

Council  
1 February 2023

## WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL held on Wednesday 1 February 2023 at 7.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Campus East, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE.

PRESENT: Councillors B.Fitzsimon (Chairman)  
G.Ganney (Vice-Chairman)

M.Birleson, J.Bond, S.Bonfante, J.Boulton, S.Boulton,  
L.Brandon, J.Broach, L.Chesterman, J.Cragg,  
L.Crofton, A.Hellyer, M.Holloway, D.Jones, C Juggins,  
S.Kasumu, T.Kingsbury, J.Lake, F.Marsh,  
G.Michaelides, T.Mitchinson, G.Moore, L.Musk,  
N.Pace, D.Panter, J.Quinton, J.Ranshaw,  
D.Richardson, T.Rowse, B.Sarson, P.Shah,  
M.Siewniak, J.Skoczylas, P.Smith, C.Stanbury,  
F.Thomson, K.Thorpe, T.Travell, R.Trigg, S.Tunstall,  
F.Wachuku, J.Weston and P.Zukowskyj

OFFICIALS Chief Executive (K. Ng)  
PRESENT: Executive Director (Finance and Transformation (R. Baker)  
Executive Director (Place) (C. Barnes)  
Service Director (Resident and Neighbourhood) (S. McDaid)  
Interim Assistant Director (Legal and Governance) (S. Saunders)  
Governance Services Manager (A. Marston)

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### 39. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 December 2022 were approved as a correct record and noted by the mayor.

### 40. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S. McNamara, R. Platt, S. Thusu and J. Weston.

### 41. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

#### 41.1. Question to the Leader from Alan Reimer

“The council gives a lot of information about the use of the recycling bins and in particular, the use of the inner bin. The advice appears on the WHBC website and printed literature. However, I have evidence that both inner and outer bins are mixed together in the refuse collection vehicles. There is no separation of the contents of the inner bin from the rest of the recycling bin. Because of this, is there any reason for supplying the inner bins and should WHBC’s information on recycling be amended?”

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**Answer:**

The question was answered by Councillor S. Kasumu, Executive Member for Environment and Climate Change:

“Thank you for the question. Our recycling trucks are split bodied. One compartment for mixed recycling and the other for separated paper, and they are both located at the back of the truck. This might give a false impression to the public that all the recycled materials are mixed together at the point of collection. Paper is collected separately as the processing of paper that is not mixed with other dry recyclables can be recycled back into a higher grade of paper and returns a higher price per tonne. Therefore, it is always our preference that if a resident has an inner caddy that they use it to keep their paper separate, and this is what our guidance is based on. Due to the impact of raw material availability, the lead times for the delivery of new inner caddies has been extended, which has meant that on occasion we have instructed residents to place paper in the body of the blue lidded bin with other dry recyclable material. The facility where our mixed recycling goes to can accept paper, and it is still recycled, contributing to our overall recycling rate. Thank you.”

42. **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS BY MEMBERS**

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

43. **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The mayor made the following announcements:

43.1. **Holocaust Memorial Day**

A gathering to mark Holocaust Memorial Day was held on The Campus last Friday 27 January 2023, attended by the Vice Lord-Lieutenant Ant Chapman, along with representatives from the Youth Council, local faith communities and the public. There were thought-provoking speeches, readings, and the symbolic release of doves, before viewing artwork in Campus West. The mayor expressed her thanks to everyone who took part in this moving event.

43.2. **Civic Awards 2023**

The nominations are now closed and will be reviewed by the judging panel. The Civic Awards are sponsored this year by Urbaser who will present the Environmental Award, and the University of Hertfordshire who sponsor and present the Young Person Award.

43.3. **Mayor's Civic Service - 26 February 2023**

The mayor hoped many of the councillors will be able to attend the Civic Service, which will this year take place at Our Lady, Queen of Apostles Church in Welwyn

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Garden City, with the service conducted by Father Norbert Fernandes. By the time of the service, Father Norbert will have been Installed as Canon Norbert Fernandes at Westminster Cathedral on 7 February 2023.

