

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COUNCIL HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
WEDNESDAY 14 DECEMBER 2022, AT 7.00
PM

PRESENT: Councillor I Devonshire (Chairman)
Councillors A Alder, D Andrews, T Beckett,
R Buckmaster, P Boylan, E Buckmaster,
S Bull, K Crofton, B Crystall, A Curtis,
G Cutting, B Deering, H Drake, J Dumont,
R Fernando, M Goldspink, J Goodeve,
A Hall, L Haysey, J Jones, J Kaye, I Kemp,
G McAndrew, S Newton, M Pope,
C Redfern, S Reed, P Ruffles, S Rutland-
Barsby, D Snowdon, T Stowe, N Symonds,
R Townsend, A Ward-Booth, G Williamson,
C Wilson and J Wyllie

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Richard Cassidy	- Chief Executive
Lorraine Blackburn	- Scrutiny Officer
James Ellis	- Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer
Jonathan Geall	- Head of Housing and Health
Steven Linnett	- Head of Strategic Finance and Property
Helen Standen	- Deputy Chief Executive
Ben Wood	- Head of Communications, Strategy and

Policy

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

- Lead for
Cambridgeshire,
Hertfordshire and
Bedfordshire Federation
of Small Businesses

269 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman thanked Reverend Stephen Bate, for his welcome. He also thanked Members for wearing Christmas attire for the meeting and explained the background to the tradition in that it was a fundraising event to raise money for the Chairman's charity.

The Chairman summarised the events that he and the Vice Chairman Councillor Rosemary Bolton, had attended since the last meeting of Council.

- Light of Love events in Buntingford, Hertford and Bishop's Stortford which were Isabel Hospice events
- The High Sheriffs Justices Service at St Albans Cathedral
- A Tour of the Essex and Herts Air Ambulance at North Weald. He said that Air Ambulance was a charity and solely funded from charitable donations
- He advised Members that this weekend, Hertford Theatre gave away 14 free tickets to local children plus their parents so that they could attend the Christmas Production of "The Snowsmith" at Ware Drill Hall.

The Chairman advised Members that there would be a

Holocaust Memorial Event on Thursday 26 January at 6:30pm in the Council Chamber. This event would be in person, the first since 2019.

The Chairman was pleased to announce that Councillor Stan Bull had been awarded a Queen's Platinum Jubilee Coin for his services as a Voluntary Ambulance Car Driver. He said that Councillor Bull had been volunteering for over 22 years.

Councillor Bull explained that his work as a voluntary driver had happened by chance in that he had been working with a friend who had asked him what he was going to do when he retired. He said that he had enjoyed every minute of his time as a driver, and that it was a very rewarding job helping people. He felt that it was an ideal job for a retiree adding that two weeks ago the traffic manager for the service had said just how much he appreciated his help. Councillor Bull said that he was very proud to receive the award.

Finally, the Economic Development Team had provided a lot of work on business support during the Covid recovery period. The Chairman introduced Pam Charman, the Lead for the Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire Federation of Small Businesses who explained the background to the federation, which was to influence government and policy to secure business friendly ideas. She presented the award to the Economic Development Team and thanked the team for producing a thriving business programme, working in a way which was relevant and said that we should all celebrate what had been achieved in East Hertfordshire.

The Chairman reminded Members to pick up their mail

from the pigeon-holes.

The Chairman announced that item 11 (Member Non-Attendance Waiver and Extension to Six Month Time Limit) be withdrawn as the Member was now in attendance.

270 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader said that she always enjoyed this meeting just before Christmas. She thanked the staff who she said had come through a very difficult time especially to the refuse crews who continued to do an essential job. She said that very few bins had been missed. The Leader said that the roads were not easy and would remain so for more days and asked Members and residents to be careful.

At the Leader's request Councillors Kaye and Cutting made announcements on her behalf:

Councillor Kaye provided an update on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The Council had applied for money for various projects and had been given £219,000 to spend by March 2023. Two further tranches of money would be provided in 2023/24 and 2024/25.

Secondly the Council had been successful in achieving the bronze award in relation to the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme organised by the Ministry of Defence. Councillor Huggins had been instrumental in raising this issue at a previous Council meeting. Under the scheme, additional priority was afforded to members of the armed forces in relation to social housing and providing grant support to commemorate the work of armed forces. Councillor Kaye said that there were only two other councils in Hertfordshire which had been given this award.

