NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER - DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERNON ROAD, LETCHWORTH, SG6 3JF
ON TUESDAY, 22ND SEPTEMBER, 2026 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Val Bryant (Chair), Sean Nolan (Vice-Chair), Ian Albert, Amy Allen, Mick Debenham, Tamsin Thomas, Donna Wright and Daniel Allen.*

In Attendance: *Isabelle Alajooz (Director - Governance and Monitoring Officer), Ian Couper (Director - Resources), Philip Doggett (Principal Estates Surveyor), Robert Filby (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Sarah Kingsley (Director - Environment), Martin Lawrence (Strategic Housing Manager), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Alan North (Service Manager - Greenspace), Anthony Roche (Chief Executive), Rachael Rooney (Interim Strategic Planning Manager), Nigel Smith (Director - Place) and Louise Symes (Transport, Parking & Projects Service Manager).*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting approximately* 3 *members of the public, including registered speakers.*

Councillor Jon Clayden was present as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Stewart Willoughby was present as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee for the meeting on 9 September 2026.

25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 47 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Laura Williams.

26 MINUTES - 16 JUNE 2026

Audio Recording – 1 minute 56 seconds

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

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 16 June 2206 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

27 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 32 seconds

There was no other business notified.

28 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 36 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.

29 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 3 minutes 51 seconds

The Chair invited Mr David Cook to provide a 5-minute verbal presentation relating to Agenda Item 8 – Local Plan – Content and Evidence Base Consultation.

Mr Cook thanked the Chair for the opportunity and advised that:

- He was speaking as a North Herts resident with three daughters living at home due to not being able to afford to move out and remain in North Herts.
- He provided consultancy planning work on a commercial basis but had no work connection to the North Herts area.
- He wanted to note that the Interim Strategic Planning Manager was an asset to the Council and was a great ambassador in the community promoting interest and engagement with the process.
- His first point related to self-build, which was referred to within the document pack, which outlined there was a statutory duty to meet demand for this.
- Whilst two options were presented for the Cabinet to consider, they should also consider a third option which could establish a specific policy to encourage self-build development, as was the case in Central Bedfordshire.
- He did not want Cabinet to adopt this policy tonight, but rather to consult on this position.
- Secondly, many key workers cannot afford to live in the area local to which they work, with most housing still unaffordable even at reduced market rates. This included people like teachers, nurses and Council officers, who were having to travel into their place of work to provide services to villages which were unaffordable.
- Again, there should be a consideration as part of the consultation on how this could be addressed.
- Finally, there was an issue with the balance of urban and rural development, with most housing being provided as urban expansion and therefore there would be a higher proportion of urban properties. However, this was not beneficial to the surrounding villages, and consideration should be given to appropriate development to support rural life, such as farm worker properties previously built in the rural areas of the district.

In response to the presentation, the following Members raised points:

- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Donna Wright

The points raised included:

- There were specific self-build plots included in the permission granted for the Land North of the Grange development. This was an important step and reflected that self-build had always been part of the agenda of the Council.
- There were good points raised and these could be taken forward and considered as part of the next version of the Local Plan.
- The comments on urban versus rural expansion were interesting and the historical trend of this could be explored.
- Whilst rural communities did need to be sustainable and provide options for younger workers to remain local, there was also a need to consider the protection of the countryside, as well as providing housing with suitable transport options.
- It was important to provide a good balance of appropriate group across the settlements in the district.

The Chair thanked Mr Cook for his presentation.

30 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Audio recording – 12 minutes 16 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.

31 CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE ACTION PLAN UPDATE

Audio recording – 13 minutes 02 seconds

Councillor Val Bryant, as Leader of the Council, presented the report entitled 'Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan Update' and highlighted that:

- This report provided an update for Cabinet against the agreed Action Plan following the Corporate Peer Challenge in November 2024.
- The Action Plan was approved by Cabinet in March 2025, with further updates provided at meetings in September 2025 and February 2026.
- A follow up report from the Local Government Association Peers was also presented to Cabinet in February 2026.

