

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COUNCIL HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON WEDNESDAY
26 FEBRUARY 2025, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor M Connolly (Chairman).
Councillors M Adams, D Andrews, P Boylan,
C Brittain, M Butcher, I Devonshire,
E Buckmaster, S Bull, V Burt, R Carter,
N Clements, S Copley, N Cox, B Crystall,
A Daar, B Deering, J Dumont, J Dunlop,
Y Estop, V Glover-Ward, C Hart, G Hill,
D Hollebon, A Holt, S Hopewell, C Horner,
T Hoskin, D Jacobs, S Marlow, G McAndrew,
S Nicholls, A Parsad-Wyatt, C Redfern,
V Smith, T Stowe, M Swainston, J Thomas,
R Townsend, S Watson, D Willcocks,
G Williams, G Williamson, C Wilson, F Woolf,
J Wyllie and D Woollcombe.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

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

346 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman announced that she would be holding an

afternoon tea on 16 March 2025 at Hertford Castle and invitations had been sent out.

She said that there was a heavy agenda and reminded Members that they could only speak once on an item and asked Members under Item 8 to ask a supplementary question without any preamble.

347 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader of the Council welcomed Members to the meeting. He said that the Head of Operations, Jess Khanom-Metaman, had left the authority last week to spend more time with her young family. The Leader said she had been instrumental in delivering several projects across East Herts such as Grange Paddocks, Hartham Leisure Centre, and BEAM. He thanked her for her work and wished her well for the future.

The Leader welcomed the new Commercial and Cultural Development Manager, Steve Sargent, at BEAM who had started in January.

The Leader thanked the Hertford Civic Society for awarding BEAM an architectural award as well as Hartham Leisure Centre.

The Leader said that Councillor Goldspink had given her apologies for the meeting due to family illness and on behalf of the Council, he sent her best wishes.

348 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R Buckmaster, Deffley and Goldspink.

349 MINUTES - 11 DECEMBER 2024

Councillor Wilson proposed, and Councillor Hill seconded a motion that the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 December 2024 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 11 December 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

350 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

351 PETITIONS

There were no petitions submitted.

352 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The full responses to the submitted Public Questions can be found in the supplementary document [here](#).

353 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

The full responses to the submitted Members' Questions can be found in the supplementary document [here](#).

354 EXECUTIVE REPORT - 11 FEBRUARY 2025

The Leader of the Council presented a report setting out recommendations to the Council made by the Executive at its meeting on 11 February 2025.

355 PARKING STRATEGY 2025

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability presented the Parking Strategy following a public consultation and engagement over five weeks in autumn

2024. He said that the consultation was open to all residents and 1700 responses were received.

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability clarified that the strategy was the only recommendation that was to be considered by Council and the parking tariff increases were approved by the Executive at their last meeting. He said that support of the parking strategy was independent of parking charges.

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability said that the Council had approved a £1.75 million income target for parking in February 2024 and the parking strategy set the context and principle of the changes to support the income targets and ambitions of the Council. He said that the strategy was designed to ensure that the council effectively managed its parking whilst managing the challenges of growth. The council aimed to discourage non-essential car journeys and use active travel for short trips.

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability said that there was a strong focus on resident and business engagement early on in the process and the consultation responses could be found in Appendix A. Pricing had been used to motivate behaviour change and the strategy had 22 actions based on short, medium, and long term.

Councillor Hoskin proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported. Councillor Wilson seconded the proposal.

Councillor Buckmaster said that he would be voting against the proposal because he said there was a strong move within it to get rid of free parking periods. He felt that smaller towns and villages were being treated differently and following the discussion at the Executive, Sawbridgeworth had kept its free period because of a

technicality. He felt that if the strategy took away free weekend parking, then cars would park on street and cause further problems.

Councillor Parsad-Wyatt said there were some important actions in the strategy such as electric vehicle charging points and a move to paperless ticketing. He said however that he would have to vote against the strategy as he was not comfortable with the suggestions in the document. He was concerned that emissions-based pricing would affect the poorest.

Councillor Deering said he echoed the comments of his colleagues. He said there were some actions in the strategy, like reducing emissions, that everyone could be supportive of. However, he felt that emissions-based pricing would discriminate against those who could not afford new cars. He added that residents and business owners did not feel their views had been listened to and he confirmed that the Conservative group would not be supporting the strategy.

