

# NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

## CABINET

### MEETING HELD IN THE FOUNDATION HOUSE, ICKNIELD WAY, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY ON TUESDAY, 25TH JULY, 2017 AT 7.30 PM

## MINUTES

**Present:** *Councillors Councillor Lynda Needham (Chairman), Councillor Julian Cunningham (Vice-Chairman), Jane Gray, Tony Hunter, David Levett, Bernard Lovewell, Ray Shakespeare-Smith and Michael Weeks*

**In Attendance:**

*Norma Atlay (Strategic Director of Finance, Policy and Governance), Ian Couper (Head of Finance, Performance and Asset Management), Ian Fullstone (Head of Development and Building Control), Vaughan Watson (Head of Leisure and Environmental Services), Steve Crowley (Contracts and Projects Manager), Louise Symes (Strategic Planning and Projects Manager), Nigel Smith (Principal Strategic Planning Officer), Mark Scanes (Systems and Technical Manager), Jeanette Thompson (Senior Lawyer) and Ian Gourlay (Committee and Member Services Manager)*

**Also Present:** *Councillors Cathryn Henry (Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee), Elizabeth Dennis and Michael Muir.  
10 members of the public.*

### 13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

### 14 MINUTES - 13 JUNE 2017

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the Meeting of Cabinet held on 13 June 2017 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

### 15 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

There was no notification of other business.

### 16 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

- (1) The Chairman paid tribute to Norma Atlay (Strategic Director of Finance, Performance and Governance), who was attending her final Cabinet meeting before her retirement. She stated that Norma would be sorely missed as her financial guidance to Cabinet over the years had always been first class. She thanked Norma for the service she had provided to Cabinet, and wished her all the best for a well deserved retirement.
- (2) The Chairman announced that Members of the public and the press may use their devices to film/photograph, or do a sound recording of the meeting, but she asked them to not use flash and to disable any beeps or other sound notifications that emitted from their devices. In addition, the Chairman had arranged for the sound at this particular meeting to be recorded;
- (3) The Chairman 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 Chairman asked that, for the benefit of any members of the public present at the meeting, Officers announce their name and their designation to the meeting when invited to speak.

## 17 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- (i) Emma Bown (Hitchin resident): petition against the proposed closure of Rosehill Play Area in Hitchin

Ms Bown advised that when the Council announced plans to close the Rosehill playground, the response in her neighbourhood was dramatic. The residents' submission sent to Members in May 2017, and which she trusted the Cabinet had all seen, had included some 450 hand written signatures from parents, childminders, grandparents, aunts and uncles who lived in the area and who took their children to the park. Responses also included those from beaver and cubs groups, school children who used the park and social media posts.

Ms Bown stated that she was attending the meeting to represent those people mentioned. She hoped Members had all seen the letter, the petition, and evidence of good use which was circulated to The Leader of the Council, the Executive Members for Leisure, local councillors and many others.

Ms Bown commented that local residents knew that the Rosehill Play Area was well used. Their own photographs confirmed that this was the case, and discussions they had had with the maintenance contractor affirmed this. Over and above the submitted response, only a few weeks ago over 80 people from the local community congregated there for the day for the Jo Cox Great Get Together. Almost every day after school the park was very well used. She asked how many of the Cabinet Members had taken the time to engage with users of this park? If Members had not seen the pictures and evidence they had submitted then she urged them to do so.

Ms Bown commented that the community's response was to question the Cabinet's wisdom and judgement in not maintaining a well-loved and well used community asset. She felt that it was not a lot to ask:

-for a Council to ensure a safe play space for local children who had no electoral voice;

-for a play space to be guaranteed when there was a growing population of children within 5 minutes walk;

-to forward plan for children who would come when new houses were built and families moved into developments at Cambridge Road junction and the planned development on Highover Farm;

-to keep a park and its equipment that was well used properly and professionally inspected and maintained. The maintenance company themselves had told residents that this park was well used and, indeed, of their surprise of the categorisation that there was low use and therefore the play equipment was to be removed. The residents had heard first hand stories from parents and grandparents who tell them of their own play time on the well-loved the 'rocking horse' which had been at the park for over 50 years. It was understood that the cost of the park was £2,200 per annum, set against some tens of thousands to remove the equipment. This information had not been readily forthcoming, and the residents had needed to persist to get this information. She asked councillors to pause and consider that figure of £2,200 per annum; and

-for councillors to think again about the plan to effectively close the Rosehill playground.

