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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERONON ROAD, LETCHWORTH, SG6 3JF
ON TUESDAY, 13TH SEPTEMBER, 2022 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg (Chair), Ruth Brown, Ian Albert, Judi Billing, Keith Hoskins, Amy Allen, Steve Jarvis, Sean Prendergast and Tom Plater*

In Attendance: *Anthony Roche (Managing Director), Johanne Dufficy (Service Director – Customers), Jeanette Thompson (Service Director – Legal and Community), Sarah Kingsley (Service Director – Place), Ian Couper (Service Director – Resources), Louise Symes (Strategic infrastructure and Projects Manager), Nigel Smith (Strategic Planning Manager), Anne Banner (Benefits Manager), Geraldine Goodwin (Revenues Manager), Clare Skeels (Senior Planning Officer), Hollie Hawkins (Planning Officer), Christine Crofts (Communications Manager), Louise Randall (Leisure Manager), Chris Jeffery (Customer Service Manager), Laura Allen (Senior Planning Officer), James Lovegrove (Committee Member and Scrutiny Officer) and William Edwards (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager)*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting there were no members of the public present.*

104 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 29 seconds

Before proceeding with the Committee Agenda Items, the Chair made a statement regarding the passing of Her Majesty The Queen and the proclamation of the new King Charles III. The Chair provided Members the chance to give tributes, and held a minute's silence.

Following this, the meeting continued to consider the business on the agenda.

There were no apologies for absence.

105 MINUTES - 21 JUNE 2022

Audio Recording – 6 minutes 55 seconds

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Ruth Brown seconded and it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 21 June 2022 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

106 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 7 minutes 20 seconds

There was no other business notified.

107 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 7 minutes 24 seconds

- (1) The Chair welcomed those present at the meeting, especially those who had attended to give a presentation;
- (2) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded;
- (3) 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) The Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.
- (5) The Chair advised of a change to the agenda order and Item 19 would be taken following the conclusion of Item 8.
- (6) The Chair requested that Members avoid making political comments at this meeting due to the period of national mourning.

108 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 8 minutes 46 seconds

There was no public participation at this meeting.

109 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Audio recording – 8 minutes 50 seconds

The Chair advised that referrals made from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee would be taken with their respective items on the Cabinet agenda.

110 2022 - 27 COMMUNITY CONSULTATION STRATEGY

Audio recording – 9 minutes 20 seconds

The Communications Manager presented the report entitled 'Community Consultation Strategy 2022-27' and provided Members with the following updates:

- Our 2022 District Wide Survey results from this year highlighted that residents views on their involvement and engagement by the Council has gone down since 2019, but this was understandable as much consultation work during this time had been focused on the pandemic response.
- This proposal is for a resident facing, community based consultation strategy and will involve explaining the consultation process to residents.
- There was a need to consult residents more regularly and increase the level of digital consultation happening. The pandemic had demonstrated that the local community was capable and willing to use digital means to be consulted.

- It was being explored whether a twice per annum District Wide survey could be launched, to give of the moment attitudes of residents.
- Having two way conversations, by sharing results and being transparent with these, was important and results of this and future surveys would be displayed on dedicated webpage.
- The strategy also acknowledged the need for face-to-face consultation led by Councillors at one-to-ones with residents, Town Talks and Surgeries.

Councillor Judi Billing noted that as Executive Member for Community Engagement she was happy with this strategy. It was good to see the proposals building on the digital developments that came from the pandemic, such as the whole street Zoom meetings.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Judi Billing seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet approved the Community Consultation Strategy for the period 2022-27.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

- (1) Consultation is critical to demonstrate that the Council is committed to engaging with its community, to help shape the direction of future policies, to inform necessary improvement or refinements to services and to ascertain if current approaches to service delivery are meeting the needs of residents.
- (2) Our most recent District Wide Survey (DWS) highlights a decline in resident views since 2019 on how we consult with them. We need to proactively show that we are a council that listens and wants to engage with our residents by successfully implementing our community-facing strategy.
- (3) Increased forms of digital consultation will enable us to reach a wider audience more frequently