The Chief Executive further highlighted for Members that:

- There were references to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Section 8 of the report. However, this process had been paused by the government since the report was written. This pause did not have any material impact on the recommendations proposed.
- Should the LGR process be cancelled, Cabinet may need to consider the Action Plan again and a further Corporate Peer Challenge visit may be conducted.
- However, the indications so far were that LGR was on pause and would proceed in the future.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ian Alber
- Councillor Donna Wright
- Councillor Tamsin Thomas
- Councillor Mick Debenham

In response to questions, the Chief Executive advised that:

- The recommendations proposed were that no further reports would be provided to Cabinet and therefore it would not be relevant to add further detail on timescales for actions. However, this could be discussed outside of the meeting, if further clarification was required.
- Executive Members and their relevant Directors could continue to discuss actions which related to their areas and monitor any ongoing actions outside of Cabinet meetings.
- An assessment of how well the Action Plan had been delivered could form part of the ongoing discussion between Executive Members and Directors.
- The increased communication with staff has continued throughout the LGR process to date and had increased since the pause was announced, with an all-staff briefing arranged specifically to address the pause.
- A staff survey was being conducted at the time of the pause announcement, and it was agreed that this would be continued and results analysed to provide insight into the impact of the pause on staff.
- There was a Member Briefing arranged for Thursday 24 September to provide information on the LGR pause.
- The restructure of the Leadership Team and its success could be discussed at the next Political Liaison Board meeting.

Councillor Val Bryant, as Chair, proposed to approve the recommendations, as amended, and this was seconded by Councillor Mick Debenham.

As part of the debate, Councillor Daniel Allen noted that the Council had learnt a lot from this Peer Review process and it had brought staff and Councillors into a better way of working together. He would encourage all other authorities to engage with the Peer Review process to enhance working at their organisation.

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

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Noted the progress against the agreed Action Plan.

(2) Agreed no further progress updates are required at meetings, but ongoing actions should be appropriately continued and developed between Directors and relevant Executive Members.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: As the Action Plan is as complete as it is likely to be, plus the need to focus resource on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), it is recommended that no further updates are provided to the Action Plan. To be clear this does not mean that the Council will now ignore the recommendations, but rather reflects that changes have been embedded in how we work and that these have now become business as usual.

32 LOCAL PLAN - CONTENT AND EVIDENCE BASE CONSULTATION

Audio recording – 25 minutes 57 seconds

Councillor Donna Wright, as Executive Member for Place, presented the report entitled ‘Local Plan – Content and Evidence Base Consultation’ and highlighted that:

- The report sought Cabinet approval the publish the Local Plan and Evidence Base documents for consultation, which would form the second stage of the Local Plan Review process.
- The consultation feedback would feed into the Local Plan Review process in 2027.

- The documents for consultation were included as appendices to the report, with a further 4 appendices included for information only.
- Following reforms to the plan making system in March 2026, there were five main stages to be completed, which were outlined in paragraph 7.1 of the report.
- An initial public scoping consultation took place between May and June 2026 and sought views on which issues and priorities should be included. There were 75 responses received and these were outlined at Appendix A, with most of the main issues having been incorporated already.
- As well as the public consultation, Member Workshops have been held on a regular basis and updates have been provided to the Strategic Planning Board.
- The Gateway 1 Assessment was required by the end of October 2026 and was a self-assessment on how prepared the Council was to begin the review process. This assessment was included at Appendix B.
- A site submission map had been added to the website which allowed stakeholders to review and discuss sites in advance of the formal consultation starting in October. The site map included all suggested sites and allocated sites from the last Local Plan which had not started as of March 2026. These sites were currently being assessed but no decisions on which would be taken forward had yet been taken.
- There was a Member Workshop scheduled for 18 January 2027 to allow members to consider some of the assessments before consultation later in 2027.
- The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) now outlined that Local Plans should cover a minimum of 10 years rather than a minimum of 15 years as per the previous NPPF. Therefore, it was suggested that this Plan cover 2029-2040. This was to align with the anticipated adoption in 2029, but should also ensure there is enough land available for future development, allowing for longer term projects to be brought forward.
- There remained several risks including Local Government. Reorganisation, future government policy changes, budget available to support the process and resourcing of the Strategic Planning team.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Sean Nolan
- Councillor Daniel Allen

