

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
EXECUTIVE HELD AS A VIRTUAL MEETING  
ON TUESDAY 2 JUNE 2020, AT 7.00 PM

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PRESENT: Councillor (Chairman/Leader)  
Councillors L Haysey, P Boylan,  
E Buckmaster, G Cutting, J Goodeve,  
G McAndrew, S Rutland-Barsby and  
G Williamson.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors C Redfern, R Bolton, S Bull,  
J Frecknall, M Goldspink, A Hall,  
D Hollebon, J Jones, T Page, M Pope,  
P Ruffles and A Ward-Booth.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Richard Cassidy	- Chief Executive
Helen Standen	- Deputy Chief Executive
Rebecca Dobson	- Democratic Services Manager
James Ellis	- Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Bob Palmer	- Head of Strategic Finance and Property
Sara Saunders	- Head of Planning and Building Control

Su Tarran	- Head of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service
Jess Khanom-Metaman	- Head of Operations
Steven King	- Finance Management Trainee
John Williams	- Electoral Services Manager

## 18 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader of the Council welcomed those present in the virtual meeting, and those watching the livestreamed meeting. She explained the protocol which would be followed for the conduct of the meeting.

Councillor Haysey referred to the way in which the District's communities were taking measures to maintain social distancing, in particular in the three main towns of Hertford, Bishop's Stortford and Ware. The measures had been put in place to keep people safe, and it was important that all respected the social distancing requirements.

## 19 MINUTES – 11 FEBRUARY 2020

Councillor Haysey proposed, and Councillor E Buckmaster seconded, a motion that the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 February 2020 be approved as

a correct record. The motion on being put to the meeting, and a vote taken, was declared CARRIED.

**RESOLVED** – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 February 2020 be approved as a correct record, and signed by the Leader.

20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

21 UPDATE FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor Wyllie said the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had not met since before the last Executive meeting, as due to the Covid-19 crisis, the Committee's March meeting had been cancelled. However, it would be meeting on 16 June, and areas of the Committee's work would shortly, therefore, be back on track.

22 UPDATE FROM AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Councillor Pope said the Audit and Governance Committee had met remotely on 19 May 2020. It had had a full agenda, which had included a presentation on the audit plan for the forthcoming audit by the Council's external auditors, EY. The Committee had also received a presentation from the Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS) and from the Shared Internal Fraud Service. In relation to the latter, it had been noted that there were a number of outstanding recommendations relating to cyber security matters,

so the Committee had asked that the relevant Officer attend the next meeting to give an update. In relation to the SIAS report, the Committee had noted that the number of internal audit days being purchased by the Council had decreased from 400 to 300 since 2017/18, and would monitor this level, as it would not wish to see that figure decrease further.

Councillor Pope said the Committee had also received the financial update for Quarter 3, and a more recent verbal update on the financial position. Finally, updates on the risk management strategy and the strategic risk register had been received.

## 23 GILSTON AREA SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT - FINAL FOR ADOPTION

Councillor Haysey submitted a report outlining the results of the public consultation on the draft Gilston Area Charter Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The report sought agreement to adopt a revised document. The report also stated that the three statutory consultees had no comment on the Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report.

Councillor Haysey said this SPD would establish the principles of masterplanning for the Gilston area. During the next 10 to 15 years, 10,000 homes would be developed. She was adamant that the quality of design of these homes would be exemplary. The SPD would set standards for developers. The SPD had been out for consultation and a number of comments to improve the document had been incorporated. She

invited Councillor E Buckmaster to speak.

Councillor E Buckmaster said he wished to speak both as the Ward Member for the area, and the Executive Member for Wellbeing. He had been involved in a group which had helped to develop the SPD. He referred to the key words in the report regarding adopting the SPD, through a comprehensive and consistent manner. It was very important that the development would knit together with the existing landscape and communities. He referred to the importance of treating this as one strategic site as part of the masterplan. Modifications had been incorporated from responses to the consultation, including the site promoters, and the paper had been shared with the neighbourhood plan group, from whom no comments had been received.

Councillor Haysey proposed a motion to support the recommendations. Councillor Buckmaster seconded the motion.

