

Council
1 February 2021

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL held on Monday 1 February 2021 at 7.30 pm via Zoom.

PRESENT: Councillors R.Trigg (Mayor)
P.Hebden (Deputy Mayor)

D.Bell, M.Birleson, E.Boulton, J.Boulton, S.Boulton,
H.Bower, J.Caliskan, A.Chesterman, L.Chesterman,
M.Cook, M.Cowan, J.Cragg, A.Dennis, S.Elam,
B.Fitzsimon, G.Hayes, M.Holloway, T.Jackson-Mynott,
C.Juggins, S.Kasumu, T.Kingsbury, M.Larkins, R.Lass,
F.Marsh, G.Michaelides, T.Mitchinson, L.Musk,
N.Pace, H.Quenet, J.Quinton, J.Ranshaw,
D.Richardson, A.Rohale, B.Sarson, P.Shah,
J.P.Skoczylas, P.Smith, S.Thusu, F.Thomson,
J.Weston, S.Wrenn, P.Zukowskyj

OFFICIALS Chief Executive (K.Ng)
PRESENT: Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) (N.Long)
Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) (S.Russell)
Monitoring Officer (M.Martinus)
Head of Resources and Chief Finance Officer (R.Baker)
Governance Services Manager (A.Marston)
Principal Governance Officer (J.Anthony)

88. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and noted by the Mayor.

The hard copies of minutes will be signed by the Mayor as soon as it is reasonably practicable or alternatively, electronic signatures can be arranged after a meeting.

89. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L.Brandon, J.Broach, S.Markiewicz and K.Thorpe.

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90. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS BY MEMBERS

Councillors S.Boulton, L.Chesterman and P.Zukowskyj declared non-pecuniary interests in items on the Agenda as appropriate as Members of Hertfordshire County Council.

91. ANNOUNCEMENTS

91.1. Holocaust Memorial Day

Wreaths were laid at the memorials in both Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield on Wednesday 27 January 2021. Holocaust Memorial Day was an important reminder of the lessons we could learn from the past, the Mayor was please the Council was able to mark the occasion online enabling the local community to share in the act of remembrance. The Mayor thanked everyone who took part in the videos, the contributions were both thoughtful and thought-provoking.

91.2. Civic Awards

The Council had a great response to the awards this year. The nominations will now be reviewed by the judging panel.

92. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS

92.1. Question to the Leader from Councillor M.Holloway

“On the matter of forthcoming local elections, in order to reassure the public, can the leader describe some of the measures being recommended to Councils in order to make the 50 plus polling stations Covid Secure in Welwyn Hatfield?”

Answer

The Leader asked Councillor F.Thomson (Executive Member, Governance, Public Health and Climate Change), to answer:-

“Like all councils in this same position, we are closely monitoring and will strictly follow all government guidance on the subject, as well as that of bodies such as the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA). In addition, if additional requirements come forward from any such guidance, we will take steps to also put these into place. Further, all Returning Officers are working with and seeking guidance from the Director of Public Health and their safety officers.

In order to ensure that polling stations are safe places for voters, staff and other attendees, the following are the proposed arrangements the council will be putting into place, which will be similar to the measures the public have become used to over recent months in shops and banks, such as hand sanitiser, floor markings and face coverings.

For example, there will be:

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- Tape for floor markings - In order to ensure that social distancing can be maintained at all times, floor markings inside and outside the polling station will help to manage queues, maintain distance between staff members, and between staff and voters, with a one way system around the polling station.
- Additional signage – Signs will be in place to remind voters of the need to follow public health guidelines such as social distancing, the wearing of face-coverings and only entering if symptom-free.
- Hand sanitiser - Hand sanitiser will be available on desks and at both the entrance and exit to the polling station, with voters encouraged to clean their hands on entry and exit.
- Face coverings – the use of face-coverings will be required for all individuals in a polling station (unless they are subject to an exemption) in line with government regulations. All staff will have a face covering. Whilst the majority of voters will likely be in possession of their own personal face covering, and will have been encouraged to bring it with them to vote, the station will have a stock of masks available to provide to those who have not brought their own face covering, and people will be advised to dispose of these face coverings themselves after they have left the polling station.
- Additional pencils - Whilst all voters should be encouraged to bring their own pen or pencil to the polling station, there will be a spare stock of single-use or 'cleaned' pencils available to provide for use where needed.
- Additional staff – where possible, additional staff will be employed to manage queues and to advise voters to follow public health guidance.
- Regular cleaning- There will be cleaning throughout the day of touchpoints, such as doors, polling booths and any writing implements, as recommended by public health authorities."