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

- Any changes to government policy would need to be considered as the Plan was prepared and that was normal practice. Some policy changes would be immediately introduced, whereas others would have transitional arrangements before the new policy applied.
- They had not considered using social media videos or the North Herts app to promote the consultation but would liaise with the Communications team to explore these options.

Councillor Donna Wright proposed to approve the recommendations and this was seconded by Councillor Daniel Allen.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Val Bryant

The following points were made as part of the debate:

- The Council app had now had over 15k downloads in North Herts.
- Officers should be thanked for the work done and the comprehensive nature of the documents produced to date.

- The site submission maps on the website are a little unclear and could be more accessible on the website.
- The Member Workshops have been really valuable to attend.

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

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Noted the following documents:
- Consultation Summary Report – scoping consultation (Appendix A)
- Gateway 1 self-assessment (Appendix B)
- Consultation and Engagement Strategy (Appendix C)

(2) Approved the Local Plan using a plan-period of 11 years from 2029 – 2040

(3) Delegated authority to the Director of Place, in consultation with the Executive Director of Place, to amend and update the Statement of Community Involvement.

(4) Approved for consultation, the following documents:
- Content and Evidence Base document (Appendix D)
- Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report (Appendix E)
- Equality Impact Assessment (Appendix F)
- Health Impact Assessment (Appendix G)

and delegated to the Director of Place, in consultation with the Executive Member of Place, to make any minor updates of a non-substantive nature to these documents, including in relation to any updates on Local Government Reorganisation.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To ensure the Council continues to meet the agreed milestones set out in the published timetable required under new Plan-making system.

33 STRATEGIC PLANNING MATTERS REPORT

Audio recording – 38 minutes 29 seconds

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

- The final updated National Planning Policy Framework was published on 17 August 2026. It was not radically different from the draft version released in December 2025 but provided important clarifications and updated definitions.
- There were new National Development Management policies introduced, which could take precedence over local planning policies where there were conflicts.
- There were further updates in approach to greenbelt, climate change, health inequalities and building safe communities, where were outlined within the report.
- A new National Scheme of Delegation was being introduced, with the final regulations approved on 15 July, and would place all applications into two categories.
- There was a report going to Full Council in October 2026, which would provide constitutional changes required for adoption of the new National Scheme of Delegation, and a Member Briefing had been arranged for 30 September ahead of this decision. The National Scheme of Delegation would come into effect on 31 October 2026.
- New requirements for Biodiversity Net Gain were outlined in the report.
- The position on Housing Delivery and 5 Year Housing Land Supply was outlined in the report. The Council was still short of a 5 year supply, although the headline figure was declining, the reality was that housing delivery was improving. This was due to the 2 year delay in publication of the Housing Delivery Test by government.

- A briefing had been prepared for Members on this and had been uploaded to GrowZone, with details also included in the Five Year Housing Supply Position paper published on the website.
- Luton Rising were now taking steps to implement the Development Consent Order and this would include establishing groups to monitor various aspects of the impact of the expansion.
- All surrounding authorities were continuing to progress with their Local Plan work.
- The main upcoming risks were continuing to fail to achieve a 5 year housing land supply, the implementation of the planning system reforms which was increasing workload within the team, and recruitment and retention of key staff, although two posts had recently been filled.

