

Council  
2 February 2022

## WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL held on Wednesday 2 February 2022 at 7.30 pm in the Roller City, Campus West, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6BX.

PRESENT: Councillors P. Hebden (Mayor)  
B. Fitzsimon (Deputy Mayor)

D. Bell, M. Birleson, J. Boulton, S. Boulton, L. Chesterman, J. Cragg, A. Dennis, S. Elam, G. Ganney, G. Hayes, A. Hellyer, M. Holloway, T. Jackson-Mynott, T. Kingsbury, J. Lake, R. Lass, F. Marsh, S. McNamara, G. Michaelides, L. Musk, R. Platt, H. Quenet, J. Quinton, J. Ranshaw, D. Richardson, A. Rohale, B. Sarson, P. Shah, J. Skoczylas, P. Smith, C. Stanbury, K. Thorpe, S. Thusu, F. Thomson, T. Travell, R. Trigg, S. Tunstall, F. Wachuku, J. Weston and P. Zukowskyj

OFFICIALS Chief Executive (K. Ng)  
PRESENT: Head of Law and Administration (M. Martinus)  
Head of Resources (R. Baker)  
Governance Services Manager (A. Marston)  
Principal Governance Officer (J. Anthony)

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40. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2022 were deferred to be confirmed at the next council meeting on 22 February 2022.

41. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Bond L. Brandon, C. Juggins, S. Kasumu and N. Pace

An apology was also received from Councillor M. Birleson who was only able to attend up to the vote on the proposed amendment to the budget report (item 45.1 below).

42. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS BY MEMBERS

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Councillors S. Boulton, P. Hebden, T. Kingsbury, F. Thomson, S. Thusu and P. Zukowskyj declared non-pecuniary interests in items on the Agenda as appropriate as Members of Hertfordshire County Council.

Councillor A. Hellyer declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 9 as a retail consultant. Councillor L. Musk declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 7 as an employee of Marks and Spencer plc. Councillor F. Marsh declared a non-pecuniary interest on items on the agenda, as a member of the Welwyn Garden City BID (business improvement district) and Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce.

43. ANNOUNCEMENTS

43.1. Mike Larkins

Councillors were aware that former councillor Mike Larkins had passed away on 31st December 2021. The service would be held at Our Lady Queen of Apostles Church on Wednesday 23 February 2022 followed by the burial at The Lawn Cemetery.

The Mayor invited Members to share their thoughts. Tributes were led by Councillor L. Chesterman who explained how Mike's career had developed though his appointment as 'secretary' to various bodies and boards, as well as his love for travel and his dog Arnie.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor T. Kingsbury stated that Mike Larkins was pragmatic, always thinking of others and was a great councillor by wanting the best for the community. It was stated that it was a sad time for his friends, family and the labour group.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrats & Independent Group, Councillor P. Zukowskyj stated that Mike Larkins was courteous, kind and a real gentleman. He stated the community had lost a real champion.

The Leader of the Labour Group, Councillor K. Thorpe, stated that Welwyn Hatfield and the Labour Party had lost a fantastic servant and lovely person. It was expressed that Mike Larkins had considerable knowledge of all things Welwyn Hatfield and was passionate about caring for others. He stated that Mike Larkins had a smile and laugh that could lift the gloomiest situations.

Councillors L. Musk and F. Thomson also paid personal tributes to Mike Larkins.

The Council then held a minute's silence for reflection.

43.2. Quiz Night

The Mayor thanked everybody who supported the Quiz Night at Campus West on 3rd December 2021. Members noted that 113 tickets were sold, it was a

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great evening, and the food was excellent. The Mayor gave a special thank you to Campus West staff for their help. The evening raised over £1300 for JOCA.

43.3. Mayors Annual Fundraising Dinner

The Mayor announced the dinner, to be held at Brocket Hall, had been moved to the new date of Friday 25th March 2022. It was hoped that this would avoid the worst of Omicron. The Mayor gave thanks to everybody who had already bought tickets and ask if others would like to come along to book soon. The Mayor was looking forward to a great evening and with support, raising valuable funds for JOCA. The Mayor asked if anybody had any raffle or auction prizes they would like to donate, please let him know, or contact Sally Houghton.

