

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, 23rd January, 2025 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors: Clare Billing (Chair), Tina Bhartwas (Vice-Chair), Ian Albert, Daniel Allen, Amy Allen, David Barnard, Matt Barnes, Sadie Billing, Ruth Brown, Cathy Brownjohn, Val Bryant, David Chalmers, Jon Clayden, Ruth Clifton, Mick Debenham, Elizabeth Dennis, Emma Fernandes, Joe Graziano, Keith Hoskins, Steve Jarvis, Tim Johnson, Chris Lucas, Ian Mantle, Nigel Mason, Bryony May, Caroline McDonnell, Ralph Muncer, Lisa Nash, Sean Nolan, Louise Peace, Vijaiya Poopalasingham, Sean Prendergast, Martin Prescott, Emma Rowe, Claire Strong, Tom Tyson, Paul Ward, Laura Williams, Alistair Willoughby, Stewart Willoughby, Claire Winchester, Dave Winstanley, Donna Wright and Daniel Wright-Mason.

IN ATTENDANCE: Anne Banner (Benefits Manager), Amy Cantrill (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), Jo Dufficy (Service Director - Customers), Geraldine Goodwin (Revenues Manager and Data Protection Officer), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Callum Reeve (Electoral Services Assistant), Anthony Roche (Managing Director), Melanie Stimpson (Democratic Services Manager) and Jeanette Thompson (Service Director - Legal and Community).

ALSO PRESENT:

At the commencement of the meeting approximately 2 members of the public were in attendance.

75 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minutes 46 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tamsin Thomas, Dominic Griffiths, Sam Collins, Steven Patmore, Michael Muir, Sarah Lucas and Rhona Cameron.

76 MINUTES - 28 NOVEMBER 2024

Audio Recording – 2 minutes 28 seconds

Prior to consideration of the Minutes, Councillor David Barnard provided an apology to Officers and Members following comments he had made at the previous meeting of Council.

Councillor Clare Billing, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Daniel Allen seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 28 November 2024 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

77 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 5 seconds

There was no other business notified.

78 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 11 seconds

- (1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be recorded.
- (2) The Chair reminded Members that the Council had declared both a Climate Emergency and an Ecological Emergency. These are serious decisions, and mean 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) 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.
- (4) The Chair advised that the normal procedure rules in respect of debate and times to speak will apply.
- (5) The Chair advised that 4.8.23(a) of the Constitution did not apply to this meeting. A comfort break would be held at an appropriate time, should proceedings continue at length.
- (6) The Chair agreed a change to the order of the published agenda and Agenda Item 6 'Questions from Members' and Agenda Item 7 'Notice of Motions' were taken after Agenda Item 13.
- (7) The Chair had agreed that Agenda Item 9 'Community Governance Review – Draft Proposals for Public Consultation' be deferred to the Full Council meeting on Thursday 27 February 2025.

At 19:37 Councillor Sadie Billing left the Council Chamber.

- (8) The Chair announced that Louise Symes, Strategic Planning and Projects Manager, had been working at North Hertfordshire for 30 years, and extended gratitude to Louise for her services to the Council. Councillor Daniel Allen also commended Louise for her work and dedication.

Councillor Clare Billing, as Chair, proposed, Councillor Daniel Allen seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Council placed on record its sincere thanks and appreciation to Louise Symes for her long and valuable service to Local Government.

At 19:42 Councillor Sadie Billing returned to the meeting.

- (9) The Chair announced that sadly former District Councillor Tony Hunter had passed away on 7 January 2025, and the following Members paid tribute:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor David Barnard
- Councillor Tina Bhartwas

Following on from the tributes members and officers stood for a minute's silence in commemoration .

79 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 19 minutes 23 seconds

There was no public participation at this meeting.

80 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Audio recording – 19 minutes 38 seconds

The Chair advised that the referrals 8A, 8B and 8C from Cabinet would be taken with the respective items on the agenda.

81 COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW - DRAFT PROPOSALS FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Audio recording – 20 minutes 28 seconds

As previously advised this item had been deferred to the meeting of Full Council on 27 February 2025.

82 REVIEW OF MEMBERS ALLOWANCES SCHEME

Audio recording – 20 minutes 37 seconds

The Democratic Service Manager introduced the report entitled 'Review of Members Allowances Scheme' and advised that:

- The Council was currently required to agree on an annual basis, a Scheme of Allowances payable to members for the following financial year. The current Scheme was approved by Council in January 2024.
- Under the regulations when making or accepting a scheme the Council shall have regard to the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP).
- The scheme being purposed by the IRP included an annual indexation therefore if approved would I not require a review until 2028, post the next scheduled District Council elections.

The Chair invited Ms. Margaret Waller, as Chair of the IRP to present their report. Ms. Waller highlighted the following, that:

- Remuneration should not be seen as an incentive to service nor should the lack of it be seen as a barrier to participation.
- The proposals included within this report aimed to depoliticise the process of Member allowances.
- The increase to the basic allowance of 4.1% was in line with Council staff pay award and that for the next three years all basic allowance increases would be in line with Council staff pay award.
- The new basic allowance would be £5,999, which was slightly below average for neighboring councils.
- One of the options looked at was increasing basic allowance in line with inflation. However, this was discarded as it would not close the gap identified by the baseline evaluation.

