

## 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, 2nd October, 2025 at 7.30 pm

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

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Isabelle Alajooz (Director - Governance and Monitoring Officer), Amy Cantrill (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Ian Couper (Director - Resources), Robert Filby (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Anthony Roche (Chief Executive) and Melanie Stimpson (Democratic Services Manager).

**ALSO PRESENT:** At the commencement of the meeting approximately 5 members of the public, including registered speakers.

#### 38 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

*Audio recording – 1 minute 53 seconds*

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ian Albert, David Barnard, Ruth Clifton and Paul Ward.

#### 39 MINUTES - 10 JULY 2025

*Audio Recording – 2 minutes 10 seconds*

Councillor Keith Hoskins, 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 10 July 2025 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

#### 40 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

*Audio recording – 2 minutes 42 seconds*

There was no other business notified.

## 41 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 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 reminded Members to respond to the Youth Democracy Day invite in November and encouraged them to spread awareness of the event to schools within their wards.

## 42 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

*Audio recording – 5 minutes 14 seconds*

The Chair invited the first Public Speaker, Ms Rosie Waters, Chief Executive Officer of North Herts Citizens' Advice Bureau to speak about their organisation. Ms Waters thanked the Chair for the opportunity and provided a verbal presentation which highlighted the following:

- They advised people on a range of issues including housing, debt, benefits, employment and they were active in every community across the district.
- 7,193 residents in North Herts had been helped by their services last year which was a 7% increase on the previous year.
- Their services had positive, lifechanging and sometimes lifesaving impacts and helped the Council to address their Thriving Communities priority.
- Many clients reported better mental and physical health after using their services.
- Their services significantly reduced demand for statutory public services.
- 1,380 people had been reached via their preventative workshops and events.
- They had worked to make their service more accessible and they supported digitally challenged residents to navigate increasingly online public services.
- Housing advice they provided had saved the Council an estimated £200,000.
- Their Energy Champion provided trusted information to residents and they had applied for grants to expand their green energy offer in this area.
- They offered value for money as every £1 invested returned an estimated £11 to residents and £18 in wider, socioeconomic benefits.
- Financial outcomes of £2.8 million had been achieved by their services.
- The previous Council grant had helped them to attract an additional £600,000 of funding from other sources.
- A new, multi-year grant from the Council would help them to maintain their capacity and develop their services further to improve the lives of residents and help the Council to achieve its priorities.

*N.B. Councillor Martin Prescott entered the Chamber at 19.37 and Councillor Sam Collins entered the Chamber at 19.41.*

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham
- Councillor Bryony May
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Sadie Billing

In response to questions, Ms Waters advised that:

- Residents could contact them through multiple channels including telephone, email and face-to-face and could also access their self-help online materials.
- They would reach those that did not already use their services through their communication strategy and increasing the comfortability of their services.
- Volunteer recruitment decreased dramatically after the COVID-19 pandemic and had not recovered to the same level since.
- To increase recruitment, they had made volunteering easier and more flexible.
- Young people were underrepresented in their client numbers and they would address this by improving their digital accessibility and engaging schools to introduce schemes such as their financial capability programme.
- The North Herts Cost of Living Alliance was a monthly meet up attended by partner organisations in North Herts as well as Officers from the Council Revenues and Benefits Team with the aim of working together to better help residents that were struggling with the cost of living.
- Disability benefit claims had reportedly increased.
- Housing issues in North Herts were more prevalent than in neighbouring districts and boroughs as housing affordability was becoming worse in their district.

The Chair advised Members that the North Herts Citizens' Advice Bureau AGM would be taking place on Thursday 23 October and that they were welcome to attend.