43.4. Cabinet Members' Announcements

Councillor F. Thomson (Executive Member, Housing and Climate Change) gave the following announcement:

Members may have seen the article in today's local paper, which suggested Welwyn Hatfield's climate action is the worst in Hertfordshire; and I thought it was important to clarify some of the claims made.

A not-for-profit organisation Climate Emergency UK (CEUK) has scored councils across the country on their Climate Change Action Plans.

CEUK are open on their website that they have not included any actions councils are undertaking to reduce emissions and improve biodiversity; and this was important – they have not scored councils' performance.

Additionally, the organisation recognised and stated on their website that "Councils may be doing good things which aren't reflected in their Action Plan. That is why next year we will be assessing all Councils on what they are actually doing".

Along with officers, I was disappointed with the scoring by CEUK, and especially with the methodology used, which did not accurately reflect the continued progress this council has made since declaring a climate emergency in June 2019; and I welcome their move to score performance.

This Conservative administration remains fully committed to tackling the causes and effects of climate change, and as members will be aware we have a climate change strategy, which can be found on the Council's website: [www.welhat.gov.uk/plans-strategies/climate-change-strategy](http://www.welhat.gov.uk/plans-strategies/climate-change-strategy)

We did not underestimate the challenge of tackling climate change, however I am confident we were making important progress in this area, as is evidenced by the number of projects currently underway, and which members of the council's cross party Climate Change Group were updated on at last week's Climate Change meeting.

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The council has been working with communities, businesses, and other partners on a variety of initiatives to reduce carbon emissions, as well as promoting energy efficiency measures, sustainable construction and behavioural change.

For example, we were taking positive action to address our own carbon footprint and successfully secured a decarbonisation grant of over £2 million to improve the energy efficiency of Campus West, Campus East and Hatfield Swim Centre. The current developments under construction as part of our regeneration of Hatfield Town Centre will meet the government's Future Homes Standard, which will increase their sustainability and reduce their carbon footprint. We were helping local businesses to reduce their carbon emissions with grants of up to £5,000.

For residents, we had recently expanded our EV (electric vehicle) charging points across Welwyn Hatfield.

We were planting over 2,000 trees to create pocket woodlands in Black Fan; and we have introduced a weekly food waste collection which converts food into electricity and fertiliser. The council is also working with Affinity Water to help tenants reduce their water consumption.

This is just a small selection of the many projects the council was undertaking to reduce carbon emissions, and I was pleased to say that we have seen a reduction of around 507 tonnes of carbon over the past 12 months. However, there is more to be done, and we will continue to do so.

#### 44. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS

##### 44.1. Question to the Leader from Councillor Siobhan Elam

“With the recent announcement, in Welwyn Garden City, of the closure of both Marks and Spencer and Next, there is a danger of decreased customer footfall causing a knock-on effect to other premises and thus seriously threatening the viability of our Town Centre.

In the light of this, has the Council any plans to meet with and discuss the future of the Howard Centre with either the owners, Land Estates Management, or their letting agents, Savills, in order to proactively take steps to minimise the damage that may be suffered?”

#### Answer

When the announcement of Marks and Spencer leaving the Howard Centre was made, I shared many of the concerns of our residents and immediately asked for a meeting to be arranged with the owner of Howard Centre, LaSalle Investment Management and Marks and Spencer.

We met with LaSalle yesterday and have expressed our disappointment and concerns about Next and Marks and Spencer. It is reassuring to hear that they

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are actively engaging with Marks and Spencer trying to find a solution and that a number of potential occupiers have expressed interests in their other vacant units. LaSalle is also looking at a number of long-term options that would improve the financial sustainability of the centre.

With regards to Marks and Spencer, as members will have seen, I have written to them that they should at least remain a presence in our town, especially the food offer and I'll be meeting with them directly in the coming weeks.

44.2. Question to the Leader from Councillor Paul Zukowskyj

"In April 2021 a resident reported to me concerns about a wall that is part owned by the council. The wall, around six feet high, was in such poor repair loose bricks were clearly resting above head height, presenting a significant health and safety risk to residents, their children and their pets.

I finally received a response in May 2021, nearly a month later. An assessment of works needed was listed.

I chased this in August 2021, to be told that the failure to respond was an oversight and progress was being made, but ownership issues had made things complicated.

