

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES

Meeting of the Council held as a virtual meeting
on Thursday, 21st January, 2021 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors: Councillor Val Bryant (Vice-Chair), Ian Albert, Daniel Allen, Kate Aspinwall, David Barnard, Clare Billing, Judi Billing, John Bishop, Ruth Brown, Paul Clark, Sam Collins, George Davies, Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, Morgan Derbyshire, Faye Frost, 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, Lisa Nash, Sue Ngwala, Sam North, Helen Oliver, Sean Prendergast, Mike Rice, Adem Ruggiero-Cakir, Val Shanley, Carol Stanier, Martin Stears-Handscorn, Claire Strong, Richard Thake and Tom Tyson

IN ATTENDANCE: Anthony Roche (Managing Director), Jeanette Thompson (Service Director - Legal and Community), Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), Vaughan Watson (Service Director - Place), Jo Dufficy (Service Director - Customers), Vic Godfrey (I T Manager), Melanie Stimpson (Democratic Services Manager), Anne Banner (Benefits Manager), Louise Randall (Leisure Contracts Manager) and Hilary Dineen (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager)

ALSO PRESENT: At the commencement of the meeting one registered speaker.

65 WELCOME AND REMOTE/PARTLY REMOTE MEETINGS PROTOCOL SUMMARY

Audio recording – 8 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 to 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 onto You Tube and recorded via Zoom.

Extracts from the Remote/Partly Remote Meetings Protocol was included with the agenda and the full version was available on the Council's website which included information regarding:

- Live Streaming;
- Noise Interference;
- Rules of Debate and
- Voting

Members were requested to ensure that they were familiar with the Protocol.

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager advised Members that, due to a software update by Zoom, our usual voting procedure had been disrupted and would no longer work as required. This was not something that we had any control over or could do anything about.

For the purposes of this meeting Member will vote using the raise hand button. For each vote those voting for a motion would be asked to use the raise hand function. Once counted, the votes will be cleared and Members voting against the motion would be asked to use the raise hand button, once counted the votes would be cleared and the process would be repeated for those who wished to Abstain. This process would extend the time taken to vote therefore Members were asked to please be patient.

The Vice-Chair of the Council, Councillor Val Bryant started the meeting proper.

66 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 6 minutes 26 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bill Davidson, Steve Deakin-Davies, Gary Grindal, Kay Tart, Terry Tyler and Michael Weeks.

67 MINUTES - 6 FEBRUARY 2020 TO 12 NOVEMBER 2020

Audio Recording – 6 minutes 43 seconds

The Vice-Chair advised that since the beginning of March, when NHDC started to hold meetings remotely, it had not been possible to approve Minutes of meetings. Minutes could now be approved with the electronic signature of the Chair of the meeting being applied following approval.

There were 9 sets of Minutes to agree:

- 6 February 2020;
- 27 February 2020;
- 16 April 2020;
- 4 June 2020;
- 9 July 2020;
- 27 August 2020;
- 24 September 2020;
- 8 October 2020;
- 12 November 2020.

Some Members commented that it was difficult to recall what happened February 2020.

Councillor Val Bryant proposed, Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb seconded and it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Minutes of the meetings of Cabinet held on 6 February 2020, 27 February 2020, 16 April 2020, 4 June 2020, 9 July 2020, 27 August 2020, 24 September 2020, 8 October 2020 and 12 November 2020 be approved as a true record of the proceedings;
- (2) That, with the authorisation of the Vice-Chair, her electronic signature and initials be attached to the Minutes approved in (1) above.

68 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 11 minutes 55 seconds

There was no other business notified.

69 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 12 minutes 3 seconds

(1) Audio Recording

The Vice-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 had that in mind as we carried 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 Vice-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 had been seconded.

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

In accordance with the Constitution Members was asked to ensure that no speech exceeded five minutes without the consent of the Vice-Chair.

(5) Comfort Break

The Vice-Chair advised that, if the meeting was still in progress at 9pm, she would call a comfort break at an appropriate place.

(6) Order of Business

The Vice-Chair advised that the order of the agenda did not accord with the order of business that was set out in the Constitution, which was a mistake when the agenda was compiled.