The Chair thanked Ms Waters for her presentation and invited the second Public Speaker, Ms Hannah Gray of North Herts CVS to speak about their organisation. Ms Gray thanked the Chair for the opportunity and provided a verbal presentation accompanied by visual slides, and highlighted the following:

- Their organisation supported volunteering, faith and social enterprise groups in North Herts to enrich life.
- They had 1200 representatives from local groups and charities in their network.
- Over 1000 hours of direct support had been given to these groups.
- Detailed advice had been given to organisations on their governance to ensure that they were compliant.
- Independent advice had been given to Baldock Community Association to ensure that Baldock Community Centre would provide a service in the future.
- They had set up a monthly CEO Network meeting as a space for CEOs to come together to share ideas, form partnerships and support each other in addition to a Volunteer Manager Network to aid volunteer recruitment.
- They held their Annual General Meeting and Funding Summit in September which enabled groups to meet with funding providers.
- An event on Local Government Reorganisation was organised by them and hosted by the Leader of the Council.
- Training provided by them helped to boost the skills, experience, knowledge and resilience of managers and volunteers.

- MPs were lobbied when the changes to National Insurance were introduced.
- Funding was obtained to build a social value calculator which would allow groups to better demonstrate the social value they provided for free.
- They ran multiple projects including GoVolHerts, Community Transport, Staying Connected, Reach out Hertfordshire, Breakaway Playschemes and Volunteering for Health which helped to drive volunteering in a variety of sectors.
- Council grant funding they received enabled them to fulfil their core services.
- They wanted to provide greater advocacy for groups, work with the Council to provide a conference for Community Centres and run even more events.

In response to a question from Councillor Daniel Allen, Ms Gray advised that the Social Value Calculator would be launched on 20 October and it was developed by the University of Hertfordshire but built for and by the voluntary sector in North Herts to ensure that it was simple and intuitive for all groups to use.

Councillors Tamsin Thomas and Ruth Brown put on record their thanks to North Herts CVS for their work.

*N.B. Councillor Ralph Muncer left the Chamber at 20.03 and returned at 20.06.*

The Chair thanked Ms Gray for her presentation and invited the third Public Speakers, Ms Myeesha Alam and Mr Mohammed Alam of North Herts Minority Ethnic Forum to speak about their organisation. They thanked the Chair for the opportunity and provided a verbal presentation accompanied by visual slides, and highlighted the following:

- Established in 1998, the forum was an umbrella organisation that provided services to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities and created a shared space for them to celebrate their heritage.
- They provided advocacy services, employability and skills development programmes, senior and youth services and health and wellbeing activities.
- They partnered with local authorities, consulted BAME groups, and acted as a hub to bridge the gap between communities.
- Their aim was to encourage newcomers to adopt and embrace British values, democracy, rule of law and tolerance of other communities while remembering their own culture.
- Their team was comprised of 3 staff, 10 trustees and many volunteers.
- Most of their projects ran on short-term funding from six months to a year but a small number operated on long-term funding sustained by donations.
- They worked in partnership with others such as Hertfordshire Constabulary who recognised them as a third-party reporting centre for hate crime.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor David Chalmers
- Councillor Jon Clayden
- Councillor Chris Lucas

In response to questions, Mr Alam advised that:

- They were a small charity based in Hitchin conducting activities across the district and Stevenage.
- Their core funding came from grants from the National Lottery Community Fund and the Council which they were grateful for. Additional funding was also received from Rowlands Foundation and Hertfordshire Community Foundation.
- Their Fundraising Team was comprised of two trustees and one volunteer.
- No reports of hate crime had been made to them in the last six months.

- Volunteer recruitment often came through previous users of their services who were confident enough to use the skills they had acquired.
- Activities were community based due to language barriers, however, they held some events with a mix of communities which were well attended.
- They used social media to promote community events and had received several donations from these to give to asylum seekers.

Councillor Tina Bhartwas noted that it would be of great benefit for all Members to engage with the events that the Minority Ethnic Forum held.

The Chair thanked the Public Speakers for their presentations.

#### **43 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES**

*Audio recording – 53 minutes 45 seconds*

The Chair advised that the referral from Cabinet would be taken with the respective item on the agenda.