He thanked Councillor Huggins for raising this initially and championing this cause adding that the Council would be working towards achieving the silver award status.

Councillor Cutting provided an update in relation to the headline results following a residents' survey on how the Council runs things. He provided a comparative study to Members.

271 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Bell, Brady, Burmicz, Frecknall, Hollebon, Huggins, McMullen, Page and Stevenson.

272 MINUTES - 16 NOVEMBER 2022

Councillor Curtis said that he had emailed the Chairman regarding Anti-Semitism and the publication of the Anti-Semitism audit on the adoption on the "I Hate" definition and queried whether the council had yet adopted the policy on a Campaign against Anti-Semitism.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services thanked the Member for the early notification of his query and confirmed that the Council had accepted the definition and the policy had been adopted in 2019.

The Chairman confirmed that he, the Vice Chairman and Councillor Crofton attended the Remembrance Sunday events at all five of our towns, not four.

Councillor L Haysey proposed, and Councillor E Buckmaster seconded a motion that the Minutes of the

meeting held on 16 November 2022 be approved as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman.

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

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

273 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

274 PETITIONS

There were no petitions to consider.

275 PUBLIC QUESTION

David Royle, on behalf of the Sustainable Sawbridgeworth Community Group, to ask Cllr Graham McAndrew, Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability

Is this Council aware of the Cornwall Development and Decision Wheel (CDDW) used by Cornwall Council for cabinet decisions since September 2019* and has it considered a similar approach for its own decision making, using the Doughnut Economics model pioneered by Kate Raworth, which aims to ensure that no one misses out on life's essentials (from food and housing to healthcare and political voice), while ensuring that, collectively, we do not overdo the pressure on Earth's life-supporting systems,

such as a stable climate, fertile soils, and a protective ozone layer? If not, how does this Council propose to keep this balance?

Response

I'd like to thank David Royle for bringing Cornwall's approach to my attention. I have to admit that I was not aware of this model but from an initial look, I can see that it aims to locate council decision-making within the wider environmental sustainability context.

I am pleased to report, therefore, that while not specifically using Cornwall's Development and Decision Wheel, East Herts Council has already adopted many of the model's key principles. Notably, all reports put before members, whether at a scrutiny committee, the Executive or the full Council, include a section on environmental implications. Added to this, as environmental sustainability has been one of the council's corporate priorities for three years now, decision-making across the council's broad remit is increasingly being seen through the lens of climate change, air quality, biodiversity and the like. Examples range from the solar panels, air source heating and other energy efficiency measures at Grange Paddocks and Hartham Leisure Centre to advanced discussions with housing associations about Passivhaus development and new emission standards for licensed taxis set to become among the strictest in Hertfordshire from next April.

I think a great example of the council taking difficult financial decisions with regard to its wider environmental responsibilities is our decision to switch our vehicle fleet to five e-vehicles. While delivering a modest but welcome financial savings of £2,000 over the coming five years,

more importantly, this will give an annual saving of at least nine tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent – that’s a total saving of at least 45 tonnes over five years – and will also contribute to improving air quality.

Finally, earlier today, I, together with members and officers from across Hertfordshire, met representatives of the National Farmers Union to discuss biodiversity and soil sustainability as these are obviously important considerations given the rural nature of much of our district.

So, while I and officers will most definitely look into Cornwall’s approach in more detail, I hope I have been able to provide assurances that sustainability considerations already play a central role in East Herts Council’s decision-making.

There was no supplementary question.

276 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Question 1

Cllr Norma Symonds to ask Cllr Peter Boylan, the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods

Our council agreed a five-year housing plan in May this year. Six months has now gone, and I would like to ask the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods for an update on what has happened so far, especially with social housing.

Response

Since Council’s approval of the Housing Strategy in May

this year, considerable progress has been made. Members may recall that delivering more affordable homes with lower rents – and even social rents where possible – is the *very first objective* listed in the Strategy. I was therefore particularly pleased to officially open the new housing scheme in Pegram Drive, Buntingford last month where Hightown Housing have delivered nine homes at social rent. Added to this, B3 Living's new scheme in Bengoe sees rents capped at the local housing allowance, meaning they are just 60%-70% of private market rents in Hertford. I think both schemes show that low rents can and are being delivered when the council and registered providers work together. On top of this, officers are currently exploring new ways to ensure low rents, including talking to two registered providers about building homes for social rent on the few small plots of land still in the council's ownership.

