

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
EXECUTIVE HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
TUESDAY 3 JUNE 2025, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor (Chairman/Leader)
Councillors B Crystall, M Goldspink,
C Brittain, A Daar, J Dumont, V Glover-Ward,
S Hopewell, T Hoskin and C Wilson.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors E Buckmaster, Y Estop and
T Stowe.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Richard Crutchley	- Team Leader (Planning Policy)
James Ellis	- Director for Legal, Policy and Governance and Monitoring Officer
Jonathan Geall	- Director for Communities
Maria Hennessy	- Principal Planning Policy Officer
Katie Mogan	- Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
Brian Moldon	- Director for Finance, Risk and Performance

48 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

49 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader reminded Members and Officers that the meeting was being webcast.

50 MINUTES - 18 MARCH 2025

Councillor Glover-Ward asked for a correction at minute number 393. The minutes read 'Councillor Glover-Ward said that there would be two mandatory consultations at various stages. She said that one would be expected towards the end of next year.'. She asked for it to be amended to say that there would be a consultation on the vision document and two consultations on the District Plan, with the first District Plan consultation not being before the end of 2026.

Councillor Dumont proposed, and Councillor Glover-Ward seconded a motion that the Minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2025, as amended, be approved as a correct record, and be signed by the Leader. On being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2025, as amended, be approved as a correct record, and signed by the Leader.

51 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

52 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented the report which provided an update on the work done so far on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2026/27. He said the recommendation was seeking permission to consult with the public and other major

precepting authorities as the scheme needed to be updated to take account of the rollout of Universal Credit.

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability said that the current scheme placed a high administrative burden on the council and the proposed banded scheme would reduce the number of changes that needed to be processed. He said that the scheme was a work in progress and the final Council Tax Support scheme would be agreed by Council at the end of the year.

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability said he was amending the recommendation in the report to 'Agree that the Council will consult with the public and Major Precepting Authorities on the introduction of a new income banded/grid scheme for working age applicants with effect from 1 April 2026, with the final scheme to be consulted on delegated to the Executive Member for Financial Sustainability in conjunction with the Section 151 officer for agreement'.

Councillor Brittain proposed that the recommendations in the report, as amended, be supported. Councillor Wilson seconded the proposal.

Councillor E Buckmaster said he understood why the scheme was being updated but questioned whether this would be easily understood by residents. He asked if there was a way of making sure people understood the implications of the changes.

Councillor Brittain said that it could be difficult for residents to work out what they would be entitled to under the scheme. He said he would take the point away and try to find a way of making it simpler.

The Director for Finance, Risk and Performance said that the scheme was complicated at the moment. He said that the banded scheme would mean that residents did not

have to go through so many reassessments if their income changed on a weekly basis.

Councillor Glover-Ward said that she was quite shocked to see that 40% of residents were going through a monthly re-evaluation. She said that the banded scheme should have a significant reduction on the number of re-evaluations.

Councillor Estop asked what was meant in the report that this would improve the level of council tax collection.

Councillor Brittain said that the lowest collection rate was from those who received council tax support. He said that there was an opportunity to create a 100% rebate and take people of most need out of council tax rates altogether which would have a better impact on increasing collection rates.

Councillor Crystall asked if the consultation would be sent to organisations like the Citizens Advice Bureau or food banks, as these often dealt with people most in need.

The Director for Finance, Risk and Performance said that the paper was going to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee next week and the Benefits Manager would be in attendance to answer detailed questions. He said that the consultation would be open to everyone to get the views of as many people as possible.

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

RESOLVED - agree that the Council will consult with the public and Major Precepting Authorities on the introduction of a new income banded/grid scheme for working age applicants with effect

from 1 April 2026 with the final scheme to be consulted on delegated to the Executive Member for Financial Sustainability in conjunction with the Section 151 officer for agreement.

53 PROVISIONAL OUTTURN 2023/24 AND 2023/24 DRAFT STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented the provisional outturn and draft statement of accounts. He said that the report had been subject to delays in the auditing process in 2020/21 and 2021/22. He said that the report showed a £224k underspend which would be transferred into the general fund to counter the anticipated overspend in 2024/25. There was also an increased provision of doubtful debts and £1.2million had been put into the interest equalisation reserve which would support the predicted loss on the property funds.

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

Councillor Buckmaster referred to the table on page 50 and sought clarification if the numbers presented were gross figures before any costs had been taken out and if the table on page 52 contained the net figures.