Thursday, 23rd January, 2025

- The IRP looked at benchmarking payments for Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA) against national figures for councils with similar workloads, as detailed in the data at Appendix 2 and 4.
- Childcare and Dependent Care Allowances were recommended to increase annually in line with the October 2024 London weighted Real Living Wage of £13.85 per hour.
- Travel and subsistence rates would remain the same. However, it was proposed that Councillor could now claim expenses for a taxi on exceptions where no other public transport was available.

The following members asked questions:

- Councillor Matt Barnes
- Councillor Alistair Willoughby

In response to questions, the IRP Chair advised that:

- The IRP did not enquire about the Councils budget forecast as the report was based purely on review findings.
- The SRA for the Chair of Standards was not raised within the survey and therefore had not been considered for an increase within this review.

The Chair advised that each recommendation would be taken individually.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed recommendation 2.1, Councillor Tina Bhartwas seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Council considered the report and recommendations of the IRP, as attached as Appendix A of the submitted report.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed recommendation 2.2, and Councillor Val Bryant seconded.

Councillor Ralph Muncer proposed an amendment to freeze both the Basic Allowance and Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA) for the 2025/26 financial year. Councillor David Barnard seconded the amendment.

The following members took part in the debate about the amendment:

- Councillor Nigel Mason
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor David Barnard
- Councillor Matt Barnes

The following was raised during the debate:

- The Council ask for the view of an IRP and in most cases getting independent advice would make debate limited.
- The time for a freeze in allowances was in the past, when Council staff were experiencing a pay freeze.

Having been proposed and seconded, a recorded vote having been requested, the amendment was LOST the result was as follows:

YES:	5
ABSTAIN:	18
NO:	21
TOTAL:	44

The individual results were as follows:

Cllr Ian Albert	NO
Cllr Amy Allen	NO
Cllr Daniel Allen	NO
Cllr David Barnard	YES
Cllr Matt Barnes	ABSTAIN
Cllr Tina Bhartwas	NO
Cllr Clare Billing	NO
Cllr Sadie Billing	NO
Cllr Ruth Brown	ABSTAIN
Cllr Cathy Brownjohn	NO
Cllr Val Bryant	NO
Cllr David Chalmers	ABSTAIN
Cllr Jon Clayden	ABSTAIN
Cllr Ruth Clifton	ABSTAIN
Cllr Mick Debenham	NO
Cllr Elizabeth Dennis	ABSTAIN
Cllr Emma Fernandes	NO
Cllr Joe Graziano	YES
Cllr Keith Hoskins	ABSTAIN
Cllr Steve Jarvis	ABSTAIN
Cllr Tim Johnson	ABSTAIN
Cllr Chris Lucas	ABSTAIN
Cllr Ian Mantle	NO
Cllr Nigel Mason	NO
Cllr Bryony May	ABSTAIN
Cllr Caroline McDonnell	ABSTAIN
Cllr Ralph Muncer	YES
Cllr Lisa Nash	ABSTAIN
Cllr Sean Nolan	NO
Cllr Louise Peace	ABSTAIN
Cllr Vijaiya Poopalasingham	NO
Cllr Sean Prendergast	ABSTAIN
Cllr Martin Prescott	YES
Cllr Emma Rowe	NO
Cllr Claire Strong	YES
Cllr Tom Tyson	ABSTAIN
Cllr Paul Ward	ABSTAIN
Cllr Laura Williams	NO
Cllr Alistair Willoughby	NO
Cllr Stewart Willoughby	NO
Cllr Claire Winchester	ABSTAIN
Cllr Dave Winstanley	NO
Cllr Donna Wright	NO
Cllr Daniel Wright-Mason	NO

Councillor Alistair Willoughby proposed an amendment to the original motion of a freeze to SRA's at their current rate for the year 2025/26 only, which was seconded by Councillor Nigel Mason.

The following members took part in the debate on the amendment:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Laura Williams

- Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham
- Councillor Tim Johnson
- Councillor David Barnard
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Nigel Mason

The following was raised during the debate:

- The report was produced by an independent panel and the council should accept their assessment.
- The amendment still recommended an increase to the basic allowance pay rise for all Members, which may not be well received by the public, especially those that were struggling financially.
- Councillors came from different backgrounds and to continue to promote and encourage a diverse Council it must be accessible for all; this recommendation struck the balance between being access while not overpaying.
- An increase in bus fares, train fares and a loss of winter fuel allowances has affected pensioners, this was an issue for the public but also Members of pension age.
- The Member pay rise would be in line with Officers at the Council.

Following a vote the amendment was **CARRIED**.

There was no further debate on the substantive motion.

Following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Council agreed the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2025/2026 as set out in Appendix B, amended as per tracked with specified indexation has been applied for up to the next four years, through to 31 March 2029, subject to a freeze to any increase in Special Responsibility Allowances for 2025/2026. (From 1 April 2026 the Special Responsibility Allowances, as identified by the IRP in Recommendation 12 of their report will be index linked).