Having been made aware of this and on reflection, with the aim of improved community engagement, she had agreed to these items being moved earlier in the agenda, when members of the public were more likely to be engaged and wish to participate and watch.

Future agendas would reflect that as set out in the constitution.

In respect of the Items regarding Covid-19 Leisure Contracts Recovery, the Vice-Chair would take Item 15 the Part 2 item prior to Item 13 the Part 1 item.

70 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 14 minutes 42 seconds

Ms Rosie Waters, Citizens Advice North Herts thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address Council as follows:

- They had just completed first year of a three year financial agreement with NHDC;
- Last year NHDC agreed a one year uplift of £50,000
- They need the uplift again this year
- Covid-19 had resulted in a reduction in the number of clients but the demand was for more complex issues;
- Issues included, lack of money, use of foodbanks, domestic violence and loss of jobs to mention just a few;
- They had signposted many people to one of the many voluntary organisations such as those delivering food and medicine;
- Since March 2020 they had support 4,433 clients with almost 9,000 issues and had achieved financial outcomes for clients of £1.1 million;
- Clients were 92 percent likely to recommend their services and feedback included that they felt better after talking to CAB;
- The uplift received last year had mainly been spent on increasing supervisor capacity, which allowed them to seamlessly transfer to 100 percent homeworking;
- They had run some very successful “pop up” sessions and would be extending this once restrictions were lifted;
- An uplift of funding was required for the next year to enable them to continue with their work, which helped reduce the number of people contacting the Council;
- Existing funding was stretched by using highly experienced volunteers and this funding was used to leverage other funding streams;
- Covid had taught them a lot and has accelerated plans including increased use of digital channels;
- They hoped to extend their physical presence to more places across the district as soon as restrictions allowed;
- The work was more intensive so there was a need to recruit and train more volunteers as well as upskill existing volunteers.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Judi Billing
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor David Levett

In response to questions Ms Waters advised:

- If did not receive the £50,000 uplift in 2021/22:
 - they would not be able to open for as many hours, probably resulting in closing for a day and half a week
 - Would have to make a choice about limiting channels that were available to access services.
- Last year's uplift was used:
 - Initially to fund a new support worker to visit clients
 - Subsequently for supervision
- They did support clients from just outside the area, such as Fairfield Park
- They had a reciprocal arrangement with Mid Beds which meant that they gave initial advice to people from Bedfordshire, but if they needed more then they were referred to Mid Beds.

The Vice-Chair thanked Ms Waters for her presentation.

71 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

Audio recording – 24 minutes 43 seconds

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

(A) Unlawfully Parked Vehicles

Councillor Jim McNally to Councillor Paul Clark (Executive Member for Planning and Transport):

"Members were advised, via the MIS of 18 December 2020, that the minimum set period for observing vehicles unlawfully parked on yellow lines was to be reduced from 5 minutes to 2 minutes. The record of the decision taken under delegated authority states at paragraph 6.1 that 'The Executive Member for Planning & Transport & Deputy as well as other ward councillors have been informed and are supportive of the decision taken'. Can the Executive Member inform Council which ward councillors were informed and when?"

Councillor Paul Clark responded as follows:

"We are aware of concerns raised around the District raised by residents concerning anti-social parking, one area being anti-social parking particularly outside take aways and other areas such as post offices and ATMs within the town centres and also within neighbourhood centres.

Examples include:

In Baldock:

Bell Row

Issue previously raised by Cllr Muir and local residents with vehicles parking in the street and across entrance ways picking up takeaways.

In Hitchin:

Bancroft

With the Chicken George Takeaway
Takeaways in Nightingale Road

Thursday, 21st January, 2021

This has been an on-going issue and has increased during the pandemic with issues raised by residents

Pizza Kebab and Curry Houses on the corner of Bearton Road and Brampton Park Road

Issue previously raised by Councillor Judi Billing and local residents

Highbury Road Post Office

On-going issues and previously raised by local ward Councillors.