Councillor Thomas said that the signs in the East Herts operated car parks were cluttered and could be confusing for visitors. He added that the poorest people in the community did not own cars and have to rely on public transport so the emissions-based pricing would not affect them.

Councillor Watson said that residents in Ware were pleased to see the rules being improved on Resident Parking Zones. He said the direction of travel was hugely encouraging and supported the strategy.

Councillor Copley referred to the comments from Councillor Deering about the impact on businesses. She said it was naïve to think that parking charges were the reason footfall had fallen in towns. She felt the council should be encouraging people to support their local shops

and not buy online.

Councillor Hopewell added that research had shown that businesses overestimate those who travel into town and park directly outside their premises. Visitors who drive stay within the towns for longer and were using the shops more.

Councillor Crystall said that one thing Councillor Glover-Ward had been working hard on was helping markets become more successful within the towns to pull visitors in when the high streets were quieter.

Councillor Horner echoed the comments from Councillor Watson and said that it was important to look at the rules around Resident Parking Zones as none had been introduced since the last time the rules were changed.

Councillor Daar said that the young people in her family did not drive and used public transport. She felt the council should lobby the county council for better bus prices.

Councillor Estop said she commended the strategy and the aims had been prepared in a careful way. She felt there was a good sense of fairness and balance on a complex matter.

Councillor McAndrew said that East Herts was a rural and urban district. He said that fuel poverty meant that people in rural areas were finding it difficult to get into the town centres.

Councillor Holt said he represented a rural ward and found that people visited the shops such as the butchers in a short time period because of the free parking available. He said it was often the case that if parking charges were increased then people would visit larger supermarkets on the edge of towns.

Councillor Hart asked if the council would be exploring incentives for car sharing and carpooling as this was a positive initiative.

Councillor Hoskin said that nothing specific had been explored so far but it was worth looking into.

Councillor Wilson said that this strategy attempted to be fair and said that if all areas were given reduced parking charges, there would be no income which the council needed. He said there were lesser chargers in Buntingford, Sawbridgeworth and Stanstead Abbots and said that the universal decline in footfall in high streets was unlikely to be due to parking charges.

Councillor Hoskin responded to the points raised within the debate. He said there was an ambition to get rid of non-essential journeys and research had shown that 70% of residents live within one or two miles of the town centre.

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 Parking strategy 2025 be approved.

356 CALL FOR SITES - UPDATE

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth presented the Call for Sites Update and said that the Council agreed to a review of the District Plan in late 2023 and a revised timetable was agreed in October 2024. In order to update the District Plan, the planning department needed to assemble a huge amount of evidence and a call for sites exercise was undertaken between July and September 2024.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said that landowners, developers, agents, and site promoters were invited to submit areas of land for the council to determine if they would be suitable for development. She said that submitting a site did not confirm that it would be selected for allocation in the District Plan and the report only detailed the outcome of the call for sites and presented the sites submitted.

Councillor Glover-Ward proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported. Councillor Swainston seconded the proposal.

Councillor Hart asked about weighting given to certain criteria when the planners were assessing the sites for development.

Councillor Estop said that it was important to have a sound District Plan and the planning department would now move to produce Strategic Land Availability Assessment to look at the sites and determine the best sites to allocate for development. She said this was the best process for a spatial strategy and not speculative submission of planning applications for larger sites. She did not think that Full Council was the right place for oversight of the process and needed to be a Member led Committee.

Councillor Buckmaster said he had faith in the planning policy team and said there was an Executive sub-committee to look at the review of the District Plan. He said that this report was part of the District Plan process, and the vast number of sites would be filtered out following engagement with other bodies such as the County Council and Herts Highways. He said that the reason for asking his earlier question under Item 8 was that the proposed reorganisation of local government would put additional pressure on the process and felt that

a conversation needed to be had with the government about what could realistically be achieved over the next few years.

Councillor Deering understood that this report was part of a process and knew that not all sites would be picked. He said that any communications with the public would be very important, and he called on the administration to do so. He said that the Conservative group would be supporting the recommendation but made it clear to residents that by supporting it, they were not taking any views on any particular sites.

Councillor McAndrew said that developing the District Plan was a massive task and said that there was a danger that some sites could come forward through the planning process to be developed.

Councillor Woollcombe said he welcomed the call for sites and asked whether there would be a similar call for infrastructure as the district was short on sewage treatment and water supply infrastructure.

Councillor Swainston welcomed recognition from Members that this was an essential process to go through.