#### **44 FIRST QUARTER CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REVIEW 2025/26**

*Audio recording – 53 minutes 53 seconds*

Councillor Daniel Allen, as Leader of the Council, presented Referral 6A from Cabinet and the report entitled 'First Quarter Capital Budget Monitoring Review 2025/26' and advised that:

- The report was presented to Cabinet to provide an update on the impact upon the approved Capital Budget for 2025/26.
- There was an estimated decrease in spend of £0.412M for 2025/26, and an estimated increase in spend of £1.446M in future years.
- The most significant budget change was the removal of £0.563M for the Solar for Business scheme.
- £0.250M would be reprofiled into 2026/27 for resurfacing Broadway Gardens and £0.122M into Phase 2 of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund.
- Paragraph 8.5 referred to a fully Government grant funded Warm Homes scheme that would provide energy efficiency improvements to 26 low-income households across North Herts.
- The Council were asked to approve £1.275M of funding for this across 3 years.

In response to a question from Councillor Matt Barnes, the Director – Resources advised that there would be no revenue impact from the removal of the Solar for Business scheme from the Capital Budget.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Val Bryant seconded the recommendations within the report.

*N.B. Councillor Nigel Mason left the Chamber at 20.27 and returned at 20.29.*

As part of the debate, Councillor Ruth Brown made the following points:

- Whilst the Warm Homes grant scheme and the additional funding for Phase 2 of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund were welcomed, the removal of the funding for the Solar for Business scheme was not as the introduction of the scheme had been investigated since 2019.
- The Council had declared a climate emergency, there were pressures on the Green Belt due to housing construction, and there was a lack of solar panels in industrial areas.

Councillor Ruth Brown proposed an additional recommendation to the motion that 'the Executive Member for Environment and Officers should conduct a lessons learnt exercise on the issues with the Solar for Business scheme to date and produce a concrete, fully costed plan to overcome these by the end of 2025 for inclusion in the 2026/27 Budget'. This amendment was seconded by Councillor David Chalmers.

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

- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Steve Jarvis
- Councillor Mick Debenham
- Councillor David Chalmers
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Sam Collins
- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Jon Clayden

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

- The Administration had tried to engage businesses on the Solar for Business scheme, but it had not been successful.
- Being unable to make the scheme work while other local authorities had been operating it for several years reflected poorly on the Council.
- Extensive information was provided to businesses on the scheme and three businesses showed interest, however, none of them wanted to proceed.
- The scheme could have been implemented by one of the previous administrations at the Council.
- A Climate Emergency had been declared by the Council and the Solar for Business scheme would ensure that they were responding to that.
- The Opposition Budget Workshop would be a more appropriate place for budget discussions to take place and lessons learned from the scheme could also be discussed at the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.
- The Council should investigate the reasons that businesses had not taken up the scheme and work with communities and other Councils to ensure that any future green initiatives would be of more interest to businesses.
- It was disappointing that the Administration had decided to remove the scheme from the Capital Budget due to financial, rather than environmental reasoning.
- Delivering the scheme would be of great benefit to businesses in the district.
- Communication of the scheme should be investigated as not all business owners received information on the scheme when it was publicised.
- They should be encouraging more solar panel construction on buildings rather than open space which the scheme would help to do.

Councillor Ruth Brown replied to the debate on the amendment and made the following points:

- The Solar for Business scheme would require time and resources to set up, however, it could have both financial and environmental benefits once operational.
- Solar farms in open space were unpopular with residents, therefore, solar panel installation on industrial buildings would be preferable.
- Solar Together had already been a successful scheme, therefore, Solar for Business could be too.

In response to a question from Councillor Sadie Billing, Councillor Ruth Brown advised that there were other Councils that produced income from Solar for Business schemes but she could not provide examples of these.

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

As part of the debate on the original motion, Councillor Daniel Allen highlighted that cross-party discussions could have helped with the Solar for Business scheme and he was willing to work with opposition Members.