111 DISTRICT WIDE SURVEY 2022

Audio recording – 15 minutes 09 seconds

The Communications Manager presented the report entitled 'District Wide Survey 2022' and advised Members of the following:

- 800 residents had been surveyed by phone earlier this year and results are largely in line with national trends and similar to previous survey results.
- In terms of areas of strength, satisfaction with North Herts as a place to live is very high and contrary to national trends, satisfaction with the Council is above national trends and has stabilised from the downward trend between 2013-2019, agreement that the Council offers value for money is above national levels and satisfaction with Waste and Recycling has seen a significant increase on the last survey results.
- Areas of focus include monitoring resident views of the running of the council, as the percentage that think it is getting worse is larger than the percentage who think it is getting better. The top three themes from residents feedback were: a) improving the look of a local area, b) improving street cleaning and c) improvement in communications that are clear and transparent.
- Satisfaction with street cleaning, benefits and housing services have all recorded their lowest levels in this survey.
- For those residents who have recently made contact with the Council, satisfaction with the service received was at its lowest on record and dissatisfaction to the highest.

- In terms of areas to explore further, satisfaction scores on whether the Council 'consults and engages the community' are to be addressed through the Community Consultation Strategy 2022-27.
- Royston residents provided the lowest score with regard to the Council offering value for money and similarly scored lower than the rest of the district when it came to the Council involving, consulting and engaging residents, so worth monitoring this.
- Potential new forms of customer contact, including a 'live chat' option on the Council website, were another area for the Council's Customer Service team to explore.

Councillor Ruth Brown advised that the trend in Royston residents has been ongoing for many years and there is a section of the community that feels distant from North Herts, mainly due to the location of the town near South Cambridgeshire border and the open countryside space between it and other towns in North Herts. She hoped that developing the Place narrative would help the Council rectify these issues.

In response to a question from Councillor Keith Hoskins, the Communications Manager advised that they would need to look into whether there was a correlation between the decline in public satisfaction with services and the staffing availability due to the pandemic and would report back outside of the meeting.

The Chair noted that this information would be helpful for Councillors, as a narrative could be built around this. The Chair thanked the Communications Manager for the work put into conducting the survey and the presentation of the results for Members to action.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Ruth Brown seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Cabinet commented on and noted the key findings and observations from the District Wide Survey.
- (2) That Cabinet noted the results will be considered by the Leadership Team in conjunction with the Executive Members and an action plan produced.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure that Cabinet is aware of the results and any trends from previous surveys and how the results will be used to inform future service delivery.

112 3Cs POLICY UPDATE

Audio recording – 24 minutes 13 seconds

The Customer Service Manager presented the report entitled '3Cs Policy Update' and advised Members of the following:

- The report detailed the updated 3Cs Policy, which was due for renewal in September 2022. Included in the appendices was the Complaints Flowchart and the Unreasonable Complainants policy.
- The overall 3Cs policy had been strengthened through this update and the word was updated to be as customer friendly as possible.
- Major changes to the policy had been detailed at point 8.1. Other updates were generally to the look and feel of the document.
- The Unreasonable Complainants (& Contact) Policy had been audited by SIAS and benchmarked against policies from other authorities and was deemed to be suitable for its purpose. It was not expected that this policy would be used frequently.
- The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had reviewed the policy and were happy to support the changes.

- The days to respond would be standardised to 10 working days across the document, and this would be updated and communicated to staff.

The Chair commented that the document was more accessible and more customer friendly. It provides details of what is not a complaint and removing the more difficult policies away from the main Customer Service Strategy was positive.