Councillor Wilson responded to comments about communicating with residents and said that this would take place. He said that all councillors were responsible for communicating key messages to their resident.

Councillor Williams responded to Councillor Woollcombe's question that a call for infrastructure did not exist.

Councillor Glover-Ward said that she could not guarantee that sites that come through would not have planning applications submitted. In relation to the infrastructure, Thames Water and Affinity had a five-year programme of

infrastructure that they would be building based on likely sites that would come forward in the District Plan. The Executive District Plan Committee would be dealing with the strategic decisions, and these were meetings that other councillors could attend.

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 (A) the Call for Sites submissions be noted and agreed for evaluation through the Strategic Land Availability Assessment; and

(B) the results of the Strategic Land Availability Assessment be reported in due course.

357 BUDGET 2025/26 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2025-2035

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented the Budget 2025/26 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2025-2035 report and said that despite the uncertainty of the future of the district council following the government's Devolution White Paper, the council were still required to set a balanced budget.

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability said that £1.46 million of officer delegated savings and £492,000 of Executive recommended savings had been identified with the majority of officer delegated savings coming from contracts and leaving vacancies open. He said that some savings proposed for 2024/25 budget year were still to be implemented in the 2025/26 budget.

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability referred to the savings that had been rejected by the Executive such as reducing planning enforcement, reducing the

grant to Citizens Advice and council communications. He said that although these were non-statutory services, these represented good value for money for residents.

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability said that the cost of services were displayed in section 1.6 and there had been some gains from the extended producer responsibility scheme and a lower than expected staff pay award. However, these had been offset by a reduction in the income forecast for BEAM, rise in national insurance contributions and continuing liability for Charrington's House. He said that to cover these costs, an increase of 2.98% in Council Tax had been proposed and it was important that all the savings proposals were realised.

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability warned that there were risks ahead with external factors such as the cost of finance and business rates review which was outside the council's control. He said another risk was the performance of BEAM and whether it could reach its income target, but the business plan was being reviewed with the new manager.

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability thanked officers for their work in preparing the budget report and said the financial situation was challenging but the administration was able to present a balanced budget for 2025/26 and work continued at pace to reduce the gap in future years to ensure budget targets are met.

Councillor Brittain proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported. Councillor Swainston seconded the proposal.

Councillor Buckmaster said it was good to hear that BEAM was on its way to making its income targets and the leisure services were making money. He said that the administration had declared early on that they would like to replace the Executive system with an alternative but

seemed that they did not mind using their Executive powers. He referred to the decisions on the two key revenue generators; the increase in the garden waste charge and parking tariffs. He said he was not saying that the Executive had not followed due process but felt that Full Council was the place to discuss the budget. He said that he could not support a budget that his own residents were against. He asked why there were eight Executive Members which was the same as the county council that had a £1.2 billion budget.

Councillor Devonshire referred to page 533 of the report in relation to asset disposal. He asked why only £30,000 out of the £10.8 million assets identified for disposal had been completed.

Councillor Clements acknowledged the difficult position that the current administration had inherited. He referred to the list of recommended savings and the review of receptions. He said that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had recently looked at digital exclusion in the district and highlighted the importance of receptions. He asked if this meant the Executive were considering closing receptions.

Councillor Williamson referred to Charrington's House and asked why East Herts were still paying business rates at £300k a year. He said that Members were told that business rates liabilities would stop once the development agreement had been signed but the Audit and Governance Committee had been told that this was the wrong advice. He asked the Executive Member how long they were expecting to pay business rates on this building.

Councillor Dumont said that the Executive relied on Officers bringing them the full list of options to balance the budget. He said just because they appeared on the list, did not mean the Executive had encouraged the

option and said that there had been a number of red lines. He noted that the opposition had not mentioned the cut to Citizens Advice which had been cut under the previous administration.

Councillor Parsad-Wyatt referred to Appendix C and the suggestion that staff could be charged to use the car park. He thought it could be seen as hypocritical that staff were not being asked to pay to use the car park, but residents were being asked to pay more for car parking across the district. He acknowledged that it was small in financial terms but said it would increase the budget surplus by 50% and asked why it had been ruled out as an option.

Councillor Estop referred to Charrington's House and said that the previous administration had evicted tenants prematurely which had led to a loss in income. She felt it should have been occupied until the development process was underway.

Councillor Jacobs referred to the £170k for repairs at the United Reform Church and said he could not understand why that money was going back two years. He said a survey was due to be carried out on the building soon and if it required urgent works, he said it could not wait over a year because the money had been allocated to the incorrect financial year.