In Royston:

Takeaways in Melbourne Street near the pedestrian crossing

Issue raised by parking services team

On a general point our Parking Enforcement officers continually encounter issues with vehicles parking on double yellow lines, which has increased during the pandemic, particularly with click and collect and more restaurants offering takeaways

This is not to adversely affect businesses only to encourage those using these businesses to park responsibly on street;

We are aware of cars not moving on when a Civil Enforcement Officer asks, as they are aware of the 5 minute period;

It is not deemed appropriate to have a zero time period in terms of loading and unloading, Civil Enforcement Officers (CEO's) do need an observation period;

Ward Councillors were made aware of the option on one particular situation where relationships between those parking illegally and anti-socially and the residents is causing concern, this is in relation to the correspondence over the Chicken George (Councillors that officers liaised with were Councillors Keith Hoskins, Judi Billing, Ian Albert, Sam Collins, County Councillor Derrick Ashley, Councillors Ian Mantle and Paul Clark);

Other Ward Councillors were made aware in MIS dated 18 December 2020, regarding the Delegated decision notice issued, no comments were received in respect of this delegated report from any Councillor.

It was also included in the Shadow Portfolio Holder briefing slides on page 17."

Councillor Jim McNally asked the following supplementary question.

"I note that you mentioned various towns in North Herts and informing other ward Councillors, as stated in the decision sheet, but it did not include any Councillors in the town of Baldock. The observation period only seems to have been changed with regard to single and double yellow lines with no regard taken in to account regarding unlawful parking in residents' parking bays, which is a particular problem in the towns. That is likely to lead to inconsistency with the application of parking restrictions Consultations seems to have been taken along strict party lines no Conservative Members were informed despite all four towns having elected Conservative Councillors. Why was consultations, or informing ward Councillors in this instance seemingly high handed and autocratic?"

Councillor Paul Clark responded:

"I will disagree with my colleague. As I said at the end, the Shadow Portfolio Holder for Parking and Transport was informed in the slides of the Shadow briefing in November and that was Councillor McNally. County Councillor Ashley, a Conservative was also mentioned. I don't keep a diary of everyone I have spoken to on every single matter. There would have been other general discussions as we went round. Councillors Mantle and Stears-Hanscomb were aware as were other Councillors."

(B) Progress of Work on the New Settlement

Councillor David Levett to Councillor Paul Clark (Executive Member for Planning and Transport):

"Could the Executive Member update us on the progress of work on the New Settlement for which the previous administration secured substantial funding from central government?"

Councillor Paul Clark advised:

"When this was your portfolio Councillor Levett, but things have moved on with the Growth Board. Councillor Martin Stears-Handscorn (Leader of the Council) is going to answer this as he is the representative on the Growth Board"

Councillor Martin Stears-Handscorn responded that:

"New settlement work has been carried out for some time under previous administrations with all-party support. I am assuming that New Settlement MHCLG grant work referred to in the question is the application led by NHDC on behalf of ourselves, East Herts, Welwyn-Hatfield and Stevenage. This award was approximately £250k. The projects agreed to be funded within this award, which included forecasting population and economic growth through to 2050 and the typologies of settlements, are complete and there is a small amount of money left.

A further MHCLG grant application under the previous administration to continue this work and bring Broxbourne into the project was unsuccessful.

This administration fully intends to continue this work as we are able, working with the same partners with the addition of Broxbourne. I am chairing and Anthony is leading a Growth Locations/New Settlement/ Infrastructure work stream as part of the North East and Central Herts Strategic Planning Group which is part of the Herts Growth Board. We are using the remaining grant, circa £30k, to map out the next steps on this work.

In summary, the work undertaken so far is being rolled forward into the Growth Board work, specifically the NEC group (which meets the joint working criteria of the award) and the workstream led by Anthony with the support of Ian Fullstone and planning colleagues on growth and new settlements."

Councillor David Levett asked the following supplementary question:

"Do you think that it is important that new settlement work is progressed as we are hopefully looking to get a Local Plan agreed soon. As mentioned at previous meetings, a new settlement could be a viable alternative to further growth around our towns?"

Councillor Martin Stears-Handscorn responded as follows:

"Yes we do feel it is important that the new settlement work goes forward. As you know the time horizon for a new settlement is a very long one, therefore, much as we all wish that the work was done earlier and was an alternative to our current Local Plan, the reality is we are talking about the next Local Plan. So in answer to your question, yes it is important and hopefully will avoid any future incursion around our existing towns."