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed recommendation 2.3, Councillor Val Bryant seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: The Council expressed appreciation to the IRP for their work over the last year on this report.

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

N.B. Following the conclusion of this Item, Councillor Sadie Billing left the Chamber and returned at 21.00.

83 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2025/26

Audio recording – 1 hours 13 minutes 48 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen presented the referral from 8A Cabinet stating:

- Each year the Council was required to review its Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) in accordance with the requirements of the schedule 1A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and to either maintain the scheme, revise the scheme, or replace it.
- The Council carried out a full review of its Council Tax Reduction Scheme in 2022/23. The review resulted in the introduction of a banded scheme from 2023/24. The new scheme was now coming to the end of its second year.

- Following a review two adjustments were needed in 2024/25, these were in relation to the Post Office compensation scheme and an uplift to the bands to reflect the Consumer Price Index.

Councillor Ian Albert presented the report entitled 'Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2025/2026' and highlighted the following:

- The adjustments were made to continue to support those in most need, the council has enhanced its policy on handling and investigating fraud.
- The CTRS was divided into two Schemes one for working age, which accounts for two thirds of the claimants and one for pension age, the other third.
- The banded scheme was effective as it had reduced the administrative burden and feedback received was that it was now easier to understand.
- A hardship scheme was introduced, but the take up was low with just 6 applications in the year 2023/24 and no applications in the year 2024/25.
- It was recognised that higher inflation may negatively affect some therefore a recommendation had been included to increase the bands to mitigate this.
- For year 2025/26 the Cabinet reviewed options but apart from the two mentioned above they were decided against to reduce hardship to the constituents as well as cost to the Council.
- The CTRS in 2024/25 cost approximately £9.18m, with these costs shared between the Council and the Major Precepting Authorities which were approximately 76% County Council, 12% Police and Crime Commissioner, 12% District Council.
- The reduction to the tax base resulted in an estimated reduction in funding for North Herts of £12,000.

As part of the debate Councillor Matt Barnes thanked Councillor Ian Albert for providing a detailed introduction which answered outstanding questions and advised he would support the recommendations.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed, and Councillor Daniel Allen seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Council:

- (1) Approved the continuation of the banded scheme for working age applicants which remains largely unchanged for 2025/2026, a small adjustment to the income bands to reflect CPI has been incorporated to ensure the scheme continues to support those most in need.
- (2) Noted the cost of the scheme is currently £9.18m noting that this is not an actual cost but a reduction of the amount of council tax collected.
- (3) Noted that the Discretionary Exceptional Hardship Scheme, previously agreed to provide additional transitional support will continue to be used to support cases of exceptional hardship.

REASONS FOR DECISION: To ensure that the Council has a Council Tax Reduction Scheme that continues to:

- (1) Provide the greatest support to the lowest income households.
- (2) Reduce the administrative burden that has been placed on the Council since the introduction of Universal Credit (UC)
- (3) Be simple to understand, meaning that customers will be able to calculate entitlement and assess the impact of potential changes in circumstances.

N.B. Following the conclusion of this item, Councillor Elizabeth Denis left the Chamber and returned at 20:56

84 Q2 INVESTMENT STRATEGY (INTEGRATED CAPITAL AND TREASURY) MONITORING

Audio recording – 1 hours 22 minutes 47 seconds

N.B Councillor Paul Ward, having declared an interest due to his employment, left the Chamber at 20.53 and did not take place in the debate or vote.

Councillor Daniel Allen presented referral 8B from Cabinet.

Councillor Ian Albert presented the report 'Second Quarter Investment Strategy (Capital and Treasury) Review 2024/25' and highlighted that:

- This followed the recent decision to progress with the Leisure Centre Decarbonisation Scheme and sought approval for capital expenditure for 2025/26 to take place alongside those works.
- The Council would generate £2.4M of interest in 2024/25 from investments made during the first half of the year and it was forecast that the Council would generate £2.8M of interest over the whole of 2024/25.
- The changes proposed and agreed by Cabinet were outlined in Table 3 of the report and included a full review of expected spend in this year.
- The amount required for the changing rooms upgrade had increased from previous forecasts to £330k but the estimate for the flume remained unchanged at £300k.
- Improved facilities would be popular with residents and would support the income to the Council from these facilities.

In response to a question from Councillor Ralph Muncer, the Service Director – Resources advised that the contractor who operate North Herts Leisure Centre provided income based on the leisure facilities meeting certain conditions, including a working flume and adequate changing facilities.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed, Councillor Val Bryant seconded the recommendation and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Council:

- (1) Noted the position of Treasury Management activity as at the end of September 2024.
- (2) Approved capital budgets in 2025/26 for a new flume (£300k) and a refurbishment of the pool changing rooms (£330k) at North Herts Leisure Centre.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

- (1) Cabinet has approved adjustments to the capital programme and has ensured 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.
- (3) The proposal to approve the 2025/26 capital budgets at North Herts Leisure Centre in January (rather than in the usual budget report at the end of February) means that the works can take place at the same time as the decarbonisation works, and therefore not

require two periods where the pool cannot be used. It also provides a more obvious benefit to users of the facility.

N.B. At 21:00 following the conclusion of this item, there was a comfort break and the meeting reconvened at 21.11.