Having been proposed and seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That Council approved a capital budget of £1.275M (£0.319M in 25/26, £0.478M in 26/27 and £0.478M in 27/28) for the Government's new energy efficiency Warm Homes Scheme. This would be fully funded from Government grants as paragraph 8.5 of the report referred.

**REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:**

- (1) Council approved the capital budget each year, so any significant additions should be approved by Council.
- (2) Adding the budget to the capital programme allowed the Council to deliver a government funded scheme aiming to provide energy efficiency improvements to low income households with the aim of tackling fuel poverty and reducing emissions.

**45 NOTICE OF MOTIONS**

*Audio recording – 1 hour 14 minutes 44 seconds*

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

**(A) Use of Asylum Hotels in North Hertfordshire**

The Chair advised Members to refrain from referencing specific hotels in use for asylum accommodation both in and outside the district during the course of the motion.

Councillor Ralph Muncer proposed the motion as follows:

‘2025 has been the worst year ever for small boat crossings with over 30,000 people having crossed the Channel, meaning since the Labour Government came to power in July 2024, over 50,000 people have now crossed the Channel leaving the immigration policy of this Government in tatters.

The number of asylum seekers being housed in hotels is still higher than when the Conservative Government left office despite Labour pledging to end the use of asylum hotels.

According to a Home Office report, as of 30 June 2025, 156 asylum seekers are being housed in hotels in North Hertfordshire, with most being housed in Needham House Hotel in Little Wymondley, a location which is wholly unsuitable for this purpose and has resulted in Hertfordshire Constabulary attending the hotel on a regular basis.

The use of local hotels as long-term accommodation for asylum seekers is not a sustainable solution and places disproportionate pressures on local infrastructure and services, as well as threatening community cohesion.

Therefore, the Council resolves to:

- (1) Instruct the Chief Executive and Director – Governance to urgently assess the merits of seeking legal advice to prevent local hotels from being used as accommodation for asylum seekers, considering every option including the use of injunctions, stop notices and other planning enforcement mechanisms.

- (2) Instruct the Leader of the Council to write to the Secretary of State for the Home Department expressing this Council's concern about the use of hotels in North Hertfordshire for asylum seeker accommodation, requesting the Government close the remaining hotels currently in use for this purpose and do not open any further asylum hotels within the District, nor employ the use of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in North Hertfordshire for the purpose of providing accommodation to asylum seekers.
- (3) Instruct the Leader of the Council to write to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, calling on the Government to adopt the Conservative proposals to clarify in law and policy beyond doubt that such asylum hotels should always require a change of use application.
- (4) Reverse the decision of Council in September 2023 and withdraw from the City of Sanctuary's Local Authorities Network.'

Councillor Steven Patmore seconded the motion.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Nigel Mason
- Councillor Mick Debenham
- Councillor Clare Billing
- Councillor Alistair Willoughby
- Councillor Sean Prendergast
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Tim Johnson
- Councillor Sadie Billing
- Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham
- Councillor Keith Hoskins

The following points were made as part of the debate:

- Net migration had fallen 52% since its peak in 2024.
- Councillor actions had consequences and Members should encourage hope rather than hate given the outlook of the country.
- This motion was pandering to prejudices held by certain groups in society.
- Refugees had not significantly impacted the district as only 11 claims for permanent social housing had been granted to them in the last 4 years.
- Asylum seekers were not the problem as they were in desperate need of safety and removing accommodation for them would only increase their vulnerability.
- The Council should focus on real issues that residents faced and ensure a strong community where the vulnerable were supported.
- Reversing a commitment that had been voted overwhelmingly in favour for would show that the Council only held their values when it was convenient.
- The use of hotels as asylum seeker accommodation was due to the infrastructure collapse over many years and the Government had pledged to fix this already.
- Asylum seekers did not undermine communities, but the presence of hate did.
- Members had been elected to improve the lives of everyone in the district which included those that had arrived from overseas.
- Abandoning their commitment to the City of Sanctuary Network would isolate the Council from groups that had compassion for asylum seekers and show that the district was no longer a place of kindness, humanity and safety.
- The Council should work with the Government and its partners to find solutions.