(C) Local Election Safeguards

Councillor Morgan Derbyshire to Councillor Martin Stears-Handscorn (Leader of the Council):

"Would the Leader of the Council please outline the safeguards that have been put in place to protect poll workers and voters if the local elections are to go ahead this May?"

Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb gave the following response:

“I should first make it clear that making arrangements for elections is the responsibility of the Returning Officer and is not within my remit or any other executive member. Having said that, in order to reassure Members and our voters I have consulted the Returning Officer who is happy for the following information to be provided.

Given that there is continued uncertainty that the elections in May will take place, we must continue to plan that the elections will indeed happen in May – and under these ‘unprecedented’ conditions.

The Electoral Commission has published various key consideration documents for the delivery of the May 2021 Poll – one in particular with regards to Polling Stations. These documents have been developed in consultation with the Association of Electoral Administrators, Solace and the Cabinet Office.

The general public health principles, to help to mitigate the risk of the spread of the virus, are expected to be followed by both the electorate and polling station staff:

- Maintain social distancing
- Clean hands regularly
- Avoid touching face
- Limit the number of contacts
- Wear a face covering, where necessary
- Self-isolate and get a test, where necessary

There will be regular cleaning throughout the day of touchpoints such as doors, polling booths and any writing implements, although voters will be encouraged to bring their own pen or pencil to the polling station.

Additional staff will be employed to stand at the entrance of the busier polling stations to manage entry to the station for social distancing purposes, as well as to encourage voters and other stakeholders attending the polling station to abide by the public health measures in place, such as the wearing of face coverings, sanitising hands on entry and exit, and to answer any questions about what to expect inside the venue.

Polling station staff will be encouraged to take regular breaks, wherever possible, to allow a rest from wearing face coverings.

There will be additional signage to remind voters of the need to follow public health guidelines such as social distancing, the wearing of face-coverings and only entering if symptom-free.

Hand sanitiser will be available at the polling station, with voters encouraged to clean their hands on entry and exit.

The use of face-coverings will be required for all individuals in a polling station (unless they are subject to an exemption or are a member of staff working behind an individual screen) in line with government regulations. Spare masks will be available to those who have not brought their own face covering.

Where stations allow, a one-way system will be adopted to ensure that social distancing can be maintained.

The Polling Stations are being assessed to consider the most appropriate layout of desks and polling booths, to help maintain distance between the polling staff, and between polling staff and voters.

The UK Government have currently confirmed that there will be no test and trace requirement to record the contact details of those entering a polling station for the purposes of voting, even where the polling station is located in a building where it would usually be required.

There will be some documents and papers that will be shared and staff will be reminded that they should only be present if they are well, avoid touching their faces, and regularly and frequently wash their hands.

There are many other electoral processes which need safeguards in place and this just a sample of the measures that can be expected at Polling Stations. This is under review on an ongoing basis through the Council's Elections Project Board and meetings that the Returning Officer has held with her Herts counterparts. The safety of everyone is of paramount importance and I encourage you to contact the Returning Officer should an Member have any other queries or concerns."

Councillor Morgan Derbyshire asked the following supplementary question:

"Would you agree with me that it is dangerous for any political party asking its candidates and volunteers to hand deliver campaign literature while the District is in the highest tier and the Government's message is still Stay Home, Stay Safe"

Councillor Martin Stears-Handscorn responded:

"Yes I agree and thank you for a simple supplementary to answer"

72 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

Audio recording – 40 minutes 18 seconds

No motions had been submitted.

73 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Audio recording – 40 minutes 24 seconds

A Referral from Cabinet: 15 December 2020 - IT Capital - Purchase of Laptops

The Executive Member for Finance and IT presented the referral from Cabinet regarding IT Capital – Purchase of Laptops, which was considered at the meeting held on 15 December 2020.

He advised that:

- This was regarding the reprofiling of the IT budget to purchase equipment;
- The Council had been working remotely for approximately 10 months and some staff were not equipped to take part in virtual meetings as current desktop equipment did not have cameras, microphones etc.
- It was important that staff and councillors were adequately equipped;
- The issuing of laptops instead of desktop equipment would enable more mobile working and would result in savings in license fees, which have to be purchased for each set of equipment.