Councillor Steve Jarvis noted that this was an impressive document, which was clear and easy to understand, and went above and beyond other local authorities. He noted that 10 working days seemed a short period to respond and suggested that this could be extended to 20 working days, as is the case at other authorities, and that escalation to Stage 2 could be extended to 28 days. This would ensure that the policy is not set up to fail by setting unachievable targets.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Sean Prendergast seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Cabinet adopted the Updated 3Cs Policy, Appendix A – Complaint Flow Chart and Appendix B – Unreasonable Complainant (& Contact) Policy.
- (2) That Cabinet agree to delegate any minor changes in relation to the 3Cs policy to the Service Director – Customers in consultation with the Executive Member for the Customer Service Centre.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) The recommendations are being made to ensure the 3C's policy stays current and reflects learning since the last review date. The policy continues to remain in line with Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) best practice.
- (2) Some of the specific updates and amendments address matters that have arisen for the first time and therefore adding them now helps to ensure the policy is clear for all going forward.
- (3) The updates ensure the Council has a robust policy to refer to when required, and customers are clear on how the policy works.
- (4) The policies and associated report have been seen by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 06 September 2022.

113 FIRST QUARTER INVESTMENT STRATEGY (CAPITAL AND TREASURY) REVIEW 2022/23

Audio recording – 31 minutes 20 seconds

The Executive Member for Finance and IT presented the report entitled 'First Quarter Investment Strategy (Capital and Treasury) Review 2022/23' and noted the following for Members:

- Table 2 in the report detailed the capital schemes which had been delayed.
- Table 3 in the report detailed the cost changes in the capital schemes, as some of these had come in above budget and therefore needed a decision by Cabinet before proceeding.
- Playground renovations are forecast to exceed the current budget, the majority of this shortfall can be found from Section 106 money.
- The Solar Thermal scheme in Royston was set to come in at £20k over budget.

- Work on the boilers at the outdoor pools started and engineers identified further works required. The works were completed due to the additional costs of delaying the works.
- Treasury returns were increasing, but still significantly below inflation.

The Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee advised that the last meeting was attended by the Independent Member for the first time, who asked several detailed and important questions. He noted that the Committee had approved that report be recommended to Cabinet at its meeting.

In response to a questions from Councillor Ruth Brown, the Service Director – Resources advised that, whilst work had not been undertaken to assess this, it was expected that there would be an additional benefit to the investment in Solar Thermal in Royston, as energy would be saved that would have been at a higher cost.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Cabinet noted the forecast expenditure of £12.252M in 2022/23 on the capital programme, paragraph 8.3 refers.
- (2) That Cabinet approved the adjustments to the capital programme for 2022/23 onwards, as a result of the revised timetable of schemes detailed in table 2 and 3, increasing the estimated spend in 2023/24 by £2.048M.
- (3) That Cabinet noted the position of the availability of capital resources, as detailed in table 4 paragraph 8.6 and the requirement to keep the capital programme under review for affordability.
- (4) That Cabinet noted the position of Treasury Management activity as at the end of June 2022.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

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

114 FIRST QUARTER REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2022/23

Audio recording – 37 minutes 15 seconds

The Executive Member for Finance and IT presented the report entitled 'First Quarter Revenue Budget Monitoring 2022/23' and advised Members of the following:

- Table 3 highlighted the variances, which were predominantly due to the Covid 19 recovery and inflation impacts.
- In the past it has been in the Council's interest to enter into a business pool rate and it was expected the Council would enter into this again if the opportunity became available.
- It was important for Members to note some of the larger variances detailed in the report.
- Leisure centre recovery was proceeding well and the return from Stevenage Leisure Limited was expected to be larger than predicted.

The Chair of Finance, Audit and Risk Committee noted the Committee had a lively debate around this item, but had no further comments to add.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Cabinet noted this report.
- (2) That Cabinet approved the changes to the 2022/23 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.2, a £559k decrease in net expenditure.
- (3) That Cabinet noted the changes to the 2023/24 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.2, a total £414k increase in net expenditure. These will be incorporated in the draft revenue budget for 2023/24.
- (4) That Cabinet delegated to the Service Director: Resources (in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and IT) authority to enter in to a Business Rate Pooling arrangement (if available) if it is estimated that it will be in the financial interests of the Council.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: Members are able to monitor, make adjustments within the overall budgetary framework and request appropriate action of Services who do not meet the budget targets set as part of the Corporate Business Planning process.