N.B. Councillor Amy Allen left the Chamber at 20.09 and returned at 20.14.

Councillor Donna Wright proposed to approve the recommendations and this was seconded by Councillor Sean Nolan.

As part of the debate, Councillor Sean Nolan noted that it was good to get some clarity on the groups which would be established to monitor the developments surrounding Luton Airport expansion. This Council had an interest in ensuring the works would enhance travel in the neighbouring areas and there was a risk of an impact on Hitchin, but this provided clarity on the monitoring processes to be established.

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

RESOLVED: That the report on Strategic Planning Matters was noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To keep Cabinet informed of recent developments on Strategic Planning Matters.

34 NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY

Audio recording – 46 minutes 24 seconds

Councillor Donna Wright, as Executive Member for Place, presented the report entitled ‘North Hertfordshire Town Centre Strategy’ and highlighted that:

- The adopted Local Plan required an up-to-date Town Centre Strategy to be produced, which would enhance existing Local Plan policies and would feed into the Local Plan Review process.
- Should the Town Centre Strategy be adopted, it would be a formal consideration in planning applications.
- A consultation had taken place on the proposed strategy, with 84 responses received, 75% of these were from North Herts residents. Consultation had also taken place with members of the Strategic Planning Board, as well as BIDs in the district and other business organisations.
- A summary of consultation responses received, as well as a response from the Council to points raised, was included at Appendix 2.
- The consultation highlighted a gap between stakeholder input and the purpose of the strategy, and the amended document sought to clarify the position of the strategy as a planning document and not a proposal for regeneration.
- There would now be a focus on delivery of the strategy, with achievable timescales and clear ownership of actions.
- A new Town Centre Officer had been recruited to support delivery of the strategy and they would lead on taking this forward with relevant stakeholders.

- Previous engagement between the Council and key town centre stakeholders had been fragmented and it was hoped this strategy would provide a more holistic approach to ensure that emerging issues were included within plans and projects developed.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Amy Allen
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Ian Albert

In response to questions, the Transport, Parking & Projects Service Manager advised that:

- The Council would work together with partners in Letchworth, such as the BID and Heritage Foundation, to look to promote activities which would bring people into the town and consider improvements to transport to support this.
- Whilst this strategy could provide framework for planning decisions, there would need to be work conducted with partners in parallel with this strategy to address footfall and retail improvements.
- Work to install a separated cycle lane on Broadway Gardens roundabout was identified as part of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan and work was already underway to assess the feasibility of this.
- The strategy provided some priorities and aspirations for Town Centres, but partnership working would be required to ensure delivery of these.
- The new Town Centre Project Officer would be coming into post by the end of 2026. Therefore, it was expected that work would begin in January 2027 to meet with stakeholders and develop the scope of the delivery plans.
- There would be local workshops with organisations, including BID Managers, to discuss the delivery plans to progress this strategy.
- The intention was to include Councillors as part of the process, including at relevant Community Forums.

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

- It was not possible at this stage to put an end point on works, as work would be conducted by the new Officer when they were in post.
- The strategy had taken around 3 years to produce following the adoption of the Local Plan. This delay had, in part, been due to resourcing issues in the team.

In response to questions, the Executive Member for Place advised that the priority was to get 5-year delivery plans in place, and this would be the focus of the new Officer, once they were in post. This would include clear timescales, responsibilities and ownership of actions and regular updates would be provided to the Strategic Planning Board to monitor progress.

Councillor Donna Wright proposed to approve the recommendations and this was seconded by Councillor Mick Debenham.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Tamsin Thomas
- Councillor Val Bryant

The following points were made as part of the debate:

- Having previously not funded economic development, it was positive to see this administration bringing needed funding and attention to this area. However, better demonstration and highlighting of the work completed already was required.

