

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
EXECUTIVE HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
TUESDAY 28 SEPTEMBER 2021, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor L Haysey (Leader)
Councillors L Haysey, P Boylan,
E Buckmaster, J Goodeve, J Kaye,
G McAndrew and G Williamson.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors M Pope, P Ruffles and
N Symonds.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Richard Cassidy	- Chief Executive
James Ellis	- Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer
Katie Mogan	- Democratic Services Manager
Jonathan Geall	- Head of Housing and Health
Steven Linnett	- Head of Strategic Finance and Property
Su Tarran	- Head of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service

169 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Cutting.

170 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader said the Council were aware of the perceived petrol shortage across the country and gave her thanks to the crews from Urbaser who collected the District's refuse, and have done an amazing job in the last few days. She acknowledged that they have had an extraordinarily difficult job over the last few months and placed on record her thanks to the crews.

The Leader asked Councillor Kaye to make an announcement about the council's grant policies and the amount of money that had been provided to local charities and communities.

Councillor Kaye announced that East Herts Council had put in a bid for £150,000 from the Herts Health Protection Board which was successful. The money had been given to local charities and communities who kept operating through the pandemic, helping and supporting individuals. Councillor Kaye said he visited a care home in Bishop's Stortford who had a visit from 'AceHounds', a charity that have been supported by the grants. The charity took dogs round to visit residents as they had a beneficial effect on their wellbeing.

Other charities such as 'Always Be You' in Ware who work with adults with learning difficulties received funding. They would normally meet once or twice a

week but could not in the pandemic so provided kits and delivered to people on the door. The next grants programme will be launched in the next few weeks and Councillor Kaye encouraged people to apply for grants up to £8,000.

Councillor Haysey said it was encouraging to see that the council could provide grants to communities to recognise their extraordinary work.

Councillor Haysey said the order of the agenda would be amended so after item 6, the order would be heard as follows: item 11, 12, 10, 7, 8 and 9.

171 MINUTES - 6 JULY 2021

Councillor Kaye proposed, and Councillor Goodeve seconded a motion that the Minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2021 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 6 July 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by Leader.

172 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

173 UPDATE FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor Haysey said the report from the committee

was included in the supplementary agenda and thanked the Chairman for working with the Scrutiny Officer in producing the report. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the Tenancy Strategy and supported it.

174 UPDATE FROM AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Councillor Pope had nothing to add to the committee report.

Councillor Haysey said there were some good discussions at the Audit and Governance Committee and thanked the Members involved.

175 COUNCIL TAX LONG TERM EMPTY PREMIUM

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented a report on the Council Tax Long Term Empty Premium. He said that the Council had decided to charge premiums on long term empty homes as they were encouraged to do so by the government. The charge was not designed to create revenue but as an incentive for owners to bring the house back into use. As a further incentive, the proposal was to bring in higher rates as follows: properties that have been empty for over two years but under five at 100%, over five years but under ten years at 200% and ten years plus at 300%. Alongside this, the other change to the policy was that once a long term empty property has been sold, the new owners can have liability of the premium deferred for 12 months if they are not able to move in straightaway, but occupy the property within 12 months.

Councillor Williamson proposed and Councillor Kaye seconded a motion supporting the recommendation in the report. On being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED - to recommend to Council the increase of the Long Term Empty Premium from April 2022, including the discretion to remove the premium for up to 12 months when new owners occupy within 12 months of purchase.

176 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented a report on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. The report was reviewed every year and the full details were in the report.

The Leader gave her thanks to the Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits and her team for their hard work in difficult circumstances over the pandemic.

Councillor Williamson proposed and Councillor Buckmaster seconded a motion supporting the recommendation in the report. On being put the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED - to recommend to Council that there be no changes to the local Council Tax Support scheme for April 2022.

177 TENANCY STRATEGY

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods presented a report on the draft Tenancy Strategy 2021-26. He explained that each Local Authority responsible for housing is required under the Localism Act to produce and review a tenancy strategy. The Act was clear about what the strategy should cover and the Tenancy Strategy provided detail on what kind of tenancies should be offered as well as giving guidance on rent levels the council would like to see. There was an emphasis on social rather than affordable rents. The Tenancy Strategy was not concerned with affordable housing supply as this was the remit of the District Plan and the Housing Strategy which would be on the agenda for the November meeting. East Herts' planning policies have meant there has been a 10.2% increase in the number of affordable homes in the ten years to 2020, compared to 2.9% across Hertfordshire and 3.4% across England in the same period. Councillor Boylan stressed that the Tenancy Strategy was only guidance but Registered Providers had been consulted and it was pleasing to see they were predominantly offering lifetime tenancies. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had considered the strategy and whilst Members expressed disappointment that the council could not set rent levels, they endorsed the aspirations of the strategy.

Councillor Goodeve said it was pleasing to hear that the planning policies were delivering positive outcomes.

Councillor Haysey said that it was important to express

what the council could and could not do within the Tenancy Strategy. The council cannot enforce but can encourage.

