local authority planning committees, with permission granted to around 9 out of 10 applications.
3. That research by the Local Government Association has said that there are existing planning permissions for more than one million homes that have not yet been started.

This Council is concerned that the proposals seek to:

1. Reduce or remove the right of residents to object to applications near them.
2. Grant automatic rights for developers to build on land identified as 'for growth'.
3. Remove section 106 payments for infrastructure and replace them with a national levy.

This Council further notes:

1. The Royal Institute for British Architects said the proposals were 'shameful and would do almost nothing to guarantee delivery of affordable, well-designed and sustainable homes'. RIBA also said that proposals could lead to the next generation of slum housing.
2. The reforms are opposed by the all-party Local Government Association, currently led by Conservative Councillors.

This Council believes:

1. That existing planning procedures, as currently administered by our own team in North Hertfordshire, allow for local democratic control over future development, and give local people a say in planning proposals that affect them.
2. That proposals for automatic rights to build in 'growth' areas, and increased permitted development rights, risk unregulated growth and unsustainable communities.
3. That local communities must be in the driving seat on shaping the future of their communities, and local determination of the planning framework and planning applications play an important part in this process.

This Council resolves to:

1. Take part in the consultation in the planning proposals, and to make representations against the proposals as outlined in this motion.
2. Write to and lobby all three of our Members of Parliament, urging them to oppose these proposals and to circulate their replies to members.
3. Highlight its concerns over these proposals with the public and local residents.

The following Councillors took part in the debate:

- Councillor David Levett.

Upon the vote it was:

**RESOLVED:**

That this Council notes:

1. The publication by Government of the White Paper, 'Planning for the Future' on 6 August 2020, which set out proposals on reforms to the planning process for the future.
2. That the vast majority of planning applications are given the go-ahead by local authority planning committees, with permission granted to around 9 out of 10 applications.
3. That research by the Local Government Association has said that there are existing planning permissions for more than one million homes that have not yet been started.

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2. That proposals for automatic rights to build in 'growth' areas, and increased permitted development rights, risk unregulated growth and unsustainable communities.
3. That local communities must be in the driving seat on shaping the future of their communities, and local determination of the planning framework and planning applications play an important part in this process.



This Council resolves to:

1. Take part in the consultation in the planning proposals, and to make representations against the proposals as outlined in this motion.
2. Write to and lobby all three of our Members of Parliament, urging them to oppose these proposals and to circulate their replies to members.
3. Highlight its concerns over these proposals with the public and local residents.”

B. Racial Equality

Councillor Sam Collins proposed the following motion which was seconded by Councillor Helen Oliver:

Council notes with serious concern the death of George Floyd and other black people at the hands of police in America during 2020 and the systemic racism towards black people that continues to exist around the world.

Council also notes the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people in the UK and that decisive action needs to be taken to mitigate these risks on sections of our community.

Council also welcomes the progress that has been made in North Herts over a number of years to build community cohesion and strengthen the voice of those who are marginalised, but recognises that there is much more we can and must do.

That Council resolves:

To stand in solidarity with people of ethnic minority backgrounds across the district, Britain and around the world.

To lobby government for immediate action to address the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on ethnic minority people in the UK including here in Hertfordshire where we will continue to work with our Director of Public Health on this issue.

To lobby government and the county council on racial inequality in education, including recruiting more black and ethnic minority teachers and to lobby national government to reform the curriculum to fully reflect British history including the history of slavery empire and colonialism.

To ensure the Council’s HR and management practices fully meet the requirements for equalities, diversity and inclusion in the recruitment and career progression of all staff.

Furthermore, that mandatory racial awareness and unconscious bias training is provided for staff council staff, especially management, customer facing roles and elected members.

To establish wider dialogue with community organisations to make clear recommendations to the Council and other public bodies of further actions required to tackle discrimination and reduce inequalities across the town.

To work with neighbouring local authorities to deliver all of the above.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Helen Oliver;
- Councillor Carol Stanier

Councillor Carol Stanier proposed that the last sentence of the motion be amended to read:

“To work with our Parish and Town Councils and neighbouring local authorities to deliver all of the above.”

Councillor Sam Collins advised that the second to last sentence of the motion should read:

“To establish wider dialogue with community organisations to make clear recommendations to the Council and other public bodies of further actions required to tackle discrimination and reduce inequalities across the District.”

Councillor Sam Collins, the proposer of the motion and Councillor Helen Oliver, the seconder of the motion accepted the proposed amendments to the motion.

Councillor David Levett proposed that the sentence regarding training be amended to read:

“Furthermore, it is a requirement that racial awareness and unconscious bias training is provided for staff council staff, especially management, customer facing roles and elected members.”

Councillor Collins, the proposer, accepted the amendment, Councillor Helen Oliver, the seconder, did not accept the amendment.

Councillor David Levett withdrew his amendment.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Daniel Allen;
- Councillor Martin Stears-Handscorn;
- Councillor David Levett;
- Councillor Kate Aspinwall;
- Councillor Sue Ngwala.