Councillor McAndrew said that he had requested a breakdown of charges to justify the increase in the garden waste at the Executive meeting but had yet to receive it and wanted to understand why there was a variance between the North Herts and East Herts charges.

Councillor Deering said that he was also concerned that the council had a shared service with North Herts but the increase in charges were twice as much. He echoed the

points raised by Councillor Buckmaster that the increases in fees and charges had been pushed through via executive decisions and also felt that Full Council was the correct forum for that discussion. He also echoed the points raised by Councillor Devonshire and the asset disposals. He said that council tax would not need to be increased if the income target of £10million had been achieved.

Councillor Hoskin responded to Councillor McAndrew's concern about the garden waste charge variance. He said that he was happy to supply the detailed information and said there were two distinct differences between East Herts and North Herts. He said that four vehicles were required to cover East Herts, whereas just three needed for North Herts and this additional vehicle cost £215k. He also explained that the routes in East Herts were longer than North Herts incurring additional costs. He then referred to the increase in parking charges and said this had been discussed at Overview and Scrutiny and the Executive and was done with complete transparency in two open sessions.

Councillor Copley said she felt the Executive were doing a good job in difficult circumstances. She referred to the comments about the disposal of assets and said that the administration had been left in a difficult situation by the previous one and had to make difficult decisions to sell assets.

Councillor Thomas praised the report in terms of its transparency. He said it was good that the Executive had displayed the potential savings they could have made and where the red lines were. He urged the Executive to continue with asset disposals as quickly as possible.

Councillor Swainston said the current administration did not close Charrington's House and could not deliver the ORL project in time. She said that the parking and waste

increases had been scrutinised by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and that all parties were represented on the committee. She commended the Executive on their proposed budget.

Councillor Williams said that he did not agree with comments made by the opposition and said that the Executive Member for Financial Sustainability had worked hard to get a balanced budget.

Councillor Buckmaster raised a point of order and said it was the opposition's job to hold the joint administration to account. He said the previous administration did not ask for Covid or the war in Ukraine to happen and the financial environment was challenging.

Councillor Brittain responded to points raised in the debate. He referred to the parking and garden waste charge increase and said that the Executive had been presented with options and it was either increase some charges or cut other important services.

Councillor Brittain said that the previous asset disposal target was too challenging and ORL was responsible for 80% of assets in the list. At the time, they were told that it could move forward once the Development Agreement had been signed but this was no longer the case. If they had known that previously, the budget could have been moved into future years. He said that the money had not been lost but that it was not available in the first place.

Councillor Brittain referred to charging staff for using the car park and said that the Executive had thought it was important to ensure staff were able to park without charge. He referred to the URC Hall and said that if the survey identified urgent works, it could be done. The budget in 2026/27 was an expectation but not definitive.

Councillor Brittain referred to the breakdown of the

charges for the garden waste. He said the Section 151 Officer was working on these, but he had seen a draft. He explained that the cost of the service to the council was greater than the revenue received for it due to indirect costs to the council. He said that there was no requirement for align charges with North Herts and this had not existed previously as when the service started, North Herts charged for it and East Herts did not. He said that it was important to be fair to residents and look at a fair charge for those who use the service as the majority of residents do not use the service and it would not be fair for them to subsidise the service for others.

The motion to support the recommendations having been proposed and seconded was put to a recorded vote and the result was as follows:

FOR

Councillors Adams, Brittain, Burt, Carter, Copley, Cox, Crystall, Daar, Dunlop, Glover-Ward, Hart, Hill, Hopewell, Horner, Hoskin, Marlow, Nicholls, Smith, Swainston, Thomas, Townsend, Watson, Williams, Wilson, Woolcombe (26)

AGAINST

Councillors Andrews, Boylan, E Buckmaster, Bull, Deering, Devonshire, Hollebon, Holt, McAndrew, Parsad-Wyatt, Stowe, Williamson, Woolf, Wyllie (14)

ABSTAINED

Councillors Butcher, Clements, Connolly, Estop, Jacobs, Redfern, Willcocks (7)

RESOLVED – that the budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan at Appendix A, savings programme at Appendix C, Capital Programme at Appendix D,

Fees and Charges at Appendix E and increase Council Tax by 2.98%, which will result in a Band D Council Tax increase of £5.82 to £201.04 per year be approved.