Cabinet recommended to Council:

- (1) That the capital programme for IT spend is amended as detailed in 7.4 Table 2 to enable IT to progress the procurement of laptops for staff to facilitate more effective home working arrangements. The net impact is an increase in spend in 2021/22 of £55k as detailed in 7.5 and shown in Table 3;

- (2) That £50k of the capital is bought forward into this year's budget so that the IT Manager can progress the procurement of the first batch of laptops so that delivery to staff can happen at the earliest opportunity.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed, Councillor Sam North seconded and it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the capital programme for IT spend is amended as detailed in 7.4 Table 2 to enable IT to progress the procurement of laptops for staff to facilitate more effective home working arrangements. The net impact is an increase in spend in 2021/22 of £55k as detailed in 7.5 and shown in Table 3;
- (2) That £50k of the capital is bought forward into this year's budget so that the IT Manager can progress the procurement of the first batch of laptops so that delivery to staff can happen at the earliest opportunity.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) To enable a continued agile way of working which has been brought about by the Coronavirus pandemic, increasing flexibility and business continuity resilience and ensuring a future proofed approach;
- (2) To avoid additional capital costs associated with a requirement to increase Microsoft licences where users have a personal computer in the office and an NHDC provided device at home;
- (3) To respond to feedback from the staff survey regarding the need for staff to be provided with equipment that have cameras and microphones to enable council wide participation in meetings and similar activities;
- (4) To enable the procurement, build and distribution of laptops to take place ahead of the new financial year, considering supplier lead in times and scheduling of resources in the IT team.

B Referral from Cabinet: 15 December 2020 - Investment Strategy (Capital and Treasury) Mid-Year Review 2020-21

The Executive Member for Finance and IT presented the referral from Cabinet regarding Investment Strategy (Capital and Treasury) Mid-Year Review 2020-21, which was considered at the meeting held on 15 December 2020.

He advised that:

- Table 2 detailed the capital spend, including the amounts in relation to property investment, which had been deferred due to the current economic conditions;
- Table 3 showed that the Capital programme would be funded from S106 receipt, grants and contributions from capital reserves and there would be no requirement to borrow;
- There had been changes to borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board with the lower interest rates being accompanied by restrictions on borrowing meaning that borrowing could not take place if the project was being undertaken purely for yield;
- Paragraph 8.10 detailed the impact of Covid-19 and the economic downturn on cash investment rates
- Paragraph 8.12 detailed all the current investments held by the Council as at 30 September 2020.

Cabinet recommended to Council:

- (1) That the position of Treasury Management activity as at the end of September 2020 be noted.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed, Councillor Sam North seconded and it was:

RESOLVED: That the position of Treasury Management activity as at the end of September 2020 be noted.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

- (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.

C Referral from Cabinet: 15 December 2020 - Covid-19 Leisure Contracts Recovery

The Chair advised that this referral would be taken with Items 13 and 15.

74 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME

Audio recording – 54 minutes 16 seconds

The Executive Member for Finance and IT presented the report entitled Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

He advised that:

- The Service Director – Customers and her team should be thanked for the work undertaken regarding the Council Tax Reduction Scheme;
- There had been an almost 16 percent increase in those claiming
- It had been the intention to carry out a full review of the scheme this year, but this had not been possible due to the pandemic and the impact on claimants;
- It was hoped to undertake a full review in the next year, but this was dependent on the pandemic situation;
- The additional support payment was proposed to continue at the current levels for 2021/22.

The following Member took part in the debate:

- Councillor Sam North.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed, Councillor Sam North seconded and it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Council notes the CTRS position relating to this and previous financial years.
- (2) That Council notes that a full review of the CTRS has commenced and been postponed due to the consequences on the Scheme of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- (3) That Council confirm that the amounts continue to be distributed to Parish, Town & Community Councils in 2021/22.

