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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER - DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERNON ROAD, LETCHWORTH, SG6 3JF
ON TUESDAY, 16TH JUNE, 2026 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present:	*Councillors: Val Bryant (Chair), Sean Nolan (Vice-Chair), Ian Albert, Amy Allen, Mick Debenham, Tamsin Thomas, Laura Williams, Donna Wright and Daniel Allen.*
In Attendance:	*Isabelle Alajooz (Director - Governance and Monitoring Officer), Luca Benedito (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Rumi Bose (Churchgate Project Manager), Ian Couper (Director - Resources), Philip Doggett (Principal Estates Surveyor), Robert Filby (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Martin Lawrence (Strategic Housing Manager), Susan Le Dain (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Anthony Roche (Chief Executive), Rachael Rooney (Interim Strategic Planning Manager), Nigel Smith (Director - Place) and Sohanna Srinivasan (Principal Planning & Urban Design Officer).*
Also Present:	*There were no members of the public present.* *Councillor Jon Clayden was present as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.* *Councillor Vijaya Poopalasingham was present as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.* *Neil Parlett, as Director of Planning, Development and Regeneration and Ben Parker, as Senior Associate Director at Lambert Smith Hampton*

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 52 seconds

There were no apologies for absence received.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas had advised the Chair of her late arrival to the meeting.

2 MINUTES - 14 APRIL 2026

Audio recording – 2 minutes 7 seconds

Councillor Val Bryant proposed and Councillor Sean Nolan seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 14 April 2026 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

3 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 48 seconds

There was no other business notified.

4 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 56 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 to the order of the Agenda and Agenda Items 11 and 18 to 21 would be taken following Agenda Item 24.

5 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 4 minutes 26 seconds

There was no public participation at the meeting.

6 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Audio recording – 4 minutes 32 seconds

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

7 STRATEGIC PLANNING MATTERS REPORT

Audio recording – 5 minutes 48 seconds

Councillor Donna Wright, as Executive Member for Place, presented the report entitled 'Strategic Planning Matters Report' and advised that:

- Several national changes had been made to planning decision-making and delegation.
- From 11 May, Local Planning Authorities were required to consult the Secretary of State before refusing planning permission for housing schemes of 150 dwellings or more.
- A new National Scheme of Delegation due to be implemented in October would require more decisions by officers and limit Planning Control Committees to 13 Members, and an update on this would be provided at the Planning Control Committee meeting on 2 July.
- Consultation on planning fees had concluded on 18 May and they would await the outcome of this.

- The Council had published a notice of intention to review the Local Plan following national regulations coming into force, and scoping documents for the consultation that would close on 28 June had been published.
- Government funding of approximately £108K had been received to cover staff capacity costs for this if they met the Gateway 1 assessment by the end of October.
- A legal challenge for the Luton Airport expansion had been rejected, and Luton Rising would proceed with implementing the Development Consent Order (DCO).
- Officers were liaising with other authorities, and Luton Rising had been contacted about their next steps to ascertain the implications of the expansion for North Herts.
- £20K had been set aside for any extra work associated with the DCO.
- The six largest strategic sites were moving forward and other strategic sites were also making progress.
- Collaboration with 8 neighbouring authorities on their Local Plans had been maintained.
- The final version of the Draft Town Centres Strategy would be presented to Cabinet in September for adoption, and the delivery plan would be prepared following this.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Ian Albert

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

- Traffic implications of Luton Airport expansion had been considered through the conditions imposed on the DCO and groups that would ensure those conditions were met would be set up in due course.
- Dacorum Borough Council and Hertsmere Borough Council had been placed under special measures by the Government for failure to meet decision-making targets on major applications.
- The Council was 1% under the threshold for special measures and given the small number of major applications considered by the Council, Members and officers were reminded to make robust decisions and work with Hertfordshire County Council to ensure this.

In response to questions, Councillor Donna Wright advised that:

- An additional, short period of consultation on the Draft Town Centres Strategy might take place in response to a request from Hitchin Community Forum.
- More consideration would be given on how to progress the recommendations from the S106 Task and Finish Group report as soon as possible.

Councillor Donna Wright proposed the recommendations in the report, and this was seconded by Councillor Ian Albert.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Sean Nolan
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Ian Albert

Points raised during the debate included:

- It would be useful to receive feedback on the expected traffic impacts of the Luton Airport expansion soon so that the Council could mitigate these.
- The letter sent to MPs on chalk streams was acceptable.

- It was important for them to be active and seek to influence decision-making on Luton Airport expansion by actively engaging with partners to ensure improvements and prevent impacts from affecting North Herts residents.

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

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Noted the report on strategic planning matters.

(2) Noted the response in Appendix A.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To keep Cabinet informed of recent developments on strategic planning matters.

