**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**CABINET**

**MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERNON ROAD, LETCHWORTH, HERTS, SG6 3JF ON TUESDAY, 11TH FEBRUARY, 2025 AT 7.30 PM**

**MINUTES**

**Present:** *Councillors: Daniel Allen (Chair), Ian Albert, Amy Allen, Mick Debenham and Dave Winstanley.*

**In Attendance:** *Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), Jo Doggett (Service Director - Housing & Environmental Health), Ian Fullstone (Service Director - Regulatory), Martin Lawrence (Strategic Housing Manager), Susan Le Dain (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Anthony Roche (Managing Director), Louise Symes (Strategic Planning and Projects Manager) and Jeanette Thompson (Service Director - Legal and Community).*

**Also Present:** *At the commencement of the meeting approximately no members of the public, including registered speakers.*

## 101 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

*Audio recording – 1 minute 40 seconds*

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Val Bryant and Tamsin Thomas.

## 102 MINUTES - 14 JANUARY 2025

*Audio Recording – 1 minute 48 seconds*

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Mick Debenham seconded and, following a vote, it was:

***RESOLVED:*** That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 14 January 2025 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

## 103 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

*Audio recording – 2 minutes 35 seconds*

There was no other business notified.

## 104 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

*Audio recording – 2 minutes 46 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 for the purposes of clarification that 4.8.23(a) of the Constitution did not apply to this meeting.

## 105 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

*Audio recording – 4 minutes*

There was no public participation at the meeting.

## 106 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

*Audio recording – 4 minutes 6 seconds*

The Chair advised that the item referred from the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee would be taken with the respective item on the agenda.

## 107 HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION GRANT ALLOCATIONS AND UPDATE

*Audio recording – 4 minutes 23 seconds*

Councillor Dave Winstanley, as the Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health, presented the report entitled 'Homelessness Prevention Grant Allocations and Update' and advised:

- The Council had received ringfenced grant funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), to meet legal housing duties and this report detailed the proposals for the allocation of this funding.
- The Council had a legal duty to assist households who were homeless, as the Council did not own any housing stock and worked with housing providers to meet local needs.
- The Council received over one thousand approaches for homelessness and housing advice each year, which were resolved without any legal duties being owed, so were not detailed in this report.
- There was £74,825 remaining from the Homelessness Prevention Grant for 2024/25 as highlighted in paragraph 7.7 of the report and the allocation of this amount was detailed in Table 3.
- In addition, the Council received notification in December 2024 of funding for 2025/26 from homelessness and rough sleeping grant funding programmes totalling £986k and this paper outlined how this funding would be allocated.
- Proposals for homelessness grant allocation amounts to housing providers would be staggered over the next 3 fiscal years, as detailed in Table 4. The providers were, Survivors Against Domestic Abuse (SADA), North Herts Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB), Herts Young Homeless (HYH) and One YMCA.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Mick Debenham
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Ian Albert

In response to questions, Councillor Dave Winstanley advised that:

- Multiyear funding was a way of spreading the funds over the 3 fiscal years, which was due to MHCLG introducing a new needs-based funding formula.
- This was not a new grant and funds had been received from MHCLG for the last twenty years.

In response to questions, the Strategic Housing Manager advised that:

- The Section 151 Officer would confirm at the end of each financial year that all criteria had been met.
- Social Services for Children looked after young people up to the age of 18. However, children who were 16 or 17 years old could be covered by the housing services as well.
- Provision of housing units for 16 and 17 years old had been reduced as a result of the costs involved in providing 24/7 care.
- There were not currently any housing units in North Herts District for homeless 16 and 17 years old, but children would be placed somewhere across Hertfordshire as the county council took on referrals across the ten district/boroughs.
- Moving forward to work with partner district councils to provide 24/7 care could only be considered once there were clearer details of future funding from MHCLG.

Councillor Dave Winstanley proposed and Councillor Mick Debenham seconded and, following a vote, it was:

***RESOLVED:*** That Cabinet:

(1) Approved the funding proposals for the in-year award of Homelessness Prevention Grant for 2024/25 as set out in Table 3 in paragraph 8.3.

(2) Approved the funding proposals for the allocation of part of the 2025/26 award of homelessness grants as outlined in Table 4 in paragraph 8.4 3.

***REASON FOR DECISIONS:*** There is a need to secure additional services for homeless households in the district. Adopting the recommendations at 2.1A and 2.1B secures the provision of high-quality local services to help those in need, which is also consistent with the priorities set out in the Council's Housing Strategy (2024 – 2029).