- Hotels were not a long-term accommodation solution, but backing this motion would fuel fear, anger and division in the district.
- Members should consider the reasons that the Council originally joined the City of Sanctuary Network in 2023.
- The Council should continue to indirectly support asylum seekers through the facilitation of support for local groups.
- The motion was thinly veiled and passive aggressive.
- Asylum seekers were not a burden, they were people who needed safety.
- North Herts Minority Ethnic Forum was a brilliant example of a real community looking out for people.
- The district was a welcoming place irrespective of circumstances and backgrounds and there was a responsibility for Members to do better as leaders in their communities.
- Fearnhill School was the first school in Hertfordshire to be made a School of Sanctuary due to their work with students from disadvantaged countries.

Councillor Ralph Muncer replied to the debate and made the following points:

- Polling showed that many residents were concerned about this issue and it would be a dereliction of duty to ignore them, therefore, it was important that they discussed the issues raised to make them feel represented.
- The use of asylum hotels as a medium to long-term measure had been wrong.
- This was not a motion to deny support for genuine asylum seekers, it was to deter illegal boat crossings and smugglers that benefitted from this.

Having been proposed and seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the motion was **LOST**.

**(B) Local Government Pension Scheme and Responsible Investment**

The Chair advised Members that the motion had been withdrawn and would be considered at a future meeting of Full Council and this was confirmed by Councillor Dave Winstanley as the proposer and Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason as the seconder.

*N.B. There was a break in proceedings following this motion and the meeting reconvened at 21.20. During the break Councillor Lisa Nash left the Chamber and did not return.*

**(C) Waste Service Rollout**

Councillor Caroline McDonnell proposed the motion as follows:

‘May 2025 saw the start of the new waste contract with Veolia, a shared service covering North and East Herts. Many residents in North Herts experienced problems and, worryingly, the process for resolving them has often been slow and confusing for residents and Members alike.

The chief concerns are:

- Ongoing missed collections despite reporting by residents and members
- Lack of crew knowledge of rounds including assisted collections
- “Narrow round” arrangements not continued
- Customer Services completely overwhelmed
- Inaccurate advice given to members e.g. on flats
- Inconsistent advice given to residents on multiple issues including side waste
- Blue-lid bins not delivered in time for roll-out
- Collapse of system for collecting communal bins

- System unable to cope with commercial and domestic waste at same property e.g. farms
- Member uncertainty about how to report problems and whether the portal works

North Herts Council believes that:

- The introduction of the new service could and should have been better managed and the above-stated problems prevented
- The Executive Member for Environment must accept responsibility for the shortcomings in the implementation of the new arrangements in North Herts which have unnecessarily caused inconvenience to many residents.

Therefore, Council resolves that:

- (1) The Executive Member for Environment makes a public statement apologising to all residents who have been unnecessarily inconvenienced by the failure of the service implementation. This should include writing apologies to all parish and town councils where avoidable problems such as those listed above have been identified.
- (2) The Executive Member works more closely with her counterpart in East Herts to ensure that they are giving the Shared Waste Service Manager and her officers a clear direction of travel and doing so with a common voice. This should entail scheduling meetings together in addition to the calendared briefings organised by officers.
- (3) The Executive Member takes responsibility for ensuring that all IT systems operate effectively and that coherent, accurate information is accessible wherever and whenever needed, including by Customer Services.
- (4) The Executive Member reports, as a matter of urgency, to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on actions taken, at a date to be agreed with the Chair.'

