

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COUNCIL HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON WEDNESDAY
28 FEBRUARY 2024, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor C Horner (Chairman).
Councillors M Adams, D Andrews,
R Buckmaster, P Boylan, C Brittain,
I Devonshire, E Buckmaster, S Bull, V Burt,
R Carter, M Connolly, S Copley, N Cox,
B Crystall, A Daar, B Deering, T Deffley,
J Dunlop, Y Estop, V Glover-Ward,
M Goldspink, C Hart, G Hill, D Hollebon,
A Holt, S Hopewell, T Hoskin, D Jacobs,
S Marlow, G McAndrew, S Nicholls, A Parsad-
Wyatt, C Redfern, V Smith, T Stowe,
M Swainston, J Thomas, R Townsend,
S Watson, D Willcocks, G Williamson,
C Wilson, D Woolcombe and J Wyllie.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Richard Cassidy	- Chief Executive
James Ellis	- Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer
Jonathan Geall	- Head of Housing and Health
Steven Linnett	- Head of Strategic Finance and Property
Katie Mogan	- Democratic and Electoral Services Manager

343 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman said that he had attended a number of events since the last meeting and said that of particular highlight was the Holocaust Memorial Day held in the Council Chamber which was very moving, both as an act of remembrance of past genocides but also a reminder that everyone had a role to play for a safer future. He said he had also attended a tree planting ceremony to commemorate the coronation of King Charles III in Hertford Castle.

The Chairman announced the sad news of the death of former councillor Michael McMullen who was a councillor for Hertford Rural ward from 1999 – 2023. The Chairman invited Members to share a few words. Councillor Deering, Crystall and Goldspink paid tribute to Michael McMullen and sent their best wishes and condolences to his family. A minute's silence was held.

344 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader of the Council thanked Members for attending tonight's meeting which had a full agenda.

345 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Butcher, Clements, Dumont and Woolf.

346 MINUTES - 13 DECEMBER 2023 AND 18 JANUARY 2024

Councillor Goldspink proposed, and Councillor Hill seconded a motion that the Minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2023 and 18 January 2024 be approved as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman. On being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2023 and 18 January 2024 be approved

as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

347 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

348 PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

349 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The full responses to the submitted Public Questions can be found in the supplementary [here](#).

350 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

The full responses to the submitted Members' Questions can be found in the supplementary [here](#).

351 EXECUTIVE REPORT - 13 FEBRUARY 2024

The Leader of the Council presented a report setting out recommendations to the Council made by the Executive at its meeting on 13 February 2024.

351 HARLOW AND GILSTON GARDEN TOWN: INFRASTRUCTURE DELIVERY PLAN REVIEW

The Leader of the Council presented the report. He said that the purpose of the report was to lay out what infrastructure was required and where and when it was needed to achieve the targets set out in the District Plan such as the number of houses required, sustainable travel and employment. He said that the delivery plan also provided the scale of infrastructure needed, the phasing of it, the costs, the priorities, who was responsible, who paid and identified funding gaps and how developer contributions were shared.

The Leader of the Council said that the plan needed updating after five years due to new local plans, the approvals of planning applications, changes to developer contributions and changes in costs. He said that the role of the document was to provide an evidence base for masterplanning and to assist planning officers in their future discussions to get the delivery of infrastructure at the right time and place. He said that the plan would be updated every 2-3 years to keep up with changes to needs and costs and it was important to endorse now as infrastructure delivery was a key part of achieving the council's aims.

Councillor Crystall proposed that the recommendations in the report be supported. Councillor Marlow seconded the proposal.

Councillor E Buckmaster felt that the plan was something to be vigilant about as conditions could change over the next 20 years and there could be challenges around infrastructure delivery. He said that the delivery of infrastructure was so important so the plan should be looked at closely.

Councillor Hollebon referred to pages 66 – 160 of the report and said she found them illegible and could not read the information. She asked for it to be presented in larger font next time.