8 DEVELOPER CONTRIBUTIONS SPD

Audio recording – 22 minutes 52 seconds

Councillor Donna Wright, as Executive Member for Place, presented the report entitled 'Developer Contributions SPD' and advised that:

- The Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) had been adopted in February 2023 to provide additional details on developer contributions.
- General updates to the document were made after agreement to update it in 2024.
- Following approval of the Draft SPD by Cabinet last year, 55 responses were received from the public consultation, and more amendments were made from this as outlined in paragraph 8.3 of the report.
- In response to a letter received from a developer raising concerns on healthcare contributions at section 7.2 of the document, officers had reviewed this and were confident that the SPD had not set a fixed tariff for healthcare contributions, and that it made clear that all contributions should meet legal and policy tests to ensure they were proportionate and reasonable for each development.
- The letter should not prevent adoption of the SPD before the cut-off date of 30 June.

N.B. There was a break in proceedings at 19:59 and the meeting recommenced at 20:06.

The Director – Place provided a verbal update on the letter received and advised that:

- Bloor Homes claimed that section 7.2 of the SPD set out a formulaic healthcare contribution, which was contrary to planning practice guidance.
- After review by officers, they had concluded that this section stated how the Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) interacted with the local planning authority and calculated medical services costs based on their formula rather than how the Council acted.
- Section 7.2 was just one part of the SPD, and the approach to considering contributions was set out in the introductory sections, including the regulations that governed these.
- Officers were satisfied that the SPD set a rounded approach to considering contribution requests put forward by third parties on a case-by-case basis, and this was reinforced by policies in other documents such as Policy SP7 in the Local Plan and policies in the National Planning Policy Framework.

Councillor Donna Wright proposed the recommendations in the report, and this was seconded by Councillor Daniel Allen.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Daniel Allen

Points raised during the debate included:

- They were happy to support the paper based on the response and assurances from the Director – Place.
- It was exciting to see this document progress and be used going forward as it was an exemplar document.

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

RESOLVED: That Cabinet*:*

(1) Adopted the Developer Contribution SPD, attached as Appendix 1.

(2) Revoked the 2023 Developer Contributions SPD.

(3) 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 adopted Developer Contributions SPD as considered necessary for publication and publicity in accordance with the relevant regulations.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To allow the updated Developer Contributions SPD to be adopted to support delivery of the policies in the adopted Local Plan and ensure that developer contributions for development schemes are secured appropriately where they are necessary.

9 NORTH HERTS DESIGN CODE SPD

Audio recording – 41 minutes 30 seconds

Councillor Donna Wright, as Executive Member for Place, presented the report entitled 'North Herts Design Code SPD' and advised that:

- The Draft Design Code had been presented to Cabinet in February following several Member Workshops held over the year before that.
- 68 responses had been received from the consultation and most of these had been addressed, with some raising procedural concerns on technical aspects, and these were set out at Appendix A to the report.
- A minor adjustment had been made to page 9 of the SPD in response to a second letter received from Bloor Homes to make it clear that existing plans should be consistent with the Design Code unless it would conflict with design principles established earlier.
- With the query addressed, they should accept the recommendations in the report.

The Director – Place provided a verbal update on the letter received and advised that:

- Four issues had been identified with the SPD on how it would be applied, its introduction of new policy, implications of viability, and the adequacy of consultation.
- Amendments had been made to the SPD to address its proposed application already and the letter acknowledged satisfaction with these.
- Officers did not agree that it introduced new policies as it expanded on existing policies in the Local Plan rather than creating new ones, which followed government guidance.

- It was also not agreed with that the SPD had negative viability implications as it would not reduce the quantity of development, overall value or prevent other targets being met in terms of density or space standards.
- It was also recognised that pre-existing work took precedent.
- The Design Code would be applied once applications progressed through certain stages such as Reserved Matters, but some elements would have already been fixed at earlier stages such as outline planning.
- A comply or justify approach allowed developers to put forward their case if they had not met requirements in the SPD.
- Consultation on the SPD had been condensed to meet deadlines but had not been compromised because of this and had met the relevant consultation regulations.

In response to a question from Councillor Ian Albert, the Director – Place advised that Natural England and the Environment Agency were two of the three statutory consultees for environmental appraisal screening, but there were more statutory consultees for planning consultations.

In response to a question from Councillor Ian Albert, the Principal Planning & Urban Design Officer advised that one request had been made by Historic England in response to the consultation to amend wording on listed buildings and character areas.

Councillor Donna Wright proposed the recommendations in the report, and this was seconded by Councillor Sean Nolan.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Sean Nolan

Points raised during the debate included:

- Members had been fully involved in the process of developing this document, which had helped with their understanding.
- North Herts residents had also been involved, and it had been good to receive different perspectives to ensure the future of the district beyond the existence of the Council.

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

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Noted the outcomes of the consultation on the draft Design Code SPD, as contained in the Statement of Consultation at Appendix A.

(2) Adopted the Design Code SPD, attached as Appendix B.

(3) Revoked the 2011 Design Supplementary Planning Document.

(4) Granted delegated authority to the Director: Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Place, to make any minor non-material corrections to the Design Code SPD as considered necessary for publication and publicity in accordance with the relevant regulations.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

(1) To allow the Design Code SPD to be adopted to support delivery of the policies in the adopted Local Plan and ensure that developer contributions for development schemes are secured appropriately where they are necessary.

(2) To ensure the SPD is presented in advance of the Government's final cut-off of 30 June 2026 for any SPDs to be adopted under the outgoing legacy planning system.