Councillor Page said the Council's masterplans were commendable, and he recognised that much work had gone into producing the report. He expressed concern in respect of one aspect, affordable housing. He asked that a way of strengthening the affordable housing programme be identified, to demand a robust financial viability assessment, particularly in view of the current Covid-19 impact on house prices.

Councillor Haysey agreed it was a major concern. It was important to recognise the extremely valuable role played by key workers during the Covid-19 crisis, who

were not necessarily able to afford the house prices in the district's area. This concern would be the subject of careful and ongoing consideration.

Councillor Boylan said he was anticipating the report on the future of affordable housing for the district would be published by the early Autumn. He said in terms of planning policy frameworks, the Council had already adopted the Affordable Housing SPD.

Councillor Buckmaster said the largest site promoter in respect of the Gilston Area had made clear their intention to have provision of affordable homes.

The motion, on being put to the meeting, and a vote taken, was declared CARRIED.

**RESOLVED** – to recommend to Council that (A) the responses of the consultation be noted and the officer responses and proposed changes to the Gilston Area Charter Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) be supported;

(B) The Gilston Area Charter Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), as detailed in Appendix C of this report, be approved for adoption;

(C) In accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, it has been determined that a Strategic Environmental Assessment of the emerging Gilston Area Charter Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) is not required as it is

unlikely to have significant environmental effects; and

(D) That the Head of planning and Building Control, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Growth, be authorised to make any further minor changes to the document which may be necessary.

## 24 FINANCIAL UPDATE

Councillor Williamson submitted a report on the impact of Covid 19 on the Council's finances.

Councillor Williamson said he was bringing this report before the Executive, in view of the severe impact of the measures needed to combat the virus. The report set out the position as at the end of April, and addressed the short and medium term range of impacts.

Councillor Williamson said the report addressed the budget for 2020/21, the medium term financial plan and the Council's cash position and level of reserves.

He set out the position regarding the fall in the Council's income in relation to the 2020/21 budget. The budget relied on income from fees and charges. The shortfall against budget for income in April was approximately £800,000. There were concerns about some items which could cause higher losses, such as loss of income from the trade waste service, a reduction in interest rates on investments and reduced

income from Millstream investments.

Councillor Williamson went on to describe some costs savings, although these were limited. He referred to measures which had been taken such as a short term loan made to Everyone Active to cover their payroll while the Government furlough scheme was established; and amendments to the waste service. Arrangements had been made to defer rent from commercial tenants, for either the current quarter or the next quarter. In summary, the range of income losses for the 2020/21 budget could be between £2.9 million and £4.5 million, although as grant funding of approximately £1.5 million had been provided by the Government, the net increase of use of reserves would be between £1.4 million and £3 million.

Councillor Williamson then referred to the medium term financial plan. He said that when setting the 2020/21 budget, the saving proposals and additional income generation plans had closed the budget gap for this year but there was still a budget gap for 2021/22 of £420,000. Additional income generation plans from improved recycling rates and additional trade waste customers were unlikely to be realised in the short term. One of the key plans for income generation had been for pay and display, and officers were now re-mapping the timings for a decision on the parking strategy.

Councillor Williamson drew Members' attention to the impact of Covid 19 on council tax. Government support had been received for working age claimants receiving a council tax reduction, which was welcomed,



but the prospect of increased unemployment was a concern. Any increase in council tax support cases would reduce the taxbase. The report set out the assumptions made regarding the council tax income which would be needed in the MTFP for 2021/22.

Councillor Williamson referred to the conclusion in the report, in that it was not possible to give credible overall estimates of the impact of the Covid-19 situation on the MTFP, and that new ideas to reduce net expenditure would be needed to replace or supplement existing plans.

Councillor Williamson referred to the cash and reserves position. He said in conclusion that although the Council would suffer short to medium term difficulties, it was able to face its worst case scenario. In recognition of the fact that some businesses were struggling, the report included a recommendation that Heads of Service be authorised to agree deferment of fees and charges to allay hardship.

Councillor Williamson proposed a motion that the recommendations in the report be supported. Councillor McAndrew seconded the motion.

Councillor Pope said that as Chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee, he had noted a drop in income from the Council's two property investment vehicles. He asked for more specific details and an estimate of how long the losses were expected to last.

