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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES

Meeting of the Council held in the Council Chamber, District Council Offices, Gernon Road,
Letchworth Garden City, SG6 3JF
on Thursday, 25th May, 2023 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors: Daniel Allen, Ian Albert, Amy Allen, Matt Barnes, Clare Billing, Simon Bloxham, Ruth Brown, Cathy Brownjohn, Val Bryant, Sam Collins, Adam Compton, Mick Debenham, Elizabeth Dennis, James Denselow, Faye Frost, Dominic Griffiths, Chris Hinchliff, Terry Hone, Keith Hoskins, Steve Jarvis, David Levett, Chris Lucas, Ian Mantle, Daniel Marsh, Nigel Mason, Bryony May, Gerald Morris, Ralph Muncer, Michael Muir, Lisa Nash, Sean Nolan, Louise Peace, Tom Plater, Sean Prendergast, Claire Strong, Mandi Tandi, Richard Thake, Terry Tyler, Tom Tyson, Phil Weeder, Michael Weeks, Alistair Willoughby, Dave Winstanley and Daniel Wright-Mason

IN ATTENDANCE: Anthony Roche (Managing Director), Jeanette Thompson (Service Director - Legal and Community), Melanie Stimpson (Democratic Services Manager), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Eleanor Hopcraft (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Callum Reeve (Democratic Services Apprentice) and Sjanet Wickenden (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)

ALSO PRESENT: At the commencement of the meeting approximately 8 members of the public.

200 ELECTION OF A CHAIR OF COUNCIL FOR THE CIVIC YEAR 2023/2024

Audio recording – 1:03

The Service Director – Legal & Community called for nominations for the position of Chair of the Council for the Civic Year 2023-2024.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis nominated Councillor Daniel Allen, Councillor Ruth Brown seconded, and following a vote it was:

RESOLVED: That Councillor Daniel Allen be elected as Chair of the Council for the Civic Year 2023/24.

Councillor Daniel Allen took the Chair then read and signed the Statutory Declaration of Acceptance of Office and took possession of the Chain of Office. Councillor Allen thanked the Council for his election as Chair and advised that his Consort for the year would be Councillor Amy Allen.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Elizabeth Dennis seconded, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Council placed on record its sincere thanks and appreciation to Councillor Sam North for his services as Chair of the Council during the past year and to his consort, Councillor Raj Bhakar for her help and support during his term in office.

201 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 6:05

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors David Barnard, Raj Bhakar, Terry Tyler, Tamsin Thomas, Juan Cowell and Ian Moody.

202 ELECTION OF A VICE-CHAIR OF THE COUNCIL FOR THE CIVIC YEAR 2023/2024

Audio recording – 6:31

The Chair called for nominations for the position of Vice-Chair of the Council for the Civic Year 2023/24.

Councillor Ruth Brown nominated Councillor Chris Lucas. Councillor Elizabeth Dennis seconded, and following a vote it was:

RESOLVED: That Councillor Chris Lucas be elected as Vice-Chair of the Council for the Civic Year 2023/24.

Councillor Chris Lucas then read and signed the Statutory Declaration of Acceptance of Office and took possession of the Chain of Office. Councillor Lucas thanked the Council for his election as Vice-Chair.

203 MINUTES - 18 APRIL 2023

Audio Recording – 9:32

The Chair advised that the Minutes of the previous meeting could be moved and seconded by members who were not present at that meeting, although it is preferable that those who were not present should abstain from voting and commenting on the motion.

Councillor Daniel Allen, as Chair proposed, Councillor Elizabeth Dennis seconded, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 18 April 2023 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

Councillor Ralph Muncer raised a point of order regarding the answers he was awaiting to his supplementary question at the previous meeting of Full Council.

Councillor Ian Albert, Executive Member for Finance and IT advised that he had sent his response to the supplementary question to Committee Services and that it would be published in due course.

204 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 11:58

- (1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded;
- (2) The Chair reminded Members that the Council has declared a Climate Emergency. This was a serious decision and means 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. More details were included in the agenda front sheet.