Councillor Deering echoed the comments of Councillor E Buckmaster and said the Conservative group were supportive of the principle.

The motion to support the recommendation having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – That the HGGT IDP 2023 be approved to form part of the evidence base for the consideration of master plans, pre-application consideration, planning application considered and in

relation to all other relevant development management processes in relation to the Garden Town.

351 THRIVING TOGETHER 2023 - 2027 - A NEW HEALTH AND WELLBEING PLAN FOR EAST HERTS

The Executive Member for Wellbeing presented the Thriving Together health and wellbeing plan. She said that work had begun on the plan in the previous administration and a public survey had been carried out over the autumn in 2023 which received good feedback that has been incorporated into the plan. She said a focus group was held before Christmas to go through the updated version of the plan and the document was reviewed at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16 January 2024. She said that there should be joint ownership of the plan by residents and councillors.

Councillor Hopewell proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported. Councillor Swainston seconded the proposal.

Councillor E Buckmaster said that it was good to see an update to this plan. He said that health and wellbeing was a broad subject and there was a balance to be struck over the role of the council. He said that there should be a strong emphasis on activity fitness, culture, the arts and planning who all have a role to play. He felt that the council had a role to be play with the integrated care partnership and Hertfordshire County Council with social care.

Councillor Carter said she was pleased to see a focus on children and young people as the Director of Public Health report 2019-2020 said that 8.2% of children in East Herts were living in low income families.

Councillor Deering said the Conservative group welcomed the report.

The motion to support the recommendation having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – That the Thriving Together health and wellbeing plan for 2024-2027 be approved.

351 REVISED EAST HERTS COUNCIL SAFEGUARDING POLICY AND PROCEDURE

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods presented the revised East Herts Council Safeguarding Policy and Procedure. She thanked the officers involved for their hard work and Councillor Boylan for his previous work on the policy and his continuing assistance. She said that the policy was last reviewed in 2020 and the amended version incorporated many changes which were listed at paragraph 2.11 of the report.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods said that the Independent Chair of the Hertfordshire Safeguarding Board had reviewed the policy and was very complimentary of it. She said that the new policy had an overview section at the beginning which provided clear guidelines to give everybody confidence in dealing with safeguarding matters.

Councillor Goldspink proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported. Councillor Daar seconded the proposal.

Councillor Deering said the policy was very good and the Conservative group supported it.

The motion to support the recommendation having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – That the revised Safeguarding Policy be

adopted.

352 BUDGET 2024/25 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented the Budget 2024/25 and Medium Term Financial Plan report. He said the Council were legally required to set a balanced budget and the proposal in the report did this. He ran through the highlights of the budget report including the Transforming East Herts programme, a 7.2% increase in government grants from the New Burdens Funding and New Homes Bonus, the increased cost of servicing debt, the council's low levels of reserves and a recommended 2.99% increase in Council Tax.

Councillor Brittain proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported. Councillor Goldspink seconded the proposal.

Councillor Williamson thanked the Executive Member for the report and said he had a few comments. Firstly, within the Medium Term Financial Plan, the cost of capital was clear but the income from investments made by the council were not so visible in the net costs of services. Secondly, referring to paragraph 1.9 of the report and the savings under officer delegations, he said it would be helpful if the impacts of these £1.1million savings were explained further. Thirdly, he said that the £1.7 million future spend on the Old River Lane project was a lot of money for a temporary public square concept. He referred to the £170,000 spend on the church hall and was not convinced that this represented good value for money and if this money was not spent, there would be £15,000 less pressure on the revenue budget. Lastly, he said that there were rumours in the district that the council was already bankrupt and he asked the Executive Member to allay these fears and reassure the public that the council was not bankrupt.

Councillor Williamson proposed an amendment to the recommendations in the report. He proposed to remove

Recommendation C. Councillor Devonshire seconded this proposal.