The Housing Strategy is, however, about more than simply rent levels. Providing homes for our most vulnerable residents is another major priority and so the development of affordable rented bungalows on two sites this year, in Buntingford and in Bishop's Stortford, is especially welcome when we remember that there are 33 people on the Housing Register with significant mobility-related needs, who would greatly benefit from level access homes.

Furthermore, the Strategy prioritises making homes more energy efficient, thus I was thrilled to see so many of Network Homes new affordable rented and shared ownership homes at the Blakemoor Manor development in Hertford had solar panels and e-car charging points when I visited earlier this year. I know that Network are currently drawing up a proposal to build homes to the Passivhaus specification in the district. Added to this, private home-

owners have also been able to benefit from the county-wide 'solar panel bulk buy' scheme which the council was part of this summer. The scheme was so over-subscribed that another round next year now seems likely.

Finally, we cannot overlook the importance of getting the day-to-day work of helping homeless people find accommodation and running an effective housing application and nomination process. I am currently working with officers on options for speeding up the assessment of applicants' medical circumstances and I am very grateful to Cllr Symonds for agreeing to look over those proposals when they are ready in the new year.

So, although we only six months into the five- year Housing Strategy, I hope I have been able to demonstrate that work is already well underway to deliver the priorities so resoundingly endorsed by members back in May.

There was no supplementary question.

Although not a supplementary question Councillor Symonds said she had come across a veteran and the speed with which housing worked at was brilliant because of our Veterans' Charter and that they did some really good work.

Question 2

Cllr Stephen Reed to ask Cllr Peter Boylan, the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods

Due to the previous death in Rochdale due to damp and mould, could the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods explain if any measures have been taken to avoid East

Herts repeating what happened.

Response

I'm sure all members were as shocked and saddened as I was to learn of the death of two year old Awaab Ishak who had endured prolonged exposure to damp and mould in his social rented home in Rochdale. Whilst this council does not hold any housing stock, it does, however, have a very important role to play in helping to avoid a similar tragedy here in East Herts.

This council has a specialist Housing Standards team within Environmental Health which employs several different techniques to tackle damp and mould, culminating, where necessary, in the use of formal powers to take punitive action. More typically, however, a resolution can be achieved through practical advice and support, with cases remaining open until confirmation that the problem has been remedied or it returns or worsens, prompting further investigatory visits and remedial action.

A high quality, responsive service is provided to the public with detailed advice on the council's website, such as a helpful checklist of things to consider which could be causing the problem and an easy-to-use form for reporting problems. Of note, over the 12 months of 2021/22, the Environmental Health team were approached by 62 tenants in social and private rented housing whose complaints primarily concerned damp and mould.

Perhaps understandably, the numbers of enquiries have increased in recent weeks so I would like to assure members that the Environmental Health team has reviewed all current and recent cases and are confident that there are no open cases which mirror the conditions which led to the young boy's needless and preventable

death.

Of course, social landlords also have a key role to play in tackling damp and mould. At the council's request, the district's largest landlords – covering nine-out-of-ten affordable homes – have provided details of how they are supporting their tenants. I have passed this information to fellow members as soon as I have received it. Officers from both the Housing and Environmental Health teams are continuing to work with all social landlords to ensure no tenant's reports of damp and mould go unheeded. It is also worth noting that on 22 November, the Regulator for Social Housing also wrote to all housing associations asking for a range of assurance to prevent a recurrence of such an incident.

Finally, if a tenant approaches the Housing service feeling a need to transfer to another property due to damp and mould, Housing and Environmental Health officers immediately work closely with the landlord to alleviate the problem and so avoid a disruptive move. If, on the rare occasion, a move may be necessary, officers discuss this with the medical advisor currently commissioned to assess housing applicants' circumstances. The medical advisor has assured the council that she always carefully considers the impact of reported damp and mould on an applicants' health and has reported that she will remain vigilant of any new national guidance or best practice issued.

I hope I have been able to reassure members that the council takes *all* reports of damp and mould extremely seriously. The council will *always* work with tenants, landlords and householders to find effective, permanent solutions and will *not* shy away from using its powers to require and force landlords to carry out remedial works if necessary.

