MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY 14 JULY 2026, AT 7.00 PM

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

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillor A Holt

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Richard Crutchley	-	Team Leader (Planning Policy)
Laura Guy	-	Principal Planning Policy Officer
Maria Hennessy	-	Principal Planning Policy Officer
Hilary Marsh	-	Programme Manager
Jonathan Geall	-	Director for Communities
Brian Moldon	-	Director for Finance, Risk and Performance
Sara Saunders	-	Director for Place
Helen Standen	-	Interim Chief Executive
Stephanie Tarrant	-	Assistant Director for Democracy, Elections and Information Governance

1 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor J Dumont.

2 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader welcomed everyone to the meeting and reminded attendees that the meeting was being webcast.

The full webcast of the meeting can be viewed here: Executive – 14 June 2026.

3 MINUTES – 2 JUNE 2026

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods proposed, and the Executive Member for Communities seconded a motion that the Minutes of the meeting held on 2 June 2026 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 2 June 2026 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

5 ESTABLISHING AN ARTS CHARITY

The Executive Member for Communities presented a report on the establishment of an Arts Charity and thanked officers for their work in developing the proposal.

Members were advised that the charity would build on the success of the Arts in East Herts programme and festival, which had improved access to arts and cultural activities, particularly in rural communities and delivered benefits for health, wellbeing and the local economy.

It was explained that the proposed charity would help secure grant funding, support the local creative sector and potentially enhance BEAM's outreach work through charitable donations and Gift Aid arrangements. Approval in principle would enable officers to obtain further legal advice on the options set out in the report before presenting detailed proposals for Members' consideration at a later date.

The Executive Member for Communities proposed the recommendations as detailed in the report. The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability seconded the proposal.

Members commented on whether the proposed charity could support a wider range of community-based arts initiatives, including partnerships with existing organisations and emerging venues across the district. In response, it was noted that suggestions would be considered as part of the development of the charity's objectives, which would need to be sufficiently broad to accommodate a range of relevant initiatives.

Members sought clarification on the proposed timetable and consultation requirements. It was advised that work was progressing towards establishing the charity during the period January to March 2027. It was confirmed that a further report on the final structure of the charity would be brought back to the Executive for approval before implementation.

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 Executive approve in principle the establishment of an arts-focused charity, that would raise and distribute funds for local arts and cultural activities, with a more detailed proposal to be brought back to the Executive for decision.

6 ANNUAL REPORT AND REFRESH OF LEAF PRIORITIES

The Leader of the Council presented the Corporate Plan for the coming year, noting that it followed consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which had reviewed both the Plan and the Council's performance against its existing objectives.

It was reported that Overview and Scrutiny had provided comments and observations and that several minor amendments had subsequently been made to the Plan. These changes were set out in Appendix B of the report.

The Leader of the Council proposed the recommendations as detailed in the report. The Executive Member for Communities seconded the proposal.

Members welcomed the achievements set out in the Corporate Plan and noted the success of the Riverly Arts Trail project, advising that, in addition to the original benches, an extra bench had been secured, with the remaining installations due to take place in Hertford. It was noted that the Riverly Arts Trail provided a positive example of how a project supported by initial funding had delivered lasting benefits and been well received by residents.

Members recognised the breadth of achievements delivered against the Corporate Plan and expressed their appreciation to officers for their work in delivering these outcomes.

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 Executive (A) reviewed performance over the 2025/26 year; and

(B) recommended the refreshed LEAF priorities for adoption by Council on 22 July 2026 (see sections 2.8 – 2.11).

7 HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2026-31

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods presented the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2026–2031, noting that the Council was required by statute to produce and maintain a strategy. Thanks were extended to officers for their work in preparing the document.

Members were advised that the strategy set out five strategic objectives, with a primary focus on preventing homelessness and rough sleeping wherever possible. Where homelessness could not be prevented, the strategy sought to minimise the length of time individuals experienced homelessness, improve access to temporary accommodation and increase the availability of affordable housing across the district.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods proposed the recommendations as detailed in the report. The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability seconded the proposal.

Members welcomed the strategy and the supporting data and suggested that homelessness performance data should be reported more regularly. Officers advised that the data was already collected monthly and reported nationally on a quarterly basis and agreed to consider providing more regular updates to Members.