10 WASTE VEHICLES FUEL ARRANGEMENTS

Audio recording – 54 minutes 32 seconds

Councillor Amy Allen, as Executive Member for Environment, presented the report entitled 'Waste Vehicles Fuel Arrangements' and advised that:

- The Council had moved to using Hydrogenated Vegetable Oil (HVO) fuel as a low emission alternative to diesel to support carbon reduction commitments, but global events had increased the price of both.
- HVO was currently 40p more expensive than diesel and if 100% HVO use was continued, there would be an estimated overspend of roughly £15K a month.
- The proposal would cap the use of HVO in overall fuel mix, which would still achieve some emission reduction targets while limiting financial impacts.
- This was an interim measure that they would keep under review, with the aim to return to 100% HVO fuel mix once market conditions improved.

Councillor Amy Allen proposed the recommendations in the report, and this was seconded by Councillor Daniel Allen.

As part of the debate, Councillor Ian Albert highlighted that this was a sensible and practical approach given international circumstances, and it was important for them to use HVO to some extent while recognising the financial implications as set out in the report.

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

RESOLVED: That Cabinet approved use of a HVO mix for the Council's large waste vehicles, that limits the additional cost to the Council (of using HVO over diesel) to approximately £5,000 per month from 1 July 2026 to 31 March 2027. This would be subject to a minimum HVO use of 20%, unless it became impossible to obtain HVO fuel.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

(1) The Council set a budget in January 2025 to use Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil in the vehicles (above 3.5 tonnes) in the waste and street cleansing contract. The budget set aside at the time (£40k per year ongoing) was expected to be sufficient to use 100% HVO in those vehicles, although the budget decision did reference that it would be possible to use incremental levels of HVO depending on cost. Inflation added to the budget means that £40k budget is now £42k (for 2026/27).

(2) Global events have increased the cost of fuel, with an even more substantial increase in the cost of HVO. This recommendation manages the cost impact on the Council during this period of uncertainty. Overall, the Council remains committed to its Sustainability Strategy and the carbon emission targets set within that strategy.

11 FUNDING FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION (LGR)

Audio recording – 58 minutes 55 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Jon Clayden, as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Clayden advised that:

- Some discussion had taken place on staff training costs and the balance between training for new and existing staff.

- A query regarding how county-wide costs would be allocated had been answered by the Director – Resources.
- Discussion over transparency on decision-making and where projects needed to be scaled back as they moved to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) had also taken place.
- An amendment had been made to recommendation 2.2 in the report to include that any spend can be approved by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chair of the Overview of Scrutiny Committee and political Group Leaders in addition to the Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Resources.

N.B. Councillor Daniel Allen left the Council Chamber at 20:31.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Donna Wright
- Councillor Mick Debenham
- Councillor Daniel Allen

In response to questions, Councillor Val Bryant advised that she, as the Leader of the Council, and the Executive Member for Resources were the only Members with a coherent view on staff training due to their attendance at ongoing meetings.

N.B. Councillors Daniel Allen and Tamsin Thomas entered the Council Chamber at 20:33.

In response to questions, Councillor Jon Clayden advised that neither he nor the political Group Leaders would have the decision-making power on spending, and that they would just be consultees along with the Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Resources.

In response to questions, Councillor Laura Williams advised that training plans across all 11 authorities in Hertfordshire had already been agreed by the Herts Leaders Group.

Councillor Ian Albert, as the Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled 'Funding for Local Government Reorganisation' and advised that:

- A delegated decision had allocated £450K for four HR and IT posts to address significant LGR workload pressures, and recruitment for those was ongoing, which meant that the full funding allocation might not be needed.
- £1M of total funding for the 2026/27 financial year and £1M for the 2027/28 financial year had been agreed.
- Spending related to staff backfill and county-wide costs would likely be made through delegated decision notices.
- Spending on learning and development would be allocated in tranches due to the low amounts and existing training budgets, and monitoring would take place on this through quarterly reports.
- Officer time spent on LGR was already significant and would only increase.
- A balance for spending on training for new and existing staff was recognised.
- Transparency on spending would be important to ensure scrutiny from the Overview & Scrutiny and Finance, Audit and Risk Committees.
- A huge number of important projects were taking place, and staff were being stretched in different directions, so there was a need to manage priorities.
- They were happy to accept the amendment suggested by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with the recognition that decisions would be made quickly and irregularly as £450K had already been allocated to staffing costs this year.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Daniel Allen

- Councillor Donna Wright

In response to questions, Councillor Ian Albert advised that:

- Given the importance of LGR, they were happy to include additional parties in the consultation process for spending on LGR related staffing costs.
- Decisions on staffing costs would not need to be made as quickly as those on county-wide costs, and no recruitment was planned in the near future.

In response to questions, Councillor Val Bryant advised that:

- They would be happy to listen to views from the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny and political Group Leaders, but there would be limited time for responses due to deadlines.
- An appropriate way of communicating with consultees on these matters would be considered.

In response to questions, Councillor Laura Williams advised that there was complexity on decision-making around LGR due to the number of authorities involved and the introduction of joint committees in the interim before the formation of shadow authorities.