N.B. During the break, Councillor Lisa Nash left the meeting and did not return.

85 CONSTITUTIONAL AND GOVERNANCE REVIEW

Audio recording – 1 hour 41 minutes 53 seconds

The Service Director – Legal and Community presented the report titled 'Constitutional & Governance Review' and highlighted the following:

- Since the original publication of the report in November, recommendations 2.9 to 2.12 had been added to the report with 2.11 and 2.12 included in the supplementary document.
- Due to the complexities each recommendation had been reviewed individually within the report.
- The Devolution White Paper required Authorities to have a Standards Committee as covered in recommendation 2.4.
- Recommendations cover in 2.5 covered the rules of debate, the length of speech, the number of motions and questions which can be submitted by Members and how long is spent on each one.
- Recommendation 2.6 outlined the delegation for further minor amendments to the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Working Group, for practical purposes.
- The threshold for Non-Executive Delegated Decision was set in 2015 at £50k and recommendation 2.7 sought to increase this to £75K.
- A minor amendment to the names of the Community Forums for Baldock and Royston were requested as outlined in recommendation 2.8
- Outlined in 2.9 was the biodiversity Duty and subsequent amendments to section 14 of the constitution.
- Outlined in 2.10 is the proposed amendments to section 14 of the Constitution relating to the Local Government Ombudsman report.
- 2.11 made recommendations on presentations by the Public.
- 2.12 made recommendations regarding the temporary arrangements for the Service Director - for Housing and Environmental Health until the end of March 2025.

N.B. Councillor Sadie Billing left the Chamber and returned at 21.44.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Matt Barnes
- Councillor David Barnard
- Councillor Martin Prescott

The Service Director – Legal and Community gave the following responses:

- Debates on Motions had been based, following as suggestion, as per the practice by Hertfordshire County Council.
- The intention was to create a reasonable cut off period for meetings and therefore the item being considered at 10.30pm would be the last item at that meeting. There was no discretion for the Chair.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Nigel Mason seconded to approve recommendation 2.1

The following Members took part in the Debate:

- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis

The following points were raised as part of the debate:

- If items 2.2 and 2.3 were carried, then Planning Control Committee Sub-Committee meetings would be needed to get through all items.
- Planning applications could be discussed closer to the area where the site was located, and a Sub-Committee could support this process.
- The Planning Control Committee was about serving the community and could the lack of Sub-Committees slow this down.

Following a vote it was:

RESOLVED: That Council approved the removal of the Planning Control Committee Sub-Committee meetings from the 2025 calendar.

N.B. Councillor Ruth Clifton left the meeting at 21.37 and did not return.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Val Bryant seconded to approve recommendation 2.2

The following Members took part in the Debate:

- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Nigel Mason
- Councillor Emma Fernandes
- Councillor Ian Mantle

The following points were raised as part of the debate:

- Public engagement at the Planning Control Committee was higher than any other committee and it was important that the public could see the whole meeting, changing the start time might make this harder for people to attend.
- Better management of Planning Control Committee meetings and agendas could ensure all items were considered without needing to change times.
- Having an earlier start was likely to lead to earlier finish times, which was better for the public and Members.
- Giving more time may increase the length of the work.

Following a vote it was:

RESOLVED: That Council approves that Planning Control Committee meetings commence at 7pm, from January 2025.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed, and Councillor Val Bryant seconded to approve recommendation 2.3

The following Members took part in the Debate:

- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Claire Strong

- Councillor Ian Mantle
- Councillor Tom Tyson
- Councillor Nigel Mason

The following points were raised as part of the debate:

- Without a discretion for the Chair, there was a risk that applications would miss required deadlines and house building would be blocked.
- Increased government building targets with these constraints could lead to four Planning Control Committee meetings a month to meet targets.
- Councillors were happy to follow the lead of the Chair of the Planning Control Committee especially as this would help with a backlog.
- If items were deferred due to time constraints, this could be considered as non-determination and also be difficult for members of the public.
- An option that could be looked at was splitting the District into two separate Planning Committees.
- Substitutes are available for Councillors who were unable to attend a meeting.
- The recommendation if approved would not apply to the meeting on the 30 January as the summons had been published.
- Starting at 7pm with a suggested end of 10:30pm was good for effective decision making.

Councillor Daniel Allen amended the recommendation that the cut off at 10.30pm would be at the discretion of the Chair, which was agreed by Councillor Val Bryant as the seconder.

Following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Council approves a Planning Control Committee Council Procedure Rule, that, any item under the consideration of the Committee, at 10.30 pm, will be the concluding item of the meeting, with any remaining business to be considered at the next available meeting (subject to the discretion of the Chair on a remaining item). Such amendment to take effect from January 2025.

Councillor Alistar Willoughby proposed, and Councillor Ralph Muncer seconded to approve recommendation 2.4, following a vote it was:

RESOLVED: That Council approved the Standards Committee's Terms of Reference be amended to include remit to consider and adopt or recommend adoption to the relevant decision-making body of relevant Ethical Standards Codes, or Protocols; and undertake any annual review of sections 1-18 of the Constitution (with the Monitoring Officer), prior to recommended change to Full Council.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed, and Councillor Val Bryant seconded to approve recommendation 2.5.i

Councillor Ralph Muncer proposed an amendment that 4.8.2 (g), relating to Motions on Notice, be moved to the end of the agenda, but Questions from Members to remain at the start. This was seconded by Councillor David Barnard.