358 CAPITAL STRATEGY, MINIMUM REVENUE PROVISION POLICY AND TREASURY STRATEGY 2025/26

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented the Capital Strategy, Minimum Revenue Provision Policy and Treasury Strategy 2025/26. He referred to Appendix A and the £10.55million capital spend for 2025/26, the majority of which was for the purchase of new bins and refuse vehicles under the new waste contract which would be financed by new debt and small grants. He noted that 2025/26 represented the peak of council borrowing and the council should see borrowing reduced moving forward.

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability referred to appendix B and the Minimum Revenue Provision Statement which was required to be approved. He said that the Treasury Management Strategy at Appendix C was a legal obligation under the Local Government Act 2003.

Councillor Brittain proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported. Councillor Copley seconded the proposal.

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 Capital Strategy, Minimum Revenue Provision Policy and the Treasury Management Strategy 2025/26 including the Prudential Indicators contained within the reports be approved.

359 COUNCIL TAX SETTING 2025/26

The Chairman said that the final version of the Council Tax report had been published in the supplementary agenda.

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented the report which calculated the total council tax for each parish.

Councillor Brittain proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported. Councillor Horner seconded the proposal.

Councillor Deering said that he acknowledged the requirement for Council to set the Council Tax rates but reminded Members that the Conservative group had voted against the budget in the previous item.

Councillor Horner said he was pleased to see that the parishes were named correctly.

The motion to support the recommendations having been proposed and seconded was put to a recorded vote and the result was as follows:

FOR

Councillors Adams, Andrews, Boylan, Brittain, E Buckmaster, Bull, Burt, Butcher, Carter, Clements, Copley, Cox, Crystall, Daar, Deering, Devonshire, Dumont, Dunlop, Estop, Glover-Ward, Hart, Hill, Hollebon, Holt, Hopewell, Horner, Hoskin, Jacobs, Marlow, McAndrew, Nicholls, Parsad-Wyatt, Redfern, Smith, Stowe, Swainston, Thomas, Townsend, Watson, Willcocks, Williams, Williamson, Wilson, Woolf, Woollcombe, Wyllie
(45)

AGAINST

None

ABSTAINED

Councillor Connolly (1)

RESOLVED – that (A) the Council Tax resolution, as now submitted at Appendix A, be approved;

(B) the local precepts as set out at Appendix 'A' be noted; and

(C) the Hertfordshire County Council and Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire precepts be noted.

360 MILLSTREAM BUSINESS PLAN

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented the Millstream Business Plan. He said that the council was the only shareholder in Millstream and each year, it produced a 30-year business plan. For several years, Millstream had returned on its capital but there had been recent changes which had affected this income.

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability said that interest rates had increased and through the budget setting process, there was a case for winding down Millstream. He said that there were three scenarios set out in the report and the recommendation was supporting scenario 3, to dispose of its properties now.

Councillor Brittain proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported. Councillor Horner seconded the proposal.

Councillor Williamson said that it was a sad moment and

Millstream was part of an initiative to generate revenue for the council. He said it had been a good project and did deliver financially and provided housing for residents but recognised that circumstances had changed, and the paper laid out the situation well. He gave his personal thanks to officers who set up Millstream, especially the Head of Housing and Health. He asked if it was the intention to wind up the company after the properties had been disposed of.

Councillor Buckmaster said the report showed how agile the council needed to be. He said that the environment had changed, and it was right that the council took the opportunity to change course. He said that he supported the recommendation.

Councillor Wilson said that when the previous administration took on four capital projects at once, the Liberal Democrats said that it was not prudent.

Councillor Horner acknowledged that Millstream had been set up to make money for the council and at the time, it was a prudent was of going forward. He supported this decision and agreed with Councillor Williamson that it was with a heavy heart.

Councillor Brittain thanked Members for their comments and echoed the thanks for the Head of Housing and Health. He said that external events had had an impact, the Ukraine war had increased the energy price, interest rates and inflation. He confirmed it was the intention to wind up the company when properties had been disposed of.

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 (A) Millstream Property

Investment Ltd's 2025/26 Business Plan, presented in the EXEMPT Appendix A, which includes property disposal as an option, be approved

(B) acting as Millstream's sole shareholder, Council agrees to use its reserved power, under the Shareholder Agreement with the company, to resolve that the company disposes of its properties.