Ms Bown considered that a grassy area, as per the Council's plan, was not the same as a play area. Children needed to climb, interact, explore. This would not be possible if there was only grass available to them.

Ms Bown trusted that councillors had seen the petitioners' assertion that there were clear and distinct differences between Rosehill and the nearest alternative park, Walsworth Common. She expected that the Council would argue that the costs involved were such that it had no choice, but she felt that there was always a choice. Elected Members had to choose from a variety of priorities and the allocation of scarce resources was part of that job. If Members decided to always cut and snip at the least glamorous services, then the effect was felt at all levels.

**Tuesday, 25th July, 2017**

Ms Bown stated that, nationally, the Conservative Party had felt such an effect at the recent General Election. Right across the country, and here in North Hertfordshire, people were fed up with cuts to the basics. And so were the petitioners, in their Walsworth ward and neighbourhood.

Ms Bown was of the view that, for children and for families, playgrounds were the basics. To argue that a Community Group could take over the Play Park as a trust was passing the buck. By so doing, Members were denying their responsibility. There is no precedent in setting up a CAT for a park such as Rosehill.

Ms Bown stated that the residents elected Members to the Council to be responsible for all the Council's communities. It was the Members' job to look after the needs of the District's young children. She felt that this was not a lot to ask.

The Chairman thanked Ms Bown for her presentation.

(ii) Jackie McDonald (The Future of Hitchin Town Hall and Museum Social Media Group): Hitchin Town Hall and Museum

Ms McDonald advised that the reason she was speaking was because of the unsatisfactory and delayed response from Councillor Tony Hunter (Executive Member for Community Engagement and Rural Affairs) to her questions raised at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 21 March 2017 about the Hitchin Town Hall and District Museum. In his response letter dated 13 June 2017, the following questions were not answered to her satisfaction:

How much was the project likely to cost? The answer was an estimate of £5.81M in May 2016 which was outdated, she was led to believe projected additional expenditure to open the museum was likely to be approx. £1M, bringing the total cost to around £7M. Why was there no project cost update for 2017?

£29,250 of Section 106 money was spent on a youth facility at Hitchin Town Hall. Where was this youth facility? – the public needed to know.

Her concern was that the Lucas Room could be hired without it being Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant. The answer was that this room was exempt from Building Regulations. Given that the Council had sold off buildings with entrance steps because of being DDA compliance she found this answer hard to believe. The purpose of the DDA made it unlawful to discriminate against people because of their disabilities in relation to employment, the provision of goods and services, education and transport and required "reasonable adjustments" to be made when providing access to goods, facilities, services and premises. No "reasonable adjustments" appeared to have been made to make it easier for disabled people to reach the Lucas Room.

She asked about the proposed £30,000 per year savings, and Cllr Hunter was not aware of this. In 2004/05, NHDC undertook a Fundamental Service Review (also known as a Best Value Review) of its Museum Service to close the two existing Council-run museums and instead run a museum and gallery on a single town-centre site, with a saving of £125,000. In February 2009, the Council proposed a scheme which envisaged revenue savings of £180,000p.a. This was under the portfolio of former Cllr Tricia Cowley, so it was unlikely that Cllr Tony Hunter would know about it. It seemed there had been several figures quoted, but she would be grateful to see an answer showing any saving to justify the massive expenditure so far.

Cllr Hone stated that the Council did not need the former 14/15 Brand Street in order to operate the new museum and Town Hall facility. We asked, if this is so, what were the cost implications to tax payers for the possible demolition of the building constructed on land that the council did not own? This was apparently commercially sensitive information, why then did Cllr Hone mention it? Surely any solution to open the District Museum as soon as possible would be welcome

Ms McDonald stated that because the District Museum was closed some people see this as a godsend for the Council. Once open expenditure would increase with additional staff to be employed along with costs for security, cleaning insurance maintenance etc. People were asking if this Museum was really necessary having been closed for so long.

**Tuesday, 25th July, 2017**

Ms McDonald commented that, as Members would be aware, the members of the public social media group "The Future of Hitchin Town Hall & Museum" had called for a full independent public enquiry into the financial management and upgrading of the Hitchin Town Hall and construction of the new District Museum. Involved was Mr Peter Lilley and the newly elected MP Bim Afolami who was dealing with it. Hopefully this, and her group's request for answers from her presentation to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would help the Council to become more transparent on this matter.

The Chairman thanked Ms McDonald for her presentation.