In response to questions, the Director – Resources advised that the Chief Executive would have the delegated authority to make the decisions on LGR related spending and other parties listed would be consultees only.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed the recommendations with the amendment to recommendation 2.2 to include that any spend can be approved by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and political Group Leaders in addition to the Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Resources, and this was seconded by Councillor Laura Williams.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Sean Nolan
- Councillor Daniel Allen

Points raised during the debate included:

- It was pleasing to hear that they could continue to support staff with training.
- The next couple of years would be taxing for staff, and it would be important to support them through this.

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

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Approved that up to £1 million of the available funding be allocated to county-wide costs. Any contribution will be based on a fair share from each Council and can be approved by the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Executive Member for Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation and Executive Member for Resources.

(2) Approved that up to £1 million of the available funding be allocated to additional staffing costs, noting that £450k has already been allocated. Any spend can be approved by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council, Executive Member for Resources, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and political Group Leaders, except where the Constitution already requires different approval processes.

(3) Approved that up to £200k of the available funding can be spent on additional training costs. Any spend can be approved by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Resources.

(4) Approved that any spend is subject to cap of £1 million in 2026/27 and £2 million overall.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: This is intended to provide a practical framework for agreeing LGR costs. It aims to allow timely reactions in what will need to be a fast-moving project.

12 2025-26 Q4 COUNCIL PLAN UPDATE

Audio recording – 1 hour 29 minutes 7 seconds

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled '2025-26 Q4 Council Delivery Plan Update' and advised that:

- Key Performance Indicator (KPIs) for 2026/27 were detailed within the report.
- The incomplete projects currently within the plan would be retained for 2026/27, with the addition of Royston Learner Pool.
- Three projects had been completed, two had a green delivery status, and three projects had an amber delivery status, which meant that a new milestone due date would be agreed for those.
- Three KPIs had a red status and five KPIs had an amber status, and planned actions for these were detailed at paragraphs 8.4 and 8.5 of the report.
- An agent had been appointed to lead the Expressions of Interest exercise for Charnwood House so that this could be progressed as early as July onwards.
- There was recognition that they needed to keep this plan under review as capacity and resourcing for big projects was an issue for all authorities with Local Government Reorganisation coming up.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Sean Nolan seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Noted the progress against projects as set out in the Council Delivery Plan and approved the changes to the milestones (Appendix 1).

(2) Noted the performance against the Key Performance Indicators and confirms the actions for those with a red or amber status.

(3) Approved the Key Performance Indicators and targets for 2026/27 (Appendix 2).

(4) Approved that the existing incomplete projects on the Council Delivery Plan are carried forward into 2026/27, and that the Royston Learner Pool project is added.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: The Council Delivery Plan (CDP) report provides Cabinet with the opportunity to monitor progress against the key Council projects and KPIs, including any overall trends. This end of year report also sets the scope (projects and KPIs) for 2026/27 monitoring. Overview and Scrutiny can use these reports to help with setting their work programme.

13 2025-26 YEAR END REPORT OF RISK MANAGEMENT GOVERNANCE

Audio recording – 1 hour 35 minutes 7 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham, as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Poopalasingham advised that:

- There had been no overall changes to the framework since last year.
- Paragraph 7 of the report showed the risk grid, which contained seven red corporate risks for the Council.
- The two highest scoring risks were related to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and resourcing.
- The Renters Right Act was a new addition to the risk register, although this was not yet a concern and they would continue to monitor this.
- Risk related to financial sustainability should reduce due to the financial position of the Council but there was a potential risk to this from global factors and inflation.
- There were a few risks to monitor but the Committee was broadly happy with the processes in place.

In response to a question from Councillor Sean Nolan, Councillor Poopalasingham advised that the Committee had a brief discussion on the Renters Right Act, but the Committee could not comment much on this at this stage and would continue to monitor it.

In response to a question from Councillor Daniel Allen, Councillor Ian Albert advised that the Council Delivery Plan (CDP) set out what actions would be taken on Oughtonhead Common Weir such as appointing a contractor to progress with the work on this.

In response to a question from Councillor Daniel Allen, the Director – Resources advised that there was not a high level of risk in not delivering work on Oughtonhead Common Weir, but they would pick this up with the relevant service manager.

Councillor Ian Albert, as the Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled ‘2025-26 Year End Report on Risk Management Governance’ and advised that:

- All areas raised by the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee would be kept under review, particularly cyber risks.
- Much of the detail in the report was contained within the Appendix to the report and showed that the Council had effective procedures in place to manage and monitor risks.
- Paragraph 7.1 of the report described corporate and overarching risks.
- The table at paragraph 7.2 detailed actions that would be taken to address red risks, including the actions already completed.
- Sections 9 and 12 of the report monitored performance and training.
- Service risks and activities were outlined at various sections in the report.
- The report concluded with progress against actions and set new actions for 2026/27.