Councillor Brittain confirmed that was correct.

The Director for Finance, Risk and Performance said that the leisure contract income was provided in the income graph. The council received an annual income management fee from the contractor running the centre.

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

RESOLVED – that (A) the general fund revenue outturn of £224k underspend to be transferred to the general reserve be noted;

(B) the capital outturn position be noted; and

(C) the 2023/24 draft statement of accounts be received.

54 MONITORING 2024/25 QUARTER 4 CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented the Monitoring 2024/25 Quarter 4 corporate risk register report. He said that the Leadership Team had reviewed the risks, scores and mitigations and they remained largely unchanged. He said that there were risks around the Local Government Review but there were currently insufficient details to make an assessment.

Councillor Brittain proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported. Councillor Daar 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 2024/25 quarter four corporate risk register and actions being taken to control and mitigate risk be noted.

55 OPTIONS FOR ELIZABETH ROAD SHOPS AND FLATS, BISHOP'S STORTFORD

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented the report on the options for the Elizabeth Road shops and flats. He said that the parade of shops

had been left in a poor state due to a lack of investment and catch-up repairs were needed, especially to bring up to a higher minimum energy standard in order to be let out. Tables 1 – 3 in the report showed the outcome in Year 1 for each option and Table 5 forecasted the financial implications for a 30-year period.

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability said that the best option for the council was to sell the site and reduce its debt. He accepted that the parade historically had not been managed well, and a sale was the best long-term option for the community as the management of small shops was not a core activity for the council.

Councillor Brittain proposed that the recommendations in the report be supported. Councillor Hopewell seconded the proposal.

Councillor Estop made a statement in opposition to the sale of the shops and flats. She raised issues such as the council only offering short lets on the shop units, the boundary for the sale containing the whole site, protection of existing businesses using the units, the failure to install roof insulation in the flats and the expenditure of green space. She also raised the concerns of the three business owners in the units and said that local residents had started a petition which currently had 400 signatures.

Councillor Brittain said that the council's resources would be better utilised for its core activities and landlord of shops tended to be within the private sector. He said that just because the council was selling the property, did not mean it would change its use. In relation to the boundary change, this option was considered but it was unknown as to what the future owner would want to do with the site. He said that the larger boundary allowed flexibility within the sale negotiations.

Councillor Glover-Ward said the council did not know what would happen to the site under the new owners. She said whatever design came forward, the planning application could be called in and determined by the Development Management Committee.

Councillor Hopewell said that any administration would be keen to make sure green spaces worked well, were enhanced and looked after. She reiterated that the wider boundary allowed greater options for flexibility and did not mean that would be the final boundary position.

Councillor Hoskin responded to Councillor Estop's point about the car park. He said that it would be odd to sell a commercial property without the car parking spaces and it was not an asset that earned money for the council. He said that the shops met the current standards of EPC but these requirements would increase in the future. He said that there was only one flat that did not meet the standards. He said that the exempt appendix showed the extraordinary money needed to bring it back to standard and the property would be placed better in a commercial environment to make judgements and market the shops more actively.

Councillor Goldspink said that the Executive were required to make difficult decisions. She appreciated that the community valued the local shops highly, but the council were not experts in the ownership and management of shops. She said that it was more realistic that they were looked after by experts in the field. She said that the best option would be to sell the block and the whole plot of land.

Councillor Estop said that the previous administration had planned an ugly development on this site. She said that the report did not mention that planning had been consulted. She felt that the units had been kept

deliberately vacant and leases kept at two years and the area was attracting anti-social behaviour.

Councillor Crystall said that the three empty units were not making it a dangerous area.

Councillor Brittian said he understood the fear in the community about the previous planning application happening again, but the planning system had prevented it, and the system would continue to prevent that kind of development.

Councillor Glover-Ward said that the council was wearing two hats in this situation; the planning authority and the landowner. She said it was not appropriate for the Director of Place to comment on the property sale.

Councillor Wilson said that the Executive had heard the passion from the residents, and it was clear the demand for the shops was there. He said that any commercially minded business would recognise that, and the Executive needed to look at its priorities to make sure core services were protected and improved.

Councillor Crystall said that one of the challenges arising from the local government review was to ensure councils were as financially sustainable as possible.

Councillor Dumont said that difficult decisions had to be taken, and this decision fell into that box. He said the Executive needed to look at the bigger picture and had given a lot of thought into this property and its options.

