

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COUNCIL HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
WEDNESDAY 18 FEBRUARY 2015, AT 7.00
PM

PRESENT: Councillor R Beeching (Chairman).
Councillors D Abbott, M Alexander,
D Andrews, P Ballam, E Bedford,
E Buckmaster, S Bull, A Burlton, M Carver,
Mrs R Cheswright, K Crofton, G Cutting,
L Haysey, Mrs D Hollebon, A Jackson,
G Jones, J Jones, J Mayes, G McAndrew,
M McMullen, P Moore, W Mortimer,
M Newman, T Page, P Phillips, M Pope,
J Ranger, C Rowley, S Rutland-Barsby,
R Sharma, N Symonds, J Taylor, J Thornton,
A Warman, K Warnell, G Williamson, J Wing,
M Wood, C Woodward and J Wyllie.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Simon Drinkwater	- Director of Neighbourhood Services
Jeff Hughes	- Head of Democratic and Legal Support Services
Martin Ibrahim	- Democratic Services Team Leader
Adele Taylor	- Director of Finance and Support Services

536 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed Members and reminded them that the meeting was being webcast.

He was pleased to announce that the recent “Elvis Lives” event had been well attended and had raised over £1800 for Isabel Hospice. He reminded Members of the arrangements for his Civic Dinner on 20 March 2015.

The Chairman referred to the next Council meeting on 4 March 2014, as being the last of this term and thus, the last for some retiring Members. He highlighted Councillor Ranger’s 42 years’ service and advised that refreshments would be available after that meeting.

Finally, the Chairman drew Members’ attention to the leaflets in the chamber advertising two forthcoming events for prospective candidates for Local Council elections in May 2015.

537 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 28 January 2015 be approved a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

538 EXECUTIVE REPORT - 3 FEBRUARY 2015

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Executive meeting held on 3 February 2015 be received.

(see also Minutes 539 – 540)

539 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STATEMENT AND ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY

RESOLVED – that (A) the Treasury Management Strategy and Annual Investment Strategy, as now submitted, be approved;

(B) the Prudential Indicators, as now submitted, be approved; and

(C) the counterparty listing, as now submitted, be

approved.

(see also Minute 538)

540 CONSOLIDATED BUDGET REPORT AND 2015/16 –
2017/18 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

The Leader gave a presentation on the Executive's budget proposals for 2015/16 and the Medium Term Financial Strategy until 2017/18.

He looked back to the start of this Council's term in 2011 and reminded Members of the aim of freezing Council Tax levels whilst maintaining front line services as the basis underpinning the Budget Strategy. He referred to the impact of various external factors and the continuing uncertainties in which local authorities operated, with reduced funding from central government. Council had taken a balanced approach in allocating funds to maintain services, whilst looking to make savings where possible. He referred to the shared services agenda, where greater resilience had been achieved in the Revenues and Benefits service and huge savings had been achieved in the IT shared service. Council was investigating such arrangements for other areas, such as anti-fraud and building control.

The Leader referred to the Council's balanced approach to its Reserves and placed these in context with neighbouring Authorities. The position would continue to be monitored in the coming year. He also highlighted the Council's work in supporting and encouraging businesses in East Herts using New Homes Bonus (NHB) growth investment and working in tandem with the Local Enterprise Partnership. He expressed thanks to the Economic Development team for their efforts.

The Leader also highlighted Council's approach to car parks and the introduction of a free 30 minute time band. The early indications of this support for town centres were showing an increase in footfall. He also referred to the decrease in vacant shops in both Bishop's Stortford and Hertford. The Executive Member for Economic Development would be working with

Officers to extend the scheme to Buntingford and Sawbridgeworth.

The Leader outlined some of the successes of the previous term, such as the allocation of NHB funds to parish and town councils and for supporting health and wellbeing initiatives. He also referred to increased recycling rates, reduced waste going to landfill and increased public satisfaction levels with the waste and recycling service in general. The Leader gave details of the grants distributed to voluntary organisations, which supported activities such as playschemes, Citizens Advice and Police and Community Safety Officers.