## 108 PROPOSED PARKING TARIFFS FOR 2025/26

*Audio recording – 20 minutes 8 seconds*

Councillor Daniel Allen, as the Interim Executive Member for Planning and Transport, presented the report entitled 'Proposed Parking Tariffs for 2025/26' and advised that:

- Each year the Council had to adjust parking charges to keep in line with inflation.
- As no increase had been applied in 2024/25, a 4% increase would be applied to cover 2024/2025 and 2025/2026.
- Three options were proposed and these were outlined in the report.
- Consultations had taken place in December 2024 with all the Area Forums, Letchworth, Hitchin and Royston BIDs, Royston Town Council and Knebworth Parish Council.
- A summary of the comments received from these organisations was set out in paragraph 8.2 of the report, with more detailed comments at Appendix C.
- Details for the option 2 proposal were set out at Appendix A.
- Option 3 retained all the same proposals in option 2, with a proposed change to a 50p flat rate car parking tariff increase in Royston after 3pm as outlined at Appendix B.

- This report proposed a 2% inflationary increase to be applied on resident, visitor and business parking permits and visitor parking tickets in resident permit parking zones.
- At present visitors who parked in designated Electric Vehicle (EV) charging bays could do so without paying a parking fee. This report proposed the implementation of a charge for parking whilst charging an electric vehicle later in the financial year.
- Existing parking machines across all the town centre car parks and in Knebworth would be replaced with new payment options including a pay on exit scheme/post payment scheme and would be moving towards a ticketless system, as detailed in paragraph 8.3.1 of the report.
- Visitors would be required to register their vehicle at the start of the parking sessions and pay on exiting the car park. This would allow visitors to park for longer to enjoy the town centre facilities.
- Installation of the new parking machines would commence on 17 February 2025 and would run over a six-week period across all the towns.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Dave Winstanley
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Mick Debenham

In response to questions, the Strategic Planning and Projects Manager advised that:

- The introduction of the after 3pm off peak flat rate parking in Letchworth should help to spread footfall throughout the day.
- An offer of funding had been received from both Royston Town Council and Royston BID to subsidise parking costs with follow up meetings due to take place once tariffs had been approved at Cabinet.
- Traffic regulation orders had been amended to increase the length of stay allowed whilst using an EV charging parking bay to the maximum possible in the car park during the day to accord with the On-Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme (ORCS) government grant scheme awarded to the Council and to ensure that the vehicle must be charging whilst parked in the designated bay.
- There were currently very few EV charging bays across the car parks in the district and these provide a low income for the Council.
- The Council had entered a concession contract with Blink Charging UK which would provide additional EV charging parking bays across the district.
- Some designated EV charging bays would be allocated which would not be charged for parking in initially and there would also be dual parking bays, where visitors could pay to park and charge, or just pay to park. It would take time to monitor usage of these bays.
- The flat rate after 3pm parking subsidy scheme agreed with Royston BID had been in place for over ten years.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Daniel Allen

Points raised during the debate included:

- Members supported the principles of the report and recognised that further meetings would be needed in Royston regarding subsidies.
- How the recommendations had changed following consultations and the importance of the input from the Royston BID.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Dave Winstanley seconded and, following a vote, it was:

***RESOLVED:*** That Cabinet:

(1) Noted the summary of comments and responses received to the Proposed Parking Tariff consultation at section 8.2 and the more detailed comments at Appendix C.

(2) Agreed to adopt the proposed off-street and on-street car park tariffs for 2025/26 as set out in Tables 1 to 6 at Appendix B as outlined in paragraphs 8.2.11 and 8.2.12 of this report, referred to as Option 3.

(3) 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 2025/26.

(4) Agreed to increase the charges for resident permits, visitor permits, business permits and visitor tickets for resident parking zones for 2025/26 as set out in Section 8.4 of this report.

(5) Agreed that the proposed tariff changes, as recommended and approved in paragraphs 2.2 above, are implemented as soon as practicable, and that officers in consultation with the interim Executive Member for Planning and Transport proceed with the implementation as required.

(6) Agreed that the proposed increases for resident, visitor and business permits and visitor tickets in resident parking zones, as recommended and approved in paragraphs 2.4 above, are implemented as soon as practicable, and that officers in consultation with the interim Executive Member for Planning and Transport proceed with the implementation as required.

(7) Agreed to the implementation of customers paying for parking sessions whilst parked and charging within ‘designated electric vehicle charging bays only’ later in the financial year 2025/26 as set out in section 8.5 of this report and that the Service Director - Regulatory in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Transport proceed with the implementation as required.

(8) Agreed that Officers proceed with the issuing of the necessary Notice of Variation to the 2024 Off1Street Parking Traffic Regulation Orders and the 2023 On-Street Consolidation Order as required to implement the increases recommended at 2.2 and 2.4 and approved above.

(9) Noted as part of the pay on exit scheme set out in paragraph 8.3.1 of this report that visitors will be charged the maximum period of stay for that car park if they do not ‘Check Out’ after completing their parking session.