Members noted the increase in homelessness presentations linked to mental health issues and sought assurance that appropriate support was in place. It was advised that the Council worked closely with Hertfordshire County Council and voluntary sector partners to provide specialist support and that the strategy included actions to strengthen this provision. It was further noted that the Council's longer-term homelessness prevention funding settlement would support the development of additional services.

Concern was expressed regarding the increasing number of homelessness cases where domestic abuse was a contributing factor. It was confirmed that the Council worked with a range of specialist partners, including county-wide commissioned services and local voluntary organisations, to provide support and emergency accommodation where required. The strategy included measures to expand provision and promote earlier intervention. Members highlighted the valuable awareness-raising and training provided by Future Living in relation to domestic abuse.

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) Executive consider the content of the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Review and Strategy 2026-31 and raise any further points for consideration for inclusion; and
>
> (B) subject to any further points raised, Executive recommend the document to Council for approval.

8 <u>PROVISIONAL OUTTURN 2025/26 AND DRAFT STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2025/26</u>

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented the provisional outturn for 2025/26, reporting a revenue overspend of £678,000 against budget. The largest variance related to BEAM’s first full year of operation, with further variances arising within Property Services and Parking. Corporate budgets generated an underspend, largely due to investment income and interest returns.

Members were advised that measures had been implemented to improve BEAM's financial performance and reporting arrangements, including the development of a new business plan. The Council's reserves had reduced during the year to fund one-off expenditure, while capital expenditure was below budget, with some funding carried forward to 2026/27.

The Executive also noted that the draft Statement of Accounts for 2025/26 had been published ahead of the statutory deadline and commended the finance team for this achievement.

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability proposed the recommendations as detailed in the report. The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability seconded the proposal.

Members welcomed the publication of the Statement of Accounts within the statutory deadline and thanked officers for their work.

In discussing BEAM's financial performance, officers outlined measures introduced to improve financial management and income generation, including enhanced financial oversight, new commercial opportunities, improvements to catering and online booking systems and operational efficiencies. Members noted that the venue was continuing to develop its offer and build its understanding of the market.

Whilst concern was expressed that the first-year deficit had exceeded forecasts, Members emphasised the importance of recognising BEAM's wider community and cultural value alongside its financial performance. The venue's role in supporting local events, entertainment and community engagement was acknowledged and Members welcomed signs of increasing audience demand and usage.

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 £678K overspend to be funded from the general reserve, be noted;

(B) the capital outturn position and approved carry forward budgets of £1.142m be noted; and

(C) the 2025/26 draft statement of accounts prior to them being audited, be received.

9 STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER QUARTER 4 2025/26

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented the latest review of the Council's Risk Register, which had been updated by the Leadership Team following a review of risk scores and mitigation measures.

Members were advised that a new risk relating to Local Government Reorganisation had been added to the register, reflecting potential impacts on financial resources, officer capacity, workforce stability and service delivery. It was also reported that risk management training had recently been provided to both officers and Members to strengthen understanding and application of the Council's risk management framework.

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability proposed the recommendations as detailed in the report. The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods seconded the proposal.

It was noted that climate change remained one of the Council's most significant risks and reflected on the increasing impacts experienced in recent months. The importance of continuing to focus on both climate change mitigation and adaptation measures was highlighted, including ensuring that these considerations remained a priority for any future unitary authority arrangements.

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 2025/26 quarter four corporate risk register and actions being taken to control and mitigate risk be considered and noted.

10 LOCAL PLAN: GREEN BELT ASSESSMENT

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth presented the Green Belt Assessment, which had been commissioned to support the evidence base for the new Local Plan and future planning decisions.

Members were advised that the assessment reviewed Green Belt land across the district against National Planning Policy criteria, including the recently introduced concept of Grey Belt. The study assessed approximately 260 land parcels and would help inform future Local Plan strategy.

It was emphasised that the assessment did not determine whether land was suitable for development, however solely evaluated its contribution to Green Belt purposes. The findings would be considered alongside other evidence in preparing the new Local Plan.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth proposed the recommendations as detailed in the report. The Executive Member for Wellbeing seconded the proposal.

Members received a verbal update on a number of amendments to the Green Belt Assessment following consideration by the District Planning Executive Panel and the receipt of additional representations.

Officers advised that amendments had been made to ensure all designated Local Green Spaces were correctly referenced within the assessment and associated maps.

Further clarifications had been included to explain the methodology used when assessing Green Belt land adjacent to allocated development sites.