(4) That no changes to the CTRS be made for 2021/2022.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To update Council on how the Scheme is working and to note that the full review planned to take place during 2020/2021 was postponed due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

75 REVIEW OF MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES SCHEME

Audio recording – 1 hour 1 minute 50 seconds

The Democratic Services Manager presented the report entitled Review of Members' Allowances Scheme together with the following appendices:

- Appendix A - Report and Recommendations by the IRP on the Members' Allowances Scheme 2021/2022;
- Appendix B - Proposed Members' Allowances Scheme 2021/2022 with tracked changes (2020/2021 with proposed Scheme highlighted).

She advised that there was a correction to Paragraph 10.1 of the report in that, following further analysis of the finances, the recommended increases could be provided within the current budget, so no increase in budget was required.

Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb proposed and Councillor Judi Billing seconded the proposals in the report.

Councillor David Levett proposed and Councillor Simon Harwood seconded the following amendments:

- (1) That there be an additional recommendation to thank the IRP for their work.
- (2) That the following words be added to the end of recommendation 2:
"Defer the application of the rise until 2022/23.

The Service Director – Legal and Community advised that, in respect of the second part of the proposed amendment, any increase could not be deferred as Members would have to consider any report of the IRP next year.

Councillor David Levett proposed and Councillor Simon Harwood seconded that the cost of living rise not be taken.

Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb raised a point of order in that the recommendations should be taken as they stood

The Service Director Legal and Community advised that the proposed amendment to not take the cost of living rise was not a valid amendment as it negated the recommendation rather than amended it.

Councillor Sam Collins called for a recorded vote on recommendation 2.2 and a separate vote by raise of hands on recommendations 2.1, 2.3 and 2.4 together.

Councillor Levett asked for separate votes for each recommendation.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Sam Collins;
- Councillor Ruth Brown;
- Councillor Helen Oliver;
- Councillor Claire Strong;
- Councillor Daniel Allen;
- Councillor Richard Thake;
- Councillor Simon Harwood;
- Councillor David Barnard;
- Councillor Jean Green;
- Councillor David Levett;
- Councillor Judi Billing;
- Councillor Sam North;
- Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb.

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager clarified with relevant Members that a recorded vote would be taken regarding recommendation 2.2, Recommendations 2.1,2.3 and 2.4 would be taken together and voted on by raise of hands.

A recorded vote was taken regarding recommendation 2.2 the result being:

For:

Councillors: Ian Albert, Daniel Allen, Kate Aspinwall, Clare Billing, Judi Billing, Ruth Brown, Val Bryant, Paul Clark, Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, Keith Hoskins, Mike Hughson, Ian Mantle, Sue Ngwala, Sam North, Helen Oliver, Adem Ruggiero-Cakir and Martin Stears-Handscomb.

Total For: 17

Against:

Councillors: David Barnard, Sam Collins, Morgan Derbyshire, Faye Frost, Jean Green, Simon Harwood, Terry Hone, Tony Hunter, Steve Jarvis, David Levett, Jim McNally, Ian Moody, Gerald Morris, Michael Muir, Lisa Nash, Sean Prendergast, Mike Rice, Valentine Shanley, Carol Stanier, Claire Strong, Richard Thake and Tom Tyson.

Total Against: 22

Abstain:

Councillors: John Bishop and George Davies.

Total Abstain: 2

Therefore the motion was lost.

Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb proposed and Councillor Judi Billing seconded:

- (1) That the 2020/21 Members' Allowances Scheme continue unchanged for 2021/22;
- (2) That the increase to the Independent Person and Reserve Independent Persons allowances as detailed in Appendix A and 8.9 of the report be agreed;
- (3) That the IRP be thanked for their work.

Upon the vote it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the 2020/21 Members' Allowances Scheme continue unchanged for 2021/22;
- (2) That the increase to the Independent Person and Reserve Independent Persons allowances as detailed in Appendix A and 8.9 of the report be agreed;
- (3) That the IRP be thanked for their work.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To ensure that the Council meets its statutory requirements of an annual review and adoption of the scheme.

NB: At 9.20pm the Chair announced there would be a 5 minute comfort break.

