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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

**MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERNON ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY, SG6 3JF
ON WEDNESDAY, 19TH NOVEMBER, 2025 AT 7.30 PM**

MINUTES

Present: Councillors: *Daniel Allen (Chair), Val Bryant (Vice-Chair), Ian Albert, Amy Allen, Mick Debenham, Laura Williams and Donna Wright.*

In Attendance: *Isabelle Alajooz (Director - Governance and Monitoring Officer), Anne Banner (Benefits Manager), Ian Couper (Director - Resources), Robert Filby (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Chris Jeffery (Customer and Digital Services Manager), Martin Lawrence (Strategic Housing Manager), Susan Le Dain (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Anthony Roche (Chief Executive), Nigel Smith (Director - Place) and Louise Symes (Strategic Planning and Projects Manager).*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting two members of the public were in attendance.*

Councillor Claire Winchester was also in attendance as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Sean Nolan was also in attendance as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.

41 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 27 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Tamsin Thomas.

42 MINUTES - 23 SEPTEMBER 2025

Audio recording – 1 minute 34 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen, as Chair proposed and Councillor Val Bryant seconded and, following a vote it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 23 September 2025 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

43 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 16 seconds

There was no other business notified.

44 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 18 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.
- (5) The Chair advised of a change in the order of the agenda. Agenda Item 8 would be considered after Agenda Item 11.

45 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 3 minute 28 seconds

The Chair advised that there would be a presentation from Councillor Ralph Muncer during Item 8 – Local Government Reorganisation in Hertfordshire – Submission of Final Proposals.

46 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Audio recording – 3 minutes 40 seconds

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

47 UPDATED 3C's POLICY

Audio recording 4 minutes 7 seconds

Councillor Val Bryant, as Executive Member for Customer Experience, presented the report entitled 'Updated 3C's Policy' and advised that:

- The 3C's Policy approved by Cabinet in November 2022 had been updated to comply with the Local Government Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code which was introduced in February 2024 and attached at Appendix C.
- The LGO's Complaint Handling Code was issued to provide guidance about good practice to organisations under section 23 (12A) of the Local Government Act 1974.
- Additions that have been made to the 3C's Policy were detailed in Appendix B.
- The Council would not be adopting code 6.13 of the Complaint Handling Code which did not require individuals to explain reasons for escalating to a stage 2 complaint.
- Once adopted, the updated 3C's Policy would be briefed to all staff and published on the Council website.

Councillor Val Bryant proposed and Councillor Mick Debenham seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the updates to the policy were approved.

REASON FOR DECISION: It was recommended that Cabinet approve the updated 3Cs Policy, to align with the Local Government Ombudsman's complaint handling code. The revised policy formalises existing good practices, clarifies procedures for staff and customers, and ensures continued compliance with national standards. These updates will support a fair, transparent, and consistent approach to handling feedback and complaints, helping North Herts Council maintain high service standards and a positive complaint-handling culture.

48 LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IN HERTFORDSHIRE - SUBMISSION OF FINAL PROPOSALS

Audio recording – 50 minutes 35 seconds

The Chair advised Members that he had received an email from Councillor Tom Tyson and also from the member of public who had made a presentation at Full Council on 13 November.

The Chair invited Councillor Ralph Muncer to provide Cabinet with a verbal presentation. Councillor Muncer thanked the Chair for the opportunity and highlighted the following:

- He thanked Councillor Daniel Allen for his openness and transparency with Members throughout the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) process.
- At Full Council on 13 November 2025 Members had voted together on the future governments of the district.
- The message had been made clear that most Members did not support the four-unitary option for Hertfordshire.
- He urged Cabinet to choose to listen and to support the wishes expressed at Full Council.

The Chair thanked Councillor Muncer for his presentation. The Chair reminded Members that the formal advice received from Kings Counsel was that Cabinet must consider the vote from Full Council, but that it must not determine their decision. Cabinet must have an open mind as to act with a predetermined mind would be unlawful. The legal duty of Cabinet was to the residents it served and to the integrity of the decision-making process.

The following Members asked points of clarification:

- Councillor Amy Allen
- Councillor Ian Albert

In response to points of clarification, the Monitoring Officer advised that:

- Political pressures were not relevant to the considerations of Cabinet.
- This decision was an executive function and Cabinet was the decision maker.
- The legal duty of Cabinet was to approach this with an open mind and determine it solely on the report, appendices, criteria and following the advice from Kings Counsel.
- Members who were 'dual hatters', who held a seat both at district and county council level, must not commit to a decision made at another committee before this Cabinet meeting.