115 COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN Q1 UPDATE

Audio recording – 40 minutes 35 seconds

The Executive Member for Finance and IT presented the report entitled 'Council Delivery Plan Q1 Update', alongside the referral from Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and advised of the following updates:

- The Overview and Scrutiny Committee overall approved the document and liked the new format.
- They had requested further information on the milestones related to each of the projects detailed and Officers were working on including this in future reports. However, there needed to be a balance on the level of detail provided in the report.
- There were 13 milestones which required the Cabinet to approve changes and these were detailed in the report.
- The Shared Prosperity Fund and Churchgate would need to be added to the report.
- The Electric Vehicle Chargers for Council vehicles can be removed following completion.
- This report aligns with the Council Plan and is a key document, albeit in its early stages and remains a work in progress. It was hoped that colleagues in Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would appreciate this regular update.

The Chair noted that this was an excellent document which was very accessible and would allow for better scrutiny from Members.

Councillor Steve Jarvis noted that it should be the Shared Prosperity Fund in the recommendations, not Shared Propensity Fund as written.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Cabinet noted the progress against Council projects as set out in the Council Delivery Plan (Appendix A) including changes to milestone dates and risks.
- (2) That Cabinet confirmed the completion of one of the Council projects.
- (3) That Cabinet confirmed the addition of two new Council projects, which are the Shared Prosperity Fund and Churchgate.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: The Council Delivery Plan (CDP) monitoring reports provide Cabinet with an opportunity to monitor progress against the key Council projects, and understand any new issues, risks or opportunities.

116 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Audio recording – 44 minutes 38 seconds

Councillor Ian Albert presented the report entitled 'Medium Term Financial Strategy' and provided Members with the following updates:

- The strategy itself was included at Appendix A and this, alongside the report, was focussed on the recovery from Covid impacts and inflation, alongside uncertainty over future waste costs and general funding.
- The Council has high levels of reserve funds and the more significant budget decisions can be delayed until there is more certainty regarding future funding.
- In the meantime the Council will need to reduce costs and generate income where possible, not make decisions that increase costs and be ready to make difficult decisions.
- Other areas explored when compiling this strategy were inflation affecting contractor services, pay inflation and the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.
- There has been a philosophy of cost recovery on fees and charges instilled in this strategy.
- There is likely to be a new funding formula for 2025/26.
- This is a cautious and prudent strategy, maybe with the potential to make small, one-off investments following appropriate and careful consideration.

Councillor Terry Tyler, as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, noted that the Council may have to start to look in 2024/25 onwards at service changes to deliver a balanced budget, but there were positive actions, such as looking at how the Council can generate more income. He advised that FAR Members agreed to refer this to Cabinet for consideration.

Councillor Tom Plater noted that this was a good strategy and it was good to see the proposal to sell of surplus land for green housing.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That Cabinet recommended to Full Council the adoption of the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023-28 as attached at Appendix A.

REASON FOR REFERRAL: 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 2023/2024 to 2027/2028, culminating in the setting of the Council Tax precept for 2023/24 in February 2023. This will (alongside the Council Plan) support the Council in setting a budget that is affordable and aligned to Council priorities.