In response to a question from Councillor Donna Wright, the Director – Resources advised that it was up to Cabinet Members to determine which risks should be corporate risks, and that planning would be considered at the next Risk and Performance Management Group.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Sean Nolan seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet noted the report.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That it note the report.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION: To provide assurance that the Council is effectively managing risk. The Council's Risk Management Strategy details that this annual review should be presented to Council. Cabinet have responsibility for the management of risk.

N.B. There was a break at the end of this item and the meeting reconvened at 21:28.

14 REVENUE BUDGET OUTTURN 2025/26 (FINAL)

Audio recording – 1 hour 56 minutes 24 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham, as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk (FAR) Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Poopalasingham advised that:

- The report had been updated for Cabinet to reflect a reduction in the underspend on waste vehicles and the mobilisation of the waste contract, and although this had been funded from waste reserves, this shortfall had impacted the outturn position.
- Appendix A to the report had been considered, which gave a breakdown of variance in the year and the report gave the final outturn position.
- Previous carry forward amounts at paragraph 8.5 demonstrated that delivery was constrained by capacity, and there had been concern over significant variances resulting in a big carry forward to this financial year, as this might constrain capacity further.
- There had been a focus on overspends such as the £169K in relation to Churchgate as indicated on page 489 of the Agenda Reports Pack.
- Loss of commercial waste revenue was noted and mitigations measures for this were considered.
- Apart from variances, the Committee were happy with the outturn.

N.B. Councillor Amy Allen entered the Chamber at 21:29.

Councillor Ian Albert, as the Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled 'Revenue Budget Outturn 2025-26 (Final)' and advised that:

- The number of car parking tickets sold went up by 4.6%, and penalty charge notices had also increased in this period.
- They were happy to take on board comments from the FAR Committee.
- Table 4 in the report looked at budgets, variances and carry forwards and these were carefully reviewed with Directors and Executive Members, but there was an acknowledgment for more transparency on this.
- External expertise would be important for the Churchgate project, but there was recognition that they could be more transparent about the nature of the spend on this.
- There had been further underspend against the budget, but half of this would be carried forward to next year as detailed in Table 4.
- £1.884M would be carried forward as shown at paragraph 8.3 of the report.
- Carry forwards from previous years were displayed in paragraph 8.5 to show that there were multiple planned areas of spend.
- The target level of efficiencies had been met as detailed at paragraph 8.4.
- Performance against corporate financial health income measures was shown at paragraphs 8.6-8.8.
- The General Fund was £17.9M by year end with £1.9M proposed carry forward, which was healthier than the £14.4M net position forecast back in February 2025
- Appendix 1 summarised all the variances across the year.

In response to a question by Councillor Daniel Allen, the Director – Resources advised that the costs incurred from the Public Inquiry for the appeal for the application on Barkway Road, Royston would likely be included if they were incurred before the end of March, but this would be checked.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed the recommendations in the report, and this was seconded by Councillor Daniel Allen.

As part of the debate, Councillor Sean Nolan highlighted that:

- Combining outputs from risk management around capacity with staffing from Local Government Reorganisation would always be challenging.
- They would need to keep monitoring the above as this was not the first time there had been carry forwards, but they were fortunate to have good staffing levels.
- Everything needed to be done to support staff while the Council existed.

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

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Noted this report.

(2) Approved a decrease of £1.385million in the 2025/26 net General Fund expenditure, as identified in section 8, to a total of £21.400million.

(3) Approved the changes to the 2026/27 General Fund budget, as identified in table 4 and paragraph 8.3, a total £651k increase in net expenditure

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That it approves the net transfer from earmarked reserves, as identified in table 9, of £4.925million.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

(1) Members are able to monitor, make adjustments within the overall budgetary framework and request appropriate action of Services who do not meet the budget targets set as part of the Corporate Business Planning process.

(2) Changes to the Council’s balances are monitored and approved.

15 TREASURY MANAGEMENT END OF YEAR REVIEW 2025/26

Audio recording – 2 hours 9 minutes 50 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham, as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Poopalasingham advised that:

- Balances were declining due to more capital spend, which meant less funding was available to invest. However, interest rates had stayed higher than expected.
- Interest returned from investments had been lower than the previous year but higher than expected at the beginning of the financial year.
- Inflation had not come down quickly, meaning that the higher than anticipated interest returns would be balanced out by higher spending in other areas.
- The current allocation of investments was shown on page 508 of the Agenda Reports Pack.
- Outstanding investments as of 31 March 2026 were shown at paragraph 8.9 of the report.
- There had been a good return on investments, but this could not always be guaranteed in the long-term.

Councillor Ian Albert, as the Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled 'Treasury Management End of Year Review 2025-26' and advised that:

- £2.08M had been returned from interest on investments, and while higher inflation benefitted their investments, it also impacted North Herts residents, and they sought to balance Council funding wisely.
- The position at the end of year was similar to the position at the end of Q3.
- They were required to note the breach of the strategy earlier in the year as described at paragraph 8.1 of the report, and actions would ensure this would not happen again.
- Investments continued to focus on security and liquidity first.
- Investments at the year end were shown at page 508 of the Agenda Reports Pack, and the one bank investment had now matured.