- This authority was providing a lot of support, but there were wider issues around the general decline of High Streets.
- Economic Development plans were in progress and conversations around these had been held with relevant stakeholders in communities.
- The new Officer post would be beneficial to support the rollout of this strategy and Cabinet would ensure progress against the strategy was monitored going forward.

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

RESOLVED:

(1) That the Town Centre Strategy attached as Appendix 1 was adopted.

(2) That authority was delegated 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 Town Centres Strategy as considered necessary for publication and publicity.

(3) That Officers proceed with the preparation of Delivery Plans for each of the town centres following adoption of the Town Centres Strategy.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

(1) To allow the Town Centres Strategy to be 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 and the preparation of Delivery Plan for each town.

(3) To reinforce and deliver the Council's ambitions as set out in the Council Plan (2024 - 2028).

35 CHARNWOOD HOUSE, HITCHIN

Audio recording – 1 hour 09 minutes 05 seconds

Councillor Tamsin Thomas, as Executive Member for Enterprise, presented the report entitled 'Charnwood House, Hitchin' and highlighted that:

- Charnwood House was the former site of the Hitchin Museum and was gifted to the Council for public benefit. Since the relocation of the museum, the site had been used as storage and then vacated ahead of exploration of longer term use.
- Applications were now being sought from organisations with vision and capacity to deliver a community asset at the site.
- The successful proposal should create opportunities for community activity and have a positive impact on, not only Hitchin, but the wider district.
- All proposals would be assessed fairly on specific aspects, which were outlined in the application form.

The following Members asked questions:

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

In response to questions, the Executive Member for Enterprise advised that:

- An application form had been developed which was clear as to what the assessment criteria would be.
- The aim of this was to find the best, and most viable, long-term option for the community.
- The length of the lease reflected the requirement of whoever was successful needing to attract grant funding in order to complete works on the site. Therefore, a guarantee of tenure would be required to open up these funding opportunities.
- The Council had allocated £400k towards capital repairs on the site, but this would not be sufficient for the works required and therefore the successful organisation would need to seek match funding from grants.
- Some works had been carried out by the Council, including removal of asbestos and ensuring the building was weathertight. However, there remained around £360k of the allocated budget available. This would help support the future tenant to attract grant funding.
- The application deadline was in October 2026, but there had been goon early engagement with the advertising process and there was clear interest and desire within the community to see the building used productively.
- The company running the advertising have been chosen for the experience in this area and have done similar work with properties in Luton.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas proposed to approve the recommendations and this was seconded by Councillor Mick Debenham.

As part of the debate, Councillor Ian Albert thanked Councillor Thomas and the Enterprise team for their work on this exciting prospect. He noted that recommendation 2.3 was important, as it was not just about achieving a commercial rent, but about providing a suitable community use. The money set aside to support required works was a significant contribution towards the work which will be needed, and would assist with the successful option seeking grant funding.

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

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Approved the basis and process for assessing and scoring applications from suitable interested parties (or groups).

(2) Delegated authority to the Executive Member for Enterprise in consultation with the Director of Enterprise, to finalise the terms for the lease and to complete any other documentation required to give effect to the decision.

(3) Approved grant of a long lease of Charnwood House, including a restriction to community use, and delegates to the Director of Enterprise in consultation officers in Estates and Legal Services to consider rental at a value less than best consideration where it can be shown that the disposal will promote and improve social well-being pursuant to the Local Government Act 1972: General Disposal Consent 2003.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

(1) The Council has a policy for Charnwood House to be brought back into use to support community-based activities, recognising the potential value of the asset to local and regional groups and the wider town centre.

(2) The Council Plan 2024-2028 identifies Thriving Communities as one of the Council's priorities which includes looking for opportunities to develop community hubs that provide public spaces and support for communities.

(3) This recommendation sets out how the successful applicant will be selected to enable the Council to progress granting a lease of Charnwood House and deliver the policy for the property.

N.B. Following the conclusion of this item, there was a break in proceedings and the meeting reconvened at 21.01.