117 PROPOSED INCREASE IN PARKING TARIFFS

Audio recording – 50 minutes 26 seconds

The Executive Member for Planning and Transport presented the report entitled 'Proposed Increase in Car Parking Tariffs 2022-23' and provided Members with following updates:

- There was 2% budgeted in the Medium Term Financial Strategy to be applied to car parking charges, in reality the detailed increases in the report amount to around 1.9%.
- It was felt that, with the increases in cost of living, rather than increasing tariffs across the board by 2%, there would be specific increases on 1-hour charges which had not been increased since 2019.
- Feedback had been circulated from stakeholders provided in a supplementary document.
- North Herts Council proposed that any 'Free after 3pm' schemes be ticketed to allow for data collection.
- The timeline for feedback was tight and it was not possible to report on this at the relevant Area Committees, but all of the Chairs of these committees had been consulted.
- Proposed amendments to the recommendations to make all 1-hour parking in Royston be charged at 70p and for St Martin's Road car park in Knebworth be changed to 35p for 30 minutes and 70p for 1-hour parking.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed a further amendment regarding the Hitchin charges, which would make all long stay car parks charge £1.30 after 3pm and all short stay car parks charge £1.50 after 3pm.

Councillor Brown advised further that the aim of raising the 1-hour charge is that it would encourage people to stay longer and travel less.

Councillor Judi Billing advised that whilst it was not ideal that Area Committees were not consulted directly, but there were modern ways for the relevant Chair's to make contact with their Members without the formal meeting.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg noted that four of the five Area Committees were represented at the Cabinet meeting.

Councillor Ian Albert noted that increases in Car Parking Tariffs would never be welcomed, but these proposals have tried to be supportive and as limited as possible, for example there would be no increase in season ticket prices.

In response to a question from Councillor Judi Billing, the Executive Member advised that there was no requirement for tickets currently in the car parks running a 'free after 3pm' scheme. But the BID, District Council and County Council all funded this scheme and the data used to support it was significantly out of date. The BID had raised concerns about the enforceability of requiring a ticket to be 'purchased' after 3pm, but it was felt that while there were downsides to the scheme, overall the data collected would be beneficial.

Councillor Steve Jarvis commented that he was sympathetic to the proposals and most people would not pay more under these. It would be difficult to encourage people to take a free ticket and therefore the data collected may not be accurate. A better proposal may be to run sample counts at the affected car parks to collect data.

Councillor Sean Prendergast agreed with the overall balance of the proposals, but also questioned the benefit of requiring a free ticket after 3pm.

Councillor Keith Hoskins advised that previously the Hitchin BID had brought in a 'free after 3pm' scheme, but were required to make payments to the Council for this. Therefore they undertook a count at specific car parks to establish usage, and this was conducted by local students.

The Chair noted that overwhelmingly the comments from Members were against the requirement for a free ticket after 3pm and therefore, with the unanimous consent of Members, this recommendation would be removed.

Members agreed unanimously to the amendments proposed by Councillor Brown regarding Royston and Knebworth car parking charges, and Councillor Albert regarding Hitchin.

Councillor Ruth Brown proposed and Councillor Ian Albert seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Cabinet agreed to adopt the proposed off-street car park tariffs for 2022/23 as set out in Tables 1 to 7 at Appendix A, with the following amendments:
 - a. Princes Mews, Royston car park to be kept at 70p for 1 hour parking, in line with the increased price at other Royston car parks.
 - b. St Martin's Road, Knebworth car park to be 35p for 30 minutes and 70p for 1 hour parking.
 - c. In Hitchin, all Long Stay car parks to be £1.30 after 3pm and all Short Stay car parks to be £1.50 after 3pm.
- (2) That Cabinet agreed not to increase the charges for Season Tickets for each of its long stay car parks or business permits for its car park at St. Martins Road in Knebworth for 2022/23.
- (3) That Cabinet agreed not to increase the charges for resident permits, visitor permits, business permits or visitor tickets for resident permit zones for 2022/23.
- (4) That Cabinet agreed that the proposed tariff changes, as recommended in paragraphs 2.1 as amended above, are implemented as soon as practicable, and that officers in consultation with the Executive Member and Deputy for Planning and Transport proceed with the implementation as required.
- (5) That Officers proceed with the necessary amendments to the Off- Street Parking Traffic Regulation Orders as required to implement changes recommended above, and that officers in consultation with the Executive Member and Deputy for Planning and Transport proceed with the implementation as required.