Following a vote, the amendment was **LOST**

The following Members took part in the Debate:

- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Claire Strong

The following points were raised as part of the debate:

- This should be flexible based on which is most appropriate or important to the public.
- These kinds of decisions do not need to be part of the constitution but left to the discretion of the Chair.

Following a vote it was:

RESOLVED: That Council approved the proposed amendments to the Council Procedure Rules ('CPR') on Member Motions, Member Questions and Rules of Debate, as follows, CPR 4.8.2 (f) and (g) order of business be move to the end of the meeting.

N.B. Councillor Sadie Billing returned to the Chamber at 22.19.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed, and Councillor Val Bryant seconded to approve recommendation 2.5.ii.

The following Members took part in the Debate:

- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Alistair Willoughby
- Councillor Matt Barnes
- Councillor Chris Lucas
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Joe Graziano

The following points were raised as part of the debate:

- This was one way in which opposition groups could directly challenge the administration. Discretion should be left with Group Leaders to ensure their Members did not bring forward a motion that was not necessary.
- By setting a limit the Council would set a target, rather than limiting motions, as data showed that no political group has brought more than two Motions to Council prior to this.
- These kinds of decisions did not need to be part of the Constitution but left to the discretion of the Chair.

Councillor Daniel Allen amended the recommendation that there would be a maximum of three motions per political group. This was agreed by Councillor Val Bryant, as the seconder

Following a vote, the recommendation was **LOST**

N.B. Councillor Caroline McDonnell and Emma Rowe left the Chamber. Councillor McDonnell returned at 22.22 and Councillor Rowe returned at 22.28.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Tina Bhartwas seconded to approve recommendation 2.5.iii.

The following Members took part in the Debate:

- Councillor Tina Bhartwas
- Councillor Chris Lucas
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Matt Barnes
- Councillor Nigel Mason
- Councillor Alistair Willoughby

- Councillor Sadie Billing
- Councillor Laura Williams

The following points were raised as part of the debate:

- There was concern that the Council would stop debating topics that had a substantial impact on the District, due to Members not having power to affect such things.
- A request to write to a Secretary of State on a matter could be made directly to the Leader of the Council, without the need to submit a Motion
- It should be for Group Leaders to discourage Motions that were not within the remit of the Council
- Debate on items of national importance allowed Members to come together with one voice.
- This was too prescriptive and prevented avenues for supporting residents.

The Service Director – Legal and Community advised that it would be down to the Chair to decide what was considered within the scope.

The Managing Director advised that this wording was previously included within the Constitution.

In reply, Councillor Daniel Allen stated that Members could directly request that he wrote to Members of Parliament, however these were currently only requested via Motions.

Following a vote, the recommendation was **LOST**

N.B. Councillor Amy Allen left the Chamber and returned at 22.50.

N.B. Councillor Martin Prescott left the Chamber at 22.37 and did not return.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed, and Councillor Val Bryant seconded to approve recommendation 2.5.iv including the amendment to allow 30 minutes of debate per Motion

Councillor Ralph Muncer proposed, and Councillor David Barnard seconded an amendment to remove the 90-minute guillotine.

The following Members too part in the Debate on the amendment:

- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor Alistair Willoughby
- Councillor Chris Lucas
- Councillor Daniel Allen

The following points were raised as part of the debate on the amendment:

- There was clarification that there would be 30 minutes discussion per Motion, with no limit on the number of Motions submitted.
- A limit could lead to filibustering in an attempt to stop debate.
- Motions were part of Council business and the guillotine would limit democratic debate.

Following a vote, this amendment was **CARRIED**.

The following Members took part in the Debate:

- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Ralph Muncer

The following points were raised as part of the Debate on the substantive motion:

- Councillors should respect the time of other Members, accept when a point has already been made by a colleague and not repeat the same point.
- These decisions should be left to the discretion of the Chair, rather than limiting democratic debate through the Constitution.
- Motions can encourage new members to talk and get involved in debates.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed an amendment that debates on Motions be up to 30 minutes rather than 15 minutes, and this was seconded by Councillor Val Bryant.

Following a vote it was:

RESOLVED: That Council approves CPR 4.8.12 (d) Motions on Notice - Debate to be up to 30 minutes per Motion.

*N.B. Councillors Sadie Billing, Keith Hoskins and Elizabeth Dennis left the Chamber.
Councillor Hoskins returned at 22.49 and Councillor Dennis returned at 22.52.*

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed, and Councillor Val Bryant seconded to approve recommendation 2.5.v.

The following Members took part in the Debate:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor David Barnard

The following points raised in the debate were:

- This recommendation was not necessary and the current system of leaving it to the discretion of the Chair was satisfactory.
- This was the procedure used for questions, and it seemed fair to apply this for motions too.