Members were also advised that a representation had resulted in a reassessment of one parcel at Hertford Heath. Following review by the study's authors, the parcel's assessment had been amended, resulting in its reclassification from Green Belt to Grey Belt for assessment purposes. Officers emphasised that this related solely to the parcel's performance against Green Belt purposes and did not indicate suitability for development.

Councillor Crystall proposed an adjournment to the meeting to consider the amendments. Councillor Hoskin seconded the proposal.

Following the adjournment, the Executive Member for Planning and Growth, in agreement with the Executive Member for Wellbeing, proposed the following amendments to the recommendation.

- Replace recommendations:

(A) That the Green Belt Assessment, attached as the main report at Appendix A and a series of individual parcel maps and reports at Appendix B (parts 1 to 19), be agreed as part of the evidence base to inform the new East Herts Local Plan and as a material consideration for Development Management purposes in the determination of planning applications, and

(B) Any minor amendments to the content of the Green Belt Assessment be delegated to the Director for Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Growth.

With:

(A) To accept the changes to the published appendix A and appendix B, as laid out in the supplementary table document.

(B) That the Green Belt Assessment, attached as the main report at Appendix A, as amended by the supplementary table document, and a series of individual parcel maps and reports at Appendix B (parts 1 to 19), as amended by the supplementary table document, be agreed as part of the evidence base to inform the new East Herts Local Plan and as a material consideration for Development Management purposes in the determination of planning applications, and

(C) That any minor amendments to the content of the Green Belt Assessment be delegated to the Director for Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Growth.

The Executive Member for Wellbeing seconded the amendment.

Members acknowledged the scale and complexity of the Green Belt Assessment and welcomed the proposal to delegate authority for minor amendments to the Director for Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Growth.

Members sought clarification on the extent to which Green Belt or Grey Belt land might be required to meet future development needs through the new Local Plan. In response, it was explained that the Council was currently completing the evidence-gathering stage and that decisions on development strategy would be considered as part of the Local Plan process. Members were advised that no conclusions had yet been reached regarding the location or scale of future development.

During discussion, Members emphasised the importance of Green Belt protection and noted concerns that the introduction of Grey Belt policy by Government could increase opportunities for development on land currently within the Green Belt. It was reiterated that the assessment had been undertaken to comply with National Planning Policy requirements and did not represent a decision by the Council to allocate land for development. Members noted that similar challenges were being faced by councils across the country as part of the Local Plan process.

Having been proposed and seconded, the amendment was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

The motion to support the substantive recommendations, having been proposed and seconded, was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED. It was noted that Councillor Hoskin voted against the recommendation.

> **RESOLVED** – that (A) the changes to the published appendix A and appendix B, as laid out in the supplementary table document, be accepted;
>
> (B) the Green Belt Assessment, attached as the main report at Appendix A, as amended by the supplementary table document, and a series of individual parcel maps and reports at Appendix B (parts 1 to 19), as amended by the supplementary table document, be agreed as part of the evidence base to inform the new East Herts Local Plan and as a material consideration for Development Management purposes in the determination of planning applications, and
>
> (C) any minor amendments to the content of the Green Belt Assessment be delegated to the Director for Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Growth.

11 <u>LOCAL PLAN: RETAIL AND TOWN CENTRES STUDY</u>

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth presented the updated Retail and Town Centre Study, which would provide evidence for the new Local Plan and future planning decisions.

The study assessed retail and leisure needs, reviewed the health of the district’s five town centres and considered changes affecting the sector since 2013. Drawing on market data, stakeholder engagement, business surveys and resident feedback, it concluded that there was no requirement to allocate additional retail or leisure floorspace during the Local Plan period.

Members noted that all five town centres were considered to be in good or relatively good health, although opportunities existed to further strengthen their vitality and viability. The findings would be used to inform future town centre strategies and planning policies.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth proposed the recommendations as detailed in the report. The Executive Member for Resident Engagement seconded the proposal.

Members welcomed the findings of the study and noted that it would provide valuable evidence to support future town centre improvements. Particular reference was made to the differing views of businesses and residents regarding the provision of short-term parking, which was considered a useful insight for future discussions on town centre priorities.

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 Retail and Town Centres Study and appendices (attached at Appendices A and B) be agreed as part of the evidence base to inform the new East Herts Local Plan and as a material consideration for Development Management purposes in the determination of planning applications.

(B) any minor amendments to the content of the Retail and Town Centres Study be delegated to the Director for Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Growth.