The Chief Executive presented the report entitled 'Local Government Reorganisation in Hertfordshire – Submission of Final Proposals' and advised that:

- A significant amount of work had already been undertaken to produce this submission and it was recognised that the LGR would continue to have an impact on workloads for the next few years.
- All local authorities in Hertfordshire had worked together to produce a single submission which met all the criteria set by the Government.
- The strength of relationships formed within the local authorities would help transition to the future model.
- The LGR would create lots of opportunities and would bring services together and would also reset relationship with communities.
- All the options had advantages and disadvantages and there was no correct answer, as different people would have different views.
- Shared visions and ambitions that underpinned this submission were set out in paragraph 8.5 of the report.
- The government would judge any submission against the six criteria set out in paragraph 7.3 of report, which are all equally weighted. All options that met the criteria would be put to public statutory consultation next year.
- The reorganisation statutory consultation for all areas on the devolutionary priority programme had commenced today to conclude on 11 January 2026.
- The recent decision on LGR in Surrey had been based on financial matters and this was not an indication of how decisions would be made elsewhere.
- This submission document was as accurate as possible based on the set of assumptions as explained from paragraph 8.8 onwards in the report.
- Community engagement on LGR options in Hertfordshire took place in September which was summarised in paragraphs 8.14 and 8.15 of the report.
- No response had yet been received to the letter sent from all local authorities in Hertfordshire to the Secretary of State a couple of weeks ago, as detailed in paragraph 7.3 of the report.
- Work had already started on the Transition Programme as detailed in paragraph 8.16 of the report and staff and Members would be kept updated with progress.
- Recommendation 2.1 had been amended to refer to Appendices A-E.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Mick Debenham
- Councillor Amy Allen
- Councillor Donna Wright
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Ian Albert

In response to questions, the Chief Executive advised that:

- It would be for the new unitary authority to decide the frequency of meetings of the Planning Control Committee.
- One disadvantage of the three unitary option was the disparity of size of this option.
- There would be fewer staff redundancies with the four unitary option because of the larger management structure required.
- Staff would be supported through the whole process with a workforce plan.
- The two and three unitary options had been based using county divisions and the four unitary option was based on the district wards.
- The county division was based on a boundary review carried out in 2017 and there were 9 county divisions covering North Hertfordshire.
- The district boundary review was carried out in 2024 with an average ratio of councillors to electors.

- The government would determine the funding allocation for any council.
- It would be set out in the adopted housing policy of the new unitary authority to where residents would be housed.
- There would be a review of boundaries in the first term of the new unitary authority as part of the electoral structure.

In response to questions, the Director – Resources advised that:

- The central authority would look at funding and decide how to split this between the different unitary authorities.
- All of the new unitary options were deemed to be long term financially viable.

N.B. There was a break in proceedings during this item and the meeting reconvened at 21:07

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Mick Debenham
- Councillor Donna Wright
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Amy Allen
- Councillor Laura Williams
- Councillor Daniel Allen

Points raised during the debate included:

- Residents had voted for the four unitary option whilst Full Council had voted for the two unitary option.
- The two unitary option would be too large and remote for residents who were used to a district approach.
- Staffing should not be overlooked and the financial implications of redundancies needed to be considered.
- The four unitary option kept government local and would minimise any disruption to staff and services.
- Whichever option was chosen it would need to be future proofed.
- Localism was important and a small council could be more responsive.
- The four unitary option offered a balance of accountability and financial sustainability for residents.
- All three models were viable, but Cabinet should listen to the feedback from residents and stakeholders who wanted the four unitary option.
- This was just the beginning of the journey and it would ultimately be the Secretary of State to make the final decision for Hertfordshire.
- Members needed to work together to ensure a successful transition.
- The four unitary option provided a positive vision for Hertfordshire.
- Each option carried opportunities but also carried risks.
- The model must be chosen that would best serve residents for decades to come.
- Cabinet must vote on this without fear or pressure from any political group.

Councillor Laura Williams proposed, with the inclusion of an additional recommendation to send an accompanying side letter to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to outline the position of Full Council and to give consideration to concerns regarding the proposed placement of Arbury ward.