43.4. Mayor's Charity Fundraising Dinner - 17 March 2023

The mayor thanked those who had already booked tickets for the fundraising dinner. For those unable to come, the mayor asked them to consider making a donation of raffle or auction prizes for the evening, to help raise funds for the Welwyn Hatfield Women's Refuge.

43.5. Vigil for Ukrainian Families

One year on from the start of the Ukraine conflict, a vigil has been arranged for 24 February at 5pm in the town centre. This is open to the public to join, gathering by the statue of Ebenezer Howard.

43.6. Cabinet Member Announcement

Councillor F. Thomson made the following announcement:

"I'm pleased to provide an update to Full Council on the council's housing compliance situation. Two weeks ago, the council received a letter from the Regulator for Social Housing notifying the council that the regulatory notice would be removed from their website on the 25th of January. This is obviously a key milestone for the council and has shown the level of confidence the regulator has in the council to turn around the compliance situation. In particular it makes reference to the honesty and transparency with which we identified and published the root cause of the issues. I would like to thank the Chief Executive and also our Housing Compliance Manager for the huge amount of work they have done over the last year in a bid to get us to this situation, to the strong compliance position we are in now."

44. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS

44.1. Question to the Leader from Councillor Max Holloway

This question was withdrawn.

44.2. Question to the Leader from Councillor Michal Siewniak

"It is now almost a year since Marks and Spencer closed their store in the Howard Centre to the concern of many residents. Can the Council advise and give tangible examples of how discussions are going with the owners and managers of the Howard Centre and other key stakeholders to relet or repurpose space in that development? For instance, in meetings between M&S and council leaders, M&S reported that they had shared with the council their requirements for a larger Food Hall unit in a highly accessible location. Following the departure of M&S, Next and other retailers there is now circa 150,000 sq. feet of space available out of a total space of 230,000sq. feet meaning 65% of the space is available to let."

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**Answer:**

“The Council takes great pride in all of our town centres and neighbourhood centres across the borough, and the investment this council has made in recent years to strengthen them for our residents and businesses. Members will recall that that I made my feelings known at the time and wrote to Marks and Spencer's, which led to a meeting involving myself and officers of the council, the Howard Centre, and Directors of Marks and Spencer's. Indeed, members of all parties were united in their disappointment at the closure of M&S which was commercial decisions taken in privately owned units.

Whilst the challenges facing traditional town retail from the trend towards online shopping, the resurgence of out-of-town retail, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemics are well documented, with few town centres seemingly immune from impact, it was still disappointing to lose such a well-established retailer from Welwyn Garden City Town Centre, which were for reasons outside the council's control. Whilst there are clearly challenges facing the future of our town centres, I'm incredibly proud of the work the council is doing to promote both Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield Town Centres. Whilst the council recognises there are vacant units across the borough, they are all privately owned units and the council has 100% occupancy rate in its retail units, working hard with its tenants throughout the pandemic and beyond, to help them continue trading. Comprehensive investment programmes are being delivered through the Hatfield 2030+ and the Welwyn Garden City 2120 regeneration programmes, with recent improvements in Anniversary Gardens, Stonehills, Campus West Car Park, The Commons Multi-Storey Car Park, White Lion Square and One Town Centre to name but a few. These projects all helped to increase dwell time and footfall and support the town centres as they adapt to the challenges highlighted earlier.

The council does not currently own any land that would be suitable for an accessible M&S store elsewhere in the town, but we have put them in touch with agents that we use for any potential sites that are owned by third parties and have offered to help appropriately with any planning application requests that come forward. We also made it clear to M&S that they were welcome to maintain a dialogue about their plans. In relation to units in the Howard Centre, council officers meet regularly with the centre management team and letting agents to support and advocate for the units to be brought back into use. However, it would be wrong for us to pretend this is something the council could control. The Howard Centre is privately owned, and it would not be lawful for the council to try to let space directly. There has been positive recent engagement with our asset managers appointed by the owner and the council is supporting them to explore a wide range of potential users for the space. We will continue to engage positively and proactively with all stakeholders and the Regeneration Programme referred to earlier, together with our support for the Welwyn Garden City Bid and the funding we have secured for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund all have a combined effect to attract investment into the town centres.”

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44.3. Question to the Leader from Councillor Margaret Birleson

“Please can the Leader inform the Council of the increase of benefits claims over the last year, how does this compare with the previous year and are they being referred to Food Banks?”