Councillor Boylan proposed and Councillor Goodeve seconded a motion supporting the recommendation in the report. On being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED - to recommend to Council the adoption of the East Herts Tenancy Strategy for 2021-2026.

178 PROVISIONAL OUTTURN 2020/21

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented a report on the council's provisional outturn at the close of the last financial year. He explained the figure was provisional as it was subject to verification by the external auditors. The outturn has shown an overspend of £116,000 which had been funded by general reserves. Councillor Williamson said the pandemic had an effect on revenue and the government grants did not cover the council's full losses and whilst that level of overspend would be considered high in a normal year, in the current circumstances, it was to be expected.

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability said that £414,000 would be carried forward to the 2021/22 budget to fund IT projects and £4.27 million would be carried forward to 2021/22 budget to fund ongoing capital schemes.

Councillor Haysey said the Council were aware that the financial situation was not going to get any easier and Members were conscious of the work being done by Officers to stay within budget and to be a financially prudent council.

Councillor Williamson proposed and Councillor Buckmaster seconded a motion supporting the recommendations in the report. On being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that (A) the funding of the General Fund revenue outturn of £116k overspend from the general reserve be approved;

(B) That the revenue budgets of £414k be carried forward from 2020/21 to 2021/22; and

(C) That the capital budgets of £4.271m be carried forward to 2021/22 to fund ongoing capital schemes.

179 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT 2021/22 – QUARTER 1
FORECAST TO YEAR END

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented a report on Quarter 1 of the current financial year. The current predicted outturn was an £82,000 overspend and the details of the under and

overspends in each service was provided in the report. Councillor Williamson said the country was still in a partial lockdown in the first half of quarter one and it was not unusual for the forecast to show an overspend at an early stage in the year.

Councillor Williamson proposed and Councillor Boylan seconded a motion supporting the recommendations in the report. On being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that (A) the net revenue budget forecast over spend of £0.082 million in 2021/22 be noted; and

(B) the revised capital budget for 2021/22 of £50.039million, which includes £4.171m carried forward from 2020/21 to be approved as part of the Provisional Outturn report, and the forecast zero variance to that budget be noted.

180 BUDGET 2022/23 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2022 – 2025 PREPARATION

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented a report on the Budget 2022/23 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2022-25 preparations. He said the purpose of the report was to set the scene for Members and for the Executive to give Officers a steer and approve the recommendation and assumptions to provide a basis for Officers to work from. There were a range of emerging factors with both positive and

negative impacts on the budget and the forecast had been updated in light of these factors, for example the earlier assumptions of an increase in council tax support did not happen as the economy had opened up.

Councillor Williamson said that finding savings remained a challenge and they would have to be found through efficiencies and new sources of income, such as the introduction of charging for garden waste collection. A number of savings had been built into the budget from the previously agreed three year saving plan. Additionally, the Transformation Programme was underway and would not have a significant impact until 2023/24.

Councillor Haysey commented that the council was in a better position than had first been thought. East Herts was a prudent and cautious council and Members would continue to ensure that their ambitious plans for residents are fundable and available, and that services are maintained.

Councillor Williamson proposed and Councillor Haysey seconded a motion supporting the recommendations in the report. On being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that (A) agree, as guidance to Officers, that the budget proposals should be based on a Council Tax increase of £5, contract inflation up to 4%, no inflation in other goods and services budgets and that the provision for the national pay award will be up to 3%

(effectively 2.75% as 0.25% of the pay provision this year will be carried forward as a result of the 1.75% final pay offer from the employer's side);

(B) Note the comprehensive spending review savings to be implemented in 2022/23 and 2023/24 as agreed by Council in March 2021 and acknowledge the requirement of Council that compensating savings, delivered to the same timescales, have to be put in place and reported to the next Council meeting should the Executive decide that any savings proposals should not proceed, or are reduced by 10% or more;

(C) Welcome the Collection Fund updated estimate that the Business Rates deficit, being spread over 3 years, will be met in full by changes to the appeals provision, removing a £0.900 million pressure on the General Fund, and that the forecast increase in Local Council Tax Support cases has not materialised and the Council Tax Base is now forecast to increase in future years;

(D) Note the assumption that the Transforming East Herts Programme will not start to result in revenue savings until the latter half of 2022/23 and into 2023/24;

(E) Agree: the re-phasing of the capital programme and revenue impacts of capital financing; that existing minor projects should be

subject to a full value for money test before proceeding; and that no new projects may come forward for the capital programme unless they are able to cover the capital financing costs in full or mitigate significant increases in revenue costs;

(F) Note the revised savings requirements of £0.967 million in 2022/23, £1.520 million in 2023/24 – 2025/26 rising to £1.901 million in 2026/27; and

(G) Agree that all service areas should review fees and charges and ensure that, where the council has discretion to set the charge, that charges should be set so as to: recover full costs; concessions should be explicitly linked to an Equalities Impact Assessment; and that services which are not currently charged for the introduction of a charge should be considered unless the service is provided generally under a statutory provision.

181 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 7.30 pm

Chairman
Date

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