

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
EXECUTIVE HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
TUESDAY 18 MARCH 2025, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor (Chairman/Leader)
Councillors B Crystall, C Brittain, A Daar,
J Dumont, V Glover-Ward, S Hopewell and
T Hoskin.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors B Deering and T Stowe.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Richard Crutchley	- Team Leader (Planning Policy)
James Ellis	- Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer
Laura Guy	- Principal Planning Officer
Peter Mannings	- Committee Support Officer
Katie Mogan	- Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
Helen Standen	- Interim Chief Executive
Ben Wood	- Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy

382 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor

Goldspink and Councillor Wilson.

383 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader of the Council announced the sad passing of Paul Burt, the Planning Support Service Manager. He sent his condolences and best wishes to his friends, family, and colleagues. A minute's silence was held to remember Paul.

384 MINUTES - 11 FEBRUARY 2025

Councillor Glover-Ward asked for a correction at minute number 327. She said that there would not be a consultation in autumn 2025 but they would be starting the preparatory work then and the consultations would be held in 2026 and 2027.

Councillor Glover-Ward proposed, and Councillor Hopewell seconded a motion that the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 February 2025, as amended, 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 11 February 2025, as amended, be approved as a correct record, and signed by the Leader.

385 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

386 ENGLISH DEVOLUTION WHITE PAPER INTERIM PLAN

The Leader of the Council introduced the English Devolution White Paper Interim Plan. He said that the government had published its white paper on devolution

in December which laid out its plan for reforms in two tier areas. The government had asked Hertfordshire to come up with an interim proposal to be submitted to them which must be submitted by 21 March 2025.

The Leader of the Council said that last month, all 11 councils in Hertfordshire have met to discuss the options and have been meeting frequently. He said the options proposed in the report had been a positive, collaborative effort and it had been brought to the Executive for discussion and agree for it to be submitted.

Councillor Daar felt that there were not enough resources delegated to town and parish councils to fulfil their new roles under these proposals. She hoped that this would be resolved moving forward.

Councillor Crystall said that town and parish councils had been a consideration, but it was not yet clear how their role would change. It may be that parishes are put in where they do not currently exist.

The Interim Chief Executive said that a working group was being set up specifically for town and parish councils and Ware had expressed an interest to join the group. She said that central government had not yet been clear how they fit into the overall picture.

Councillor Brittain said that from a public point of view, the biggest question was what would happen to Council Tax. He referred to page 26 and said implications needed to be understood in relation to council tax for the different options.

Councillor Crystall said there was a lot of data that did not exist yet. He said that a considerable amount of work had been done by all councils but were only starting to see the real implications of what the different models mean.

Councillor Glover-Ward said there was still some discussion about the ideal number of residents in a unitary. If the ideal number was 350k – 500k then the four unitary option was not a viable solution.

Councillor Crystall said it was balance between financial sustainability and democratic representation.

Councillor Dumont said that there were a lot of questions that did not have answers at the moment. He said that this was a once in a generation opportunity and was pleased to hear that progress was being made. He said that there were things that concerned him such as the transition costs of £52-54 million and questioned who foots the bill.

Councillor Hoskin said that this exercise was about economies of scale and said that option one looked too large. He referred to the waste service and said that when the district hands over, it was important that the service did not stop start but was a continuation.

Councillor Deering said that this was coming from the government, not the county council. His personal view was that it was important to consider what was best for residents. He said it was difficult to see any savings realised through breaking up the county and felt that most residents knew which council to go to for certain issues, i.e. the county council for highways, adult services, and the district for planning services. He said that he struggled to see where the benefits for residents were coming from and if residents knew this reorganisation was happening then they might wish for the money to be spent elsewhere.

Councillor Hopewell said she had concerns about larger services such as adult and children's services being spread over multiple councils. She said that in Nottingham, a workplace parking levy was ringfenced and

put into local bus services. She felt that residents appreciated having a local feeling and East Herts residents would not be particularly connected to other residents in Hertfordshire.

Councillor Stowe said he remembered the last reorganisation in 1973 and felt it was a disaster and lots of money was wasted. He said the argument was that devolution gave more power to the people, but he felt it would do the opposite.

Councillor Hopewell referred to the practicalities of IT infrastructure and the transfer of residents across different systems and the risk to front line services.

Councillor Glover-Ward said she had mentioned the devolution plans to residents at the Gilston Residents Association and they were horrified that they might lose their local council. She said that residents may not be happy about planning decisions, but recognised officers do the best they can and felt having services locally was better.

Councillor Daar said she was disappointed that there was no mention of environmental sustainability and the current ongoing work with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. She said that on the doorstep, people did not understand the role of the Police and Crime Commissioner and felt that if there was an elected mayor, there would be little connection to residents.

Councillor Crystall said that there was a feeling of a loss of democratic accountability and connection to local councils in the proposals. He said that the Hertfordshire Growth Board had a set of missions that were clearly environmentally focused and councils across Herts agreed this was an important stream to focus on.

Councillor Dumont said that the debate was good and

important, and it was good to voice any concerns.