**Answer**

The Leader asked Councillor S. Boulton (Executive Member, Resources and Planning), to answer:

“Despite the cost-of-living crisis, the council has actually seen a reduction in the benefits claims compared to last year. The overall caseload for Council Tax Support and Housing Benefit has reduced from 7,047 in December 2021, to 6,769 in December 2022, a reduction of around 4%. We have also seen a reduction in New Claims, also with a reduction of around 4%, in the first nine months of financial year compared to the same period last year.

The Council Tax and Benefit Teams advise claimants of the support available through food banks and other money advisory services, including Citizens Advice. Information is also published on our website, with direct links from the home page, for support residents can pursue if they are struggling with the cost-of-living crisis, which includes information on local food banks.

Our team has also been working closely with Hertfordshire County Council on the cost-of-living crisis and providing support on prompting wider schemes available to residents, such as free school meals and the Household Support Fund.”

In a supplementary question, Councillor Birleson asked:

“6,000 still sounds very high, does the Leader agree with me that no one should have to decide on whether to feed their family or heat their home and have to rely on food banks.”

**Answer:**

Councillor S. Boulton (Executive Member, Resources and Planning), answered:

“In an ideal world, I would agree that nobody should have to decide between heating their homes or feeding their family, or indeed paying their rent or their Council Tax or anything else. However, we don't live in an ideal world and this council does its very best to help all the people in the borough.”

44.4. Question to the Leader from Councillor Lucy Musk

“Can the council confirm the numbers of households that are waiting for repairs to completed and the average wait as part of the backlog from contract changes?”

**Answer:**

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

“When Morgan Sindall took over the new contract on the 1st of October, there were 1,121 repairs at as the starting position to carry out, and the average time taken to complete the job was 35.5 days. I’d just like to explain why this would be longer than usual. These were jobs that the previous contractor could not complete by the contract end date, and the focus at the time was to ensure that all the mobilisation tasks were prioritised. Whilst these jobs were raised on the system, Morgan Sindall could not work on them until the contract start date. We had communicated to tenants at the time that during the contract changeover it may take longer to complete repairs. It should be noted that there are just three jobs outstanding from this amount and they are all booked in. I would also like to highlight that excluding the backlog, the average time to complete a repair job is approximately seven days and Morgan Sindall’s performance, as you will be aware, is discussed as part of the monthly Cross Party Housing Maintenance Contract Board.”

In a supplementary question, Councillor Musk asked:

“Since joining this council in 2018 I have collected there were 16 questions from Labour and Lib Dem groups and two motions from Labour and Lib Dem groups surrounding housing repairs and compliance. I’m thankful that the compliance issue has now been fixed and we can go back to our residents. However, residents are still complaining of wait times of over 7 days, and I would say that there is a failure somewhere if it’s taking this amount of questions and motions from opposition groups to be raised at full public meetings, for people to see a difference in the services that are being provided.”

**Answer:**

Councillor F. Thomson (Executive Member, Housing), answered:

“What I would say is that Morgan Sindall, obviously have taken over the new contract in October. I think those of us who sit on the Cross-Party Housing Mobilisation Board, and don’t forget we meet once a month, and we are presented with updates on performance and waiting times. I would expect a new contractor to take time to bed in their service, and I think that’s absolutely what we are seeing. Having said that, Morgan Sindall are currently processing about two and a half thousand repairs a month and customer satisfaction is consistently above 85%, and they’ve introduced this new rant and rave service, which many will be familiar with, and are gathering data and feedback in terms of customer satisfaction. So, I think, having you know, come on board just in October I think we need to give them a little bit longer to bed the service in, but so far, the response that is coming back from tenants is actually very pleasing. There will always be some outstanding cases, long-standing cases which need additional work, but I am confident that we are moving in the right direction with repairs.”

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44.5. Question to the Leader from Councillor Lynn Chesterman

“At the recent Overview and Scrutiny Committee nobody was able to answer what the council’s ‘front line services’ are and how these are defined. As this term is constantly used by the Cabinet in their publicity, can the Leader please explain what these are and how they are weighted when it comes to budget decisions?”