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

RESOLVED – that the freehold of the commercial and residential block owned by the council at

Elizabeth Road, Bishop's Stortford (as shown in the plan at Appendix A) be marketed for disposal, in its current condition and with the current short-term leases in place, with authority to determine the best means of disposal and to complete the sale delegated to the Director for Communities.

56 UPDATE OF THE STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth presented the update on the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) which was updated every five years. The SCI set out how the council would consult with the public on planning matters and the revised version aligned with the council's LEAF priorities. She said that the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 would bring several implications for planning with many details to be set out in secondary legislation and the SCI allowed for this transition to meet any new requirements when details emerged.

Councillor Glover-Ward proposed that the recommendations in the report be supported. Councillor Wilson seconded the proposal.

Councillor Estop asked if there would be some provision for translating the big strategic studies into formats and ways the public could understand.

Councillor Glover-Ward said she could discuss this with the Executive Member for Resident Engagement but creating a synopsis from large documents would take a considerable amount of officer time.

Councillor Crystall suggested this could be a job for AI.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer said that one of the principles within the SCI was to avoid planning jargon and making digital technology more prevalent in planning was

on the government's radar.

Councillor Crystall said that table 6.1 on page 223 showed an excellent summary of consultation methods.

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

RESOLVED – To recommend to Council that the Statement of Community Involvement 2025, as detailed at Appendix A to this report, be approved for adoption.

57 HERTFORDSHIRE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth presented the Hertfordshire Green Infrastructure Strategy. The study was commissioned by HIIP and was an update to the 2011 plan. This report would form part of the evidence base for the new District Plan to inform strategies and policies.

Councillor Glover-Ward proposed that the recommendations in the report be supported. Councillor Goldspink seconded the proposal.

Councillor Daar said it was good to see a lot of evidence in the plan and hoped a lot of this would be brought forward into the District Plan.

Councillor Hoskin felt that the infrastructure for active travel should be a high priority.

Councillor E Buckmaster said that this was an important document. He said that East Herts geographically covered a third of the whole county and this was a good framework to look at planning policies from this.

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

RESOLVED – To recommend to Council that the Hertfordshire Green Infrastructure Strategy (2022), attached in three sections as Appendix A, B and C, be agreed as part of the evidence base to inform the new East Herts District Plan.

58 MEMBERSHIP OF THE DISTRICT PLAN EXECUTIVE PANEL

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth presented the report on the District Plan Executive Panel. She said that the process of preparing the plan was a lengthy and complex exercise and required a wide range of supporting evidence. She said that the report was recommending that the District Plan Executive Panel be reconvened so that the panel could make recommendations to Council, via the Executive associated with the District Plan. This would allow the Panel to have full consideration of all issues, and the panel would be made up of three Executive Members and all Members were invited to their meetings.

Councillor Glover-Ward proposed that the recommendations in the report be supported. Councillor Hopewell seconded the proposal.

Councillor Hopewell said that the District Plan was a big piece of work, and it was important that there was an opportunity to look at the detail. She said it was great that all Members could attend and participate, and she encouraged all Members to take advantage of the opportunity.

Councillor Crystall said it was great that the public had access to these meeting and encouraged members to attend.

Councillor E Buckmaster said he was on the previous panel and felt this was the best way to go about developing the District Plan.

Councillor Estop said she welcomed the panel and said that it was great to have a body that was open to contributions from all Members.

Councillor Dumont asked if there was a mechanism for members of the public to ask questions of the panel.

The Director for Legal, Policy and Governance said if there was a desire from the Executive to include this, he was happy to look at ways to potentially implement it.

Councillor Glover-Wards said she would welcome that and if it could not be done, the public could approach their ward members and ask questions through them.

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

RESOLVED – to recommend to Council that:

(A) The District Plan Executive Panel is reconvened as a subgroup of Executive for the specific purposes of advancing the new District Plan;

(B) Three Members are drawn from the Executive to sit on the DPEP, namely Cllrs Vicky Glover-Ward (Chair), Ben Crystall and Joseph Dumont, with Cllr Tim Hoskin nominated as a substitute for Green Party members and Cllr Chris Wilson for Cllr Joseph Dumont, and

(C) The Council's website is updated to reflect the formation and purpose of the Panel and forms the

primary source of information pertaining to the Panel.

59 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 8.20 pm

Chairman
Date