76 ELECTORAL SERVICES - SCALE OF FEES 2021/22

Audio recording – 1 hour 55 minutes 37 seconds

NB: The meeting resumed at 9.25pm

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager undertook a roll call to ensure that all could hear and be heard.

The Democratic Services Manager recused herself from being present during the item due to her responsibilities as Returning Officer and was placed in a breakout room for the duration of the item.

The Service Director- Resources presented the report entitled Electoral Services – Scale of Fees 2021/22 together with the following appendix:

- Appendix A - Electoral Services Scale of Fees 2021/2022.

He advised that:

- The fees for the Returning Officer remain unchanged from last year;
- The fees for other positions had been compared to the rates paid by other Councils;
- It was proposed that these be set at a level where we can attract people to take on the roles;
- Some fees had been simplified.

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

RESOLVED: That the Scale of Fees for 2021/22 as set out in Appendix A be agreed.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Council to remunerate the Returning Officer and the staff employed to carry out tasks during electoral events and to be open and transparent regarding other payments. Previously this was dealt with under Delegated Decision prepared by the Democratic Services Manager for the then Returning Officer (the Chief Executive). Following the Council decision to appoint the Democratic Services Manager as the Returning Officer, this is no longer appropriate.

The Democratic Services Manager returned to the meeting.

77 COVID LEISURE CONTRACTS RECOVERY

Audio recording – 2 hours 52 minutes 5 seconds

NB This Item was considered following the Part 2 Item of the same name (Minute 79 refers)

The Committee Member and Scrutiny Manager undertook a roll call to ensure that all present could hear and be heard.

Prior to the item being discussed Councillor Claire Strong advised that she was a member of Archers Gym and would therefore not take part in the debate or vote.

Prior to the item being discussed Councillor Jim McNally advised that he regularly attended North Herts Leisure Centre and would therefore not take part in the debate and vote.

The Executive Member for Environment and Leisure presented the report entitled Covid Leisure Contracts Recovery and the referral from the Cabinet meeting held on 15 December 2020 (9c)

He advised that:

- That a further lockdown had changed expectations in respect of leisure facilities;
- It was currently expected that the leisure facilities would be closed until the end of March 2021;
- This meant that the level of losses would exceed the £1.8 million previously agreed by Council;
- If this Council wished to continue to provide the valued leisure facilities then the only option was for the Council to underwrite losses.

Councillor Steve Jarvis proposed and Councillor Ian Albert seconded the recommendations contained in both the Part 1 and Part 2 reports.

Councillor David Levett called for a recorded vote on recommendation 2.1 and a separate recorded vote on the recommendations contained in the Part 2 report.

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

- Councillor Gerald Morris;
- Councillor Steve Jarvis;
- Councillor Ian Albert;
- Councillor David Levett.

In response to questions the Service Director – Resources advised that in the event that SLL went into administration any money paid would be lost.

Following recorded votes as detailed below it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Council supports the continued delivery of leisure facilities in the District to support the health and wellbeing of our residents;

- (2) That financial support is provided on an open-book basis to SLL to enable the leisure facilities to be open when Covid-19 restrictions allow. The support provided will reimburse any losses. The support to SLL in 2020/21 is forecast to be £2.45m (assuming the leisure facilities will now remain closed until the 31 March 2021). Future levels of support will depend on any further restrictions and the speed of recovery. It is assumed to be an additional £2m in 2021/22, but realistic scenarios show that it could be as low as £1.3m in 2021/22 (no further restrictions), or as much as £4.4m across 2021/22 (£3.1m) and 2022/23 (£1.3m).
- (3) That Council notes that the cost of not supporting SLL and closing the facilities could be as high as the cost of providing support.
- (4) That (following an initial payment to cover losses to date) payments to SLL are made on a monthly basis following submission of management accounts showing the extent of any losses. These accounts will be reviewed by the Service Director: Place in consultation with the Service Director: Resources, Executive Member for Environment and Leisure and Executive Member for Finance and IT. The affordability of payments will be kept under constant review by the Service Director: Resources, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and IT.
- (5) That Council notes that, in the event of higher levels of support being provided, budget savings in future years (2022/23 onwards) will need to be delivered more quickly than currently forecast.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To seek approval to provide financial support on an open-book basis to SLL to enable the leisure facilities to be open when Covid-19 restrictions allow.