In response to a question by Councillor Mick Debenham, the Director – Resources advised that Surrey County Council had not gone through Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) yet, but there was no risk associated with this as any outstanding investments in authorities that went through LGR would be transferred to one of the new authorities.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Sean Nolan seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet noted the position of Treasury Management activity as at the end of March 2026.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That it:

(1) Approves the actual 2025/26 prudential and treasury indicators as detailed in Appendix B.

(2) Notes the annual Treasury Management Review for 2025/26 (Appendix B).

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS: 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.

16 CAPITAL END OF YEAR REVIEW 2025/26

Audio recording – 2 hours 16 minutes 26 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham, as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Poopalasingham advised that:

- Total expenditure against the capital budget over the year, including an underspend of £1.448M was detailed at Table 1 in the report, and areas within the capital schemes in which this had occurred were set out in Table 2.
- The Leisure Centre Decarbonisation project would need to be kept under review due to slippage of timelines and an increase in the project budget to cover additional costs.
- In-year variances on individual capital projects were shown at Table 3.
- Projects successfully completed in 2025/26 were highlighted at paragraph 8.6.
- There was a need to borrow to finance the capital programme as shown at paragraph 8.7 of the report.
- Borrowing had mostly been done internally, and they could continue with this approach as the most significant 2025/26 capital expenditure had already taken place.
- External borrowing needed to be kept under review due to high interest rates.
- Borrowing would impact the budget due to a minimum revenue provision charge.

- The Council were in an overall good position, but they would continue to monitor spending on budgets.
- Councillor Ian Albert was thanked for his attendance at the Committee.

The Director – Resources advised that £1.4M had been budgeted for a minimum revenue provision this year, which was a correction to the figure quoted at the most recent Finance, Audit and Risk Committee meeting.

Councillor Ian Albert, as the Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled 'Capital End of Year Review 2025-26' and advised that:

- Input and comments from Members of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee were welcomed.
- Completed capital projects such as King George V Skate Park and the leisure centre upgrades were fantastic achievements and of huge benefit to residents.
- Just over £1M of capital slippage and a net underspend of £300K was detailed at Table 2, which included the need to increase the budget for the Leisure Centre Decarbonisation project.
- The capacity to deliver would continue to be kept under review.
- £22M spend on capital projects during the year had been shown in Table 4, and this had been mostly funded by internal borrowing.
- The minimum revenue provision costs in 2026/27 would be less than anticipated due to capital slippage, and this would be monitored through quarterly review mechanisms.
- Projects would need to be kept under review moving forward due to Local Government Reorganisation.

In response to a question by Councillor Daniel Allen, Councillor Sean Nolan advised that they would speak to IT about the laptop refresh and the associated costs with this if Members were required to have a laptop.

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

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Noted expenditure of £22.002million in 2025/26 on the capital programme, paragraph 8.3 refers.

(2) Approved the adjustments to the capital programme for 2026/27 as a result of the revised timetable of schemes and other adjustments detailed in table 2, increasing the estimated spend by £1.950million.

(3) Noted the position of the availability of capital resources, as detailed in table 4 paragraph 8.7 and the requirement to keep the capital programme under review for affordability.

(4) Approved the application of £1.057million of capital receipts/set aside towards the 2025/26 capital programme, paragraph 8.7 refers.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: Cabinet is required to approve adjustments to the capital programme and ensure the capital programme is fully funded.

17 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Audio recording – 2 hours 30 minutes 4 seconds

Councillor Val Bryant proposed and Councillor Sean Nolan 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).

18 ALLOCATION OF MHCLG HOMELESSNESS GRANT - PART 2

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 (as amended).

19 ALLOCATION OF MHCLG HOMELESSNESS GRANT - PART 1

Audio recording – 2 hours 35 minutes 54 seconds

Councillor Mick Debenham, as Executive Member for Regulatory, presented the report entitled 'Allocation of MHCLG Homelessness Grant – Part 1' and advised that:

- The proposed allocation of MHCLG funding equated to £2.8M of ringfenced funding for statutory homelessness duties over the next three years.
- This report set out proposals for part of the funding, and this would align with grant conditions, national policy and local priorities as detailed in Table 4.
- Most of the funding would support two homelessness schemes in the district operated by Keystage Housing and One YMCA.
- It was proposed to allocate £700K to Keystage Housing over the next three years, with the allocation for this financial year being lower to reflect a £58K interim payment made to them in May.
- It was proposed to allocate £81K to One YMCA to reconfigure existing accommodation to create additional units and increase capacity at their facilities.
- £8K was proposed for Herts Young Homelessness to deliver education programmes to secondary schools.
- £616K would be left over, which was different to the incorrect amount of £674K detailed in Table 4.
- Proposed allocations would support the Council in meeting its statutory homelessness duties, enhance local provision and increase accommodation capacity.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Donna Wright
- Councillor Ian Albert

In response to questions, Councillor Mick Debenham advised that:

- They had been paying Keystage since last March at a reduced rate of housing benefit, and the only risk was them not being able to continue providing their services.
- There was spare capacity as they were not inundated with homelessness.