The Executive Member for Community Engagement and Rural Affairs (Councillor Tony Hunter) stated that NHDC was now on its own in attempting to complete this project. In 2012, the Council had hoped that it would be working with a partner, but unfortunately that had been fraught with problems, which was why the current position pertained.

The Executive Member for Community Engagement and Rural Affairs explained that the £2.3Million cost quoted in previous reports was the projected cost when the Council was just looking at the Museum and Town Hall. Things changed when 14 and 15 Brand Street were added to the scheme, and hence the figure of £5.81Million was the revised projected cost. To date, NHDC had spent £5.329Million on the project.

The Executive Member for Community Engagement and Rural Affairs advised that all financial decisions on the town Hall had gone through either Cabinet or Council, and the last time a report was presented for a change in the budget was in May 2016.

In respect of Section 106 monies, the Executive Member for Community Engagement and Rural Affairs commented that the deployment of those funds was administered by the NHDC Planning Department, and had to meet the strict criteria for the use of such monies.

In relation to the DDA, the Executive Member for Community Engagement and Rural Affairs stated that on some occasions it was recognised that compliance would be difficult and so in these cases building operators were expected to do as much as they could to facilitate disabled access.

With regard to the statement made by Councillor Hone, the Executive Member for Community Engagement and Rural Affairs clarified that the Council could put a new lift in the part of the premises under its control and ignore the space occupied by 14/15 Brand Street. He added that the Council was now in a position where it could open the facility to the public in a selective manner, and that would be happening in the coming weeks. Council members would be shown around the facility in the next week, following which it would be opened up to selected groups from across the District.

The Executive Member for Community Engagement and Rural Affairs apologised for the fact that he had not been made aware that he had to reply to a letter from Ms McDonald until quite late in the process, partly due to the May 2017 Elections. He added that it had been agreed that the project would, at the appropriate time, be reviewed by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

In response to a Member's question regarding how Ms McDonald had been led to believe that an additional £1Million had been spent on the project, she replied that this was information that had been provided to her by other people in the town.

The Cabinet Chairman asked the Strategic Director of Finance, Policy and Governance to check whether or not the building in Brand Street opposite the Town Hall referred to by Ms McDonald was DDA compliant and advise accordingly.

**18 ITEM REFERRED FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 18 JULY 2017 - CORPORATE PLAN 2018 TO 2023**

**RESOLVED:** That consideration of this referral takes place in conjunction with agenda item number 8 (see Minute 20 below).

## 19 STRATEGIC PLANNING MATTERS

The Executive Member for Planning and Enterprise presented the report of the Strategic Director of Planning, Housing and Enterprise informing Members of the current position regarding the Duty to Co-operate with neighbouring authorities; Other Local Plans and Examinations; North Hertfordshire Local Plan; Neighbourhood Plans; and Government announcements.

The Executive Member for Planning and Enterprise updated the Cabinet on the following matters:

- Duty to Co-operate – this was ongoing, and a list of the agreed Memoranda of Understanding previously published would be updated shortly;
- Other Plans and Examinations – the East Hertfordshire and Welwyn Hatfield Local Plans were on similar timetables to the North Hertfordshire Local Plan, and no dates for Examination Hearings had been announced, although Welwyn Hatfield had received a list of 22 preliminary questions from their appointed Inspector regarding the Duty to Co-operate; Luton had consulted on the “proposed main modifications” to their Local Plan, and the responses had been forwarded to the Inspector; Stevenage had consulted on “proposed main modifications” and NHDC’s response had been tabled at the meeting; in respect of the St. Albans Judicial review, a High Court Judge had upheld the Inspector’s conclusion that St. Albans had failed in their duty to co-operate; Central Bedfordshire’s Local Plan had been published for public consultation for 8 weeks commencing on 4 July 2017;
- North Hertfordshire Local Plan – an Inspector had been appointed for the Public Examination. The dates and venue for the Examination had yet to be announced, and Members and the public would be advised of them as soon as they were received. The Programme Officer had written to all Members and respondents to the consultation outlining her role and contact details;
- Neighbourhood Plans – Pirton Parish Council was in the process of appointing an examiner into their Neighbourhood Plan; an application by Bygrave Parish Council would be considered later in the meeting; consultation on the Wymondley Neighbourhood Plan began on 23 June 2017 and would close on 4 August 2017; and
- Government Announcements – the Housing White Paper “Fixing out Broken Housing Market” had been published in February 2017, but progress had been delayed due to the General Election; the first set of Regulations relating to the Neighbourhood Planning Act had been published.