Councillor Brittain responded to the points raised by Councillor Williamson. He said the point about separating other sources of income from investments was valid and would look to amend this in the future. He said that he was happy to come back with more information on the officer delegated savings but he assured Members that there was no impact on services and they related to efficiency savings. He said that he had not heard the rumours but he reassured residents and Members that the council was not going bankrupt.

Councillor Estop said that she opposed the amendment. She said the hall had not been looked after but it was structurally sound and was used regularly by the community. She said it had been designated an Asset of Community Value so was protected by planning policy.

Councillor Swainston said that she also opposed the amendment and said that the council could not get rid of an Asset of Community Value.

Councillor Goldspink said she opposed the amendment and referred to Policy BISH8 says that no community hall which was valuable should be destroyed unless adequate or a better replacement was built. She said that until such time, the hall was all the community had and it was well used and should be preserved.

Councillor Deering said he supported the amendment. He said that part of the concern of this expenditure supported the theme of inaction in relation to the Old River Lane site. He said that the previous administration had left the Council with a significant project and nothing had happened in the last year. He said the proposal lacked ambition and it was difficult to see how it was a good use of taxpayers money.

Councillor McAndrew referred to the comments about not

raising the amendment earlier throughout the committee process. He said he had attended a previous Executive meeting and said that he would be annoyed if he was a resident of Buntingford to learn that £170,000 was being spent on a hall in Bishop's Stortford and not on the swimming pool in their town. He said he stood by that and said he supported the amendment.

Councillor Wilson said that he had no problem with the amendment being brought but the same comment was made by the previous Executive Member of Financial Sustainability at the Council meeting in March 2023 about the Liberal Democrat amendment. He said that the Liberal Democrat group had previously highlighted that the number of capital projects undertaken were unwise and now the council did not have the money to complete the Old River Lane project. He said that the residents of Bishop's Stortford had missed out on what they were expected to get and their compensation was to keep the community hall going.

Councillor Crystall said that he supported what Councillor Wilson and Brittain had said. He did not agree with the amendment and said there was a passion within the town to keep the hall as it was well used and therefore felt it was worth spending money on it. He said he was concerned about the comments raised by Councillor McAndrew about Buntingford and felt the rhetoric was divisive and difficult decisions had to be made.

Councillor McAndrew raised a point of clarification and said that he was responding to comments made by Councillor Brittain saying that no one had raised the issue previously.

Councillor Hollebon asked if Councillor Wilson could provide figures to justify his comments about residents wanting to keep the hall in Bishop's Stortford.

Councillor Wilson said that there were multiple comments on social media and has spoken to residents. He said the opinion

on the ground was quite clear.

Councillor Devonshire asked for clarification on how the £170,000 was arrived at.

Councillor Brittain said that the figure came from a building appraisal summary report in November 2022 which identified several changes and upgrades to the building. He said there were 28 different line items and was happy to distribute the report to members.

Councillor Jacobs said that he was puzzled by the fixation on one budget line and a relatively small amount of money. He said he was pleased that the Executive had changed their mind over the future of the building and said there was a clear demonstration of support for retaining the hall in the community.

Councillor Hart asked what would happen if the other savings identified in the report were not realised. She felt the council had committed to the maintenance of the hall without being clear that other savings would be achieved.

Councillor Brittain said he was very confident that the savings would be achieved and there would be in year monitoring to look at progress to ensure these savings transpire.

Councillor Deffley referred to the £170,000 figure for the hall and said the figure was from November 2022 and there had been significant increase in construction inflation in the last few years. He asked if this figure was still accurate.

Councillor Brittain said he accepted the point about contract inflation but the work was based on an estimate and said if the price fluctuated within 10% it would not create a major problem.

Councillor Andrews said that he hoped Members who represented Buntingford were in a good position to explain to

residents why this money had not been spent on the swimming pool.