Following a vote it was:

RESOLVED: That Council approves CPR 4.8.12 Motions on Notice – order of Motions shall be debated in rotation commencing with the largest opposition group, followed by the remaining opposition groups in descending order of group size and the administration group ending the round this order would be repeated until all Motions have been considered.

N.B. Councillor Sadie Billing returned to the Chamber at 23.09

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed, and Councillor Val Bryant seconded to approve recommendation 2.5.vi

The following Members took part in the Debate:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Paul Ward

The following points were raised as part of the debate:

- It was clarified that any extension to this time would remain at the discretion of the Chair.
- This would encourage Councillors to think more about what they said.

Following a vote it was:

RESOLVED: That Council approves CPR 4.8.14 (e) Content and Length of Speeches – to be reduced per Councillor to three minutes.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed, and Councillor Matt Barnes seconded to approve recommendation 2.6 and 2.12 and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Council approves:

- (1) The delegation to the Monitoring Officer to finalise any amendments relating to recommendations 2.3-2.5, as approved, in consultation with the Constitutional and Governance Working Group, and thereafter to be reported to Councillors via the Member Information Service.
- (2) To note that the Managing Director has extended the temporary Service Director Housing & Environmental Health arrangements, as per his Delegated Decision of 18 December 2024, until 31 March 2025 – and that section 14 will be amended accordingly.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed, and Councillor Val Bryant seconded to approve recommendation 2.7.

As part of the Debate, Councillor Ralph Muncer noted that £25K was not a small amount of money and it was important that the Council have oversight with large spending.

Following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Council approves the increase of the Non-Executive Delegated Decision financial/ contractual threshold reporting limit to £75K (from £50K) and instructs the Service Director Resources and Monitoring Officer to make the necessary amendments to the Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Regulations (and relevant Guidance documentation) accordingly.

Councillor Val Bryant proposed, and Councillor Alistair Willoughby seconded to approve recommendation 2.8 and following a vote it was:

RESOLVED: That Council approves as the non-Decision-making body by vote of assent), that the Leader will exercise his Executive function, to change the names of the following Community Forums:

- (2.7.1) Baldock and District – to become Baldock and Villages Community Forum.
- (2.7.2) Royston and District – to become Royston and Villages Community Forum.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed, and Councillor Val Bryant seconded to approve recommendation 2.9 and following a vote it was:

RESOLVED: That Council approves to amend section 14.6.11(b)(iv)A as detailed in paragraph 8.6-8.8 (namely):

“all functions of the Local Planning Authority primarily Planning Policy and Development Control (including enforcement functions, authorising expenditure of planning obligation monies, Biodiversity Net Gain, and Environmental Impact Assessment functions, and Tree Preservation Orders), other than matters reserved to the Planning Control Committee”

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed, and Councillor Dave Winstanley seconded to approve recommendation 2.10 and following a vote it was:

RESOLVED: That Council approves the revisions to section 14 of the Constitution relating to LGO decisions and payments, as detailed under section 8.5 of the Cabinet report, as follows:

14.6.5(a)(xiii) Managing Director's delegation:

"(xiii) To consider any report of the Local Government Ombudsman and to settle any compensation payments ~~up to £2000~~ (in conjunction with the section 151 Officer and Monitoring Officer)"

14.6.13 Proper Officers Schedule:

"Local Government Act 1974 S.30(5) To give notice and that copies of an Ombudsman's report, in draft and final are available to the Managing Director, and Monitoring Officer (where maladministration identified)"

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed, and Councillor Val Bryant seconded to approve recommendation 2.11 and following a vote it was:

RESOLVED: That Council approves to amend section 4.8.9(e) Presentations by the Public as follows:

(e) Number of presentations: At any one meeting no person or organisation may make more than ~~two~~ one presentations per agenda item (or combined referral and main item) and no more than two such presentations may be made on behalf of one organisation.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS: To ensure the arrangements are up-to date and fit for purpose.

N.B. At 23:09 at the end of this item there was a comfort break and the meeting resumed at 23:16.

86 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

Audio recording – 3 hours 47 minutes

In accordance with Standing Order 4.8.11, four questions had been submitted by the required deadline set out in the Constitution.

(A) Free After 3pm Parking

Councillor Tim Johnson to Councillor Daniel Allen (Interim Executive Member for Planning and Transport):

"Can the Executive Member for Planning and Transport clarify why the administration is getting rid of free after three pm parking in Royston, citing consistency across the area, when anomalies are allowed to remain elsewhere, and what consultation has been done with local businesses?"

Councillor Daniel Allen gave a response as follows:

"The parking was never free it was a subsidised tariff paid for by the Herts County Council members and since this is no longer being paid, the District has published the tariff, so any organisation has transparency as to what needs to be subsidised."

A supplementary question was asked by Councillor Tim Johnson:

“Will the Cabinet publish the impact assessment undertaken in June 2023?”

Councillor Daniel Allen gave a response as follows:

“The assessment will be published in due course and has already been shared with the relevant parties.”

(B) Response to Local Government Re-Organisation White Paper

Councillor Ralph Muncer to Councillor Daniel Allen (Leader of the Council):

“To ask the Leader of the Council what proposals the administration intend to bring forward in response to the Local Government Re-organisation announced as part of the Government’s English Devolution White Paper?”