Councillor Holloway in a supplementary question asked, in light of the tragic circumstances the UK finds itself in regards to the death toll of Covid, it is nearly 170 in Welwyn Hatfield. Do you agree that it is in fact responsible and not shameful, that we consider all avenues for safe and secure elections and would you agree that we should be able to have an on-going conversation on this subject without being accused of playing party politics?

Councillor Thomson answered that safety is paramount and we will regularly review the situation as will the Government. The Government has said they will be reviewing the situation and as further guidance comes forward then we will look to implement it. We are all keen to see a Covid safe election. I think most of us do not want to see the elections delayed any further but it is about providing the safest election as possible for everybody.

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92.2. Question to the Leader from Councillor K.Thorpe

“Does the leader agree with me that given the severity of Coronavirus in our area, that it was entirely right for political parties to suspend campaigning activities, including leaflet deliveries to ensure the safety of residents and to safeguard efforts to drive down infection rates?”

Answer

“Thank you for your question.

Whilst the campaigning activities of political parties are not a matter the Council has any powers or duties over, I agree that like the Council is doing, all organisations should take all necessary COVID safe steps to ensure that every one of us is kept safe and avoids the spread of this dreadful infection.

Having said that from my and my group’s point of view, I agree that it is entirely right for political parties to suspend campaigning activities, including leaflet deliveries during high Tier and lockdown situations. Whilst there seems to be an element of interpretation of the rules, the intention of the ‘Stay at Home’ message, even with the exceptions listed, would seem to prohibit such activities. Indeed, I am aware of a letter from Chloe Smith MP Minister of State for the Constitution and Devolution which states - Current national lockdown restrictions in England, say: “You must not leave, or be outside of your home except where necessary”.

The Government’s view is that these restrictions do not support door to door campaigning or leafleting by individual political party activists. - I know both your and my party have suspended these activities during heightened restrictions, but I am aware of reports that this isn’t true of every party in this council.

It is a shame that we couldn’t have come to a joint understanding on this, but I hope that those delivering reconsider their actions, the effect it may have on the pandemic and the mixed message it sends to the public.”

93. BUDGET 2021/22

Report of the Chief Executive setting out the proposals for approval of the 2021/22 budgets for revenue (General Fund and Housing Revenue Account) and capital and also asking the Council to approve the Borough element of the Council Tax for 2021/22 (final approval would be sought at the special Council meeting on 23 February 2021).

It was moved and seconded by Councillors D.Bell and T.Kingsbury that the recommendations in the report be approved.

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93.1. Amendment 1

It was moved and seconded by Councillors P.Zukowskyj and M.Cowan that the budget proposals recommendations in the report be amended as follows:-

“As Verge Protection Orders (VPO) are rolled out, parking enforcement should be proactively extended to cover those areas. It is proposed that up to £25k is added to the parking enforcement budget for 2021/22 and this will be funded from the Strategic Initiative Reserve. Officers should bring a progress report on how VPO's are being enforced and how the additional budget is being utilised to a Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel (CPPP) meeting in October/November 2021.”

On being put to the meeting there voted:-

**RESOLVED:
(unanimous)**

Voting FOR: D.Bell, M.Birleson, E.Boulton, J.Boulton, S.Boulton, H.Bower, J.Caliskan, A.Chesterman, L.Chesterman, M.Cook, M.Cowan, J.Cragg, A.Dennis, S.Elam, B.Fitzsimon, G.Hayes, P.Hebden, M.Holloway, T.Jackson-Mynott, C.Juggins, S.Kasumu, T.Kingsbury, M.Larkins, R.Lass, F.Marsh, G.Michaelides, T.Mitchinson, L.Musk, N.Pace, H.Quenet, J.Quinton, J.Ranshaw, D.Richardson, A.Rohale, B.Sarson, P.Shah, J.P.Skoczylas, P.Smith, F.Thomson, S.Thusu, R.Trigg, J.Weston, S.Wrenn, P.Zukowskyj

And the first Amendment was declared CARRIED.