There was no supplementary question.

Question 3

Cllr Alexander Curtis to ask Cllr Graham McAndrew, the Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability

Great Amwell residents have reported that on multiple occasions the paper boxes contained within their cardboard/glass/metal recycling bins have been tipped into the waste collection lorry instead of being emptied into a separate container. What steps is East Herts District Council taking to ensure that the contractor, Urbaser, stops doing this, in line with our contract with them?

Response

We are moving away from inner paper boxes which will prevent this from happening in the future. Urbaser have reminded their staff to check recycling bins before emptying. Unfortunately, we are operating on a high level of agency staff which can exacerbate the issue. If residents are concerned that their box or items in the box are being tipped into the chamber.

Incorrectly, we encourage reporting so we can review CCTV and take further action.

Councillor Curtis said that the Council should keep an eye on this especially in relation to hitting targets.

Question 4

Cllr Mione Goldspink to ask Cllr Geoffrey Williamson,

the Executive Member for Financial Sustainability

What would be the effect on the Council's future budget of cancelling the plans to build a cinema on the Old River Lane site in Bishop's Stortford? Would cancelling this project free up money for general revenue expenditure?

Response

My thanks to Councillor Goldspink for raising this question. I refer Members to the Business Plan for the Arts Centre which was presented to Council in March last year. This stated that the Arts Centre would need a subsidy of just shy of £700k for the first seven years but thereafter will return a surplus amounting to £7.6m over the remainder of the period in which we will be repaying the loan. This is taking into account all the finance costs as they were calculated at the time the Business Case was prepared. Hence, in answer to the question if the Arts Centre project were to be cancelled this would cost the Council £6.9m over the next 30 years.

Whilst borrowing for the Arts Centre has revenue implications in terms of Minimum Revenue Provision and interest payments, if the Arts Centre did not proceed these savings would only be notional, as we would need to decapitalise all expenditure to date and that would become an immediate charge of in the region of £2 million to the revenue account. That £2 million deficit would then reduce the General Fund balance below the minimum recommended by our Section 151 officer, and the Council would have no choice but to use earmarked reserves to restore the General Fund balance back to a minimum level. As we intend to use our reserves judiciously in the coming years to smooth out our savings requirements in

the MTFP, using these reserves to bolster the General Fund instead would cause significant further savings requirements to be met in the first two years of the new Council, which I don't believe is a position anyone in this chamber would advocate.

There would also be of course the non-financial cost to our residents by depriving them of this grand new facility.

There was no supplementary question.

Question 5

Cllr Alexander Curtis to ask Cllr Geoffrey Williamson, the Executive Member for Financial Sustainability

Could the Executive Member please confirm that sufficient savings will be made in his upcoming 2023/24 budget to ensure that the Council can keep to its Medium Term Financial Plan?

Response

I thank Councillor Curtis for raising this. In answer, I would refer Councillor Curtis and other Members to the report on the budget and Medium Term Financial Plan that was considered by the Executive last week. The report indicated that after planned increases in revenue are taken into account we have a savings target in 2023/24 of £822k; the major causes of this being the local government pay settlement for staff, and higher contract inflation.

We have already identified measures that enable us to meet that target. In particular, we have worked with the Leadership Team on savings that relate to efficiencies

within the organisation and which do not affect our delivery of services to residents, and as such these do not require Member approval. These savings have a combined value of £866k, which being in excess of the target means in relation to Cllr Curtis's question that sufficient savings have been identified to allow us to present a balanced budget for next year in line with our Medium Term Financial Plan.

I can remind Members that the budget and MTFP will be considered by the Audit & Governance Committee on 24th January, prior it coming before Full Council on 1st March.

There was no supplementary question.

Question 6

Cllr Carolyn Redfern to ask Cllr Geoffrey Williamson, the Executive Member for Financial Sustainability

In view of the Transforming East Herts Programme and the plans to severely slim down East Herts spending, when will Executive publish the plans in full, to let residents know what they are doing to ensure services are protected and they will not be underserved?

Response

The business case for the Transformation Programme was published in July and this gives the details for what the programme comprises and what it will achieve. Its aim is to enable the Council to protect its delivery of its services but at lower costs through efficiencies and greater use of technology. We believe this will give our residents a better experience overall yet at the same time contributing to our need to reduce expenditure. With reference to my reply to

Cllr Curtis, this is already bearing fruit with the savings that have been identified for the next financial year which will save £822k but with no impact on the quality of our services to our residents.