In November 2021 I chased again, no response.

In mid-December, I chased again, this time copying the Chief Executive in. She responded saying she had asked senior housing officers to sort it and let me know what was happening as I'd not had a response in November. I got no further response.

On 17th Jan, I wrote to the Chief Executive again. This time I informed her that if the wall was not at least made safe by the following Friday, 21st Jan, I would attend and do the work myself.

Sometime in the intervening days council staff finally attended to remove the loose brickwork and fence off the damaged wall, making it much safer.

Why does this council apparently need to have the leader of the opposition threaten to undertake basic demolition work themselves after ten months of complete inaction by this council, when the safety of residents, children and pets is at risk?"

**Answer**

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

Thank you for your question.

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As I'm sure Cllr Zukowskyj is aware, this particular issue was complicated by the fact that the wall is in multiple ownership and the majority of the wall is not actually owned by the council. Nonetheless she agreed that this should have been dealt with much earlier and was not acceptable that this has taken as long as it had.

Since I had taken on the Housing Portfolio in May, I had been working very closely with the Chief Executive to review the work of the Housing Property Services Team and that we recognised the culture needed to be changed in some of the teams to ensure that staff follow through the initial enquiry and job requests. Given the volume of repair jobs that the team were required to carry out (for example, the team had dealt with in excess of 20,000 responsive repairs since May), we were also investing in systems to ensure that jobs could be tracked more effectively and that a new staffing structure will be put in place in the coming months

Councillor Zukowskyj in a supplementary question stated that there were other walls in disrepair around the borough and that if he could forward any new issues to the appropriate section and copy Councillor Thomson in. Councillor Zukowskyj also stated that it would be good to have some indication of how long the administration feels is appropriate for a response when someone raises something that could be a health and safety issues and asked what a reasonable response time frame would be?

Councillor Thomson answered that the work should have been carried out sooner. Structures were being reviewed and she, with Officers to seek, ways the service could be improved. In response to specific time frames any repairs were risk based but in this instance the response took too long.

45. BUDGET 2022/23

Report of the Chief Executive setting out the proposals for approval of the 2022/23 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 2022/23 (final approval to be sought at the Special Council meeting on 22 February 2022).

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

45.1. Amendment

It was moved and seconded by Councillors P. Zukowskyj and F. Marsh 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 (200 units);*

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- *provide capital receipts to the General Fund; and,*
- *reduce borrowing costs associated with borrowing.*

*That the reduction to borrowing costs be utilised to:*

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

*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:

**(13 voting FOR, 23 voting AGAINST and 6 abstained)**

**Voting FOR: A. Dennis, S. Elam, M. Holloway, T. Jackson – Mynott, A. Rohale, F. Marsh, R. Platt, H. Quenet, J. Quinton, J. Ranshaw, J.P. Skoczylas, J. Weston, P. Zukowskyj**

**Voting AGAINST: D. Bell, J. Boulton, S. Boulton, J. Cragg, B. Fitzsimon, G. Ganney, P. Hebden, A. Hellyer, T. Kingsbury, J. Lake, R. Lass, S. McNamara, G. Michaelides, D. Richardson, B. Sarson, P. Smith, C. Stanbury, F. Thomson, S. Thusu, T. Travell, R. Trigg, S. Tunstall, F. Wachuku**

**Voting ABSTAIN: M. Birleson, L. Chesterman, G. Hayes, L. Musk, P. Shah, K. Thorpe**

**And the Amendment was declared LOST.**

45.2. Recommendations

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

RESOLVED

**(23 voting FOR and 18 AGAINST)**

**Voting FOR: D. Bell, J. Boulton, S. Boulton, J. Cragg, B. Fitzsimon, G. Ganney, P. Hebden, A. Hellyer, T. Kingsbury, J. Lake, R. Lass, S. McNamara, G. Michaelides, D. Richardson, B. Sarson, P. Smith, C. Stanbury, F. Thomson, S. Thusu, T. Travell, R. Trigg, S. Tunstall, F. Wachuku**