**RESOLVED:** That the report on Strategic Planning Matters be noted.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To keep the Cabinet informed of recent developments on strategic planning matters and progress on the North Hertfordshire Local Plan.

## 20 CORPORATE PLAN 2018 TO 2023

The Executive Member for Policy, Transport and Green Issues presented the report of the Strategic Director of Finance, Policy and Governance in respect of the Corporate Plan 2018 to 2023. The following appendix was submitted with the report:

Appendix A – Corporate Plan 2018-2023.

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee presented the following referral from that Committee, made at its meeting held on 18 July 2017, in respect of the Corporate Plan 2018 to 2023 (Minute 27 refers):

**“RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:** That Cabinet consider the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee made in the discussion above regarding the Corporate Plan 2018 to 2023, in particular the following:

- (i) That the document as a whole felt disjointed;
- (ii) That more hard data should be included;
- (iii) That some specific and measurable targets should be included;
- (iv) That some detail be included regarding the differences between parished and non-parished areas; and
- (v) That, whilst acknowledging financial constraints, the document should be more policy led.”

The Executive Member for Policy, Transport and Green Issues advised that the Corporate Plan needed to reflect any recent changes in legislation; capacity; financial constraints; population; and patterns and

location of deprivation. He added that the Plan also reflected the three Corporate Objectives approved by the Council on 19 July 2017.

In respect of the Corporate Plan itself, the Executive Member for Policy, Transport and Green Issues explained that it began with outlining the statutory and non-statutory services provided by the Council, before dealing with the Corporate Objectives. The Corporate Objectives had been the same for the past 3 or 4 years. Each objective contained certain key words. This was followed by what the Council intended to achieve under these key words. He considered that this was not a disjointed approach, rather it was a sensible and logical approach. He commented that he had taken note of the debate at the Council meeting held on 19 July 2017 and would change the sub-heading "Supporting the Disadvantaged" to read "Supporting Disadvantaged People". The Plan next contained a short section on performance and monitoring and reporting, before concluding with a section describing North Hertfordshire's community.

With regard to the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Executive Member for Policy, Transport and Green Issues considered that the document was not disjointed for the reason previously mentioned: it did not need to contain an excessive amount of hard data as it was a strategy document; if specific and measurable targets were included then this would turn the Plan into a series of Performance Indicators, which were dealt with separately and the monitoring of which was the responsibility of the overview and Scrutiny Committee; and financial constraints had to be uppermost in order that the Plan could be sufficiently funded. He was therefore unable to support Recommendations (i), (ii), (iii) and (v) of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

However, in relation to recommendation (v) of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Executive Member for Policy, Transport and Green Issues agreed that some detail regarding the differences between parished and non-parished areas should be included in the document, and he had accepted that the Plan should be amended with appropriate references before it was submitted to Council for approval.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the Corporate Plan 2018-2023 be amended to include the changed sub-heading regarding disadvantaged people and to include some detail regarding differences between parished and non-parished areas of the District;
- (2) That the Executive Member for Policy, Transport and Green issues be authorised to agree any minor typographical or re-drafting amendments to the document prior to its submission to Council; and

**RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:** That the Corporate Plan 2018 to 2023, as attached at Appendix A to the report, and as amended, be adopted.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To have in place a suitable, high level strategic policy document for the Council, to inform its corporate business planning process.

## **21 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2018-2023**

The Executive Member for Finance and IT presented the report of the Strategic Director of Finance, Policy and Governance in respect of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2018-2023. The following appendix was submitted with the report:

Appendix A – Medium Term Financial Strategy 2018-2023.

The Executive Member for Finance and IT advised that the MTFS derived directly from the Corporate Plan, which put in place the Council's high level strategic direction. The MTFS was concerned with the infrastructure underneath the Corporate Plan to ensure that the Council had in place the necessary finances to deliver the Plan.

The Executive Member for Finance and IT stated that the financial position continued to be uncertain. There was a financial settlement in place for three years, but beyond that timeframe the position was unclear.

The Executive Member for Finance and IT explained that it was forecast that the Council would need to reduce its expenditure or generate additional income of £4.2 Million per year by 2021/2022.