REASON FOR DECISION: To implement an increase in car parking tariffs in order to effectively manage their use and in accordance with the Council's fees and charges policy as set out in its Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). To set car parking tariffs that support the achievement of modal shift away from private car use and to help support the vitality of town centres.

118 INFORMATION NOTE ON ASYLUM DISPERSAL AND REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT SCHEMES

Audio recording – 73 minutes 47seconds

The Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health presented the 'Information Note on Asylum Dispersal and Refugee Resettlement Schemes' and advised of the following:

- The Home Office announced in spring 2022 that all Local Authorities would be expected to participate in the full dispersal scheme regarding asylum seekers.
- The Home Office would be procuring private rented housing across all areas for use for dispersal.

- Initial authority allocations are expected to be 97 by December 2023, based on a straight percentage share.
- Private rental sector in this area is already stretched and it is difficult to see where additional private rented properties would be found.
- Consequently this will impact the properties available to support homeless people and will increase private rents of available properties. This will also impact local services available.
- North Herts has so far resettled 10 Syrian families, which equates to 50 individuals, and a further 2 Syrian families, 10 individuals, were expected in the coming months.
- In 2021-22 there were 10 individual Afghans provided accommodation by settle.
- A meeting has taken place with the CEOs of Eastern regional Local Authorities and a further meeting will take place to agree a regional plan for the dispersal.
- A further Cabinet report will be produced when further details of the scheme have been confirmed.

In a response to a question from Councillor Ian Albert, Councillor Prendergast advised that it was too early at this stage to comment on possible budgetary requirements, until the regional plan is agreed.

119 DRAFT DEVELOPER CONTRIBUTIONS SPD

Audio recording – 78 minutes 47 seconds

The Executive Member for Planning and Transport presented the report entitled 'Draft Developer Contributions SPD' and provided Members with the following updates:

- An SPD was a Supplementary Planning Document and was produced as a suite of documents to sit alongside the Local Plan.
- The Local Plan Inspector's Report has now been received and examination has closed on this and a date will be set for this to be considered at Full Council.
- A number of changes were required to the SPD from its initial production in 2020, these centred around Greenspaces, First Homes, biodiversity gains and Levelling Up. Full details were provided at 8.2 in the report.
- The recommendation was for this to be put out for public consultation for 5 weeks.
- The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) had been explored previously and was last discussed in 2021 where it was agreed to maintain Section 106. It was expected that there would be changes made to the CILs and therefore, without confirmation of these changes, it was difficult to adopt.

In response to a question from Councillor Keith Hoskins, Councillor Brown advised that there was some discussions about whether CILs would be more lucrative and it certainly would not be for larger sites. Given the changes proposed in the Levelling Up policy, which included a mandatory Infrastructure Levy, it would not be worthwhile changing at this point.

In response to a question from Councillor Steve Jarvis, the Senior Planning Officer advised that there was a section in the draft SPD which covers the biodiversity net gain and would require a biodiversity net gain of 10% by 2023. This is outlined and details of reporting were included in the SPD. There is no target included in the Local Plan, as this is not mandatory, until required by the Environment Act 2021.

Councillor Ruth Brown proposed and Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the draft Developer Contributions SPD, attached as Appendix A to this report, were endorsed and approved for a five-week public consultation.

REASON FOR DECISION: To allow the Developer Contributions SPD to be progressed so that it may be adopted at the same time as, or shortly after, any future decision to adopt the new Local Plan.

N.B. Following the conclusion of this item, the Chair allowed for a 5 minute comfort break.

120 PROPOSED CONSERVATION AREA AT CHESFIELD

Audio recording – 96 minutes 27 seconds

The Executive Member for Planning and Transport presented the report entitled 'Proposed New Conservation Area for Chesfield Park' and provided Members with the following updates:

- This was part of the wider reviews of conservation areas across the district and this was a proposed new conservation area.
- A consultant had explored the area and have drawn up the proposals attached in the report.
- The recommendation is to send this for public consultation in October and November 2022.