Going forward beyond next year there are further savings that will be required and the Transformation Programme will be at the heart of this, and in conjunction, the new Administration after next May will be tasked to set the new Corporate Plan and alongside that to undertake a Reconciling Policy, Performance & Resources exercise to ensure its future spending is aligned with its new corporate plan priorities.

There was no supplementary question.

Question 7

Cllr Carolyn Redfern to ask Cllr Graham McAndrew, the Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability

What is the Council doing to address issues of parking, speed limits and rat runs throughout the district but in particular the serious issues in West Street, Hertford?

Response

The management of speeding and inappropriate use of roads, as a through route, is for Hertfordshire County Council (the Highway Authority) to consider. East Herts council has no powers to manage these types of issues.

The power to enforce the associated Traffic Regulation Orders would be for the police to undertake. East Herts has no powers to engage. We will of course direct correspondents to the appropriate authority, and if

possible, highlight the issues directly to the police.

We will carry out parking enforcement when obstruction of residential driveways, or dropped kerbs, are reported by the public.

In relation to parking in West Street, there are very limited parking restrictions in the road. These are checked daily through the mobile patrols carried out by Civil Enforcement Officers.

277 EXECUTIVE REPORT - 25 OCTOBER AND 22 NOVEMBER 2022

The Leader of the Council presented a report setting out recommendations to the Council made by the Executive at its meetings on 25 October and 22 November 2022.

277 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented the recommendation which was referred to in the Executive report of 25 October 2022 that no changes be made to the local Council Tax Support Scheme for April 2023.

Councillor G Williamson proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported.
Councillor M Pope seconded the proposal.

Councillor M Goldspink said that her party supported the recommendation.

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 no changes be made to the local Council Tax Support Scheme for April 2023.

277 NORTH OF HERTFORD - LAND WEST OF WADESMILL ROAD,
BENGEO (HERT4, PHASE 2) MASTERPLANNING
FRAMEWORK

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth presented the recommendation which was referred to the Executive on 22 November 2022 regarding a recommendation to agree the Masterplanning Framework as a material consideration for Development Management purposes.

Councillor J Goodeve proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported.

Councillor Ruffles seconded the proposal.

Councillor Goldspink said that she was confused by this proposal given that there was some opposition. She said that the plan seemed to centre on whether there should be a quarry and if the quarry was not included whether housing could be built. She said that situation was complicated to residents and that there was a campaign to stop housing being built in this area. Councillor Goldspink said she would be abstaining from voting.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said that this site was an allocated site in the District Plan and it complied with the council's policies. She said that there had not been a planning application submitted but it was anticipated that one would be forthcoming shortly.

Councillor Wilson said that he supported the “Save Bengo Fields Campaign” and was hopeful that an application would not go through but he understood the need for a Masterplan.

Councillor Curtis said that he was aware of the campaign and that green space should be retained and would not be voting and deferring to local knowledge on this.

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

RESOLVED – that the North of Hertford – Land West of Wadesmill Road, Bengo (HERT4, Phase 2) Masterplanning Framework October 2022 be agreed as a material consideration for Development Management purposes.

277 AFFORDABLE HOUSING NEEDS ASSESSMENT UPDATE FOR EAST HERTS

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods presented the recommendation which was referred to the Executive report 22 November 2022.

Councillor P Boylan proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported.

Councillor N Symonds seconded the proposal.

Councillor Goldspink said that the Liberal Democrat Group was happy to support the recommendation but that it was sad to see that there was still so much need for affordable housing in the district. She hoped that the Council would

try to provide more affordable homes.

Councillor Curtis welcomed the assessment on the update. He said that he was disappointed that under 20% of the total number of affordable homes were homes for people to own not rent. He felt that the Council should be doing more to encourage home ownership rather for people to rent. It was for that reason he would be voting against the recommendation.

Councillor Crystall asked if the Assessment referred to in the report could be made available to Members.

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 Affordable Housing Needs Assessment Update 2022 be supported to form part of the evidence base to inform Development Management decisions and support the East Herts District Plan 2018 and any future reviews and revisions to it.