The Executive Member for Finance and IT outlined some of the key points contained in the MTFS, as follows:

- The MTFS now assumed a 3% staff pay increase in 2018/19 and 2019/20, followed by a 2% increase each year thereafter, it had previously assumed a 1% increase in each year. This would require a change to the current national 1% public sector pay cap policy for these pay increases to take place. If this cap was not lifted, then this pressure would reflect the cost pressures to maintain the staff resources to deliver services. The combined effect financially would be an additional £750,000 over 4 years;
- Last year's MTFS had assumed 0.5% growth in the Council Tax base (i.e. number of Band D equivalent properties paying Council Tax). Actual growth in the Council Tax base in recent years had exceeded 1% per year. It was expected that this level of growth would continue going forward and therefore the assumed growth had been changed to 1% per year;
- In respect of the New Homes Bonus, the 0.4% baseline was assumed each year. The figures in the MTFS were based on the assumption that the Local Plan was adopted. If it were not adopted then housing growth was likely to be much lower;
- Over the life of the MTFS, the available capital resources would be substantially diminished. After this, the cost of capital investment would be substantially higher as it would incorporate borrowing charges and Minimum Revenue Provision. The Capital Programme (for all projects that were not committed to start) would be reviewed to ascertain whether each project was necessary for continued service provision and, if the project were for investment, what return would it provide (and would it still provide a positive return if were necessary to borrow money to fund the project); and
- Officers (including Corporate Board) would continue to review current models of service delivery, and put forward proposals as to potential changes and the savings that could be achieved. This would include the determination of what non-statutory services were being provided (including services that exceeded the statutory level of provision) to ensure that there was a case for continued delivery.

**RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:** That the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2018-2013, as attached at Appendix A to the report, be adopted.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To assist in the process of forward planning the use of Council resources and in budget setting for 2018/19 to 2022/23, culminating in the setting of the Council Tax precept for 2018/19 in February 2018.

## 22 REVIEW OF EXISTING NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE PLANNING GUIDANCE

The Executive Member for Planning and Enterprise presented the report of the Strategic Director of Planning, Housing and Enterprise in respect of a review of existing North Hertfordshire Planning Guidance.

The Executive Member for Planning and Enterprise advised that an exercise had been carried out to review the Council's existing Supplementary Planning Guidance documents in order to identify whether or not they remained relevant in the light of the Council's emerging Local Plan that was submitted for Examination on 9 June 2017, or required updating, consolidating or revoking.

The Executive Member for Planning and Enterprise stated that the review had highlighted that some of the documents were out of date because policies had been changed; some needed revision due to new legislation; and others needed updating and consolidating to reflect the content of the Council's emerging Local Plan.

The Executive Member for Planning and Enterprise referred to Table A in the report, which identified those documents which it was recommended would be revoked without direct replacement, with reasons and timescales for their revocation. Table B in the report set out the existing guidance proposed to be retained, together with the proposed way forward for each document.

### **RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the revocation of the planning guidance set out at Table A in Paragraph 8.8 of the report be approved; and

- (2) That the review be approved including, where appropriate, the consolidation of existing or new planning guidance documents set out in Table B in Paragraph 8.11 of the report.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To demonstrate that the Council has a clear and up to date approach to its planning guidance.

## 23 DESIGNATION OF A NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING AREA FOR BALDOCK, BYGRAVE AND CLOTHALL

The Executive Member for Planning and Enterprise presented the report of the Strategic Director of Planning, Housing and Enterprise in respect of the designation of a Neighbourhood Planning area for Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall. The following appendices were submitted with the report:

Appendix A – Application letter from Bygrave Parish Council;  
Appendix B – Letter of support from Clothall and Luffenhall Parish Meeting;  
Appendix C – Map of the proposed Neighbourhood Planning Area for Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall;  
Appendix D – Constitution of the Bygrave, Baldock and Clothall Planning Group; and  
Appendix E – Summary of comments.

The Executive Member for Planning and Enterprise advised that the boundaries of previously designated Neighbourhood Planning Areas had generally been co-terminus with the boundaries of parish areas. This application was more complicated, in that the proposed Neighbourhood Plan area comprised two parishes and the unparished town of Baldock.

The Executive Member for Planning and Enterprise stated that questions had been asked as to whether this application complied with the provisions of Neighbourhood Planning legislation. He confirmed that the decision was to determine whether the application was for designation of the neighbourhood planning area was acceptable, and was not in relation to powers of the body/group which had submitted the application to subsequently undertake neighbourhood activities. He commented that legal advice had confirmed that the Council had the powers to approve the designation of the Neighbourhood Planning Area as submitted.