***REASON FOR DECISIONS:*** To implement an increase in car parking tariffs and permits within resident parking zones 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.

## 109 BUDGET 2025/26 (REVENUE BUDGET AND INVESTMENT STRATEGY)

*Audio recording – 42 minutes 22 seconds*

The Chair invited Councillor Sean Nolan, as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Nolan advised that there had been discussions around:

- The primary facts set out in the budget as part of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and looking into the savings that would be required over the next four to five years to fill the deficit and balance the in-year budget without using reserves.
- How the 'TBC' potential income items in the report would have a positive effect of the overall figures rather than a negative one.
- The Investment Strategy and around the type of investments made and any potential future risks involved.
- Where the various grant funding included within the report had been allocated and used.

Councillor Ian Albert, as the Executive Member for Finance and IT, presented the report entitled 'Budget 2025/26 (Revenue Budget and Investment Strategy)' and advised that:

- This year the reports had been combined into one report to reflect where capital spend had significant revenue implications.
- The aim was to set a balanced budget including some of the General Fund reserves over the MTFS.
- In 2025/26 funding gains from previous Business Rates would be utilised rather than using General Fund reserves.
- The Council would need to find over £2.5 million savings by the end of the MFTS period.
- The General Fund reserves were well above the minimum recommended by the Section 151 Officer.
- The £1.435 million funding for Extended Producer Responsibility provided growth in the budget beyond inflationary cost pressures. But uncertainty over that funding stream in future.
- Consultations would take place later in the year with residents concerning any savings to be made that would have an impact on services.
- The Council would be increasing Council Tax by 2.99% which was the maximum amount allowed without holding a referendum.
- The banded Council Tax Reduction Scheme would continue to support those residents in most need.
- Some of the key features from the Budget Workshops held in November 2024 could be found in paragraphs 8.2-8.4.
- Funding was required to fully staff the Environmental Health service to ensure delivery of this important service.
- FAR had asked for additional information on the revenue investments, including whether they related to statutory services. This was included at Appendix G.
- It was an important part of the capital programme to improve facilities and services to residents across the district.
- Although the Learner Pool at Royston Leisure Centre was not included in the capital programme, discussions would continue to look to deliver a business case at a later stage.
- The comments made by the Chief Finance Officer on budget risk and General Fund reserves could be found in the section 25 report included at Appendix D.
- The Investment Strategy at Appendix F highlighted where the Council could invest its surplus funds.
- The Council wanted to be able to deliver services to residents and had a key priority of 'sustainability'. It would therefore make investments in the budget for decarbonisation of services and to provide resources for the Environmental Health service.

Councillor Mick Debenham advised that the funding included for NCP4, to replace the play equipment in Howard Park, could be removed from the Capital Programme, as this would be completed within funds already allocated to the project under ECP4. Therefore, an amendment could be made to the recommendations to remove this amount.

In response to a question from Councillor Daniel Allen, the Service Director – Resources advised that work would be carried out to find the most effective way of providing cooling for Hitchin Town Hall and it would not conflict with any decarbonisation work.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Dave Winstanley
- Councillor Daniel Allen

Points raised during the debate included:

- Members were pleased that the Royston Learner Pool project would still be considered in the future.
- Members were happy to support investment into Environmental Health staffing to ensure delivery of this important statutory service.

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

***RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:*** That it:

(1) Notes the position on the Collection Fund and how it will be funded.

(2) Notes the position relating to the General Fund balance and that due to the risks identified a minimum balance of £2.6 million is recommended.

(3) Notes the net revenue savings that are likely to be required in future years, combined with the Chief Finance Officer's section 25 report (Appendix D) which provides a commentary on the risks and reliability of estimates contained in the budget.

(4) Approves the revenue savings and investments as detailed in Appendix B.

(5) Approves the capital programme as detailed in Appendix C, adjusted by the removal of NCP4 which will now be funded within the allocation for ECP4.

(6) Approves a net expenditure budget of £22.792m, as detailed in Appendix E.

(7) Approves a Council Tax increase of 2.99%, which is in line with the provisions in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

(8) Approves the Investment Strategy as detailed in Appendix F.

(9) Approves the adoption of the four clauses in relation to the Code of Practice on Treasury Management (as detailed in paragraphs 8.32 to 8.35).

***REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:***

(1) To ensure that all relevant factors are considered in arriving at a budget (revenue and capital) and Council Tax level for 2025/26. To ensure that the budget is aligned to Council priorities for 2024-28 as set out in the Council Plan.

(2) The Council's Investment Strategy is set to comply with relevant statutory guidance, including the CIPFA Prudential Code. The Strategy also sets out the Council's approach to risks in relation to the investment of surplus cash.

The meeting closed at 8.34 pm

Chair