Councillor Crystall said that conversations with residents was important, and the council had a page dedicated to local government reform which would have updated FAQs as and when more information came from the government.

Councillor Deering said that he struggled to see how these proposals would bring more devolution. He said that councillors would still be democratically elected, but they would be more remote.

The motion to support the recommendation was proposed by Councillor Crystall and seconded by Councillor Daar.

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 Government’s proposals for English Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation be noted, and

(B) the Executive delegates to the Leader of the Council, in consultation with the Deputy Leader, that the interim proposals for Local Government Reorganisation in Hertfordshire as set out in the report be submitted to the Government by the deadline of 21 March 2025.

387 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT 2024/25 - Q3 FORECAST TO YEAR END

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented the Q3 forecast to year-end report which was currently showing a £955k overspend. He said the list of variances was shown at Appendix C and 75% of the

overspend related to BEAM. A change to the accounting policy to capitalise on interest had resulted in a reduced interest payment of £340k. He said that work was ongoing to reduce outstanding debt and old debt over 180 days totalled £2.2 million.

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

Councillor Crystall referred to the reduction to the end of year overspend and asked if this would continue to decrease over the financial year.

Councillor Brittain said that number was a predicted overspend and the fact that it was lower than the Q1 estimate did not mean that it would continue to get lower. He said it would depend on outcomes at BEAM.

Councillor Daar referred to paragraph 2.3 and the moving of £160k to reserves to meet future potential losses on property funds.

Councillor Brittain said the money had been invested into two property funds and these were in the process of being wound up for differing reasons. He said that the likely capital received back from funds would be less than the council put in, but the exact amount was still unknown. It was anticipated that the council would know within the next three to six months.

Councillor Dumont referred to the 75% overspend on BEAM and highlighted how unpredictable things could be. He recognised the good work within the outstanding aged debt.

Councillor Brittain said work was being done and the debt figure would decrease over the next six months as issues were resolved. He said that a lot of it would be resolved

by writing it off as a lot of the debt was not recoverable.

Councillor Deering referred to paragraph 2.7 and that debt over 180 days had gone up which suggested this was fresh debt. He said the fresher the debt, the greater the chance of it getting paid.

Councillor Brittain said that one of the issues raised during the work was that some of the invoices that the council was raising were not valid so things in the debt account were there that should not have been counted as income.

Councillor Deering asked if the team would be going after fresh debt.

Councillor Brittain said that whilst looking at the old debt, the department could understand why it was there. He said that he understood the point about catching up on recent debt, but the exercise had to be done to identify old debt that was recoverable. He said that systems were being changed to avoid debt occurring in the first place by moving people onto direct debits.

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 reasons for the net revenue budget end of year projected overspend of £955k be noted; and

(B) the capital programme forecast outturn of £9.083m, carry forward of £7.835m be noted.

388 CORPORATE PROCUREMENT STRATEGY 2025-2030

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented the Corporate Procurement Strategy 2025-

2030. He said the strategy was underpinned by the Procurement Act 2023 which came into force in February 2025 and reformed existing rules focussed on cutting red tape, supporting innovation, transparency and simplifying processes to work with more small and medium sized businesses.

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

Councillor Dumont said that there was a video on the government's website to explain the changes. He said that social value was important and a lot easier for larger companies to demonstrate. He said that the evidence was asked for at the start but was not followed through to monitor its success and he encouraged the council to take a proactive approach in getting social value from contracts.

Councillor Daar said that the strategy covered community wealth building adequately which boosted local economies. She said that one consideration of awarding contracts is local if they spent money locally.

Councillor Hoskin said that the council bought services from the county council as the waste disposal authority but the tracker on the waste stopped when it left the UK. He said there needed to be traceability.

Councillor Brittain said that was a good point and the practicalities could be worked through.

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 the updated Corporate Procurement Strategy 2025-2030 be approved.

389 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID-YEAR REVIEW 2024/25

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented the Treasury Management Mid-Year Review which highlighted the key issues in the economic background and council borrowing. He said that all the council's borrowing was now short-term loans, and the report showed a reduction in property investment as investment funds would be being wound up.

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

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 – to recommend to Council to approve the Mid-Year Treasury Management review and Prudential Indicators for 2024/25.

390 EAST HERTS EXECUTIVE SCRUTINY PROTOCOL

The Committee Support Officer presented the East Herts Executive Scrutiny Protocol which had been developed because of new government guidance being issued in April 2024 about the purpose of Overview and Scrutiny and how this should be conducted.

He said that the protocol document set out the principles that would define the relationship between the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Executive. Overview and Scrutiny Members considered the protocol on 4th March, and Members of Overview and Scrutiny agreed to sign up to the protocol. Comments from the committee included adding the word 'overview' into the title and adding the ability to scrutinise external organisations.

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

Councillor Crystall said it was a positive document and recognised a useful way of working.

Councillor Dumont was pleased to see that there would be an agenda item for the Executive to bring updates back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

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 and Overview and Scrutiny protocol be approved with effect from 18 March 2025, and

(B) the Executive and Overview and Scrutiny protocol be reviewed after June 2027.