Councillor Bryony May seconded the motion.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Dominic Griffiths
- Councillor Matt Barnes
- Councillor Amy Allen
- Councillor Bryony May
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Jon Clayden
- Councillor Laura Williams
- Councillor Joe Graziano
- Councillor Sam Collins
- Councillor Steve Jarvis
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Tim Johnson
- Councillor David Chalmers
- Councillor Keith Hoskins
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Tamsin Thomas
- Councillor Nigel Mason
- Councillor Sean Prendergast
- Councillor Claire Strong

- Councillor Tom Tyson

The following points were made as part of the debate:

- Not only had villages experienced problems with bin collections since the rollout, but towns such as Royston had too.
- The new three weekly collections had encouraged residents to recycle more.
- Due to more missed bin collections, the Customer Service Centre (CSC) had received more contacts and wait times to speak to a representative over the phone had become unreasonable.
- Despite the assurances of the Council, there had been a persistent lack of collections in some areas.
- In some cases, communal recycling bins had been incorrectly measured which had led to overflowing bins and presented health and hygiene hazards to the public.
- Crews had worked tirelessly under huge pressure to deliver the service and deserved thanks and support from Members rather than criticism.
- A change of this scale would always bring challenges and as anticipated, the rollout had initially led to more reports of repeat missed collections, however, the situation had improved after notes had been added to crew systems and guidance had been reinforced.
- After problems had been experienced with the merger of the former 'narrow rounds' with a round in East Herts, Veolia had aligned the properties of the narrow rounds back under the supervision of the Council which had led to a more stable service with the hope of further improvements.
- CSC had been busy but not overwhelmed due to the recruitment of extra staff and introduction of web forms leading up to the rollout.
- Call numbers to CSC were expected to return to normal in October.
- Due to a data error, some communal bin collections were wrongly scheduled but this had been corrected and interim weekly collections had been put in place.
- Council policy on side waste had not changed.
- Despite delays to the delivery of new bins due to system incompatibility issues, 97% of bins had been delivered to residents by 3 August.
- Missed bin deliveries were prioritised through a dedicated web form and residents that had not received their new bin were still able to recycle in the meantime through side waste or use of their side recycle box.
- Special data for mixed commercial and domestic properties had been updated and they had been monitored to ensure reliability.
- The Councillor Portal had remained operational for the course of the rollout, however, reduced staffing had caused a backlog of requests which they had been working to clear and return to normal.
- Residual waste had decreased 50-60% in comparison to earlier in the year which showed a strong shift to recycling.
- A detailed report on the rollout would be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on Tuesday 11 November.
- They would continue to work with their partners, Officers and residents to deliver a good service.
- For some Members, the rollout had generated the greatest number of resident enquiries and requests since they had been elected.
- Despite raising multiple cases on the Councillor Portal, missed communal bin collections in residential flats had not yet been addressed and no advice had been provided to those with communal bins prior to the rollout except for the generic information leaflets.
- Members recognised the sheer amount of work that had gone into this project and appreciated its aims. However, it was important for the Council to recognise that there were underlying problems with the service that needed to be resolved.
- Issues from the rollout could be investigated at the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

- It was recognised that the rollout had been complex, however, an apology should be issued to residents as there were long-standing issues which had not been resolved.
- Overall service for the waste collections had been good, however, there had been too many instances where the service had fallen short of standards.
- The rollout had been technically complex with the integration of the waste management system into their customer relationship management system which had required extensive collaboration across the Council but had yielded automated processes to assist CSC and decrease contacts from residents.
- The 'Find Your Bin Collection Day' app which had been developed to aid residents during the rollout had been used over 150,000 times.
- The motion would not resolve the cause of the problems.
- In some instances, issues raised by residents had been resolved within 24 hours.
- Given the opinions expressed by Members, the Council should issue the apology rather than the Executive Member for Environment.
- The increase in recycling resulting from the rollout had been positive.
- The motion asked the Council to do things that they were already addressing.
- The rollout had been a good initiative with positive feedback from some residents, however, instances where issues had not been resolved for 9 weeks was not acceptable.
- Overall, the rollout had been a success and they should not lose sight of that.
- Lessons needed to be learned from the teething problems that had been experienced from the service.
- Officers and the Executive Member for Environment should be commended for delivering the new service and dealing with problems where they had arisen.
- Distress had been caused by the lack of communal bin collections and the Council had an opportunity to take responsibility by acknowledging the shortfalls of the rollout and issue a heartfelt apology through this motion.
- Any big project such as this one could not be error free and missed bin collections had and would always be a continuous issue.
- Some residents had been unsettled by the change of collection days.
- Recycling advice on product packaging contradicted the guidance provided by the Council.