Councillor Daniel Allen gave a response as follows:

“The Council is working with colleagues from the County Council, all 10 of the District and Borough Councils and the Police and Crime Commissioner to consider what the White Paper can mean for Hertfordshire. These groups have joined together in a Working Group and our council is being represented by the Managing Director. Any decisions will be based on the evidence and what is the best outcome for the communities that we serve.”

A supplementary question was asked by Councillor Ralph Muncer:

“Why are you against a singular unitary Council?”

Councillor Daniel Allen gave a response as follows:

“Our county is diverse and any reform of local government should consider residents, businesses, local representatives and stake holders and a single unitary authority would take away from the communities we serve.”

(C) Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) – Issued

Councillor Ralph Muncer to Councillor Daniel Allen (Interim Executive Member for Planning and Transport)

“How many Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) were issued by this authority in 2024?”

Councillor Daniel Allen gave a response as follows:

“15,623.”

A supplementary question was asked by Councillor Ralph Muncer:

“Can Councillor Allen confirm the total income from those fixed notices, and whether the directorate of which is responsible for enforcing parking in North Hertfordshire makes a net profit?”

Councillor Daniel Allen gave a response as follows:

“I do not have figures like that off the top of my head, but I will get back to you with that data.”

(D) Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) – Appeals

Councillor Ralph Muncer to Councillor Daniel Allen (Interim Executive Member for Planning and Transport)

“How many of the PCNs issued by this authority in 2024 were successfully appealed?”

Councillor Daniel Allen gave a response as follows:

“The answer is 1,948 which is 12.5%.”

A supplementary question was asked by Councillor Ralph Muncer:

“What are the costs associated to the Council with upholding those appeals, and the cost of lost revenue from those 12.5%?”

Councillor Daniel Allen gave a response as follows:

“I will have to get back to you, of those appeals 29 were due to medical emergencies, 315 were due to blue badge holders who had forgotten or covered up their badges, 451 had valid tickets produced afterwards were the ticket had blown off the dashboard and 1,143 of these were broken down cars, loading PayPal errors, pay by phone errors, the wrong reg numbers. All these appeals are understandable reasons and show that we believe in a fairer greener North Herts.”

87 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

Audio recording – 3 hours 57 minutes 24 seconds

There were two motions submitted in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.12.

(A) Support the Introduction of a Youth Mobility Scheme

Councillor David Chalmers proposed the motion as follows;

This council notes that:

- Opportunities for young people to travel, study, and work abroad foster cultural exchange, personal development, and economic growth.
- The UK previously benefited from the EU's Erasmus+ programme, which supported youth mobility and exchange. Prior to Brexit, our young people were able to freely travel between member states, and wider European Economic Area (EEA) to live work and study without time limits.
- Since the UK's departure from the EU, young people in North Hertfordshire and across the UK face increased barriers to living, working, and studying in European countries, limiting opportunities that were previously available. We now have a 90-day limit on the time we can spend in European countries without buying a visa.
- Young people have been disproportionately impacted by the restrictions on mobility.
- A Youth Mobility Scheme between the UK and the EU would offer structured opportunities for young people to gain international experience and develop skills valuable to their personal and professional futures. In North Hertfordshire, according to the 2021 Census, 26,000 young people aged between 18-35 (19% of the total population) would be eligible to benefit from the scheme. The ability to experience different cultures and gain a better perspective of the world is extremely valuable, especially for young people.
- Local businesses – especially those in hospitality -would also benefit from the extra temporary personnel offered by young people across the EU taking advantage of the scheme.

Justification:

This motion seeks to enhance the prospects of young people across North Hertfordshire, providing them with access to opportunities that foster growth, learning, and intercultural

understanding. According to the 2021 Census 26,000 young people aged between 18-35 would be eligible to take advantage of the scheme – 19% of the local population. A Youth Mobility Scheme which has been proposed by the European Union would strengthen ties between the UK and EU, aligning with the council's commitment to creating a thriving and inclusive community. The UK currently has Youth Mobility Schemes with Australia and Japan allowing 18 – 35 year olds to move and work freely between countries for up to 2 years – the UK /EU Youth Mobility Scheme would follow this model.

Local businesses – especially those involved in hospitality – would benefit from the extra temporary personnel supplied by young people across the EU taking advantage of the scheme. Local educational institutions would also benefit from potential EU students. In April 2024 the EU Commission expressed a desire to open negotiations with the UK on a youth mobility scheme for young people aged 18-30, which was rejected by the previous Conservative Government and has yet to be accepted by the current Labour Government.

This council resolves to:

1. Publicly endorse the principle of establishing a Youth Mobility Scheme between the UK and the European Union.
2. Instruct the Council Leader to write to the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, and the Secretary of State for Education, urging them to open negotiations with the European Union to create such a scheme.