277 FIRST HOMES – ADOPTION OF A TECHNICAL GUIDANCE NOTE

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods presented the recommendation which was referred to in the Executive report of 22 November 2022 regarding the adoption of a Technical Guidance Note.

Councillor P Boylan proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported. Councillor B Deering seconded the proposal.

Councillor Deering said that the Council was one of the highest providers of affordable housing in the county and took the provision of affordable housing very seriously.

Councillor Goldspink said that the Liberal Democrat Group was happy to support the recommendation. She added that it was unfortunate that decisions appeared to be taken by developers in terms of whether they might want to use this scheme in terms of providing affordable homes.

Councillor Redfern added her grateful thanks to officers and supported the comments made by Councillor Goldspink.

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 First Homes Technical Advice Note be approved.

278 COUNCIL TAX BASE

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented the recommendation which was referred in the Executive report of 22 November 2022 regarding the calculation of the Council Tax base for the whole district and for each Parish and Town Council for 2023/24.

Councillor Williamson proposed that the recommendations in the report be supported. Councillor R Fernando seconded the proposal.

The motion to support the recommendations having been

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

RESOLVED – that (A) the calculation of the Council’s tax base for the whole district and for the parish areas for 2023/24 be approved.

(B) that pursuant to the report and in accordance with the Local authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) Regulations 2012 the amount calculated by Est Hertfordshire District Council as its council tax base for the whole areas for 2023/24 shall be 63892.8 and for the parish areas listed below for 2023/24 shall be as follows:

ALBURY	287.47	HIGH WYCH	344.58
ANSTEY	174.21	HORMEAD	368.16
ARDELEY	210.00	HUNSDON	518.73
ASPENDEN	124.61	LITTLE BERKHAMSTEAD	274.25
ASTON	442.71	LITTLE HADHAM	549.18
BAYFORD	225.90	LITTLE MUNDEN	422.27
BENGEO	281.91	MUCH HADHAM	981.05
BENNINGTON	411.81	SACOMBE	90.93
BISHOP’S STORTFORD	17064.08	STANSTEAD ST. MARGARETS	710.36
BRAMFIELD	109.73	SAWBRIDGE WORTH	4075.77
BRAUGHING	665.18	STANDON	2013.99
BRENT PELHAM/ MEESDEN	149.81	STANSTEAD ABBOTTS	704.78
BRICKENDEN	358.19	STAPLEFORD	271.21
BUCKLAND	113.30	STOCKING PELHAM	84.85

BUNTINGFORD	3342.84	TEWIN	866.03
COTTERED	326.90	THORLEY	153.27
DATCHWORTH	736.34	THUNDRIDGE	707.95
EASTWICK / GILSTON	440.94	WALKERN	720.16
FURNEUX PELHAM	269.29	WARESIDE	308.61
GREAT AMWELL	970.42	WARE TOWN	7565.32
GREAT MUNDEN	144.57	WATTON AT STONE	1057.61
HERTFORD	12406.21	WESTMILL	169.34
HERTFORD HEATH	973.62	WIDFORD	294.15
HERTINGFORDBURY	334.05	WYDDIAL	76.13

279 MEMBER NON-ATTENDANCE WAIVER AND EXTENSION TO SIX-MONTH TIME LIMIT

This item was withdrawn.

280 DEBATE NOT HATE

The Leader proposed the following motion on notice:

This Council notes the Local Government Association are calling for support from organisations to sign the Debate Not Hate public statement, aiming to address the rise in abusive and intimidating behaviour directed at local politicians.

This Council acknowledges the findings of this report, principally that 88% of the locally elected representatives who responded to the LGA's survey have faced abuse and intimidation in the last 12 months. 73% said they have experienced it over social media where it seems to be

becoming increasingly normalised and 64% said they have experienced it in person.

The Council understands this can have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of our Members and their families and we should be taking steps to ensure elected representatives feel safe and secure in their own communities.

By signing up to the Debate Not Hate public statement, The Council will lend its support to the LGA's recommendations, one of which is that the relevant Government department should convene a working group, in partnership with the LGA, to bring together agencies to develop and implement an action plan to address the issue of abuse.

I invite Councillors to share any experiences they have had and lend their support to Debate Not Hate

Councillor Goldspink seconded the motion and she said that it was a very important motion. She added that it was important as Members, to be able to express feelings but in a courteous and respectful manner. She wanted to support the proposal made by the LGA and felt that all seven recommendations be supported and made available with the Minutes of this meeting.