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

- The district had fewer than 100 households in temporary accommodation.
- Single homeless people were the biggest challenge as they often had multiple needs and it was difficult to resource them, but organisations like One YMCA and Keystage Housing were critical in helping with this.
- Local Government Reorganisation may provide opportunities for extra capacity as they would be grouped with at least one other authority that had its own housing stock, which would increase their flexibility on providing homelessness accommodation.

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

RESOLVED: That Cabinet approved the funding proposals for the allocation of Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant received from the MHCLG as outlined in Table 4 in paragraph 8.11.

REASON FOR DECISION: There is a need to secure housing services for homeless households in the district, including key existing services on the single homeless pathway. Adopting the recommendation at 2.1 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).

20 GA2 ACCESS LAND

Audio recording – 2 hours 43 minutes 32 seconds

Councillor Tamsin Thomas, as Executive Member for Enterprise, presented the report entitled 'GA2 Access Land' and advised that:

- This follow-up report sought Cabinet approval to proceed with the option agreement for the potential sale of land that was approved by Cabinet last year.
- Terms for the option agreement were subject to notices being published regarding the appropriation of open space and disposal of the land.
- No objections or representations had been received in response and this stage had been completed.
- This land was required to facilitate access to the GA2 strategic housing site, which would deliver 600 dwellings and associated infrastructure near Great Ashby as seen in the Masterplan approved by Cabinet and ratified by Council in November 2024.
- Access would be required from Mendip Way, which would cross five parcels of land owned by separate parties, including the Council.
- Wider collaboration was required with the four other landowners, and the option agreement would give Picture Estates Ltd the option to acquire the land subject to planning permission being granted.
- The land owned by the Council was currently a playground and any loss from this would be mitigated through new provision in the GA2 development.
- Careful structuring of the agreement had ensured the Council would obtain best value.
- Upfront costs from this process had been covered by the developer and deducted from the proceeds of sale that would be split equally between the five landowners.
- If Cabinet approved this, it would ensure the unlocking of a strategic site and a capital receipt.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Laura Williams
- Councillor Daniel Allen

- Councillor Mick Debenham

In response to questions, the Principal Estates Surveyor advised that:

- If planning permission for this site was not granted, then the option agreement would not be exercised and they would retain ownership of the land in its current use as a playground, but this was unlikely given the agreed allocation.
- Access to the site must come from Mendip Way and the development could not proceed without passing through this land.
- One of the conditions of development would be the satisfactory reprovision and enhancement of the play area.
- There was a small risk that one of the other landowners might not accept a future deal and it could fall through, but this was unlikely as there had been years of discussions and negotiations to get to this point and all landowners would receive a capital receipt from the sale.

In response to questions, Councillor Tamsin Thomas advised that:

- The 600 proposed dwellings would be needed by the district, so it was critical that this happened to unlock the development.
- It was also critical that the enhancement of the playground and open space would take place through this.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas proposed and Councillor Ian Albert seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Noted that the proposals to appropriate open space for planning purposes and dispose of the open space land has been publicly advertised in compliance with the requirements of s122 and s123 of the Local Government Act 1972.

(2) Appropriated for planning purposes, pursuant to s122 of the Local Government Act 1972, the land that is the subject of the transaction for the purposes of facilitating the development of the GA2 site including the provision of a new access road and associated works and infrastructure.

(3) Delegated authority to the Director: Resources, in consultation with the Executive Member for Resources, to finalise, complete, sign and seal all necessary documentation associated with the transaction, subject to receipt of valuation advice confirming compliance with the Council's duty under section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 to obtain best consideration reasonably obtainable.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

(1) Public notices as required by s122 & s123 of the LGA 1972 have been published and no objections or representations have been received by the deadline of 5pm on 15th May.

(2) The recommendations are made to ensure that access is available to facilitate the development of GA2, a Strategic Housing site allocated in the Local Plan, which will Page 369 Agenda Item 11 assist in the delivery of circa 600 new homes and associated facilities including affordable homes.

(3) Completion of the sale is also expected to generate a capital receipt.

21 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Audio recording – 2 hours 53 minutes 8 seconds

Councillor Val Bryant proposed and Councillor Sean Nolan 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 Paragraphs 3 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).

22 PART 2 MINUTES – 19 NOVEMBER 2025

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

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

RESOLVED: That the Part 2 Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 19 November 2025 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

23 CHURCHGATE REGENERATION PROJECT UPDATE AND NEXT STEPS - PART 2

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

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

24 CHURCHGATE REGENERATION PROJECT UPDATE & NEXT STEPS - PART 1

Audio recording – 3 hours 23 minutes 10 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Jon Clayden, as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Clayden advised that:

- The Committee appreciated the opportunity to consider the report.
- They were keen to ensure that there was no softening of quality or affordable housing allocation resulting due to the updated process.
- There was concern over the sign off process for this project once the shadow authorities were formed.
- It had also been questioned why the work could not be completed inhouse, but that query had been answered.
- The balance of risk for the Council versus the risk for a developer as the project progressed was also considered.
- Recognition should be given to any increasing costs as these would be borne by the taxpayer.
- Some costs were distorting, but the Committee did not believe that the project had reached a point where there should be a cap on spending.