Councillor Claire Winchester seconded the motion.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Tom Tyson
- Councillor Emma Rowe
- Councillor Amy Allan
- Councillor Donna Wright
- Councillor Stewart Williby
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Claire Winchester
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason
- Councillor John Clayden
- Councillor Ruth Brown

Points raised in the debate included:

- Engaging the youth population of North Herts District is important to council and it was recognised that a Youth Mobility Scheme could be beneficial to the district's population.
- Mobility from Europe into the district could help in certain industries that have staffing gaps for example hospitality.
- This Motion would show Members agreement of the potential of a Youth Mobility Scheme.
- This Motion covers a subject that was much more complex than something that can be decided by Members and should be resolved in the wider discussions with London and Brussels.
- The scheme is something that would be resolved in National Government and although Members could show support it does not warrant a full council debate.

Councillor David Chalmers replied to the debate highlighting that this was a real opportunity for the whole Council to say what they all think on such an important national issue.

Following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Council:

(1) Publicly endorse the principle of establishing a Youth Mobility Scheme between the UK and the European Union.

(2) Instruct the Council Leader to write to the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, and the Secretary of State for Education, urging them to open negotiations with the European Union to create such a scheme.

(B) Digital Exclusion and fair representation for all in Council consultations

Councillor Paul Ward proposed the motion as follows;

A person is digitally excluded if they are unable to use information technology in the ways that are needed to participate fully in modern life.

The Council says in the District Plan 2024-28 that Accessible Services are a priority, particularly digitally. However, it also recognises that some residents are not digitally savvy or cannot access digital services. It says, “some of our residents can’t or don’t use online services, so we’re committed to remaining accessible in other ways including by post, phone and via our Customer Service Centre.”

A House of Lords committee report in January 2024 on Digital Exclusion in the UK identified issues with affordability, connectivity, skills, motivation and digital-only public services.

There is evidence to show older people are disproportionately affected by digital exclusion. Age UK has found that around 20% of people aged 65 or over do not use the internet and 46% cannot complete all the fundamental tasks to safely use it. North Hertfordshire has a population with 19.7% aged 65 or over, higher than the England average of 18.6% (ONS 2022 data).

However, digital exclusion is not only about elderly people. The Centre for Social Justice has estimated that 30% of digitally excluded people in the UK are of working age. Other groups that are disproportionately affected by the problem include people with low incomes and those with mental and/or physical health conditions.

The Council must be careful to avoid indirect age or other discrimination in its consultations.

The Council does have measures in place today that should address this. It is welcomed that the Council already has procedures in place to assess equality implications in reports put forward for approval. This includes assessing both the implications of proposed changes, as well as considerations for any community consultations – the latter being relevant here.

The Council has a Community Consultation Strategy which lays out a range of suitable channels that are recommended to teams in the Directorates planning consultations. This covers provision for both for in-person / non-digital access as well as digital access, with the specifics being determined on a case-by-case basis based on the consultation’s nature.

However the evidence of the Council providing effective non-digital access across consultations are variable. For example, the Churchgate consultation included clear instructions for non-digital users and was also advertised broadly. However the consultation on Car Park charges used email, and the Parish Arrangements consultation was online.

The Council can do better at this consistently to give all our residents a fair deal in accessing all consultations and contributing into local democracy. Whilst Councillors themselves are a vital link to the community in person, they cannot be relied on to be the sole non-digital means of engagement with our residents.

As well as the Community Consultation Strategy, the Council has a Digital Strategy which aims for it to be “digital first for all our customers”. This also includes a digital skills training and communication plan, targeted for councillors and employees. However, it does not currently include an explicit digital skills improvement approach for residents, although we expect residents to access our services and consultations primarily digitally.

This could potentially include raising awareness of existing resources. This motion highlights two additional complimentary steps the Council can take to ensure those digitally excluded are included in all public engagement and help close our community's digital gap.

Council therefore resolves that:

1. Reports brought to Council that propose public consultation must explicitly explain the appropriate mix of digital and non-digital access provision for both communicating the consultation and obtaining feedback, based on the results of the equalities assessment and using the Community Consultation Strategy.
2. The Executive Member for Community & Partnership is required to develop a digital skills and literacy plan to help residents participate in consultations and surveys, as part of the mid-term review of the Digital Strategy 2024-27, and report back to Cabinet and Overview & Scrutiny within a year with recommendations on possibilities and further actions.

Councillor Tim Johnson seconded the motion.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Donna Wright
- Councillor Tim Johnson
- Councillor Tina Bhartwas
- Councillor Daniel Allen

Points raised in the debate include:

- Any way the Council can negate exclusion of the public should be supported by Members and Officers.
- With a shift towards more online procedures, it is important that no one is excluded and that Council communications are clear and easily accessible.
- Digital exclusion is not just an issue for the elderly population but affects different levels of affluence and different ethnic groups in a variety of ways; with 33% of British Asians and 30% of Black British people being excluded.

Following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Council:

- (1) Reports brought to Council that propose public consultation must explicitly explain the appropriate mix of digital and non-digital access provision for both communicating the consultation and obtaining feedback, based on the results of the equalities assessment and using the Community Consultation Strategy.
- (2) The Executive Member for Community and Partnership is required to develop a digital skills and literacy plan to help residents participate in consultations and surveys, as part of the mid-term review of the Digital Strategy 2024-27, and report back to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny within a year with recommendations on possibilities and further actions.

The meeting closed at 0.15 am

Chair

Thursday, 23rd January, 2025