

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
EXECUTIVE HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
TUESDAY 7 JANUARY 2025, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT:

Councillors B Crystall, M Goldspink,
C Brittain, A Daar, S Hopewell and T Hoskin.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors B Deering and C Redfern.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Mathew Crosby	- Interim Head of Strategic Finance
Katie Mogan	- Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
James Ellis	- Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer
Jonathan Geall	- Head of Housing and Health
Helen Standen	- Interim Chief Executive

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Dumont, Glover-Ward and Wilson.

2 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader reminded Members and Officers that the meeting was being webcast.

3 MINUTES - 19 NOVEMBER 2024

Councillor Hoskin proposed, and Councillor Brittain seconded a motion that the Minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2024 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 19 November 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

5 DRAFT BUDGET 2025/26 AND MEDIUM TERM MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2025-2035

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented the Draft Budget 2025/26 and Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2025-2035 report. He said that there was uncertainty over the future of East Herts Council following the government's Devolution White Paper, but it still had a requirement to produce a balanced budget.

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability said that there was now a greater understanding around the government settlement to the council but the grant to cover the increase in National Insurance contributions was unknown but expected to fall short of what was required. He said the council had a balanced budget for 2025/26 but beyond this there were significant savings to be made.

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability said there was a £2 million budget gap in October 2024 and savings had been identified through £1.46 million of officer delegated savings and £492,000 of Member recommended savings. Savings proposals that had been accepted and rejected by the Executive were shown in

the appendices.

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability said that there had been some changes to the MTFP as described under paragraph 1.6 – 1.9 of the report. He said that further work would be undertaken on the MTFP to generate more savings and there was a proposal to increase council tax by 2.98%, the maximum allowed without a referendum. He said that ongoing pressures of high interest rates and a lack of government funding left the council with little choice. The budget required all planned savings to be realised and £164k had been drawn down from reserves with no plan to add to it.

Councillor Brittain proposed that the recommendations in the report be supported. Councillor Hoskin seconded the proposal.

Councillor Crystall thanked officers for their work in helping to prepare the budget in a challenging financial year.

Councillor Deering echoed the Leader's appreciation to those involved in the budget. He referred to Table 3 in the report which related to the increase in the garden waste charge. He said this was under the savings section but would be an increase for residents. He asked how this linked with the proposed North Herts charge in the shared service.

Councillor Brittain said that although it was an increase to residents, it reflected a saving to the council as there was a net income. North Herts were consulted when deciding on a charge but due to East Herts' challenging financial position, there was no choice but to increase by £10. He said that this also brought the council into line with neighbouring authorities, and it had not increased since 2021.

Councillor Deering felt that explaining the increased charge as a saving was disingenuous and wanted to see

more accurate terminology when the budget was presented to Full Council. He said that North Herts were proposing an increase that was less and asked why East Herts were proposing a greater increase.

Councillor Brittain said that there was not a requirement for both councils to have the same charge and they had tried to align the cost, but circumstances had meant that East Herts had to increase by £10.

Councillor Deering said that North Herts were increasing the charge by £6. He said that residents might find it difficult to understand why the charges were different when it was a shared service across the two councils.

Councillor Brittain said that he understood Councillor Deering's point but both councils had different financial positions.

Councillor Hoskin said that the garden waste charge was a commercial offering, and residents could choose whether they paid for the service or not and this charge was not being imposed on residents.

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 Executive requests the Audit and Governance Committee to consider the savings proposals and advise Executive of any significant issues they believe may arise;

(B) the Executive delegate to the Interim Head of Strategic Finance, in consultation with the Executive Member for Financial Sustainability, the authority to amend the proposed budget and medium-term financial plan to be put to Audit and Governance Committee on 29 January 2025 in order to reflect the Local Government Finance Settlement and other emerging information, so that

the committee can consider the most complete and up to date information.

6 CAPITAL RECEIPTS PROGRAMME - AUTHORITY TO DISPOSE OF ASSETS BY SALE

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented the Capital Receipts Programme report and said that the report was seeking authority for greater flexibility to officers regarding the sale of the assets approved at the Executive meeting in October 2024, alongside a further set of proposals. He said that the disposal of these assets would mean the council could pay down more debt, reducing the interest burden on the council.

Councillor Brittain proposed that the recommendations in the report be supported. Councillor Hoskin seconded the proposal.

Councillor Deering referred to the proposal to dispose of the Southern Maltings site and asked for reassurance that the council had been advised on its value by independent external consultants.

The Interim Deputy Chief Executive said the value of the asset was in the exempt appendix and the valuations had been led by the property team which included qualified valuers and they sought advice when needed.

Councillor Deering said that there were different ways of valuing assets and being valued as an Arts Centre would have a bearing on its value, but a commercial site would have a different value.

The Interim Deputy Chief Executive said that the basis of the valuation was described in paragraph 3.2 of the report and the nature of the lease was a continued use of the building as a commercial arts centre and preserving it for continued community use.

Councillor Deering wondered whether it was an appropriate valuation when dealing with taxpayers' money. He said there was a significant difference in the value of an arts centre and land that could be developed in a central location.

Councillor Brittain said he understand the point about a difference in valuation but there was a value to the community in having an arts centre. He said that Ware residents would probably rather see an arts centre in the community. Ware Town Council had expressed an interest in purchasing it and preserve as a community arts centre.

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 assets approved for disposal by the Executive at its meeting of 1st October 2024, as listed in paragraph 1.1, be sold by any means that will achieve best consideration for the council, with the decision on the means of disposal used for each site delegated to the Head of Housing, Health and Property;

(B) Southern Maltings, Ware be let on a 99 year lease to Ware Town Council for the consideration in the EXEMPT Appendix B;

(C) land at Hawthorn Close, Hertford be disposed of for best consideration, with authority to determine the means of disposal delegated to the Head of Housing, Health and Property;

(D) land at Park Road, Ware be disposed of for best consideration, with authority to determine the means of disposal delegated to the Head of Housing, Health and Property;

(E) the property at 34 Queen's Road Ware be

disposed of for best consideration with the receipt being recycled into the council's commuted sums reserve for affordable housing and the authority to determine the means of disposal delegated to the Head of Housing, Health and Property.

7 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 7.25 pm

Chairman
Date