Councillor Amy Allen put on record her thanks to Officers in the Waste Team and Customer Service Team, in addition to the waste collection crews.

*N.B. Councillor Tina Bhartwas left the Chamber at 21.50 and returned at 21.54.*

In response to points raised in the debate, Councillor Amy Allen advised that companies could not change their product packaging on a local level and changing it nationally would mean that the packaging would become a contaminant in other local authorities that did not share the same recycling scheme as them.

In response to a question from Councillor Michael Muir, the Chair advised that questions would be answered by the Executive Member for Environment outside of the meeting.

Councillor Caroline McDonnell replied to the debate and made the following points:

- It was good to hear that there were wards who had experienced little to no problems with the rollout.
- Waste collection crews had been pleasant and perseverant where collection problems had occurred.
- Residents deserved to know that their complaints and frustrations had been heard by the Council through an apology.

In response to the debate, the Chair proposed an amendment to the motion that the Council made the public statement apologising to all residents rather than the Executive Member for Environment and this was accepted into the substantive motion by Councillor Caroline McDonnell as proposer and Councillor Bryony May as seconder.

Having been proposed and seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the motion was **LOST**.

*N.B. Following this item, Councillors Cathy Brownjohn, Dominic Griffiths, Sarah Lucas, Martin Prescott and Tamsin Thomas left the Chamber at 22.18 and did not return.*

## 46 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

*Audio recording – 2 hours 47 minutes 4 seconds*

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

### **(A) Local Government Reorganisation Options**

Councillor Ralph Muncer to Councillor Daniel Allen, Leader of the Council:

‘To ask the Leader of the Council to outline the Administration’s preferred option for Local Government Reorganisation in Hertfordshire?’

Councillor Daniel Allen provided the following response:

‘At this point, the Administration did not have a preferred option for Local Government Reorganisation in Hertfordshire although I am sure a lot of individual councillors do. The Administration are waiting to receive all available evidence, information and proposals that will allow for a full assessment of the potential impacts. As with any significant decision, it is important that the councillors are able to consider the facts carefully, and there is a full debate at Full Council before any position is taken. Until then, it would be premature for the Administration to express a preference.’

Councillor Ralph Muncer asked a supplementary question, as follows:

‘Will the Leader of the Council guarantee his Members a free vote on the matter of Local Government Reorganisation at the meeting on the 13 November of this year?’

Councillor Daniel Allen responded:

‘It is an internal Labour matter that is not for discussion at Full Council.’

### **(B) Penalty Charge Notices – Free After 3**

Councillor Matt Barnes to Councillor Donna Wright, Executive Member for Place:

‘What advice has the Council received about issuing penalty charge notices for non-registration during the Free After 3 parking period in Royston?’

Councillor Donna Wright provided the following response:

‘The Parking Team has reviewed the Council’s Parking Contravention Codes with the British Parking Association and with other Local Authorities to identify which of the national codes might be mostly appropriately used, and a proposed approach for Royston is currently being reviewed by the Council’s Legal Team.’

Councillor Matt Barnes asked a supplementary question, as follows:

‘Have you considered removing the requirement altogether and simply counting cars with a clipboard and pen instead?’