**Voting AGAINST: L. Chesterman, A. Dennis, S. Elam, G. Hayes, M. Holloway, T. Jackson – Mynott, A. Rohale, F. Marsh, L. Musk, R. Platt, H. Quenet, J. Quinton, J. Ranshaw, J.P. Skoczylas, P. Shah, K. Thorpe, J. Weston, P. Zukowskyj**

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- (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 2022/23 have been set in accordance with regulations made under Sections 31A and 31B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992:

	100% TAXBASE	99.40% TAXBASE
Welwyn Garden City	17,853.5	17,746.4
Hatfield	12,378.2	12,303.9
Welwyn	4,747.1	4,718.6
Ayot St Lawrence	70.0	69.6
Ayot St Peter	113.4	112.7
North Mymms	4,438.3	4,411.7
Essendon	431.8	429.2
Northaw & Cuffley	3,113.5	3,094.8
Woolmer Green	614.4	610.7
TOTAL	43,760.2	43,497.6

- (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 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 £4.95 (2.26%), taking the average Band D Tax to £224.10 for 2022/23.

- (4.5) That £250k be added to the Covid-19 earmarked reserve from the 2022/23 budget, the expenditure of which will be delegated to the Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Executive Member for Resources. This will be partly funded from the one-off funding received from the Government in 2022/23.

- (4.6) That the Special Expenses Scheme as set out in section 3.5 continue into 2022/23, and the Special Expenses detailed in Appendix M be approved for inclusion in the Council Tax for 2022/23.



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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 £113.92 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 as shown in appendix F.

(5.4) The 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 2022/23 to 2026/27 as set out in Appendix I.

(6.2) The Capital Financing for the Capital Programme, for 2022/23 to 2026/27 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 2022/23 – 2024/25 as set out in appendix L.

46. NOTICES OF MOTIONS UNDER PROCEDURE RULE 16

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

46.1. The following motion has been submitted by Councillor Max Holloway and will be seconded by Councillor Glyn Hayes

This Council believes that healthy high streets are essential for employment, shopping and leisure but many shops and businesses were struggling even before the Covid pandemic.

This Council notes retail is among the sectors most affected by the coronavirus pandemic; the almost complete shutdown of non-essential shops between March and June 2020 and subsequent lockdowns have hit businesses hard.

High street retail employment fell in more than three-quarters of local authorities between 2015 and 2018 according to the Office of National

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Statistics and more than half of all UK consumers were shopping online before the pandemic.

This Council notes the impact being seen on our own high street and shopping districts.

This Council welcomes the willingness of Government to acknowledge the problems and come forward with initiatives in response to these challenges such as the furlough scheme and the Covid support business loans.

However, as the Treasury Select Committee stated in 2019, the current system of Business Rates places an unfair burden on “bricks and mortar” businesses compared to online retailers, and the Business Rate system needs radical overhaul.

This Council resolves to:

- Write to the Government to urge it to consider replacing business rates with a system which is fit for purpose and which levels the playing field between bricks and mortar businesses and online retail giants.
- Explore what local action can be taken to support our high streets through working more closely with local businesses of all sizes to better understand their needs.

After discussion, it was moved and seconded by Councillors M. Holloway and G. Hayes

On being put to the meeting there voted:

**FOR the Motion– 41**  
**AGAINST the Motion – 0**  
**ABSTENTIONS for the Motion – 0**

**And the Motion was declared CARRIED.**

47. PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2022/23

Report of the Chief Executive on the approval of the Council’s Pay Policy Statement for 2022/23.

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

Paragraph 3.3 of the report sets out the specific matters that must be included in the Council’s statutory pay policy and the requirements remain the same as in previous years.

This policy also sets out the Council’s overall rewards strategy for the whole workforce.

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Council is asked to approve this Pay Policy Statement for the period 2022/23.

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 T. Kingsbury and D. Bell and,

RESOLVED:  
(**unanimous** of those present - 41)

That the Pay Policy Statement for the period 2022/23 be approved.

48. TIMETABLE OF MEETINGS 2022/23

Report of the Head of Law and Administration on the approval of the timetable of meetings for the 2022/23 Municipal Year.

It was moved and seconded by Councillors T. Kingsbury and D. Bell and,

RESOLVED:  
(**unanimous** of those present - 41)

That the timetable of meetings for 2022/23 be approved.

Meeting ended at 10.19 pm  
JA