Councillor Hopewell provided an update on the Buntingford swimming pool. She said the Department of Education would be ending their payment towards the pool from next year and so any investment from the council would not have covered the costs of repairs and would not have saved the pool in the long term. She said she was working extremely hard to save the Ward Freman pool with a fantastic group of residents and she had agreement in principle from the County Council to lease the pool on a peppercorn rent if a viable business plan was presented. She said that a business plan was being worked on and was in the process of setting up a charity to take on the pool.

Councillor Nicholls echoed the comments from Councillor Hopewell and said that Buntingford recognised the effect of the removal of a community assets and the impact on the community.

Councillor Williamson concluded by saying that he was not suggesting that the £170,000 was spent elsewhere but that it was not spent at all.

A recorded vote was held on the amendment proposed by Councillor Williamson. The result was as follows:

FOR

Councillors Andrews, Boylan, E Buckmaster, R Buckmaster, Bull, Deering, Deffley, Devonshire, Hollebon, Holt, McAndrew, Parsad-Wyatt, Stowe, Williamson, Wyllie (15)

AGAINST

Councillors Adams, Brittain, Burt, Carter, Connolly, Copley, Cox, Crystall, Daar, Dunlop, Estop, Glover-Ward, Goldspink, Hart, Hill, Hopewell, Hoskin, Jacobs, Marlow, Nicholls,

Redfern, Smith, Swainston, Thomas, Townsend, Watson, Willcocks, Wilson, Woollcombe (29)

ABSTAINED

Councillor Horner (1)

The motion to amend the recommendation was LOST.

The debate returned to the original recommendations in the report.

Councillor Watson referred to the new Band D rate for council tax and said this translated to an extra £3.75 per week. He said the district council provided a wide range of services for this cost and acknowledged the hard work of council employees who allowed the council to provide excellent value for money.

Councillor Deering said he acknowledged the work that had gone into the budget and was pleased to see the council was starting to benefit from capital projects. He said that the Conservative group did not wish to be disruptive to the council finances and they would be supporting the budget. He referred to recommendation D and did not feel this had a place in budget papers and felt it was a political point. He said that the control of expenditure reflected well on the previous Conservative administration. He felt disappointed by the Leader's comments about what was being said in Buntingford and that Councillor McAndrew was only echoing these comments from residents. He said that if the council were a listening council, they should be listening to all views, not just those that were convenient.

Councillor E Buckmaster said that he kept hearing from Councillor Wilson about being prudent in investing in health and wellbeing and asked which project he would not have done as the leisure centres needed investment. He said he would not change what the previous administration had

achieved and none of them could predict that there would be a pandemic and a war in Europe which had an impact on inflation and costs of borrowing.

Councillor Glover-Ward said that the council's spending power had been reduced by 27% since 2010 according to the Local Government Association. She said the Executive had to look at cutting items costing just £10,000 a year to try and achieve a balanced budget.

The motion to support the recommendations having been proposed and seconded was put to a recorded vote and the result was as follows:

FOR

Councillors Adams, Andrews, Boylan, Brittain, E Buckmaster, R Buckmaster, Bull, Burt, Carter, Connolly, Copley, Cox, Crystall, Daar, Deering, Deffley, Devonshire, Dunlop, Estop, Glover-Ward, Goldspink, Hart, Hill, Hollebon, Holt, Hopewell, Horner, Hoskin, Jacobs, Marlow, McAndrew, Nicholls, Parsad-Wyatt, Redfern, Smith, Stowe, Swainston, Thomas, Townsend, Watson, Willcocks, Williamson, Wilson, Woolcombe, Wyllie (45)

AGAINST

None

ABSTAINED

None

RESOLVED – That (A) the budget and Medium Term Financial Plan at Appendix A, the savings programme at Appendix C, the Fees and Charges at Appendix F and increase Council Tax by 2.99%, which will result in a Band D Council Tax increase of £5.65 to £195.52 per year be approved;

(B) the proposed savings requirements, that will need to be delivered to balance the budget in the medium term be noted:

	2024/ 25	2025/ 26	2026/ 27
	£(000)	£(000)	£(000)
Gross Savings requirement	1,186	5,606	5,606
Savings plans 2024/25	(1,186)	(4,195)	(4,195)
<i>Savings not yet identified:</i>			
<i>2025/26 savings to be identified</i>		<i>(1,411)</i>	<i>(1,411)</i>
<i>2027/28 savings to be identified</i>			

(C) the amended Capital Programme at Appendix B which pauses the Old River Lane Arts Centre be approved, reducing revenue costs of Minimum Revenue Provision and interest by £1,514k per annum on current interest rates, a total saving of £7.442 million of over the MTFP period. Comment on the capital expenditure priorities:

- i. essential property maintenance to meet statutory requirements or to prevent loss or damage to neighbouring properties;
- ii. investment in ICT to continue but that the budget carry forward that has not been used for two years is deleted;
- iii. invest to save initiatives where the business case indicates that the cost of the investment will be recovered in under 10 years;
- iv. to allow pausing of construction of the Arts Centre at Old River Lane until such time as debt levels have fallen sufficiently to make the revenue impacts of new

borrowing affordable while at the same time undertaking landscaping works on the arts centre site so that it is an attractive site rather than an undeveloped area blighting the retail and commercial units in the City Heart scheme;

v. provide up to £170k for essential maintenance works for the URC Church Hall in Bishop's Stortford;

vi. completion of Hertford Theatre, at as low a cost as possible, so that the entire venue is opened and run on a strictly commercial basis to maximise income; and

vii. investment in depot works and waste containers for the new waste and recycling contract.

(D) the implication of the Autumn Statement that a further round of austerity is proposed by the Government and that the two major parties seem intent on keeping to the announced expenditure totals which will severely reduce government funding and inevitably require service cuts be noted.

353 CAPITAL STRATEGY, MINIMUM REVENUE PROVISION POLICY AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2024/25

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented the report and said the capital strategy showed the financial position of the council and the costs of servicing existing debts. He said that the position of the council meant that it could not afford any new major projects and the Old River Lane project would be paused until the costs of borrowing had been reduced.

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability said that capital assets were being reviewed to see if any could be sold to reduce debt and a cross party group had been set up to discuss the options. The group had agreed that assets would

only be sold where interests of the community were protected and if there was a clear financial advantage to the council of doing so.

Councillor Brittain proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported. Councillor Adams seconded the proposal.

The motion to support the recommendation having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – That (A) the Capital Strategy, Minimum Revenue Provision Policy and the Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25 including the Prudential Indicators contained within the reports be approved.

354 COUNCIL TAX SETTING 2024/25

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented the Council Tax 2024/25 setting report. He said the report presented the final council tax bill and was required to be formally approved by Council.

Councillor Brittain proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported. Councillor Adams seconded the proposal.

The motion to support the recommendations having been proposed and seconded was put to a recorded vote and the result was as follows:

FOR

Councillors Adams, Andrews, Boylan, Brittain, E Buckmaster, R Buckmaster, Bull, Burt, Carter, Connolly, Copley, Cox, Crystall, Daar, Deering, Deffley, Devonshire, Dunlop, Estop, Glover-Ward, Goldspink, Hart, Hill, Hollebon, Holt, Hopewell, Horner, Hoskin, Jacobs, Marlow, McAndrew, Nicholls, Parsad-Wyatt, Redfern, Smith, Stowe, Swainston, Thomas,

Townsend, Watson, Willcocks, Williamson, Wilson,
Woollcombe, Wyllie (45)

AGAINST

None

ABSTAINED

None

RESOLVED – That (A) the Council Tax resolution, as now submitted at Appendix A, be approved;

(B) the local precepts as set out at Appendix 'A' be noted; and

(C) the Hertfordshire County Council and Police & Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire precepts be noted.