93.2. Amendment 2

It was moved and seconded by Councillors P.Zukowskyj and M.Cowan that the budget proposals recommendations in the report be amended as follows:-

“That a garage site disposals programme be established to transfer sites to the value of £4.5m per annum to the Housing Revenue Account for the next three years to:

- increase land supply for the provision of social housing (approximately 200 units);
- provide capital receipts to the General Fund; and,
- reduce borrowing costs associated with borrowing.

That the reduction to borrowing costs be utilised to:

- generate additional efficiencies for the council in the longer term; and,
- to fund a new role of Climate Change Officer. Their responsibility would include training other council officers in energy saving options and cross-cutting climate change initiatives.

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To utilise the strategic initiatives reserve to start the programme and repay most of the upfront investment by year four.”

On being put to the meeting there voted:-

RESOLVED:
(12 voting FOR and 32 AGAINST)

Voting FOR: J.Caliskan, M.Cowan, A.Dennis, S.Elam, T.Jackson-Mynott, F.Marsh, H.Quenet, J.Quinton, J.Ranshaw, A.Rohale, J.P.Skoczylas, P.Zukowskyj

Voting AGAINST: D.Bell, M.Birleson, E.Boulton, J.Boulton, S.Boulton, H.Bower, A.Chesterman, L.Chesterman, M.Cook, J.Cragg, B.Fitzsimon, G.Hayes, P.Hebden, M.Holloway, C.Juggins, S.Kasumu, T.Kingsbury, M.Larkins, R.Lass, G.Michaelides, T.Mitchinson, L.Musk, N.Pace, D.Richardson, B.Sarson, P.Shah, P.Smith, F.Thomson, S.Thusu, R.Trigg, J.Weston, S.Wrenn

And the second Amendment was declared LOST.

93.3. Recommendations as amended

The recommendations in the report, as amended, were then put to the meeting and it was

RESOLVED:
(22 voting FOR and 22 AGAINST with Mayor’s casting vote FOR)

Voting FOR: D.Bell, E.Boulton, J.Boulton, S.Boulton, H.Bower, J.Cragg, B.Fitzsimon, P.Hebden, C.Juggins, S.Kasumu, T.Kingsbury, R.Lass, G.Michaelides, T.Mitchinson, N.Pace, D.Richardson, B.Sarson, P.Smith, F.Thomson, S.Thusu, R.Trigg, S.Wrenn

Voting AGAINST: M.Birleson, J.Caliskan, A.Chesterman, L.Chesterman, M.Cook, M.Cowan, A.Dennis, S.Elam, G.Hayes, M.Holloway, T.Jackson-Mynott, M.Larkins, F.Marsh, L.Musk, H.Quenet, J.Quinton, J.Ranshaw, A.Rohale, P.Shah, J.P.Skoczylas, J.Weston, P.Zukowskyj

- (1) That Council note the recommendations from Cabinet, and the Statement of the Chief Financial Officer on the robustness of budgets and adequacy of reserves (appendix N)
- (2) That Council also note that the following amounts for the year 2021/22 have been set in accordance with regulations made under Sections 31A and 31B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as agreed by Cabinet on 5 January 2021:

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	<u>100% TAXBASE</u>	<u>99.40% TAXBASE</u>
Welwyn Garden City	18,084.8	17,976.3
Hatfield	12,241.0	12,167.6
Welwyn	4,713.2	4,684.9
Ayot St Lawrence	70.1	69.7
Ayot St Peter	113.9	113.2
North Mymms	4,424.9	4,398.4
Essendon	427.2	424.6
Northaw & Cuffley	3076.8	3,058.3
Woolmer Green	572.8	569.4
Total	43,724.7	43,462.4

(3) That Council approve the following budget proposals:

(4) General Fund

(4.1) The proposed General Fund Budget as summarised in Appendix A, and detailed in appendix B.