- (3) The Chair reminded Members to make declarations of interest before an item, the detailed reminder about this and speaking rights was set out under the Chair's Announcements in the Agenda.
- (4) The Chair welcomed and congratulated the newly elected Members following the elections on 4 May: Councillors Dominic Griffiths, Dave Winstanley, Daniel Wright-Mason, Mick Debenham, Bryony May, Dan Marsh, Cathy Brownjohn, Matt Barnes and Louise Peace.
- (5) The Chair congratulated those Councillors successfully re-elected; Councillors Michael Muir, David Barnard, Sean Prendergast, Keith Hoskins, Steve Jarvis, Gerald Morris and Tom Tyson.
- (6) The Chair thanked former Councillors George Davies, Adem Ruggiero-Cakir, Sam North, Tony Hunter and Carol Stanier, who did not stand for re-election.
- (7) The Chair thanked former Councillors Morgan Derbyshire and Jean Green who were unsuccessful in being re-elected.
- (8) The Chair reminded new and returning Members to complete their Register of Interest forms online by 2 June 2023.
- 10) The Chair reminded Members, Agents and Election Candidates to complete the post-Election survey by 31 May 2023.
- 11) The Chair reminded Members to complete and return their elections expenses by 1 June 2023 for Town and Parish elections and 9 June 2023 for District Council elections.
- 12) The Chair advised that the normal procedure rules in respect of debate and times to speak will apply.
- 13) The Chair advised that his charities for the Civic Year 2023/24 would be Feed Up Warm up and Resolve.
- 14) The Chair offered thanks to Penny Copestake, Chair's Secretary, on behalf of former Chair Sam North, and announced that a gift of flowers had been arranged in recognition of her hard work and support.
- 15) The Chair congratulated James Lovegrove, the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager on his upcoming wedding.

205 DISTRICT COUNCIL ELECTION RESULTS (INCLUDING ALL POLLS) - 4 MAY 2023

Audio recording – 18:29

The Returning Officer presented the report regarding the results of the District Council elections, Town Council and Parish Council elections.

Councillor David Levett thanked all the staff involved in the elections.

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

RESOLVED: That the report of the Returning Officer regarding the results of the District Council elections, Town and Parish Council elections were noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To inform Members of the results of the District Council elections, Town and Parish Council elections

206 APPOINTMENT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER OF COUNCIL, MEMBERS OF THE CABINET AND DEPUTY EXECUTIVE MEMBERS FOR 2023/24

Audio recording – 20:00

The Chair advised, for purposes of clarification, that the Council was not electing a Leader of the Council at this meeting as Councillor Dennis was elected on a four-year term. He further advised Members to note that Appendix B to the report was within the supplementary pack

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis, Leader of the Council moved the report regarding the appointment of the Deputy Leader, Members of the Cabinet and Deputy Executive Members for the civic year 2023/24.

The Service Director – Legal and Community advised that she would update the Council's Constitution to reflect the renamed Community and Partnerships Executive appointment.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis proposed, Councillor Daniel Allen seconded, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the appointment of the Deputy Leader of the Council for the Civic Year 2023/24 was noted.
- (2) That the Members to be appointed as Executive Members of the Cabinet for 2023/24 and the areas for which they will be responsible as detailed in Appendix A were noted.
- (3) That the Members to be appointed as Deputy Executive Members for 2023/24 and the areas for which they will act as Deputy Executive Member as detailed at Appendix A were noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To comply with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000 and Sections 4.8.1 (a) (vii), 5.2, 5.3.4 and 5.6 of the Council's Constitution.

207 APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS OF COMMITTEES, JOINT COMMITTEES AND PANELS FOR 2023/24

Audio recording – 24:08

The Leader of the Council presented the report in respect of the appointment of Members of Committees, Joint Committees and panels for 2023/24 along with Appendices A and B.

Councillor Ruth Brown proposed amendments to Appendix B to the effect that Councillor Dominic Griffiths to become a member of the Standards Committee, Councillor Ruth Brown to become a member of the Council Tax Setting Committee, Councillor Ruth Brown to be removed as a substitute of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee, Councillor Ruth Brown to become a substitute of the Cabinet Panel for Environment, Councillor Ian Mantle to become a substitute of the Planning Control Committee and Councillor Keith Hoskins to become a substitute of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee.

The Leader of the Council accepted the amendments.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis advised that the Herts Growth Board Scrutiny Committee had not met since its inception and was currently revising their governance arrangements, therefore appointments had not been made to the Committee.