Councillor Ruth Brown proposed and Councillor Judi Billing seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the draft CAAMP for the proposed conservation area around Chesfield Park was noted.
- (2) That approval was given for public consultation to take place on the draft proposal to designate a conservation area and the draft Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan around Chesfield Park.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To ensure that the conservation areas and historic assets within North Hertfordshire are appropriately assessed and designated to inform decision making for planning applications and in the preparation of local and neighbourhood plans.

121 ARTICLE 4 DIRECTIONS

Audio recording – 97 minutes 50 seconds

The Executive Member for Planning and Transport presented the report entitled 'Making of an Article 4 Direction for the District's Primary and Secondary Shopping Frontages' and advised Members of the following:

- Government rules around change of use from Class E to Class C3, from commercial to residential, would make it easier for this to happen to non-listed buildings.
- These proposals are to protect the businesses and retail in the town centres.
- The current Article 4 requirements expired in July 2022. There was no intention to extend this, but rather to make an Article 4 Direction for each of the town centres to ensure that any move from commercial to residential would have to come through Planning.
- The proposals were for an immediate Article 4 Direction, which would remove the Permitted Development Rights and the consultation would follow.
- This proposal was supported by the relevant BIDs and the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation.

Councillor Tom Plater noted that he was in favour of these proposals and it was good to see this applied immediately to protect the town centres and aid their recovery from the impacts of Covid 19.

Councillor Ruth Brown proposed and Councillor Keith Hoskins seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Cabinet endorsed the overall approach to Article 4 Directions set out in the report.
- (2) That Cabinet approved the making of immediate Article 4 Directions for non-listed buildings located within each of the District's town centre's defined primary and secondary shopping frontages (as detailed in Appendix A).
- (3) That each of the immediate Article 4 Directions shall come into force immediately on the day they are served (October 3 2022) and consultation shall take place for a period of 6 weeks beginning on October 10 2022.
- (4) That delegated powers should be granted to the Service Director – Regulatory in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Enterprise and Transport to confirm the immediate Article 4 Directions following consultation subject to no, or only minor, amendments being necessary.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) The new Article 4 Directions relate to change of use from Use Class E (commercial, business and services) to Use Class C3 (dwellinghouses).
- (2) Commercial, business and services in town centres are important as they provide residents with access to important goods and services whilst minimising the need to travel. To safeguard main town centre use2 floorspace, the Council has designated primary and secondary shopping frontages within the District's four town centres and established policies to encourage growth and prevent loss of these uses.
- (3) The making of the Article 4 Directions will support an overarching principle of the emerging Local Plan which seeks to ensure that there is a suitable balance between increased housing development and economic facilities to ensure sustainable development is achieved. The Article 4 Directions will prevent small-scale losses of main town centre use floorspace through change of use schemes to residential under permitted development.
- (4) The Council would apply the Directions to the non-listed buildings located within the primary and secondary shopping frontages as defined by Policy ETC4 and ETC5 in the new Local Plan (as proposed to be modified). By withdrawing this permitted development right (PDR) it means any Use Class E to residential conversions in areas where the Directions are made will require planning permission. This will allow Planning Officers to assess applications against national policy (NPPF) and our emerging Local Plan policies to ensure there is a suitable provision of shops, services and facilities within the town centres.

122 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2023/23

Audio recording – 101 minutes 46 seconds

The Executive Member for Finance and IT presented the report entitled 'Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2022/23', alongside the referral from Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, and advised of the following:

- The comments provided by Finance, Audit and Risk Members were welcomed and they supported the principles of the scheme.
- The scheme proposed here is not common amongst other authorities and Finance, Audit and Risk requested the ability to review this once implemented.
- The Council Tax Reduction scheme had not been fully reviewed since 2013.
- There was expected to be an increase in costs and this was being consulted with Preceptors involved.
- The recommendation also includes a requirement to hold a public consultation, which would take place alongside key partners, such as Citizens Advice.
- A number of iterations had been explored and this would be further reviewed before the proposals are brought back to Cabinet in December, and then onto Council in January 2023 for consideration.