355 EAST HERTS COUNCIL CORPORATE PLAN

The Leader of the Council presented the East Herts Corporate Plan and said the plan had been developed alongside the budget for 2024/25 and set out the priorities that the joint administration wanted to focus on for the next three years. He said the administration had used LEAF as an acronym to organise these priorities into: Listening, open and transparent, Environmentally focussed, Acting with the community and Fair and inclusive. He said that there would be quarterly progress reports on these priorities and use feedback from consultations to refresh this plan annually.

Councillor Crystall proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported. Councillor Wilson seconded the proposal.

Councillor McAndrew said he welcomed the continuity from

the previous administration. He referred to the corporate plan encouraging digital communication channels.

Councillor Crystall said that it was moving that way and had been started under the previous administration and this was continuing.

Councillor E Buckmaster said he felt that there needed to be a common branding of initiatives across local authorities, for example East Herts Council and Hertfordshire County Council had different tag lines for air quality.

Councillor Woollcombe expressed his support for the plan. He questioned the commitment to explore replacing the Leader and Executive system of governance to a committee system. He asked the Leader to explain what that meant and when the council would receive a proposal on the subject.

Councillor Crystall said the administration would start to investigate the possible impacts of a change in governance system and would involve a cross party working group. He said the initial thinking would be that this would start before the end of the year.

Councillor Hart asked about the commitment to investigating ways of providing affordable housing.

Councillor Goldspink said the priorities in the corporate plan referred to policies over and above what happened in the planning application process. She said a few options were going to be explored and she would report back to Council when these were definite.

Councillor Devonshire asked how the committee system would work.

Councillor Crystall said that decisions would be made within politically balanced committee groups.

Councillor Deering said he thought the plan was good and was pleased to see a continuation of themes from the previous administration. He also referred to the committee system and said that reorganisation could cost money. He asked Councillor Goldspink if she could share some of the proposed plans for affordable housing.

Councillor Crystall said that the administration was exploring the committee system and said there were benefits in its decision making by involving more councillors from all parties. He said he would update the Council when he knew more.

Councillor Goldspink said there could be ways for the council to build its own affordable housing but land needed to be identified for this.

Councillor Wilson said the corporate plan was partly about improving ways of reaching different people to engage in the activities of the council.

The motion to support the recommendation having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – That the new Corporate Plan be adopted.

356 ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW 2022/23

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented the Annual Treasury Management Review 2022/23 report. He said this was required under the Local Government Act 2003 to ensure the council could maintain an adequate cash flow. He said the report met the requirements of CIPFA and the report had been reviewed by the Audit and Governance Committee in November 2023.

Councillor Brittain proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported. Councillor Thomas seconded the proposal.

The motion to support the recommendation having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – That the Annual Treasury Management Review and Prudential Indicators for 2022/23 be approved.

357 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID YEAR REVIEW 2023/24

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented the Treasury Management Mid-Year Review 2023/24 report. He said it was the mid-year version of the previous report and had been reviewed by the Audit and Governance Committee in January 2024.

Councillor Brittain proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported. Councillor Copley seconded the proposal.

The motion to support the recommendation having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – That the Mid-Year Treasury Management Review and Prudential Indicators for 2023/24

358 MILLSTREAM 30 YEAR BUSINESS PLAN 2024/25

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented the Millstream 30 Year Business Plan 2024/25 report. He said that the council's property investment company had now been operating for six years and it provided an income of £160,000 a year to the council which was built into the budget and reduces need for savings. He explained that there had been significant national regulations that had restricted the company in its aims.

One of the Directors of Millstream spoke to the meeting. He

said that Millstream owned 18 properties in East Herts with rents typically at the entry level of the private rent market. He said any works carried out to the properties were done by local contractors which in turn helped the local economy. He said that the 2024/25 business plan show the company was in a sound position to provide the income to the council.

Councillor Brittain proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported. Councillor Swainston seconded the proposal.

Councillor Williamson said that when the company was set up, it was an exciting project, and it was disappointing that external constraints had been put on the company and could not expand its operations. He said however, it was rewarding to hear it was still bringing in revenue to the council.