(4.2) The inclusion of the savings and growth proposals into the budget as detailed in appendices C and D.

(4.3) The 2021/22 fees and charges which have been incorporated into the budget proposals, as set out in appendix E.

(4.4) The increase in the Council's Band D Tax of £4.23 (1.97%), taking the average Band D Tax to £219.15 for 2021/22.

(4.5) That £610k be added to the Covid-19 earmarked reserve from the 2021/22 budget, the expenditure of which will be delegated to the Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Executive Member for Resources. This will be fully funded from the one off Covid-19 Support Grant received from the Government.

(4.6) That the Special Expenses Scheme as set out in section 3.5 continue into 2021/22, and the Special Expenses detailed in Appendix M be approved for inclusion in the Council Tax for 2021/22.

(4.7) That up to £25k is added to the parking enforcement budget for 2021/22 and this will be funded from the Strategic Initiative Reserve. Officers should bring a progress report on how VPO's are being enforced and how the additional budget is being utilised to a Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel (CPPP) meeting in October/November 2021.

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(5) Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

- (5.1) That dwelling rents are increased by CPI+1% in accordance with Government legislation, resulting in an average rent of £109.01 per week.
- (5.2) To continue the policy of charging formula rent when vacant properties are re-let.
- (5.3) The Housing Revenue Account budget for 2021/22 as shown in appendix F.
- (5.4) The 2021/22 fees and charges which have been incorporated into the budget proposals, as set out in appendix H.
- (5.5) The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to maintain HRA working balances to a minimum of 5% of rental income.

(6) Capital Programme

- (6.1) The Capital Programme for 2021/22 to 2025/26 as set out in Appendix I.
- (6.2) The Capital Financing for the Capital Programme, for 2021/22 to 2025/26 as set out in Appendix J, and note the forecast capital balances in Appendix K.

(7) Medium Term Financial Strategy

- (7.1) The Medium-Term Financial Strategy and Financial Governance Framework, including all annexes and prudential indicators for 2021/22 – 2023/24 as set out in appendix L.

94. NOTICES OF MOTIONS

The Council considered the following notice of motion submitted under Procedure Rule 16:-

94.1. The following motion has been submitted by Councillor J.Weston and was seconded by Councillor M.Birleson:-

“No cuts to Universal Credit – let families keep the £20 increase.

Aim: To maintain the income of low and middle income families.

This council notes:

- Next April the government plans to cut the benefit level for millions of claimants by ending the time limited increase to the basic rate of Universal

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Credit (and the tax credit equivalent) announced by the Chancellor on 20 March as part of his pandemic response package.

- The £20 a week boost reflected the reality that the level of benefits were not adequate to protect the swiftly increasing number of households relying on them as the crisis hit. Exactly because that increase was a very significant and welcome move to bolster low- and middle-income families' living standards, its removal will be a huge loss.
- Pressing ahead would see the level of unemployment support fall to its lowest real-terms level since 1990-91, and its lowest ever relative to average earnings. Indeed, the basic level of out-of-work support prior to the March boost was – at £73 a week (£3,800 a year) – less than half the absolute poverty line.
- The increase in benefits has had a positive effect on the lives of thousands of local claimants who are better able to pay for life's essentials such as food, clothing and utilities.
- The local economy has also benefited from the increase in benefit levels as claimants spend their money locally thereby supporting local businesses and jobs.

This council resolves to:

- Write to the Chancellor, Rishi Sunak and to the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson demanding that the £20 increase to Universal Credit is made permanent and extended to claimants on legacy benefits.
- Work with other local government organisations and local voluntary organisations to pressure the government to make the £20 increase to Universal Credit permanent.”

After discussion, it was moved and seconded by Councillors J.Weston and M.Birleson and

On being put to the meeting there voted:-

FOR the Motion– 22
AGAINST the Motion – 0
ABSTENTIONS for the Motion – 22

And the Motion was declared CARRIED.

95. REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S CONSTITUTION

Report of the Monitoring Officer on the approval to changes to the Constitution as part of the ongoing review and modernisation of the Council's governance processes following consideration by the Constitution Review Group (CRG).