**Answer:**

The Leader asked Councillor S. Boulton (Executive Member, Resources and Planning), to answer:

“I understand that at the recent Overview and Scrutiny Committee it was explained that there is no formal definition of a frontline service. It is indeed the case that different people may have a different interpretation of what is defined as frontline services, and I hope certainly that our budget discussion later tonight will not be dominated by the meaning of this term as we should be focusing on the numbers.

We have made a statement that the budget for the next year contains no cuts to frontline services, as members could see in the budget proposals. We are able to sustain services that are directly provided to all households and to name a few examples, these might be Waste Collection, Planning, Environmental Health and Community Safety.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Chesterman asked:

“A couple of bits really stood out there, the term ‘no formal definition’ and also, ‘we shouldn’t be talking about that, we should be talking about budget’. One of the reasons I wanted to be a Councillor is to make things transparent for our residents, now if we can't tell them what frontline services are, but you are saying that we won't be cutting them. I am confused and I sit here about six times a year, and I'm on lots of committees so I would actually say, perhaps, and don't you agree, is my question in there, I think perhaps there should be some work done to actually talk about what a frontline service is, because you can't keep parroting expressions from one financial year to the other to make it sit easy with the residents and think that the current budgets not going to hurt.”

**Answer:**

Councillor S. Boulton (Executive Member, Resources and Planning), answered:

“I take on board your question and I suppose we might say that frontline services are the services which we are statutorily obliged to provide, however, going forward next year we will have a look and see if we can get a definition for that.”

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45. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE CABINET

The Council considered a recommendation from the meeting of Cabinet on 24 January 2023:

45.1. Budget Proposals and Medium Term Financial Forecasts 2023/24 (Forward Plan Reference FP1143)

Following the consideration of the 2023/24 budget proposals at Cabinet on the 10 and 24 January 2023, the purpose of this report is to present to Council the budget proposals for approval.

The budget was considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) on 17 January 2023 following the review by a Task and Finish Panel. No recommendations for amendments were given by OSC, which was presented to Special Cabinet on 24 January 2023.

This year has been an extremely challenging year, with the impact of inflation on contracts, supplies and utilities, along with the ongoing impact of the pandemic on some of the council's income streams. The MTFS position was updated in September 2022, which showed an increased budget gap for 2023/24 of just under £4.5m.

The report sets out the budget proposals for 2022/23 and covers the General Fund and Housing Revenue budgets; The Capital Programme and Financing Strategy; Fees and Charges; The Medium-Term Financial Strategy; and Special Expense Details.

It was moved and seconded by Councillors S. Boulton and T. Kingsbury and

RESOLVED:

**(23 voting FOR and 20 AGAINST)**

**Voting FOR:** J. Bond, J. Boulton, S. Boulton, J. Cragg, B. Fitzsimon, G. Ganney, A. Hellyer, C. Juggins, S. Kasumu, T. Kingsbury, J. Lake, G. Michaelides, T. Mitchinson, N. Pace, D. Richardson, B. Sarson, P. Smith, C. Stanbury, F. Thomson, T. Travell, R. Trigg, S. Tunstall, and F. Wachuku

**Voting AGAINST:** M. Birleson, S. Bonfante, L. Brandon, J. Broach, L. Chesterman, L. Crofton, M. Holloway, D. Jones, F. Marsh, G. Moore, L. Musk, D. Panter, J. Quinton, J. Ranshaw, T. Rowse, J.P. Skoczylas, P. Shah, M. Siewniak, K. Thorpe, and P. Zukowskyj

- (1) Council noted the recommendations from Cabinet, and the Statement of the Chief Financial Officer on the robustness of budgets and adequacy of reserves (Appendix N of the report).
- (2) Council noted the taxbase amounts for the year 2023/24 have been set in accordance with regulations made under Sections 31A and 31B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and are detailed in the report.



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- (3) Council approved the budget proposals as presented at Special Cabinet on 24 January 2023 and detailed in the report.

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 F. Marsh and was seconded by Councillor G. Moore:

“This council notes with concern the very significant waiting list for social housing, with many thousands of eligible residents currently on the waiting list.