36 ALLOCATION OF MHCLG HOMELESSNESS GRANT

Audio recording – 1 hour 31 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:

- Following receipt of funds from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), the report proposed a multiyear funding settlement to allow the Council to meet its homelessness duties.
- The discussion at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting raised no significant or substantial comments on the proposals and the Committee were broadly in support.
- There was some discussion around the competition for housing places, including against other authorities, and how the Council approached this.
- There was some discussion about how prioritisation was given to those within the district against those outside.
- However, these discussions were the Committee trying to understand processes, rather than specific concerns with the proposals.

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

- The Council had received ringfenced funding from MHCLG to provide support for homelessness in line with its statutory duties.
- The report proposed a 3-year funding settlement for the spend of the remainder of the grant and would leave around £426k outstanding.
- The Council was required to work with key partners, such as OneYMCA, Lets4U, Citizens Advice, Herts Young Homeless and the Rough Sleeper Outreach service, to deliver on duties.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Sean Nolan
- Councillor Amy Allen

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

- The government announcement to end homelessness was not a change in legislation, but there had been a funding announcement which was around £250 over 3 years for North Herts.
- There were historically low numbers of homelessness in the district, but the Council acted in excess of the legal minimum requirements.
- The biggest issue faced was with engagement with the services.
- The additional funding would mean that a full time member of the team could be employed to specifically look at outreach to support homeless people.

Councillor Mick Debenham proposed to approve the recommendation and this was seconded by Councillor Daniel Allen.

As part of the debate, Councillor Daniel Allen noted that the team had been dealing with the issue of homelessness well and the service being provided by OneYMCA at Anderson House, Hitchin was good quality.

Having been proposed and 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 1 in paragraph 8.13.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

(1) 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 and provides stability into the first year of the new unitary authority.

(2) The recommendation at 2.1 is consistent with the priorities set out in the Council's Housing Strategy (2024 – 2029) and the Council Plan.

37 2026-27 Q1 COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN UPDATE

Audio recording – 1 hour 41 minutes 35 seconds

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled '2026-27 Q1 Council Delivery Plan Update' and highlighted that:

- The Royston Learner Pool had now been added as a project on the Council Delivery Plan.
- The next round of the Churchgate procurement exercise went live last week, which would take forward the policy agreed at Full Council in July. This had been promoted across the website and social media channels.
- The Local Government Reorganisation Corporate Risk required updating following the announcement of a pause from government, as this report had been written ahead of this announcement.
- Details of projects reporting as amber risk, including Public EV Charging and Decarbonisation of Council Buildings Phase 2, were outlined at paragraph 8.4 of the report.
- The Performance Indicators which were currently red were provided at paragraph 8.6 of the report. There were some actions being taken to address this status and whilst these were minor issues, work would always be conducted to see what further actions could be taken.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Donna Wright
- Councillor Mick Debenham

In response to questions, the Executive Member for Enterprise advised that the primary reason for the slippage in relation to the Museum Storage Project was related to the initial design received by the external organisation working with the Council and further work was needed to develop ideas to ensure that the design required was achieved within the budget allocation.

In response to questions, the Director – Place advised that a contractor had been appointed to undertake the stage 4 of the Decarbonisation project, who would design the air source heat pumps at the North Herts Leisure Centre learner pool and Hitchin Town Hall and Museum. A report would be brought to Cabinet in January with further details on the delivery of this work.

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

RESOLVED: That Cabinet noted progress against the Council projects and performance indicators, as set out in the Council Delivery Plan (Appendix A) and approves new projects, milestones and changes to milestones.

REASON FOR DECISION: The Council Delivery Plan (CDP) monitoring reports provide Cabinet, with an opportunity to monitor progress against the key Council projects, and understand any new issues, risks or opportunities. Overview and Scrutiny Committee have the opportunity to review the monitoring reports sent via the Members Information Bulletin (MIB) and request more detailed updates to be presented.