391 UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth presented the UK Shared Prosperity Fund report. She said that money had been provided to the council from the government and the spending of this money had been delegated to Officers in consultation with Executive Members. She referred to page 117 which showed the five main spending streams.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth ran through a number of highlights and projects that had benefitted from the grant money and said that officers would be providing a full evaluation of the projects later in the year. She thanked everyone involved for their work and felt that the rewards spoke for themselves.

Councillor Glover-Ward proposed that the recommendations in the report be supported. Councillor Daar seconded the proposal.

Councillor Crystall said this was a good news story.

Councillor Glover-Ward said that there were more great projects out there, but she could not mention them all.

Councillor Hopewell said she echoed the comments that this was a great piece of work and that most of these projects were not achievable otherwise.

Councillor Daar reflected that the council had done a lot of hard work on developing strategies which has enabled good projects to be identified.

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) Members review progress to date; and

(B) Members consider priorities for the 2025-26 year.

392 EAST HERTS DISTRICT PLAN REVIEW – BUNTINGFORD EMPLOYMENT STUDY 2025

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth presented the Buntingford Employment Strategy. She said that in order to update the District Plan, there was a large evidence base to be collated underpin and part of that evidence base was to have an understanding of the town's current employment market in order to guide policy decisions and whether further employment land was needed.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said that the key findings of the report was that Buntingford was experiencing significant housing growth, a lack of vacancies and a loss of employment land.

Councillor Glover-Ward proposed that the recommendations in the report be supported. Councillor Hopewell seconded the proposal.

Councillor Crystall asked if every town would have an employment study.

Councillor Glover-Ward confirmed that would be the case.

Councillor Crystall asked how long the report took to produce.

The Principal Planning Officer said that this study had been commissioned in November 2024 and had been a desktop study so could be worked through relatively quickly.

Councillor Hoskin asked how this document sat alongside the Hertfordshire Growth Board and the requirement for employment to sustain new housing.

The Principal Planning Officer said that the employment study was part of the bigger picture and would be looked at alongside district wide employment studies and the wider evidence base for infrastructure.

Councillor Hoskin asked if there were any case studies where an employment study had been used as a planning consideration elsewhere and worked.

The Principal Planning Officer said there was an emphasis on understanding that there was a balance between making employment and housing more sustainable.

Councillor Deering said he was in favour of the report and every town needed employment facilities and people needed jobs. He hoped the other studies would be expediated as much as possible.

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 – To recommend to Council that the Buntingford Employment Study (2025), attached as Appendix A, be agreed as part of the evidence base to inform the new East Herts District Plan and as a material consideration for Development Management purposes in the determination of planning applications.

393 EAST HERTS DISTRICT PLAN REVIEW – EAST HERTS STRATEGIC VISION

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth presented the East Herts Strategic Vision report. She said that the strategic vision would be used to inform the debate and a unified direction of the council's approach to growth. She said that the report discussed the reasoning behind the vision based on the important issues and challenges facing the district. The Strategic Vision was formed via a series of workshops with the Leadership Team and councillors and a result of engagement with strategic stakeholders.

Councillor Glover-Ward proposed that the recommendations in the report be supported. Councillor Dumont seconded the proposal.

Councillor Crystall thought that it was a great vision document and said the process had been really engaging. He asked when the consultation for the document would

be.

Councillor Glover-Ward said that there would be two mandatory consultations at various stages. She said that one would be expected towards the end of next year.

Councillor Hopewell asked if there was any opportunity to provide any additional support to town and parish councils in aiding their understanding of the document.

Councillor Glover-Ward said that she had opened up DMC training to all parish councillors and Planning forums had been introduced. She said she could set up a session on the District Plan if it was required.

Councillor Dumont felt that the visioning sessions had been very productive with cross party representation.

Councillor Brittain asked what happened to the District Plan if devolution went ahead and the district no longer existed.

Councillor Glover-Ward said there was experience of this within the planning team at previous authorities. She said that two separate plans had been adopted by the unitary and stayed in place until it was replaced by the next one. She said that the National Planning Policy Framework insisted that everything was to be plan led.

Councillor Daar asked if that meant the future potential unitary could have several plans adopted.

Councillor Glover-Ward expected that to happen initially but eventually there would be one plan to cover the whole unitary.

Councillor Stowe said that the last District Plan took more than a couple of years to go through the process.

Councillor Glover-Ward said that the process would be challenging but the 2.5 years timescales was set by the government.

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 – to recommend to Council that (A) the East Herts Strategic Vision is made available to stakeholders and the wider community to begin a discussion about the new District Plan, and to seek comments on the Vision;

(B) Engagement on the Strategic Vision should commence, and take the form of a six-week period of activity during Spring / Summer 2025 through a range of different forums, including online and in-person; and

(C) A further report detailing any feedback is prepared following engagement to agree a final version of the Strategic Vision, and to set the out the next stages of plan-making.

394 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 8.30 pm

Chairman
Date