The Leader referred to the ongoing work on the emerging District Plan and the reserves set aside to ensure that the current timetable was not compromised. Members were reminded of the Local Mortgage Scheme, in which, to date, 24 loan agreements had been signed. In terms of the capital programme, the Leader highlighted the funds allocated for leisure improvements at Grange Paddocks, Hartham and open spaces in general.

The Leader concluded by stating that Council had exceeded its objectives, with council tax having been reduced by 1% and grants to voluntary organisations and support for businesses having been increased. He placed on record his thanks to Officers for their efforts in meeting and exceeding these objectives.

The Leader proposed two additional items. Firstly, that fees and charges for 2015/16 be frozen. This had been suggested by scrutiny and if approved, would result in a reduction of income by £17k, thus necessitating a similar reduction in the contingency figure. Secondly, he proposed a 1% reduction in council tax in 2015/16 and a freeze in 2016/17. This would impact the contingency figures in the MTFP and would require additional savings to be identified for 2017/18 and 2018/19. The Leader believed that the proposed budget, as now amended, would improve the quality of life of all East Herts residents.

Councillor J Wing responded on behalf of his Group. He began by thanking the Executive Member for Strategic Planning and Transport for his work and efforts on the District Plan. Councillor J Wing expressed disappointment that some of the suggestions put forward by his Group in the scrutiny process had not been accepted fully. He referred to suggestions on leaf clearance and planning enforcement, which would be looked at further. He believed that removing pre-application fees for charities should be introduced as the lost income would be trivial in the overall scheme of things and would greatly benefit organisations with limited funds.

In respect of increasing resources for leisure provision across the District, Councillor J Wing had been cheered by level of support from Members generally at scrutiny. However, there had not been any explicit commitment for additional resources. Finally, he referred to historic budget underspends and had suggested a council tax reduction himself, only to be told by the Executive Member of Finance that the Council could not afford it. He wondered how this was suddenly affordable.

Councillor M Newman, on behalf of his Group, expressed broad support for the budget proposals and echoed the appreciation given to Officers for their continued support. He referred to the recent Planning Peer Challenge and questioned its omission from any specific budget proposals.

The Leader responded to this point by reminding Members that the agreed action plan would be developed and costed fully and reassured Members that this would include planning enforcement matters.

In accordance with the provisions of The Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, a recorded vote was taken on the budget proposals now detailed, the result being:

FOR:

Councillors D Abbott, M Alexander, D Andrews, P Ballam, E Bedford, R Beeching, E Buckmaster, S Bull, A Burlton,

M Carver, Mrs R Cheswright, H Crofton, G Cutting, L Haysey, Mrs D Hollebon, A Jackson, G Jones, J Jones, J Mayes, G McAndrew, M McMullen, P Moore, W Mortimer, M Newman, T Page, P Phillips, M Pope, J Ranger, C Rowley, S Rutland-Barsby, R Sharma, N Symonds, J Taylor, J Thornton, A Warman, K Warnell, G Williamson, C Woodward, J Wyllie.

AGAINST:

Councillors J Wing, M Wood.

ABSTENTIONS:

None

For: 39

Against: 2

Abstentions: 0

Council approved the recommendations as now detailed.

RESOLVED – that (A) the comments of the joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees be received;

(B) the Revised Revenue Estimates for the current financial year 2014/15 as set out in section 4 of the report submitted, including the proposed contributions to and from Reserves as detailed at paragraph 4.3 of the report submitted, be approved;

(C) the Revenue Budget underspend for 2014/15 be transferred to the Collection Fund Reserve and the New Homes Bonus Priority Spend Reserve as set out in paragraph 4.5.2 of the report submitted;

(D) the 2015/16 Revenue Budget be approved including:

- the new budget growth as set out in section 6 of the report submitted;
- the new budget savings as set out in section 6 of the report submitted;