Councillor Ruth Brown advised that the remaining Member vacancy on the Overview & Scrutiny Committee would rotate between the three named substitutes.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Elizabeth Dennis seconded, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That, for 2023/24, the seats allocated to each political party on the Committees to which Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 applies and the seats allocated to each political party on the bodies to which Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 does not apply, as set out in Appendix A to this report, was noted.
- (2) That, for 2023/24, Members be appointed to the various Committees and other bodies in accordance with the wishes of the individual political groups, as detailed in Appendix B to this report. With the following amendments: Councillor Dominic Griffiths to become a member of the Standards Committee, Councillor Ruth Brown to become a member of the Council Tax Setting Committee, Councillor Ruth Brown to be removed as a substitute of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee, Councillor Ruth Brown to become a substitute of the Cabinet Panel on the Environment, Councillor Ian Mantle to become a substitute of the Planning Control Committee and Councillor Keith Hoskins to become a substitute of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee.

REASON FOR DECISION: To comply with the provisions of Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

208 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRS AND VICE-CHAIRS OF COMMITTEES FOR 2023/24

Audio recording – 30:02

The Leader of the Council presented the report in respect of Appointment of Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Committees for 2023/24, along with Appendix A.

The Chair noted that there was a vacancy for Vice-Chair on the Standards Committee.

Councillor Gerald Morris nominated Councillor Ralph Muncer for Vice-Chair on the Standards Committee. This was seconded by Councillor Adam Compton.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis confirmed that Councillor Ian Albert was nominated as Vice-Chair for the Standards Committee, and the vacancy listed in the report was an error. Councillor Ruth Brown seconded the nomination.

Councillor David Levett, as Leader of the Conservative group, withdrew the nomination of Councillor Muncer.

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

RESOLVED: That the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Committees (except Area Forums) for 2023/24 were appointed in accordance with the details set out in Appendix A to the report, as amended, with the inclusion that Councillor Ian Albert be appointed as Vice-Chair of the Standards Committee.

REASON FOR DECISION: To comply with the provisions of Standing Order 4.8.1(a)(ix) of the Council's Constitution.

209 ADJOURNMENT

Audio recording – 34:37

The meeting of the Annual Council was adjourned at 20:05 to allow meetings of each Area Forum to convene to elect Chairs and Vice-Chairs for the Civic Year.

The meeting of the Annual Council reconvened at 20:16.

210 KEY DECISIONS - LEADER'S ANNUAL REPORT ON CASES OF SPECIAL URGENCY

Audio recording – 45:42

The Leader of the Council presented the Annual Report of Cases of Special Urgency and advised that the three key decisions taken this year were writing off rent arrears around Churchgate, items surrounding the UK Shared Prosperity Funding and the bringing in-house of Careline which included installation and maintenance contracts.

Following the question from Councillor David Levett surrounding the write-off of rent arrears around Churchgate, Councillor Elizabeth Dennis advised that a written response would be given in due course outside of the meeting.

Councillor Ian Albert advised that he would be able to provide a written response and would come to a future Overview and Scrutiny meeting to discuss the matter.

Councillor Ralph Muncer highlighted an error in Section 8.2 of the report and noted the date of Decision should read 21 June 2022 instead of 21 June 2023.

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

RESOLVED: That the report was noted with the amended date.

REASON FOR DECISION: To comply with Regulation 19 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 (“the Regulations”).

211 SCHEDULE OF COUNCIL MEETINGS 2023/24

Audio recording – 52:03

The Leader of the council presented the report in respect of the Schedule of Council Meetings 2023/24, along with Appendix A.

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

RESOLVED: That the Calendar of Meetings for 2023/24, as attached as Appendix A, were approved.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

- (1) To enable Members to agree a programme of ordinary meetings of the Council for 2023/24.
- (2) To enable Members to agree the Calendar of meetings for 2023/24

212 NOMINATION OF REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS AND OTHER BODIES FOR 2023/24

Audio recording – 53:04

The Leader of the Council presented the report in respect of Nomination of Representatives on Outside Organisations or Other Bodies for 2023/24 along with Appendix A.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis proposed that the uncontested nominations as in Appendix A be approved. Councillor Ruth Brown seconded and following a vote that motion was carried.

Councillor David Levett confirmed the withdrawal of nominations from Baldock Town Twinning Association, Baldock United Almhouses Charities, Citizens Advice North Herts and Royston Town Twinning Association.

Councillor Ruth Brown confirmed the withdrawal of a nomination from Royston Old People's Day Care Centre.

N.B: A break in proceedings was taken at 20:27, and the meeting resumed at 20:36.