Councillor Ruth Brown thanked the Executive Member and all Officers who had worked on this proposed scheme. She supported the aims of the scheme to provide further support for those most in need and simplifying the process, and anything the Council can do to support the lowest income families should be done. She noted that the impact of the cost of living had been highlighted at the North Herts Citizens Advice AGM.

Councillor Judi Billing advised that she and Councillor Albert had met with representatives from North Herts Citizens Advice, who had provided updates on where the support was most needed.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Judi Billing seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Cabinet noted that a full review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme is well underway and that consultation with the public and Major Precepting Authorities will run for six weeks from 14 September 2022.
- (2) That Cabinet noted the progress made so far on the review and that the intention is to introduce a new banded scheme for working age applicants from 01 April 2023.
- (3) That Cabinet noted the aim of the review is to introduce a new scheme that will:
 - a. enable us to increase the overall level of support for the lowest income households;
 - b. reduce the administrative burden placed on the Council following the introduction of Universal Credit whilst also;
 - c. make the scheme easier for our customers to understand and calculate entitlement.
- (4) That Cabinet noted that modelling the new scheme may increase the costs from those of the current scheme, any increase will be split between the Council and its Major Precepting Authorities. The Councils share will be 12.5%.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS: To ensure that the Council has a fit for purpose Council Tax Reduction Scheme that:

- a. Provides the greatest support to the lowest income households.
- b. Reduces the administrative burden that has been placed on the Council since the introduction of Universal Credit (UC).
- c. Is simple to understand, meaning that customers will be able to calculate entitlement and assess the impact of potential changes in circumstances.

123 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Audio recording – 107 minutes 40 seconds

RESOLVED: That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that the following report will involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).

124 SOFT PLAY INVESTMENT AT NORTH HERTS LEISURE CENTRE - PART 2

Details of decisions taken on this item are restricted due to the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of Section 200A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

125 SOFT PLAY INVESTMENT AT NORTH HERTS LEISURE CENTRE - PART 1

Audio recording – 115 minutes 35 seconds

Councillor Steve Jarvis presented the report entitled 'North Herts Leisure Centre Soft Play Investment' and advised Members of the following:

- Over the years several changes have been made to North Herts Leisure Centre to make it more suitable for users.
- This proposal is to repurpose two squash courts and changing rooms to be converted into a soft play area.
- There are currently four squash courts on site and these are significantly underused, with around 18% of capacity used throughout the week, with occasional peaks. Under this proposal two squash courts would remain.
- There was some previous concern about keeping the poolside changing rooms clean for dry-side users, and it is expected that cleaning will be doubled on site. There would still be one dry-side changing room.
- There has been an extensive consultation, with responses overwhelmingly in support of the proposal.
- Income is predicted of £50k in first year, and £60k in subsequent years.
- There was capital allocation for renovation of the changing rooms and this money will now be moved to this soft play scheme.
- These proposals will benefit users and allow more people to use the leisure centre.

In response to a question from Councillor Ruth Brown, Councillor Jarvis advised that the amount in total was £250,000.

Councillor Steve Jarvis proposed and Councillor Judi Billing seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet considered and agreed the soft play investment proposal.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:

- (1) That Council make the addition of £150k to the Capital programme in 2022/23.
- (2) That Council move the existing capital allocation of £100k in 2023/24 for refurbishment of the dry-side changing rooms to 2022/ 23 and reallocate it to the soft play project.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) Introducing a soft play facility at North Herts Leisure Centre will enhance the range of leisure facilities on offer and provide a dedicated play space for families with toddlers and young children within the local area.

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- (2) The new facility will generate additional revenue for the site, aiding the financial recovery of leisure post covid and providing an attractive additional facility for bidders when the new leisure contract is procured in 2024.

The meeting closed at 9.31 pm

Chair