The recorded vote regarding Resolution (1) was as follows:

For:

Councillors: Ian Albert, Daniel Allen, Kate Aspinwall, David Barnard, Clare Billing, Judi Billing, John Bishop, Ruth Brown, Val Bryant, Paul Clark, Sam Collins, George Davies, Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, Morgan Derbyshire, Faye Frost, Jean Green, Simon Harwood, Terry Hone, Keith Hoskins, Mike Hughson, Tony Hunter, Steve Jarvis, David Levett, Ian Mantle, Ian Moody, Gerald Morris, Michael Muir, Lisa Nash, Sue Ngwala, Sam North, Helen Oliver, Sean Prendergast, Mike Rice, Adem Ruggiero-Cakir, Valentine Shanley, Carol Stanier, Martin Stears-Handscomb, Richard Thake and Tom Tyson.

Total For: 39

Total Against: Nil

Total Abstain: Nil

The recorded vote regarding resolutions (2), (3), (4) and (5) was as follows:

For:

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

Total For: 23

Against:

Councillors: John Bishop, Gerald Morris and Michael Muir.

Total Against: 3

Abstain:

Councillors: David Barnard, George Davies, Morgan Derbyshire, Faye Frost, Jean Green, Simon Harwood, Terry Hone, Tony Hunter, David Levett, Ian Moody, Mike Rice, Valentine Shanley and Richard Thake.

Total Abstain: 13

78 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Audio recording – 2 hours 3 minutes 8 seconds

Councillor Val Bryant proposed, Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb seconded and it was:

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).

79 COVID-19 LEISURE CONTRACTS RECOVERY

NB: This item was not audio recorded or filmed

NB This Item was considered prior to the Part 1 Item of the same name (Minute 77 refers)

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager undertook a roll call to ensure that all present could hear and be heard.

Prior to the item being discussed Councillor Claire Strong advised that she was a member of Archers Gym and would therefore not take part in the debate or vote.

Prior to the item being discussed Councillor Jim McNally advised that he regularly attended North Herts Leisure Centre and would therefore not take part in the debate and vote.

The Executive Member for Environment and Leisure presented the Part 2 report entitled Covid Leisure Contracts Recovery and the Part 2 referral from the Cabinet meeting held on 15 December 2020 (9c)

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

- Councillor Simon Harwood;
- Councillor John Bishop;
- Councillor Sam North;
- Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb;
- Councillor Sam Collins;
- Councillor Helen Oliver;
- Councillor Judi Billing;
- Councillor David Levett;
- Councillor Ian Albert;
- Councillor Steve Jarvis.

Questions were responded to by the Service Director – Legal and Community

Councillor Steve Jarvis proposed, Councillor Ian Albert seconded and it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That financial support is provided on an open-book basis to SLL to enable the leisure facilities to be open when Covid-19 restrictions allow. The support provided will reimburse any losses. The support to SLL in 2020/21 is forecast to be £2.45m (assuming the leisure facilities will now remain closed until the 31 March 2021). Future levels of support will depend on any further restrictions and the speed of recovery. It is assumed to be an additional £2m in 2021/22, but realistic scenarios show that it could be as low as £1.3m in 2021/22 (no further restrictions), or as much as £4.4m across 2021/22 (£3.1m) and 2022/23 (£1.3m).
- (2) That Council notes that the cost of not supporting SLL and closing the facilities could be as high as the cost of providing support.
- (3) That (following an initial payment to cover losses to date) payments to SLL are made on a monthly basis following submission of management accounts showing the extent of any losses. These accounts will be reviewed by the Service Director: Place in consultation with the Service Director: Resources, Executive Member for Environment and Leisure and Executive Member for Finance and IT. The affordability of payments will be kept under constant review by the Service Director: Resources, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and IT.
- (4) That Council notes that, in the event of higher levels of support being provided, budget savings in future years (2022/23 onwards) will need to be delivered more quickly than currently forecast.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To seek approval to provide financial support on an open-book basis to SLL to enable the leisure facilities to be open when Covid-19 restrictions allow.

The meeting closed at 10.56 pm

Chair