12 LOCAL PLAN: HERTFORD AND WARE EMPLOYMENT STUDY

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth presented the Hertford and Ware Employment Study, which provided an updated assessment of local employment needs and opportunities. The study recommended protecting existing employment sites, supporting the delivery of allocated employment land, replacing lost employment land where appropriate and considering additional provision, particularly for industrial uses.

Members noted that the study would be part of the evidence base to inform the new Local Plan and support future development management decisions in Hertford and Ware.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth proposed the recommendations as detailed in the report. The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods seconded the proposal.

It was noted that the study had been discussed in detail at the District Planning Executive Panel, where Members, including local Hertford and Ware Councillors, had provided significant input and contributed to the discussion.

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 Hertford and Ware Employment Study, attached as Appendix A, be agreed as part of the evidence base to inform the new East Herts Local Plan and as a material consideration for Development Management purposes in the determination of planning applications; and

(B) any minor amendments to the content of the Hertford and Ware Employment Study be delegated to the Director for Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Growth.

13 LOCAL PLAN: SAWBRIDGEWORTH EMPLOYMENT STUDY

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth presented the Sawbridgeworth Employment Study, the final employment study covering the district’s main towns. The study assessed local employment needs and opportunities, taking account of changes to the economy, working patterns and planning regulations since the pandemic and Brexit.

Members were advised that Sawbridgeworth had a relatively small employment land market and modest projected growth, with many residents commuting to work outside the town. The study concluded that there was limited demand for significant new employment land, however recommended protecting and supporting existing employment opportunities through the safeguarding, refurbishment and redevelopment of existing sites where appropriate.

The Executive noted that the study would form part of the evidence base for the new Local Plan and help inform the future economic strategy for Sawbridgeworth.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth proposed the recommendations as detailed in the report. The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods seconded the proposal.

Members sought clarification on the progress of the employment studies. It was confirmed that studies for Buntingford, Bishop's Stortford, Hertford and Ware, and Sawbridgeworth had now all been completed, providing a comprehensive evidence base across the district's main towns.

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 Sawbridgeworth Employment Study, attached as Appendix A, be agreed as part of the evidence base to inform the new East Herts Local Plan and as a material consideration for Development Management purposes in the determination of planning applications; and

(B) any minor amendments to the content of the Sawbridgeworth Employment Study be delegated to the Director for Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Growth.

14 LOCAL PLAN: INDOOR SPORT NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND STRATEGY

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth presented the Indoor Sports Needs Assessment and Strategy, which would provide an updated evidence base for the new Local Plan and future planning decisions.

Members were advised that the assessment reviewed the district's indoor sports facilities and identified generally good provision, although some small localised unmet demand for swimming facilities remained following recent leisure centre closures. The study also highlighted the importance of community halls, school sports facilities and planned new provision to meet future needs.

The accompanying strategy set out priorities for protecting, improving and enhancing indoor sports facilities across the district, supported by an action plan to guide future investment and developer contributions.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth proposed the recommendations as detailed in the report. The Executive Member for Wellbeing seconded the proposal.

Members discussed the findings of the assessment and highlighted the importance of ensuring that future provision was considered alongside sustainable travel options, noting that access based solely on drive times could present challenges for some residents. It was advised that the study had been prepared in accordance with Sport England guidance, which considered both driving and walking accessibility and confirmed that sustainability considerations would continue to inform future work.

Clarification was sought regarding cross-boundary provision and relationships with neighbouring authorities. It was confirmed that the assessment had taken account of links with adjoining councils and that ongoing collaboration would continue as part of the Local Plan process, including work relating to Gilston and Harlow.

Members welcomed the recognition of the need for swimming facilities and highlighted the importance of efforts to reopen Ward Freeman Pool. The role of school sports facilities in meeting community demand was also discussed and officers confirmed that the Council was working closely with Hertfordshire County Council to ensure future educational developments reflected identified sports provision needs.

Members thanked officers for their work in producing the study and supporting evidence.

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 Indoor Sport Assessment and Strategy, attached as Appendix A, B C and D be agreed as part of the evidence base to inform the new East Herts Local Plan and as a material consideration for Development Management purposes in the determination of planning applications; and

(B) future updates of the Indoor Sport Action Plan be delegated to the Director for Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Growth; and

(C) any minor amendments to the content of the Indoor Sport Needs Assessment and Strategy be delegated to the Director for Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Growth.

15 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 8.40 pm

Chairman ....

Date ....