38 FIRST QUARTER REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2026/27

Audio recording – 1 hours 48 minutes 43 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Stewart Willoughby, as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee for the meeting on 9 September 2026, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Willoughby advised that:

- The report presented to Finance, Audit and Risk Committee was in draft form, with the final version provided in this report to Cabinet tonight. The changes related to the treatment of leases and reduced the General Fund balance at the end of 2025/26.
- There was a decrease of £740k in the working budget for Quarter 1, but the ongoing impact was an £84k increase.
- There was a request to carry forward £303k into the next financial year, which was outlined at Table 3 of the report.

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled ‘First Quarter Revenue Budget Monitoring 2026/27’ and highlighted that:

- The budget setting process had started and part of that would include a more detailed review of carry forwards.
- A lot of the carry forwards related to ongoing resourcing pressures.
- A debt write off relating to Housing Benefit was outlined at paragraph 8.19 of the report.
- An additional line had been included in Table 3 of the report which related to increased Planning Fees from December 2026 and the need to fund a joint position to transition a new Development and Conservation Manager, as the current employee was taking flexible retirement. This proposal would ensure cover was available and support the planning and development service.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed to approve the recommendations and this was seconded by Councillor Amy Allen.

As part of the debate, Councillor Sean Nolan highlighted that it was positive to be able to fund a position to cover for the Development and Conservation Manager whilst the person currently in this post took partial retirement. This would help ensure an effective transition for this service area.

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

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Noted this report.

(2) Approved the changes to the 2026/27 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.2, a £753k decrease in net expenditure.

(3) Noted the changes to the 2027/28 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.2, a total £337k increase in net expenditure. These will be incorporated in the draft revenue budget for 2027/28.

(4) Approved the debt write-off as detailed in paragraph 8.19.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

(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) To comply with the financial regulations in relation to debt write-offs.

39 FIRST QUARTER CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REVIEW 2026/27

Audio recording – 1 hour 56 minutes 36 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Stewart Willoughby, as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee for the meeting on 9 September 2026, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Willoughby advised that:

- The details of the changes in Capital Expenditure were outlined at Table 1 of the report.
- The Capital Expenditure for 2026/27 was now £13.57m, which was an increase of £4.438m against the budget.
- There needed to be a balance against Capital Expenditure, as the more spent would reduce the amount available for investment.
- Amendments to budgets had largely been due to revised timetables of projects, which was often due to resourcing demands.
- Some existing Capital Expenditure commitments would need to be reviewed to ensure that the amounts accurately reflected costs going forward.

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled ‘First Quarter Capital Budget Monitoring Review 2026/27’ and highlighted that:

- As part of the 2027/28 Budget setting process, Executive Members were encouraged to speak to Directors to consider possible saving and investment requirements.
- There would be a review of allocations as part of the budget setting to ensure amounts available for Capital Expenditure were still appropriate.

- The impact on capital receipts was outlined in paragraph 8.7 of the report.
- Overall, the position was positive, but some recognition was needed of the slippage and resourcing pressures.

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

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Noted the forecast expenditure of £13.570M in 2026/27 on the capital programme, paragraph 8.3 refers.

(2) Approved the adjustments to the capital programme for 2027/28, as a result of the revised timetable of schemes detailed in table 2 and 3, increasing the estimated spend by £0.67M.

(3) Noted the position of the availability of capital resources, as detailed in table 4 paragraph 8.6 and the requirement to keep the capital programme under review for affordability.

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

40 FIRST QUARTER TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW 2026/27

Audio recording – 2 hours 01 minute 05 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Stewart Willoughby, as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee for the meeting on 9 September 2026, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Willoughby advised that:

- The main point noted was that investment income was continuing above expectation, due to higher than expected interest rates.
- The details of the investments made were outlined at paragraph 8.5 of the report, with most being with either government or other local authorities, in accordance with the Investment Strategy.