In response to a question from Councillor Ian Albert, Councillor Clayden advised that the point raised during the debate at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting that the project had reached a tipping point was not a formal position that the Committee had taken.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas, as Executive Member for Enterprise, presented the report entitled 'Churchgate Regeneration Project Update and Next Steps – Part 1' and advised that:

- Since the Full Council meeting in July 2025, the project team had worked to test and progress issues associated with the site including viability, parking, the market and public realm.
- It was important to recognise that the Council was in a stronger position than it was in July last year as there was a clearer understanding of the site and the viability and delivery channels, a stronger technical and financial evidence base and a greater insight into market appetite and delivery expectations.
- Soft market engagement indicated that Hitchin was viewed as an attractive and credible regeneration opportunity with long-term potential whilst acknowledging that it was a complex scheme that would require careful feasibility work and detailed delivery planning.
- The Council was seeking to appoint regeneration specialists to work alongside the project team to refine a deliverable scheme and help to transition ambition into implementation.
- The phased approach would ensure that the investment, funding and risk would remain proportionate to certainty at each stage of the project while progressing the project in a controlled way with strategic oversight and decision-making control.
- Further testing of deliverability and viability would reduce uncertainty before any future long-term delivery decisions were made.
- A confirmation of viability would not compromise the delivery of affordable housing or value for money, and this stage would allow the precise testing of design, quality, viability and delivery considerations together rather than separately.
- The ambition to deliver a high-quality, viable regeneration scheme capable of supporting the long-term vitality and success of Hitchin Town Centre remained.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas proposed the recommendations in the report, and this was seconded by Councillor Daniel Allen.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Tamsin Thomas
- Councillor Sean Nolan

Points raised during the debate included:

- This was the right approach on a hugely important project.
- They would need to ensure clear communication with residents through the Churchgate website and other forms.
- The Project Board needed to urgently look at how they published the documents that were in the Agenda Reports Pack and communicated decisions on the project going forward.
- The documents were specialised and designed for the purpose of developers.
- Stakeholder communication had been considered by the project board, but there was also recognition that the public wanted to see progress, and they should communicate with an aim to demonstrate this.
- Communications Officers could attend project board meetings to ensure more communication.
- Additional layers of communication could be put in place to support the reading of more complex documents.
- The documents on this project were already in the public domain regardless of their appropriateness. Therefore, they should ensure that the information was shown in appropriate way.
- This project was one of the biggest projects the Council had undertaken, and it would be great for Hitchin.

In response to points raised during the debate, the Churchgate Project Manager advised that:

- The background documents were technical working documents on specialised topics prepared for internal decision-making purposes rather than public audiences, and it would be difficult for residents to interpret them without wider context.
- The project board would need to work on how to produce accessible updates for residents that would communicate progress going forward.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed an amendment to include that Cabinet instructs officers to undertake a review of the external communications approach of the Council, with a specific focus on improving transparency, accessibility, and the visibility of key decision-making information.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas accepted the amendment into the substantive motion, and this was also accepted by Councillor Daniel Allen as seconder.

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

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That it:

(1) Approves the additional capital / revenue funding set out in the Part 2 report to support the next phase of the Churchgate Regeneration Project.

(2) Instructs officers to undertake a review of the Council's external communications approach, with a specific focus on improving transparency, accessibility, and the visibility of key decision-making information.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

(1) Since the last Full Council update in July 2025, and subsequent Overview & Scrutiny Committee discussions in February 2026, the Churchgate Regeneration Project has progressed significantly and moved into a substantially more mature and evidence-led phase.

(2) Over the past year, the Council has undertaken an extensive programme of work to respond directly to key matters raised by Members and stakeholders, including viability, parking, public realm, market provision, delivery options, governance and long-term town centre sustainability. This has included financial analysis, specialist technical work, Project Board workshops and Member briefings.

(3) This work has enabled the Council to move from high-level vision setting into a more informed, evidence-led and delivery-focused phase.

(4) Alongside this, the Council has also undertaken early engagement with the development and investment sector to inform future procurement, delivery and partnership decisions. Feedback from this work has demonstrated strong market interest in Hitchin and increased confidence in both the credibility of the opportunity and the Council's commitment to delivering a high-quality regeneration programme for the town centre.

(5) The recommendations within this report therefore represent a logical progression from the work completed to date and are intended to ensure that future decisions regarding the regeneration of the site are informed, evidence-led and commercially robust.

(6) The proposed next stage of work is materially different from earlier strategic and visioning exercises. The Council is now seeking to appoint specialist regeneration and development expertise to work alongside the project team in refining a deliverable scheme, testing assumptions in greater detail, reducing uncertainty and supporting the transition from strategic visioning into delivery planning and implementation.

(7) This phased approach enables the Council to retain control of the project as it develops, whilst ensuring that investment and risk remain proportionate to the level of certainty and information available at each stage.

(8) The proposed next phase reflects the consistent feedback received through market engagement and specialist advice: that the appropriate next step is a structured feasibility and delivery-planning phase focused on shaping a viable, deliverable and investment ready regeneration scheme for Hitchin town centre.

The meeting closed at 11.20 pm

Chair