Councillor Mick Debenham seconded and, following a vote (a recorded vote having been requested for recommendation 2.2 only), it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Noted the content of the report, the draft Hertfordshire submission document at Appendices A to E which forms the proposed collective submission to Government on Local Government Reorganisation and the indicative non-binding view of Full Council at its meeting on 13 November 2025.
- (2) Resolved the following option:
 - c) Submit the proposal and identify the modified four unitary option as preferred and request that the Secretary of State formally modify the proposal be agreeing boundary changes, as set out in the proposal.
- (3) Delegated authority to the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council to agree any final minor amendments to the Hertfordshire submission document prior to submission to Government by 28 November 2025.
- (4) That the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, be authorised to finalise the form of wording for a side letter to be submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to accompany the Council's formal submission.

That the letter shall set out:

- (a) the outcome of the Full Council deliberations; and
- (b) the concerns raised by Members regarding the proposed placement of the Arbury ward within alternative unitary configurations, and the need for MHCLG to give this matter full consideration as part of the reorganisation process.

That the finalised letter be issued by the Leader on behalf of the Council.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: On 5 February 2025, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution wrote to all leaders of two-tier councils to formally invite them to develop proposals for a single tier of local government in their counties. Cabinet is legally required to make the decision as to this Council's response to the Minister's request, but the report to Full Council on the 13 November 2025 allowed all councillors to consider and debate this important issue before an indicative non-binding vote, to be considered by Cabinet as part of its decision making on 19 November 2025.

VOTE TOTALS:

A (preference for two unitary option):	0
B (preference for three unitary option):	0
C (preference for four unitary option):	7
D (no preference):	0

Cllr Ian Albert	C
Cllr Amy Allen	C
Cllr Daniel Allen	C
Cllr Val Bryant	C
Cllr Mick Debenham	C
Cllr Laura Williams	C
Cllr Donna Wright	C

49 DRAFT NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE TOWN CENTRES STRATEGY

Audio recording – 7 minutes 45 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Claire Winchester, as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Winchester advised that there had been discussions around:

- This was an in-depth strategy which could be strengthened by making it easier to read for a layperson.
- The introduction of a glossary was an improvement to the strategy.
- Concerns over the need to protect public spaces in all the towns for the wellbeing of the communities.
- Reflections over the importance of the surrounding villages to the town centres and the consideration required for people who needed to drive into town and subsequently be able to park.

Councillor Donna Wright, as Executive Member for Place, presented the report entitled 'Draft North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy' and advised that:

- The adopted Local Plan required the Council to have town centre plans to support local strategy.
- Updates to the existing 2008 Town Centre Strategy were necessary.
- An overarching draft strategy had been prepared by Lichfields and was set out in Appendix A.
- Moving to an overarching strategy had saved time and resources which had helped to speed up the process.
- This strategy supported the major objectives of the Local Plan and also linked into relevant key documents and strategies.
- The Town Centre Strategy would help to ensure that North Herts town centres were recognised and that plans were carried forward through Local Government Reorganisation.
- Strengths and weaknesses of the town centres were set out in Part 3 of the strategy, with actions to deliver strategies set out in Part 4.
- Feedback from consultations would help to shape a clear based action plan.
- Suggestions from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be taken on board and the final version of the Town Centre Strategy would be adopted in early 2026.

The following Members asked questions:

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

In response to questions Councillor Wright advised that:

- The delay with this strategy had occurred due to lack of resources with a staff position not being filled.
- Currently a lot of work was being carried out by the team on the Transport Strategy which would be included in the final document.

In response to questions the Director – Place advised that:

- Evidence work had commenced in January 2024 and work on the draft Town Centres Strategy had commenced later that year.
- Delay with this strategy were caused by lack of resources as a Town Centre Project Officer post was established but never successfully filled.
- The Transport Strategy flowed from the Local Plan, with the four main town centres, but there was also recognition of the village centres and the formal centres in larger areas of the district.
- The valid points made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be incorporated into the final document.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Ian Albert

Points raised during the debate included:

- This was a welcomed document which would help to promote the town centres with major developments planned.
- This strategy should be made as accessible as possible with public and Community Forum consultations.

Councillor Donna Wright proposed and Councillor Amy Allen seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Endorsed and approved the draft Town Centres Strategy (attached as Appendix A to this report) and its associated Appendices for public consultation.
- (2) Delegated authority to the Director, Place in consultation with the Executive Member for Place to make any minor non-material corrections, including but not limited to cosmetic additions or presentational alterations, to the draft Town Centres Strategy as considered necessary for the public consultation.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) To allow the draft Town Centres Strategy to be progressed to public consultation so that it may be developed and eventually adopted as a material planning consideration to support developers, landowners and relevant stakeholders when considering developing proposals and to provide policy advice to development management officers when determining planning applications until superseded by any new Local Plan.
- (2) To set key priorities which seek to maintain and enhance the unique character and vitality and viability of the district's four town centres through agreed partnership working.
- (3) To reinforce and deliver the Council's ambitions as set out in the Council Plan (2024 - 2028).