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled ‘First Quarter Treasury Management Review 2026/27’ and highlighted that:

- The higher than expected interest rates reflected the national, as well as wider international, outlook.
- However, inflation remained higher than previously forecast, which meant that the interest rates had not been reduced.
- Surplus cash has been invested in accordance with the strategy adopted by Full Council in February 2026.
- The forecast return of investment had been exceeded for this financial year.

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 June 2026 and as set out in Appendix 1.

REASONS 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.

41 GROUNDS MAINTENANCE CONTRACT REVIEW

Audio recording – 2 hours 04 minutes 32 seconds

Councillor Amy Allen, as Executive Member for Environment, presented the report entitled 'Grounds Maintenance Contract Review' and highlighted that:

- The report proposed a 5 year extension to the current contract with John O'Conner to ensure green spaces were appropriately and sensitively maintained, with John O'Conner being responsible for the management of this.
- The Greenspaces team carried out regular inspections and were satisfied from these that work was being undertaken to expected levels.
- The extension would be broadly in line with the current agreement, with some minor changes.
- The Council was awaiting confirmation from settle as to whether they wanted to continue as part of the agreement for the further 5 year extension.
- Under current Local Government Reorganisation proposals some of the North Herts green space would fall within a different authority and further detail on this would be provided when there was more clarity on the decision and process.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Donna Wright
- Councillor Sean Nolan
- Councillor Tamsin Thomas
- Councillor Mick Debenham

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

- Work had been conducted to map litter bins in the district previously, including ownership of responsibility. Therefore, if a bin was reported by residents, it should be forwarded onto the correct team to provide a response without needing to consider who had responsibility.
- There was a mechanism within the contract to monitor the performance of John O'Conner.

In response to questions, the Greenspaces Manager advised that:

- The Greenspace team had regular performance review meetings with John O'Conner and these were structured to consider whether overall performance had been satisfactory. This has been the case and therefore it was not considered to look at alternative options.
- A report was produced each month which provided details on performance.
- There had not been additional land brought into the remit of the Council recently, but should this occur conversations would be held on providing for these spaces and there was flexibility with John O'Conner to meet additional demands.
- All green spaces were managed, although there were some specific issues raised by residents and Councillors where ownership was unclear.
- Settle provided a higher specification of service than the Council and therefore would provide more regular services. It would be difficult for the Council to increase services without increasing budget allocation.
- There were no major changes proposed to the current contract.

Councillor Amy Allen proposed to approve the recommendations and this was seconded by Councillor Mick Debenham.

As part of the debate, Councillor Daniel Allen noted that he was happy to support this extension with John O'Conner as they have done lots of good, award-winning work on behalf of the Council, such as establishing bee corridors and the Green Flag award winning parks.

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

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Approved a five-year contract extension of the Grounds Maintenance Contract with John O'Conner (Grounds Maintenance) Ltd to 31st March 2032.

(2) Commented on the proposal at 8.1 to include a proposal as part of the budget setting process for 2027/28, to enhance the contract specification for border maintenance at key town centre green spaces – at a cost of approximately £25k per year.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS: A contract review process has been undertaken in the lead up to a potential break clause (31 March 2027) in the existing contract with John O'Conner for delivering our grounds maintenance services. The recommendations arise following that review process.

42 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Audio recording – 2 hours 17 minutes 58 seconds

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

RESOLVED: That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that the following report will involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).

43 PART 2 MINUTES - 25 JUNE & 9 JULY 2024 AND 16 JUNE 2026

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

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

RESOLVED: That the Part 2 Minutes of the meetings held on 25 June 2024, 9 July 2024 and 16 June 2026 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

44 KEYSTAGE AND THE TREATMENT OF HOUSING BENEFIT

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

Details of decisions 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 100A of the Local Government Act 1972.

The meeting closed at 10.28 pm

Chair

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