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The report seeks the Council's approval to make further changes to the Constitution as part of the ongoing review and modernisation of the Council's governance processes, as recommended by the peer review.

The cross-party Constitution Review Group continues to meet regularly and had recently reviewed the Financial Regulations which Members were asked to agree at this meeting.

The timing of the review of the section of the Constitution coincided with recent changes made to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Financial Management Code.

The regulations had been re-written to focus on identifying the correct controls required; revising the language to bring it in line with industry practice and streamlining the document to avoid duplication.

A summary of the changes had been provided in Appendix 3 of the report.

It was moved and seconded by Councillors T.Kingsbury and F.Thomson and

RESOLVED:
(unanimous)

- (1) Council noted and agreed CRG's recommendations of the 14 December 2020 as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.
- (2) Council approved the revised Financial Regulations section of the Constitution as provided in Appendix 2: key changes summarised in Appendix 3.

96. PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2021/22

Report of the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) on the approval of the Council's Pay Policy Statement for 2021/22.

The Localism Act 2011 required relevant authorities to prepare a Pay Policy Statement each financial year.

Paragraph 3.3 of the report set out the specific matters that must be included in the Council's statutory pay policy.

The policy also set out the Council's overall rewards strategy for the whole workforce.

The Chief Officers' pay as a ratio to the average salary have not been included in the statement this year. The ratios in previous statements have been forecast based on nine months data, however, they do not need to be published in the

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statement. The Council will report actual ratios from 12 months data at the end of the financial year, which will provide a more accurate picture.

Following Council approval, the Pay Policy Statement will be published on the Council's website as soon as possible.

It was moved and seconded by Councillors F.Thomson and T.Kingsbury and

**RESOLVED:
(unanimous)**

That the Pay Policy Statement for the period 2021/22 be approved.

97. CLIMATE CHANGE UPDATE

Report of the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) updating Members on progress since the Council declared a climate change emergency in 2019.

The Council had set itself five ambitious targets, including to reduce carbon emissions from our own estate and operations to net zero by 2030.

The Council had investigated the baseline position:

At Government level, Government data showed that the Borough emitted 629,000 tonnes of carbon from industrial, commercial, domestic and transport activities in 2019.

At Borough level, an independent appraisal showed that the Council emitted 2,507 tonnes of carbon from its own buildings, services and transport in 2019.

An independent survey showed that the Council's woodland and tree stock sequesters 2,400 tonnes of carbon per year.

The Council had created a cross-party Member Group and an Officer Group to ensure the Council achieves its objectives.

The Council had prepared a draft climate change strategy for consultation and the final version will be presented to the Climate Change Member Panel on 25 February and Cabinet on 9 March 2021.

The strategy sets out international agreements, national strategies, local plans and partnerships that will guide the climate change agenda.

The strategy contains a list of 'live' actions that will be implemented by the Council, contractors and partners over coming weeks, months and years.

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The Council intends to offer carbon literacy training to Councillors on the 10 February 2021 and to officers later in the spring to improve their understanding of climate change and ability to consider it as part of decision-making.

To further support its commitment, the Council had allocated £150,000 for the climate change agenda, and has so far earmarked £50,000 towards an Eastern New Energy project to help local business premises to become more energy efficient and £13,000 to install electric vehicle charge points in council-owned car parks.

The Council has submitted decarbonisation bids to replace gas-fired boilers with air/water source heat pumps at Campus East, Campus West and Hatfield Swim Centre that will reduce their energy consumption by approximately two-thirds.

Councillor Thomson thanked Officers and Members for their commitment to achieving the Council's Climate Change targets.

It was moved and seconded by Councillors F.Thomson and T.Kingsbury and

RESOLVED:
(unanimous)

Members noted the objective for the Council to be net carbon zero by 2030, the progress made on the agenda and the future actions that will be delivered over coming weeks, months and years to help tackle climate change.

98. APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES AND GROUPS

To approve the appointments of Members to Committees and Groups as listed in the Agenda Item 13.

It was moved and seconded by Councillors T.Kingsbury and F.Thomson and

RESOLVED:
(unanimous)

Council approved the appointments of Members to Committees and Groups, as set out in Agenda Item 13.

Meeting ended 10.12pm
AM