50 **PROCUREMENT STRATEGY 2025-2028**

Audio recording 26 minutes 45 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 discussion around:

- Understanding the 'Go Local' elements and how scoring would affect the ability of the Council to look for local procurement within contracts.
- Understanding of metrics and this part of the scoring where contracts were awarded.
- How KPI's were used to measure current procurement and setting focused targets in the future once effects were known.
- Looking at what decisions were made with procurement contracts wider than local areas.

Councillor Ian Albert, Executive Member for Finance and IT, presented the report entitled 'Procurement Strategy 2025-2028' and advised that:

- He acknowledged the important points made by the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.
- The main aims of the Procurement Strategy were set out in Section 2 of the report, with further goals set out in the remaining sections.
- The 'Go Local' policy which aimed to encourage the flow of money back into North Herts was clarified in Annex A.
- He was requesting an addition to the recommendations by adding a sentence and the end of the introduction in Section 1.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed as amended, and Councillor Val Bryant seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Procurement Strategy attached at Appendix A was approved with the inclusion of the following additional wording, at the end of the Introduction in Section 1:

'Our internal procurement guidance will reflect the contents of this Strategy and our Contract Procurement rules, to give our contract managers a detailed toolkit to be applied to the procurements that they undertake.'

REASON FOR DECISION: Having a Procurement Strategy provides a focus for procurement activity and guidance, so that it can support the delivery of Council priorities.

51 **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2025-2030**

Audio recording 33 minutes 17 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 discussion around:

- Focusing on looking ahead and the uncertainty associated with dealing with the next five years.
- The variances in the future for the Council finances which would influence funding going forward, as detailed in the agenda supplement.
- The forecast budget gap for 2029/30 and the different levels of potential funding.
- The uncertainty around the impact of costs which would be incurred with the Local Government Reorganisation and Churchgate projects.
- It was welcomed that the Council Tax Reduction Scheme was considering a reduction in charges for those with debilitating illnesses.

In response to a question from Councillor Daniel Allen, the Director – Resources advised that Fair Funding 2.0 and the setting of the new three-year funding formula were intertwined and the Council was still waiting for more information on this.

In response to a question from Councillor Amy Allen, Councillor Nolan advised that the criteria for 'debilitating illnesses' had been defined by the Marie Curie Charity as people with terminal illnesses.

Councillor Ian Albert, Executive Member for Finance and IT, presented the report entitled 'Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025-2030' and advised that:

- The Council was expecting to receive details of the three-year settlement before Christmas.
- This Medium-Term Financial Strategy followed the same format as previous strategies and was set out in Appendix A.
- Details of possible scenarios which resulted in a difference of £2.6 million forecast funding were set out in Table 1 of Appendix A.
- The Council was in a good position with strong General Fund reserves and the budget workshops looked at key priorities going forward.
- The comments from the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee regarding additional resources that would be required for the LGR and Churchgate projects would be taken on board.
- The Council needed to have a deliverable budget in line with the Council Delivery Plan.
- The staff pension scheme was in a healthy condition.
- The Council effectively had £19.6 million of reserves which demonstrated well managed Council funds with prudent use of these funds for residents.
- An addendum had been published as a supplementary document to the report.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Donna Wright

In response to questions, Councillor Albert advised that:

- Budget workshops were a useful tool to look at key priorities and feedback from the residents budget survey was also considered.
- The Medium-Term Financial Strategy was looking at the General Fund Reserves of the Council.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Donna Wright seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That it:

- (1) Approves the Medium-Term Financial Strategy as attached at Appendix A amended.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION: Adoption of a Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and communication of its contents will assist in the process of forward planning the use of Council resources and in budget setting for 2026/2027 onwards, culminating in the setting of the Council Tax precept for 2026/27 in February 2026. Alongside the Council Plan, this will support the Council in setting a budget that is affordable and aligned to Council priorities.

52 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Audio recording – 2 hours 13 minutes 9 seconds

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

RESOLVED: That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).

53 PART 2 MINUTES - 23 SEPTEMBER 2025

N.B. This item was considered in restricted session and therefore no recordings were available.

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

RESOLVED: That the Part 2 Minutes of the Meetings of the Committee held on 23 September 2025 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

54 SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE

N.B. This item was considered in restricted session and therefore no recordings were available.

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

The meeting closed at 10.18 pm

Chair

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