361 APPOINTMENT OF S151 OFFICER

The Interim Chief Executive presented the report on the Appointment of a S151 Officer. She said that the Council was required under Section 151 of the Local Government Act to appoint a Chief Finance Officer and following an open and competitive recruitment process Brian Moldon has been offered the full-time position from 1 April 2025.

Councillor Crystall proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported and said he believed Brian Moldon would be a great addition to the Leadership Team. Councillor Wilson seconded the proposal.

Councillor Deering thanked the Interim Head of Strategic Finance for his help in the short time he had been at the council.

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 appointment of Brian Moldon as the Council's Chief Financial Officers and Section 151 Officer with effect from 1st April 2025, be approved.

362 PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2025/26

The Executive Member for Corporate Services presented the Pay Policy Statement 2025/26 and said that the report came to Council every year as it was a legal requirement under the Localism Act 2010 to publish it. He said the report set out the level of remuneration of Chief Officers.

Councillor Dumont proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported. Councillor Cox seconded the proposal.

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 Pay Policy Statement 2025/26 be approved.

363 CODE FOR LOCAL AUTHORITY STATUTORY OFFICERS

The Executive Member for Corporate Services presented the Code for Local Authority Statutory Officers and said the code was the result of a collaborative effort by SOLACE, CIPFA and LLG. He explained that the code focused on the 'Golden Triangle' and the statutory roles that underpinned good governance.

The Executive Member for Corporate Services confirmed that the golden triangle structure remained strong and compliant at East Herts and aligned with national recognised standards. The Code made a commitment to transparency and leadership in the governance framework. He said it had been presented to the Standards Committee for comments on 29th January 2025.

Councillor Dumont proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported. Councillor Dunlop seconded the proposal.

Councillor Clements said that when the code was presented to the Standards Committee, there was a reference in it to the Decision-Making Accountability report which said the golden triangle was not working as it should and believed that was the reason the Code was being presented to Council to adopt. He said that he did not object to the code but without seeing the report, Members would not be confident that the issues had been resolved. He asked if Members could have sight of the report.

Councillor Dumont said that the Code had been developed over a year ago and it was being adopted by several local authorities across the country.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that the Code had been developed in July 2024 and had been discussed in several forums such as the Hertfordshire Heads of Legal group and the Standards Committee. He said that the LGA conducted a decision-making accountability (DMA) report last year which was at the behest of the previous Chief Executive in order to assist with the formulation of suggested structures for the senior management team.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services said that the DMA identified that the Golden Triangle wasn't operating quite as strongly as it should be at that time and highlighted that it was an area that should be strengthened. He said that the DMA was not disclosable as it was conducted in order to allow the Leadership Team to have full and frank discussions around what senior leadership structure better suited the authority today and, in the future, and in order to be able to have those discussions, a safe space was required to develop ideas, debate live issues and reach decisions away from external interference and distraction.

Councillor Crystall added that the key parts of the DMA report highlighted the structure of the Leadership Team, and this was something that the Interim Chief Executive was currently looking at.

Councillor Deering said that the DMA report had been referred to in a public meeting and felt that any privilege attached to it was removed. He asked for clarification if the report was privileged or non-disclosable.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services said it was not disclosable but did not have legal privilege status.

Councillor Deering asked for a written note that set out that provision.

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 Parking strategy 2025 be approved.

364 REVIEW OF THE CONSTITUTION

At this point in the meeting, Councillor Crystall proposed, and Councillor Deering seconded, a motion that the meeting would continue beyond 10 pm and until the remaining business of the agenda had been determined. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the meeting would continue beyond 10 pm and until the remaining business of the agenda had been determined.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced the Review of the Constitution. He said that the constitution was kept under regular review to ensure that

it was up to date and fit for purpose. As a result of a recent review by officers, a number of changes were proposed, some as a result of legislative changes and other more minor ones in relation to planning.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services said that Members may be aware that the new Procurement Act 2023 came into force on 24 February 2025 which required the procurement team to undertake a root and branch review of the Contract Procurement Rules at Section 9 of the Constitution. The new CPR had been designed to ensure that the Council was compliant with UK legislation, followed best practice and achieved value for money in all its procurement activities.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services said that in addition to the changes to the CPR, the planning related sections were also reviewed and these changes fell into three areas relating to master planning, speaking arrangements at DMC and minor clarifications/updates to the delegations. In terms of master planning, Members will note that the report explains that since the adoption of the District Plan in 2018 the majority of masterplans for allocated sites have followed the Council's approach and been endorsed. For those sites that were coming forward on a speculative basis or where the outline planning permission has been granted, master planning is dealt with via a discharge of condition. This usually means they have to be dealt with within a certain period of time. If not, deemed discharge is assumed.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services clarified that there were circumstances where an exemption may apply to these timescales such as development that falls within Environmental Impact Assessment, but this did not change the proposed changes which provide flexibility to deal with different circumstances.