Votes were subsequently conducted on each contested nomination as highlighted in Appendix A of the report, with the results recorded as per those listed below.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the list of nominations of representatives on Outside Organisations and Other Bodies for 2023/24, as set out in Appendix A to the report was approved, with confirmation that:
 - a) The Council's representative to Baldock Community Forum Community Interest Company be Councillor Alistair Willoughby.
 - b) The Council's representatives to Baldock Town Twinning Association be Councillors Alistair Willoughby and Juan Cowell.
 - c) The Council's representative to Baldock United Almhouses Charities be Councillors Michael Muir, Michael Weeks and Alistair Willoughby;
 - d) The Council's representatives to Citizens Advice North Herts be Councillors Louise Peace, Daniel Marsh and Simon Bloxham.
 - e) The Council's representative to Letchworth Civic Trust be Councillors Phil Weeder and Daniel Allen.
 - f) The Council's representative to Letchworth Garden City BID be Councillor Daniel Allen;
 - g) The Council's representative to London Luton Airport Consultative Committee be Councillor Steve Jarvis;
 - h) The Council's representative to Police and Crime Panel be Councillor Alistair Willoughby.
 - i) The Council's representative to Royston Old People's Day Centre Committee (Royston Old Barn) be Councillor Cathy Brownjohn.
 - j) The Council's representative to Royston Town Twinning Association be Councillor Cathy Brownjohn.
- (2) That Political Group Leaders notify the Democratic Services Manager of nominations to the remaining vacancies or any changes to the existing representatives on outside organisations.

REASON FOR DECISION: To comply with the provisions of Standing Order 4.8.1(b)(iv) and (v) of the Council's Constitution

213 NOTICE OF URGENT MOTION

Audio recording – 1:11:45

Councillor Clare Billing moved the motion and commented that there was concern for the safety of Members following the fire at the District Council Offices, as well as the results of a 2022 Local Government Association survey in which 7 out of 10 Councillors reported abuse. It should be up to the individual to choose if they wanted their addresses to be displayed on the public website, rather than the standard as is currently the case.

Councillor Amy Allen seconded the motion.

The following Members took part in debate:

- Councillor David Levett
- Councillor Gerald Morris
- Councillor Faye Frost
- Councillor Steve Jarvis
- Councillor Adam Compton
- Councillor Amy Allen
- Councillor Richard Thake
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Michael Muir
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Chris Lucas

Points raised during the debate include:

- Councillors should be able to opt in to have their address displayed on the website.
- Members could make themselves available to members of the Public in other ways such as Community Surgeries.
- It was not acceptable that Members, Council Staff and Contractors were the subject of abuse.
- Some Members wanted to be as easily contactable as possible and therefore were happy to have their details shared on the internet, but could understand the views of others who may feel more at risk.

In response to the question from Councillor Adam Compton, the Service Director – Legal and Community advised that it was not within North Hertfordshire Council's remit to remove addresses from Parish Council websites.

Councillor Clare Billing proposed and Councillor Amy Allen seconded, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Council:

- (1) At the discretion of all current members, remove councillor addresses from the Councillor directory (but maintain the entry in the Declaration of Pecuniary Interests until such time as legislative change is effected);
- (2) Adopt the default position that councillors opt in, rather than opt out, of having their addresses published on the Councillor Directory;
- (3) Write to the local Members of Parliament to ask them to support the LGA's Debate Not Hate campaign;

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- (4) Write to the Government to ask them to work with the LGA to develop and implement a plan to address abuse and intimidation of all politicians;
- (5) Work with MPs and the LGA to bring about legislative change giving councillors and their families the same protection as MPs;
- (6) Ensure the council has a clear reporting mechanism which councillors can use to monitor and record incidents of harassment and abuse of councillors, officers, staff and contractors;
- (7) Regularly review the support available to councillors in relation to abuse and intimidation and councillor safety;
- (8) Work with the local police to ensure there is a clear and joined-up mechanism for reporting threats and other concerns about the safety of councillors and their families and discuss the need to take a preventative approach that accounts for the specific risks that councillors face, as they do with other high-risk individuals, like MPs;
- (9) Take a zero-tolerance approach to abuse of councillors, officers, staff and contractors working with us. Where such occurs, this Council will robustly condemn acts of intimidation and violence against our staff, contractors and councillors.

The meeting closed at 9.01 pm

Chair

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