Councillor Donna Wright responded:

‘I just want to state for clarification that the Council is not issuing fines after 3:00pm in Royston. People are being reminded to register for their session by way of a notice on their windscreens. We have been relying on voluntary registrations but this could not reliably tell us what proportion of parking sessions after 3:00pm this is capturing. The difficulty was that they needed to collect reliable and comprehensive data as this was part of the original agreement with Royston Town Council and Royston First BID. As Council will know, these two bodies have offered a total maximum subsidy of £35,000 for the Free After 3pm tariff to continue in 25/26 but it was agreed that the usage data had to be monitored to ensure that the Council doesn’t end up having to cover more of the costs. It wouldn’t be fair for Council Taxpayers in other parts of the district to subsidise Royston car parks, so we do need to strike a careful balance between fairly implementing the scheme in Royston but not incurring any extra costs for the Council. Unfortunately, the most accurate form of data was people registering for their free parking session. In the past, we have relied on manual survey data which is too ad-hoc and does not provide a consistent baseline. It does not capture the frequency of turnover within parking period and can only be taken at various points in time. So, recording the usage of data at machines was the most reliable and independent method. From experience elsewhere, we do know that during charging hours and where penalty charges are being issued, the vast majority of parking sessions are appropriately registered and recorded. But obviously, the final operational decision for Royston will have to be dependent on the outcome of the legal advice. It may be that we may just have to be clear to residents that if they don’t register for their after 3pm parking, the subsidy may not be viable in the long-term. Whatever approach is agreed, there will be clear communications and signage in all of the car parks.’

### **(C) Events on Council Land**

Councillor Chris Lucas to Councillor Mick Debenham, Executive Member for Regulatory:

‘Could the Executive Member for Regulatory advise what would the Council’s liability position would be if an event took place on North Hertfordshire District Council land without a licence and an injury occurred to a participant or member of the public?’

Councillor Mick Debenham provided the following response:

‘The event organiser was responsible for any public liability arising from an event that they run as well as any other liability such as employers’ liability. The event organiser should therefore ensure that they have appropriate insurance in place and that this insurance remains valid if they do not have a land license or any other appropriate permissions. North Herts District Council insurance would remain valid if an event took place on our land even if the event took place without a land license. That insurance would however, only cover our liability as property owners but it not there to cover any liability that the event organiser should be responsible for.’

Councillor Chris Lucas asked a supplementary question, following which, on the advice of Officers, the Chair ruled out a response from the Executive Member on the grounds of confidentiality.

**(D) Hitchin Lido Closure**

Councillor Louise Peace to Councillor Amy Allen, Executive Member for Environment:

'When the Leisure Centre Decarbonisation Project was discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in May, Councillor Mick Debenham left the Committee in no doubt that this was a challenging project. The Committee carefully examined the submitted paper. The proposed extended opening of the Hitchin Lido until the end of October was, to me, a crucial part of maintaining goodwill with centre users while the work was carried out. This proposal was agreed by Cabinet on May 20.

A decision has now been made to close the Hitchin Lido at the end of September. The press release regarding this decision does not refer to a named Officer or yourself as portfolio holder. What was the process for reversing the decision made at Cabinet?'

Councillor Amy Allen provided the following response:

'It is a huge undertaking and challenging project and thank you for pointing that out. It was the decision by the Project Board of which on it had two Cabinet Members. The decision was based on the fact that the original decision to extend the season was to counteract the fact that the indoor pool was going to be shut for the Decarbonisation Project, as we all know. Unfortunately, we had a few things pop up which meant that the work on the area of the indoor pool for the Decarbonisation Project has been delayed. With that in mind, we felt that having both the lido and the indoor pool open at the same time was somewhat counterproductive, especially considering the cost it takes to be running the pool in October, £16,000 by the way. We felt that it was quite reasonable to not extend the already extended season for the lido because the indoor pool was open.'

Councillor Louise Peace asked a supplementary question, as follows:

'At the Overview and Scrutiny meeting in May that was mentioned earlier, we were informed that the current estimated one-off loss of revenue for the closures across all three sites is approximately £900,000. This was a cost that the Council will have to bare as per the requirements of the Leisure and Active Communities Contract. Given that the Hitchin Lido would now not be heated in October and no staffing would be required, will the £16,000 loss of revenue be reviewed and can we have that money back?'

Councillor Amy Allen responded:

'I will have to talk to Sarah Kingsley and others about it and then I can get back to you with a properly substantive answer.'

The meeting closed at 10.32 pm

Chair