The Executive Member for Wellbeing said that he was aware of the pressures on Members and Officers and that Members were now more accessible through social media and as such had more direct contact with residents who perhaps might say things which they might not in a face to face situation. He felt that people should be encouraged to speak in an appropriate manner.

Councillor Crofton said that he had not experienced any anger or abuse but had had nothing but “kindness and love”.

Councillor Dumont said that he had not experienced any abuse as a Councillor but was concerned about the abuse on Parish Councillors, who were volunteers.

Councillors Symonds said that some years ago someone had written to her about bomb making instructions and said that “someone was coming to get me”.

Councillor Boylan reminded Members that over the last few years, two Parish Councils were almost wiped out because of abuse from one councillor to another. He said that Members were here to be held to account but that they needed to be respectful to one another. He explained that abusive behaviour might put off future volunteers from standing on Parish Councils.

Councillor Curtis supported the motion. He said he had received several comments over the years and comments about taking “backhanders” about councillors working with developers. He supported the LGAs action.

Councillor Jones supported the motion adding that he regularly suffered social media abuse on a daily basis. He said that it affected his family, but he had learned to live with it.

Councillor Stowe said he had suffered some online abuse and by a Police Officer. He urged Members not to respond but accepted that it was hard not to respond to online comments.

Councillor Haysey said that her approach to any abusive emails was to ask the person to be polite in order for her to help them. She added that Members and Officers had a right to courtesy and privacy and staff needed to know that they would be supported when it happened. She said that the message should be that the Council would not allow this behaviour from residents.

Councillor Deering strongly associated himself with Councillor Haysey's comments. He said that he could not understand why some residents were so abusive to Officers who should know that they are supported.

The motion to support the recommendation having been proposed by Councillor Haysey and seconded by Councillor Goldspink was put to the meeting and declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that

This Council notes the Local Government Association are calling for support from organisations to sign the Debate Not Hate public statement, aiming to address the rise in abusive and intimidating behaviour directed at local politicians.

This Council acknowledges the findings of this report, principally that 88% of the locally elected representatives who responded to the LGA's survey have faced abuse and intimidation in the last 12 months. 73% said they have experienced it over social media where it seems to be becoming increasingly normalised and 64% said they have experienced it in person.

The Council understands this can have a significant impact

on the health and wellbeing of our Members and their families and we should be taking steps to ensure elected representatives feel safe and secure in their own communities.

By signing up to the Debate Not Hate public statement, The Council will lend its support to the LGA's recommendations, one of which is that the relevant Government department should convene a working group, in partnership with the LGA, to bring together agencies to develop and implement an action plan to address the issue of abuse.

As requested by Councillor Goldspink at the meeting the LGA recommendations are as listed below.

Recommendation 1: Councils and other relevant partners should take greater responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of councillors and take a proactive approach to preventing and handling abuse and intimidation against councillors. This should include addressing the impacts of abuse on councillors' mental health and wellbeing and working in partnership with other agencies and councils to ensure that threats and risks to councillors' safety, and that of their families, are taken seriously.

Recommendation 2: The LGA should continue to gather and disseminate good practice from across the sector, consider what more can be done to prevent abuse and intimidation of councillors through the Civility in public life programme, and support councils and councillors when these incidents occur.

Recommendation 3: Police forces should work to improve the consistency of responses to abuse of and threats made against councillors and take a risk-based approach that

accounts for the specific risks that councillors face, as they do with other high-risk individuals, such as MPs. This should include identifying best practice in relation to councillor support and safety and sharing it across the country.

Recommendation 4: The Government should prioritise legislation to put it beyond doubt that councillors can withhold their home address from the public register of pecuniary interests.

Recommendation 5: The LGA should work with political parties, election and democratic officers, and organisations responsible for guidance to raise awareness of the options currently available and promote the practice of keeping home addresses private during the election process and once elected.

Recommendation 6: Social media companies and internet service providers should acknowledge the democratic significance of local politicians and provide better and faster routes for councillors reporting abuse and misinformation online.

Recommendation 7: The relevant [Government department should convene a working group](#), in partnership with the LGA, to bring together relevant agencies to develop and implement an action plan to address the issue of abuse of local politicians and their safety.

The meeting closed at 8.38 pm

Chairman
Date