- the Contingency Budget as detailed at paragraph 8.3 of the report submitted and now amended to take account of the decision to freeze Fees and Charges and reduce Council Tax by 1% in 2015/16;
 - the use of Earmarked Reserves as set out at section 9 of the report submitted;
 - consideration of the advice from the Director of Finance and Support Services on the levels of reserves and robustness of the estimates in setting the budget as required by Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 and detailed at section 15 of the report submitted;
- (E) the East Herts element of the Council Tax Bill for 2015/16, is reduced by 1% at the 2014/15 rate, as detailed at section 11 of the report submitted;
- (F) Fees and Charges in 2015/16 be frozen;
- (G) the discounts in charges being proposed for those Private Hire and Hackney Carriages that are able to transport a wheelchair using person whilst s/he remains in the wheelchair, as set out at paragraph 7.6 of the report, be approved;
- (H) the new Capital Programme for the period 2014/15 (Revised) to 2017/18, how the programme will be funded, and the consequential revenue budget implications, as detailed at section 12 of the report, be approved;
- (I) a revised Medium Term Financial Plan covering 2014/15 (Revised) to 2018/19 (as set out at Essential Reference Paper 'A' to these Minutes), be approved, to reflect
- (i) the impact of the decisions to freeze Fees and Charges and reduce Council Tax by 1% in 2015/16;
 - (ii) the impact on Contingency levels; and

(iii) the additional savings needing to be identified in 2017/18 and 2018/19; and

(J) the proposed changes to the Council's Reserves, as set out in table 10, section 14 of the report submitted, be approved.

(see also Minute 538)

541 DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE: MINUTES - 4 FEBRUARY 2015

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Development Management Committee meeting held on 4 February 2015, be received.

542 JOINT MEETING OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEES: MINUTES - 10 FEBRUARY 2015

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees held on 10 February 2015, be received.

543 MEMBERS ALLOWANCES - REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

The Head of Democratic and Legal Support Services submitted a report containing the recommendations of the Council's Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) following its review of Members Allowances.

The IRP had recommended that allowance levels within the 2014/15 scheme be retained for 2015/16 (1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016), save for the maximum hourly rates claimable for dependant care being increased to £10.15 per hour.

Council also considered the size of the IRP, given that one resignation had been received.

The Leader proposed that the IRP's recommendations be accepted and that the size of the Panel be increased to 7

members. Various Members supported this proposal.

Councillor C Woodward questioned the evidence for the IRP's contention that most Members used their own IT equipment. The Head of Democratic and Legal Support Services surmised that this view might have been formed based on Member responses to the IRP's questionnaire.

The Executive Member for Community Partnership and Liaison clarified the agreed IT provision for Members from May 2015 onwards.

Council approved the recommendations as now detailed.

RESOLVED – that (A) allowance levels within the 2014/15 scheme be retained for 2015/16 (1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016), save for the maximum hourly rates claimable for dependant care being increased to £10.15 per hour; and

(B) the size of the Independent Remuneration Panel be increased from 6 to 7 members, with existing appointees being retained and Officers being authorised to fill the two vacancies.

544 ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR - CRIME AND POLICE ACT 2014

Council considered a report which provided a broad overview of a number of the key provisions contained within the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. The report had been considered by the Executive meeting on 6 January 2015, and the community trigger procedure had been approved. The Executive had also supported the proposed scheme of delegations, however, the recommendations had not been included in the agenda for the last Council meeting. Therefore, Council was requested to approve the delegations which would ensure that appropriate officers and organisations were authorised under the Act.

Council approved the delegations as now detailed.

RESOLVED – that the scheme of delegations to Officers be amended as follows:

1. The Head of Environmental Services and the Head of Community Safety and Health Services in consultation with the Legal Services Manager be granted delegated authority to seek an Injunction to Prevent Nuisance and Annoyance in accordance with Part 1 of the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.
2. The Head of Environmental Services and the Head of Community Safety and Health Services in consultation with the Legal Services Manager be granted delegated authority to apply for Closure Orders and to authorise their officers to issue Closure Notices and in accordance with Part 3 of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.
3. The Head of Environmental Services and the Head of Community Safety and Health Services in consultation with the Legal Services Manager be granted delegated authority to authorise Officers to serve Community Protection Notices, and Fixed Penalty Notices in the event of a breach, in accordance with Part 4 of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.
4. The Head of Community Safety and Health Services in consultation with the Legal Services Manager be granted delegated authority to may make a public spaces protection order, in accordance with Part 4 of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.

The meeting closed at 8.08 pm