Councillor Copley proposed that the recommendation in

the report be supported. Councillor Nicholls seconded the proposal.

Councillor Copley said that she sat on the Member Constitution Review Group and said that the procurement changes were a straightforward response to new legislation. She said that she also sat on DMC and thought the change to the speaking arrangements made sense as members could now ask speakers on points of clarification.

Councillor Williamson said he also sat on the review group and thanked officers for their work in preparing the amendments.

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 updates and consequential amendments to the Constitution identified in the attached appendices be approved.

365 COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW - DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager presented the Community Governance Review draft recommendations. She explained that the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 empowered a principal council such as East Herts to review and make changes to community governance within its area. At its meeting on 16 October 2024, Council agreed to carry out a Community Governance Review with the Community Governance Review Working Group being appointed by Council to consider consultation responses and provide recommendations for the review.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said that the initial consultation was carried out between 28 October 2024 and 6 January 2025 and a wide range of responses were received as listed at Appendix B. She said that the Community Governance Review working group met on 6 February 2025 to consider the consultation responses and provide a set of draft recommendations for Council to approve for a further public consultation. The draft proposals are listed at Appendix A and maps are included where relevant. The group's rationale for each draft recommendation is provided at paragraph 2.13 – 2.52.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said that if the draft recommendations were agreed, they would go out to public consultation from 3 March to 12 May 2025. The working group would then meet in June to consider all consultation responses and propose a set of final recommendations to the Council at its meeting on 23 July 2025.

Councillor Williams proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported. Councillor Thomas seconded the proposal.

Councillor Glover-Ward was pleased to see a draft recommendation to put the Rush Green roundabout into one ward.

Councillor Stowe expressed disappointment on behalf on Aston Parish Council that there was no recommendation to create a community council in the Hazel Park development. He felt this should be reviewed and the full development would increase the village population three times.

Councillor Parsad-Wyatt said that Sawbridgeworth Town Council had debated the proposals and decided that it did not want to be warded but one draft recommendation

proposed to ward Sawbridgeworth. He said it felt like the working group was not listening to the people on the ground and the fact that other towns have wards did not recognise the specific identities across Sawbridgeworth.

Councillor Buckmaster agreed with the comments from Councillor Parsad-Wyatt. He said warding did not work for the town and said that this council expressed support for proportional representation some time ago and felt Sawbridgeworth was the simplest form of this voting with a long list of candidates.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager emphasised that these recommendations were not final and encouraged people to respond to the consultation.

Councillor Hollebon felt that the whole of Thorley parish should be absorbed into Bishop's Stortford.

Councillor Nicholls said she noticed that Buntingford Town Council were not in favour of being warded but she welcomed the chance for local residents to put their views across.

Councillor Deering said some reservations had been aired and discussed the idea of deferring the decision.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said that the timetable had begun for the review which had to be completed within a year.

Councillor Deering requested that the minutes reflect the reservations held by some Members.

Councillor Connolly said she was on the working group which was politically balanced. She said the group had heard what had been expressed and would take this back to their discussions alongside comments that had come through the consultation.

Councillor Carter asked who would be involved in this consultation.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager confirmed that it was open to the public. The parish councils would be written to and residents who were affected by a potential boundary change would also be written to.

Councillor Crystall said that Members would be able to attend the working group's meeting to make representations if they wished.

Councillor Deering asked who made the final decision.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said the working group would form the final recommendations following the consultation and it would be for Council to approve them.

Councillor Thomas said he was on the working group and the group kept coming back to what made good governance for residents, not just for councillors. He said the draft recommendations were going out for public consultation and thanked those who had made representations in the debate. He thanked the officers involved for guiding the group.

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 (A) the outcome of the first stage consultation be noted.

(B) Council agree the Draft Proposals for the Community Governance Review at Appendix A, launching a public consultation on those (noting

that the Final Recommendations will be considered at a future Council meeting, taking the results of the public consultation into account).