It was further confirmed that the application had been submitted by Bygrave Parish Council on behalf of the Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Planning Group. The Senior Lawyer advised that should the designation of the Neighbourhood Planning area as submitted be approved, then Bygrave Parish Council would be the only qualifying body that could take the matter forward, no doubt in consultation with representatives and residents of Baldock and Clothall, as well as Bygrave.

**RESOLVED:** That, having regard to the representations made, the designation of the Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Neighbourhood Planning Area, as detailed in Paragraphs 8.1 to 8.8 and shown in Appendix C to the report, be approved.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To allow a neighbourhood plan to be prepared for Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall.

## 24 CAPITAL PROPOSAL TO PURCHASE CARDIO AND RESISTANCE FITNESS EQUIPMENT FOR THE COUNCIL'S HITCHIN AND ROYSTON LEISURE FACILITIES

The Executive Member for Leisure presented the report of the Head of Leisure and Environmental Services in respect of a Capital proposal to purchase cardio and resistance fitness equipment for the Council's Hitchin and Royston leisure facilities. The following appendix was submitted with the report:

Appendix A – Proposed repayment schedule.

The Executive Member for Leisure advised that the proposal was to completely replace all of the gym equipment at the Hitchin and Royston Leisure Centres with more modern equipment, at a capital cost of £520,000. The Council would pay this cost up front, and over the next 5.5 years Stevenage Leisure Centre (the Council's leisure contractor) would repay the equivalent of the cost + 3.5% interest through an increase to the annual management fee.

The Executive Member for Leisure stated the above system had worked successfully when gym equipment had been replaced/updated in the past, and she had no reason to doubt that it would not work successfully on this occasion.

The Executive Member for Leisure referred to an amendment to Paragraph 10.1 of the report, and confirmed that the Council currently received annually £83,137 (not £47,400) in income from the Hitchin and Royston Leisure Management contracts.

**RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:** That the proposal that cardio and resistance fitness equipment be purchased for the Council's Hitchin and Royston leisure facilities at a cost of £520,000 be endorsed, and that this project be added to the Council's Capital Programme for 2017/18 onwards.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To help with the achievement of the Council's Attractive and Thriving corporate objective, through increased health and wellbeing, and to ensure customer satisfaction is maintained with the Council's leisure facilities.

## 25 NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATES LOCAL DISCRETIONARY FUND

The Executive Member for Finance and IT presented the report of the Head of revenues, Benefits and IT in respect of the proposed implementation of a Business Rate Local Discretionary Fund, as announced in the 2017 Spring Budget. The following appendix was submitted with the report;

Appendix A – Local Discretionary Fund Criteria.

The Executive Member for Finance and IT advised that a Business Rates Local Discretionary Fund would be implemented as a result of the national revaluation of Business Rates which had taken place on 1 April 2017.

The Executive Member for Finance and IT stated that there had been wide concern from businesses that the effect of the revaluation, whilst being cost neutral overall, would mean that those who lost out would lose quite substantially. The Government had therefore proposed a series of measures to try and ameliorate the impact of the revaluation, including the implementation of a Business Rates Local Discretionary Fund.

The Executive Member for Finance and IT explained that the Council had been allocated a sum of money for the Fund to use over a four year period, details of which were set out in Paragraph 8.6 of the report. These funds would be distributed to local Business Ratepayers in accordance with the approved scheme.

The Executive Member for Finance and IT advised that the Council had asked the Department of Communities and Local Government whether the allocated funding could be spread more evenly over the four year period, but had been told that this would not be permissible.

The Executive Member for Finance and IT commented that all of the Hertfordshire Local Authorities were working on a scheme that would be common across the whole county. The Local Discretionary Fund criteria attached at Appendix A to the report had been agreed by the Hertfordshire Chief Finance Officers and was currently going through the political process at each of the Hertfordshire Authorities. He would shortly be approving the Local Discretionary Scheme for NHDC, details of which would be circulated to Members in due course.

### **RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the high level implications of the proposed National Non-Domestic Rates Local Discretionary Fund be noted; and
- (2) That approval of the final detail of the scheme be delegated to the Strategic Director of Finance, Policy and Governance, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and IT.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To comply with proposals announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the 2017 Spring Budget; and to provide additional financial assistance to businesses hardest hit by the 2017 revaluation of Non-Domestic property.

The meeting closed at 9.16 pm