Councillor Daniel Allen called for a recorded vote.

Following recorded vote it was:

**RESOLVED:**

Council notes with serious concern the death of George Floyd and other black people at the hands of police in America during 2020 and the systemic racism towards black people that continues to exist around the world.

Council also notes the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people in the UK and that decisive action needs to be taken to mitigate these risks on sections of our community.

Council also welcomes the progress that has been made in North Herts over a number of years to build community cohesion and strengthen the voice of those who are marginalised, but recognises that there is much more we can and must do.

That Council resolves:

To stand in solidarity with people of ethnic minority backgrounds across the district, Britain and around the world.

To lobby government for immediate action to address the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on ethnic minority people in the UK including here in Hertfordshire where we will continue to work with our Director of Public Health on this issue.

To lobby government and the county council on racial inequality in education, including recruiting more black and ethnic minority teachers and to lobby national government to reform the curriculum to fully reflect British history including the history of slavery empire and colonialism.

To ensure the Council's HR and management practices fully meet the requirements for equalities, diversity and inclusion in the recruitment and career progression of all staff.

Furthermore, that mandatory racial awareness and unconscious bias training is provided for staff council staff, especially management, customer facing roles and elected members.

To establish wider dialogue with community organisations to make clear recommendations to the Council and other public bodies of further actions required to tackle discrimination and reduce inequalities across the District.  
To work with our Parish and Town Councils and neighbouring local authorities to deliver all of the above.

The recorded votes were as follows:

**For:**

Councillors: Ian Albert, Daniel Allen, Kate Aspinwall, Ruth Brown, Val Bryant, Paul Clark, Sam Collins, Bill Davidson, George 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, Michael Muir, Lisa Nash, Sue Ngwala, Sam North, Helen Oliver, Sean Prendergast, Mike Rice, Adem Ruggerio-Cakir, Carol Stanier, Martin Stears-Handscorn, Claire Strong, Richard Thake, Terry Tyler, Tom Tyson and Michael Weeks.

**Total: 37**

**45 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

*Audio recording – 2 hours 25 minutes 34 seconds*

**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 Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).

**46 ITEM REFERRED FROM CABINET: 21 JULY 2020 - COVID-19 FINANCIAL IMPACTS**

*This Item was not audio recorded or filmed.*

The Committee Member and Scrutiny Manager undertook a roll call of Members and officers to ensure that they could hear and be heard.

*NB: The Part 2 report was discussed prior to the Part 1 referral of the same name.*

The Executive Member for Finance and IT presented the Part 2 report regarding the referral from Cabinet entitled Covid-19 Financial Impacts.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That Council notes the forecast impact of Covid-19 in comparison to available reserves and confirms that these reserves will be used to fund the impact. This means that an emergency budget is not required;
- (2) That Council approves that £350k is added to the Capital Programme for the resurfacing of the top deck of the Lairage Car Park, Hitchin;
- (3) That Council approves an addition to the Investment Strategy that would allow the Council to provide a loan to Hertfordshire Building Control of £65k, if it is required.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To ensure that the financial impacts of Covid-19 are recognised and make the necessary changes to allow the Council to manage its budgets.

**47 ITEM REFERRED FROM CABINET: 21 JULY 2020 - LEISURE CONTRACT RECOVERY**

*NB: The Part 2 report was discussed prior to the Part 1 referral of the same name.*

Prior to the item being considered Councillor Claire Strong declared a declarable interest in that she was a member of Archers, Hitchin which was operated by SLL. She advised that she would not take part in the debate or vote.

Prior to the item being considered Councillor Jim McNally declared a declarable interest in that he was a member of North Herts Leisure Centre which was operated by SLL. He advised that he would not take part in the debate or vote.

The Executive Member for Environment and Leisure presented the Part 2 report regarding the referral from Cabinet about Leisure Contract Recovery together with the following document:

- Item Referred from Cabinet - 21 July 2020 - Leisure Contract Recovery - Proposed Amendment to Recommendation.

Councillor Steve Jarvis proposed and Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb seconded the proposed amended recommendation as detailed in document attached to the report.

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

- Councillor David Levett;
- Councillor Sam Collins;
- Councillor Simon Harwood;
- Councillor Sam North;
- Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb.

The Executive Member for Environment and Leisure and Service Director Legal and Community answered questions raised by Members.

Following a detailed debate and following a vote it was:

**RESOLVED:** To provide financial support to Stevenage Leisure Limited (SLL) on an Open Book basis from 20 March 2020 up to at least 31 March 2021. The support provided would only cover losses relating to the Council's contracts, and will not cover central overheads. SLL would be required to take all reasonable actions to minimise the value of any losses. The actual value of the support required will depend on SLLs income recovery but will be capped at a maximum of £1.8m.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To seek approval for the SLL recovery plan and a phased approach toward recovery allowing flexibility through delegation, to ensure business continuity for the leisure contracts and for them to survive beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

The meeting closed at 11.07 pm

Chair