366 CHILD POVERTY IN HERTFORDSHIRE

Councillor Marlow presented his motion on notice. He said that there were 3.4 million children in poverty in the UK with 1 in 11 in poverty in Hertfordshire and 1 in 20 in East Hertfordshire. He said this showed a complete failure of the system and society and he was asking Council to write to the Chancellor and Prime Minister to remove the two-child limit on benefits, reinstate the £20 uplift and pay that uplift to parents under 25.

Councillor Copley seconded the motion and reserved her right to speak.

Councillor Redfern said that she did not oppose the motion but highlighted that the 2015 start date was misleading. She said that child poverty began to rise in 2010.

Councillor Wilson said that parents and families in his ward were struggling financially, and it was not a case of just getting a better job. He said in these circumstances, the state should be helping, and it was not the fault of the children. He said the gap between the rich and the poor was growing and there were frustrated and disempowered people out there losing faith in mainstream politics.

Councillor Carter supported the motion and said that the majority of children of families in poverty were working. She said the cost of living was really high and the motion called for a solution that could improve lives of children and invest in their future.

Councillor Parsad-Wyatt said some of the statistics on

child poverty were eye opening. He said that he supported the motion in principle, but he would have to abstain as he felt the motion did not ask this council to do anything except write a letter. He said getting the funding to provide this extra money could have unintended consequences and said he would like to see a motion brought forward about what the council can be doing as a district.

Councillor Buckmaster said that the motion meant well but he was concerned about the aims. He said that two-thirds of the county's proportion of council tax went on social care, a quarter on children's services. He said that all governments did not provide enough money and the county council was subsidising Special Educational Needs on behalf of the government. He thought that a working group would be the best mechanism to come up with some measures to help alleviate child poverty.

Councillor Crystall said that the working group suggestion was a good one. He said that he was happy to write a letter and highlighted that the Executive had been determined not to cut the Citizens Advice funding.

Councillor Clements said he would be abstaining for similar reasons. He said that the government had its own limitations and the one of the first things they did after the election was set up a task force for tackling child poverty. He did not think that a letter would encourage the government to do more than what was already happening.

Councillor Daar said that the council had given grants out for summer holiday activity clubs and put on Arts in East Herts which were some examples of what the council was already doing.

Councillor Smith said she was a teacher and so the issue was close to her heart. She felt it was short sighted to not

put children first and that there were always competing needs. She thought the idea of a working group was great and said she would be happy to support setting it up.

Councillor Dumont said that serious issues had been raised and said that the council did not have the same mechanism as the government, such as raising taxes, to help solve this problem. He felt it was disappointing that the chamber seemed to agree with the motion but that some were choosing to abstain on technicalities.

Councillor Hart said that the Labour government had previously said they would remove the two-child benefit cap. She felt that the council should be holding central government to account for promises they make or break. She said she supported the sentiment of the motion.

Councillor Copley said that funding for children was the most important thing. She urged the Council to come together and send a clear message to the government as well as looking at how to improve lives through a working group. She felt that abstaining on technicalities was ludicrous and said the Council owed it to children in this situation to do something.

Councillor Deering said that he presented the 2025/26 budget to Herts County Council in his role as a county councillor and said they were committing £290 million to children's services. He said that no one here was not supporting children but as a district council, he would like to see some reference to what the district could do. He said he would be abstaining but would be supportive of a working group.

Councillor Marlow responded to the points raised. He said that the motion was not saying the government was not doing anything but that it could do better. He urged Members to vote for the motion to let the government

know where the council stood.

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

RESOLVED - This Council notes that there has been a sharp rise in the number of children living in poverty in this country since the year 2015. There are now 4.3 million children growing up in poverty, and many of them are living in households where at least one parent is working. This Council notes a report from Dr Barnardo's Charity which shows that 1 in every 11 children living in Hertfordshire is now living in poverty, and in East Hertfordshire it is 1 in 20 children.

Figures from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in March 2023 for East Hertfordshire showed that 1,958 children under the age of 16 were living in poverty. This Council further notes that the Child Poverty Action Group has several suggestions for reducing Child Poverty. One is to provide adequate social security, and to raise the level of Universal Credit for parents under the age of 25. (They currently receive less than those who are over the age of 25.) Another is to remove the Two Child limit, as Child Poverty is higher in larger families. This Council therefore resolves to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and to the Prime Minister and ask that they take urgent steps to a) remove the Two Child limit on payment of all social security benefits, b) to reinstate the uplift of £20 in Universal Credit and c) to pay this uplift to parents under the age of 25 as well as those over the age of 25.

The meeting closed at 10.35 pm

Chairman
Date