Councillor Wyllie asked why documents were showing as outstanding on Companies House.

The Director of Millstream said he would take that away and investigate immediately as the paperwork had been completed.

Councillor Deering said that the company had been set up under the previous administration and was pleased to see it being maintained and making a welcome contribution to the council.

The motion to support the recommendation having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED - That Millstream Property Investment Ltd's 2024/25 30 Year Business Plan, presented in the EXEMPT Appendix A, be approved

359 PAY POLICY STATEMENT REPORT 2024 - 2025

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods presented the report on behalf of the Executive Member for Corporate Services. She said that the council was required to produce a pay policy statement annually under Section 38 of the Localism Act. The pay policy must set out the authority's policies relating to the remuneration of chief officers and the lowest paid employees.

Councillor Goldspink proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported. Councillor Carter seconded the proposal.

Councillor Carter said the council's staff had all worked extremely hard and had dealt with huge changes such as new digital services and a new administration. She said as a new councillor, she had appreciated their help and support.

The motion to support the recommendation having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the Pay Policy Statement 2024/25 be approved.

360 MOTIONS ON NOTICE

361 WATER SUPPLY RISK

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services drew Members' attention to the last paragraph of the motion which suggested writing to Thames Water threatening to serve them with a noise abatement notice. He said that if Members were minded to pass the motion, the wording would need to be amended as the council could not consider serving notice until a proper investigation had been carried out.

Councillor Cox requested a recorded vote on the motion. He did not receive the support of five Members so the request fell.

Councillor Cox presented his motion on notice. Councillor Woolcombe seconded the motion and reserved his right to speak.

Councillor Glover-Ward responded to the motion and thanked Councillor Cox for his well-intentioned motion as there were significant water resources challenges facing East Herts. She said that the council needed to have regard to the Thames Water Basin Management Plan in line with the requirements of the Water Framework Directive. She said that quality of water was an important consideration and measures to safeguard water sources were included in policy WAT2 of the District Plan.

There were, however, multiple organisations that had roles and responsibilities to respond to these challenges, and it was important to remember that the Council's responsibility, as detailed in Section 83 of the Water Act 2003 was to conserve water.

Councillor Glover-Ward said that the council was already meeting its responsibility on conserving water. The District Plan stated that East Herts was facing high water stress (paragraph 23.4.5) and acknowledged the high per head per day water usage in East Herts of 160 litres which was 10 litres per day more than national norms. To address this, Policy WAT4 included a specific water target of 110 litres per head per day. She said that strengthening this target could be proactively considered through the District Plan update. East Herts planners have already discussed a reduced target with the Environment Agency (EA) who would be supportive of

East Herts pursuing similar increased water efficiency gains.

Councillor Glover-Ward added that the Hertfordshire Water Study 2017 was over six years old, and the council would produce an updated Water Cycle Study to inform the District Plan update. This work would identify where water management/quality issues may be occurring in East Herts, and in turn what solutions may be appropriate plus will support any policy changes in the revised District Plan. She said that the importance of Hertfordshire's chalk streams could not be underestimated as a rare and beautiful habitat and the council's planning policy team was already working with the EA to ensure that the findings of the CaBA (Catchment Based Approach) Chalk Stream Restoration Strategy, published in October 2021, were incorporated into the District Plan update.

Councillor Glover-Ward said that in the future, the council would only be able to plan for the new homes that were needed, if it had evidence from the water industry that demonstrated that there would be an adequate water supply without causing unacceptable harm to the environment.

Councillor Glover-Ward said that the allocated strategic sites at Gilston and Ware were key to meeting this housing need. She said that the Environment Agency were a statutory consultee in the planning process including providing technical advice. As a statutory consultee, it was not for the council to tell the EA how to advise on development proposals. Should the EA consider there to be a specific issue with development proposals coming forward, they would tell the council. She said that Officers had already spoken to the Environment Agency regarding the position in the Greater Cambridge Area and the EA was clear that the situation was different in East

Herts and that there was no need to prevent development coming forward now. The position was kept under review as a matter of course and particularly when the council would be undertaking the District Plan update.