Councillor Williamson responded that the reasons for the reduction were that there had been reductions in

both funds and direct investments.

Councillor Haysey said that the overall context was that the Council was in a sound position, which was not the case for some neighbouring authorities. It was however important to keep reserves for the benefit of residents. It would be necessary to build up income streams. She thanked the Head of Strategic Finance and Property and officers for this excellent analysis of the council's financial position.

The motion, being put to the meeting, and a vote taken, was declared CARRIED.

**RESOLVED** – that (A) the potential impacts of Covid 19 on the budget for 2020/21 and the Medium Term Financial Plan be noted; and

(B) authority be given to Heads of Service to agree the deferment of any business related fees and charges where a business can demonstrate that payment would cause immediate financial hardship.

25 NOTING THE DECISION OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE TO APPROVE A SCHEME FOR THE LOCAL AUTHORITY DISCRETIONARY GRANT FUND TAKEN UNDER URGENCY PROVISIONS

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Councillor Williamson submitted a report on a decision taken by the Chief Executive on 26 May 2020, to approve the local authority discretionary grant funding scheme under urgency provisions. He said the

government had, as part of its response to Coronavirus, announced this funding, to be given to local authorities, to provide support for local businesses which were not eligible for the current Small Business Grant or Extended Retail Relief Grant Fund. East Herts Council had been awarded £1.57m to distribute to eligible businesses. The government had set national criteria. The report set out the aspects where local authorities had some limited discretion. In order to ensure that this money was distributed to businesses as soon as possible, the decision was approved by the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, on 26 May 2020, setting a deadline of two weeks within which applications could be submitted.

Councillor Williamson proposed a motion that the recommendations in the report be supported. Councillor Rutland-Barsby seconded the motion.

Councillor Wyllie declared a disclosable pecuniary interest (DPI), in that he was the owner of a small business in the district. He said he had not appreciated at the start of the meeting that he would need to have declared this interest before the item was considered.

Advice was sought from the Democratic Services Manager as to the procedure to be followed where a declaration of interest had not been made at the start of the meeting. The Democratic Services Manager advised that it would be necessary that a Member declaring a DPI had to leave the meeting for the duration of any debate and voting on the item in question. Accordingly, Councillor Wyllie left the virtual

meeting for the duration of consideration of the item.

The motion, being put to the meeting, and a vote taken, was declared CARRIED.

**RESOLVED** - that (A) the decision to approve the local authority discretionary grant funding scheme, taken by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader, be noted; and

(B) delegated authority is granted to the Head of Revenues & Benefit Service, in consultation with the Executive Member for Financial Sustainability, to revise the scheme if all the available funds are not allocated under the proposed scheme criteria.

26 LOAN TO SLM - REPORT OF DECISION TAKEN BY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

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Councillor Haysey reminded Members that this item included information at appendices B and C which was exempt from publication.

The Monitoring Officer advised that if Members wished to discuss those papers, the meeting would move to part 2, and exclude the press and public by means of stopping the livestream of the meeting.

Councillor Williamson presented a report requesting that the decision of the Chief Executive taken on 16 April 2020, to approve an emergency loan to the leisure contractor, Sport and Leisure Management Ltd (SLM), be noted. The decision had been taken under

delegated authority, to enable an expedited response, in the context of the coronavirus outbreak. The first part of the loan had already been repaid in full, and repayment terms were set out in relation to the further funding to support the cost of a core team of staff carrying out essential maintenance of the East Herts leisure centres.

Councillor Williamson proposed a motion that the recommendation in the report be supported.  
Councillor Cutting seconded the motion.

The motion, being put to the meeting, and a vote taken, was declared CARRIED.

**RESOLVED** – that the decision of the Chief Executive, taken under delegated authority, be noted, to (A) approve a loan to SLM of the sum set out in the exempt from publication Appendix B to this report, to support the cost of SLM's payroll costs for furloughed staff for April 2020 only; and

(B) to approve funding for a further loan of £16,171 in April, £12,391 in May and £10,578 in June 2020 (subject to a monthly review of Government instructions) to support the cost of a core team of staff carrying out essential maintenance of East Herts leisure centres.

The meeting closed at 7.38 pm