As noted in the local plan, this council accepts that the shortage of social housing is acute in our borough and efforts are needed to readdress this shortfall.

This council notes that current planning policies require all new developments to provide a significant proportion of affordable housing, with a requirement that over 50% of that affordable housing be social housing.

This council reaffirms its commitment to enforcing current planning policy on social housing and requests that planning officers recommend refusal of any development which fails to deliver the required housing mix.”

It was moved and seconded by Councillors F. Marsh and G. Moore that the motion be approved.

On being put to the meeting there voted:

**FOR the Motion – 20**

**AGAINST the Motion – 23**

**The Motion was declared LOST.**

46.2. The following motion has been submitted by Councillor T. Rowse and was seconded by Councillor S. Bonfante:

“Fly tipping defaces our Borough and as well as being an eyesore can contribute to attracting vermin and other health and safety issues. The council commits to take the following steps to address this:

1. Review the specification and produce implementation plans for the clearances of the skips from local recycling facilities including scheduling of weekend collections where this is deemed necessary.
2. Review the specification and produce implementation plans for the clearances of the skips from local recycling facilities over the Xmas period when demand is higher.

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3. Review the provision of recycling facilities and produce implementation plans for all fabrics including clothing, curtains and bedding materials.
4. Work with Lovells to reintroduce local recycling facilities at High View in Hatfield as soon as is practicable.
5. Revert to the communication of bin collection days to the specific rounds i.e., cease the “all encompassing” communication which too many residents find confusing
6. Complete the trial of recycling from council flats within the Borough and communicate a clear timetable for rolling out recycling to all council flats and subsequently all other flats within the Borough.
7. Produce targeted materials for students describing the correct recycling procedures within the Borough and aligned to distribution through the University of Hertfordshire freshers’ week.
8. Ensure that Borough literature covering the dos and don’ts of correct recycling and based on common errors is provided to each household e.g., don’t attempt to recycle soiled takeaway food packaging
9. Ensure that the procedures for securing more or larger home recycling bins are communicated within Borough literature, on the council website and through social media.
10. Produce specific communications for targeting landlords and tenants of HMOs
11. Trial the reintroduction of “cage days”
12. Take further preventive steps to deter fly tipping at known hot spots such as local recycling facilities.”

It was moved and seconded by Councillors T. Rowse and S. Bonfante that the motion be approved.

On being put to the meeting there voted:

**FOR the Motion – 20**  
**AGAINST the Motion – 22**  
**ABSTENTIONS for the Motion – 1**

**The Motion was declared LOST.**

*Note: Following this item there was a 10-minute comfort break. Councillor B. Sarson left during the break and did not vote on any subsequent items.*

46.3. The following motion has been submitted by Councillor M. Holloway and was seconded by Councillor K. Thorpe:

“Welwyn Hatfield Council believes:

- Workers should not foot the bill for the cost-of-living crisis caused in part by covid-19 and the economic turmoil brought on by the government’s own actions,
- Workers being forced to take strike action is always the last thing they want. This shows just how much they have been forced into a corner with the current wave of industrial action across many sectors,

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- Employment rights are hard fought for, and workers must be able to negotiate directly with their employers in good faith,
- The ability for workers to organise and strike is a fundamental right and must be protected.

Welwyn Hatfield Council resolves to:

- Put on record its support to all workers who are standing up against bad employment practices and poverty pay,
- Put on record our thanks to workers for everything they do to keep our economy and public services moving,
- Write to the relevant secretaries of state with regards to health workers and transport workers, urging the government to negotiate fairly with the unions to end these disputes quickly and in good faith,
- Write to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy opposing his anti-strike law.

It was moved and seconded by Councillors M. Holloway and K. Thorpe that the motion be approved.

On being put to the meeting there voted:

**FOR the Motion – 20**

**AGAINST the Motion – 22**

**The Motion was declared LOST.**

47. PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2023/24

Report of the Executive Director (Finance and Transformation) setting out the council's pay policy statement for 2023/24.

The ratios in this statement are based on established posts and pay levels, in place from April 2022.

It was moved and seconded by Councillors N. Pace and T. Kingsbury.

RESOLVED:

Council approved the Pay Policy Statement for the period 2023-2024.

Meeting ended at 10.36pm