Councillor Glover-Ward said that the council needed to remember that it must be able to demonstrate that it has an adequate supply of housing to meet EH housing needs. As allocated sites in the District Plan, Gilston and Ware were key to the council being able to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply. She said that if the motion was agreed, it would weaken the five-year housing land supply position and lead to an increased risk of speculative development across the district particularly around towns and villages such as Buntingford that were not in the Green belt. Speculative development would mean that the council would lose a significant degree of control over where new housing is built, the infrastructure to support that housing and ability to influence quality outcomes for communities.

Councillor Glover-Ward said that a further consequence of agreeing the motion was that it could seriously legally compromise past and future resolutions of the Development Management Committee because it made unfounded and out of context accusations as to the integrity of consultee responses to planning applications.

In summary, Councillor Glover-Ward said that the motion was premature, coming ahead of the detailed work associated with the District Plan update and if agreed, the effect of this motion would be to:

- Weaken the Council's Five Year Housing Land Supply by creating uncertainty around the deliverability of sites
- Increase the risk of speculative development across the

district without appropriate infrastructure provision and the ability to positively influence the planning outcomes for communities.

- Undermine confidence in the plan-led system, which not only allows the Council to set out the spatial strategy for the district, but it also provides development certainty as allocated sites have gone through a rigorous testing process.
- Reduce the Council's ability to influence quality placemaking and outcomes for communities.
- Result in compromising the legal integrity of past and future resolutions of the Development Management Committee. For example, Gilston, Ware2 (and other applications) by exposing the Council to risk of legal challenges based on comments made on consultee responses.
- Lead to a potential challenge from the Gilston applicants and/or objectors to the proposals.
- Jeopardise the Council's relationship with statutory consultees as a result of telling them how they should be responding to development proposals.

She said that the most appropriate way to deal with this matter was to proactively work with the EA and the water companies on the District Plan update. To write to them as outlined in the motion would have other consequential implications as stated above. She urged Members to vote against this motion.

Councillor E Buckmaster said there were some worthy points in the motion and respected Councillor Cox's intentions but did not think this was the best way of dealing with the issue. He felt it would be worth adding it to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's work programme and the committee could invite witnesses to answer these questions.

Councillor McAndrew said that the Hertfordshire Water Study

was started in 2015 and ended in 2017 but the document went up to 2052 so it was only right that the document would need revisiting.

Councillor Stowe said he agreed with the comments from Councillor Glover-Ward and felt this was the wrong way to deal with the situation. He felt it could be dealt with through the revised District Plan and engagement with the agencies concerned.

Councillor Crystall said he appreciated the frustration over the council's powers in this area. He said the motion risked causing the District Plan serious problems. He said that taking it through the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was an excellent idea and would give more opportunity to discuss the issues with the planning team in a more effective manner. He also urged Members to vote against it and promised to ensure that an improved motion about water supply would be brought to Council in the future to get support across the Chamber.

Councillor Deering said he agreed with the sentiment of the motion but agreed with Councillor Glover-Ward's comments that it would have serious ramifications with the District Plan and past and future applications heard by the Development Management Committee.

Councillor Hart was worried that the council were not looking at the long term and the plans for resolving the water shortage.

Councillor Goldspink said she appreciated the intention behind the motion but was worried about the suggestion that if agreed, would question the validity of statutory responses.

Councillor Estop said the water cycle was the most important part of infrastructure and felt that this could be used as evidence for sustainable development. She said she would be abstaining as the Chair of the Development Management Committee.

Councillor Woollcombe said he appreciated the support from the Chamber on green issues. He said he felt the Council were missing the sense of urgency and said the council could not wait for a District Plan that could be years away when the district was looking at a 450 million gallon water shortfall.

The motion to support the motion having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared LOST.

The meeting closed at 10.00 pm

Chairman
Date