

Council  
17 July 2024

## WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL held on Wednesday 17 July 2024 at 7.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Campus East, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE.

PRESENT: Councillors F.Marsh (Chair)  
M.Hobbs, A.Skottowe, I.Walsh, S.Asare, K.Bonkur,  
K.Gardner, S.Khan, L.Gilbert, A.Bardett, J.Otumunye,  
M.Short, M.Birleson, S.Bonfante, J.Broach,  
A.Chesterman, L.Chesterman, J.Cragg, L.Crofton,  
B.Fitzsimon, S.Goldwater, R.Grewal, M.Holloway,  
D.Jones, T.Kingsbury, R.Lass, G.Michaelides,  
T.Mitchinson, G.Moore, L.Musk, A.Nix, D.Panter,  
R.Platt, J.Quinton, T.Rowse, B.Sarson, P.Shah,  
M.Siewniak, K.Thorpe, R.Trigg, C.Watson, J.Weston  
and P.Zukowskyj

OFFICIALS K.Ng, Chief Executive  
PRESENT: R.Baker, Executive Director (Finance & Transformation)  
K.Roberts, Assistant Director (Customer & Transformation)  
S.Saunders, Legal Services Manager  
C.Cade, Governance Services Manager

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100. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on the 20<sup>th</sup> May 2024 were agreed as a correct record.

101. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from councillors Skoczylas, Thusu, H.Goldwater, Boulton and Scott.

102. PETITIONS

No petitions were received.

103. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

No questions from the public were received.

104. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS BY MEMBERS

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Councillors Kingsbury and Zukowskyj declared interests as Hertfordshire County Councillors.

Councillors Kingsbury and Trigg declared interests as private landlords in reference to item 8a on the agenda as the guidance referenced private landlords. As the item provides guidance they would still participate and vote in the debate.

105. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor made the following announcement:

*“The Oak Hill Crematorium, in partnership with the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management metals recycling scheme, have been requested to nominate a charity to receive a donation from us this year. Last year, they were able donate £14,000 to Isabel Hospice which was used to fund 500 nursing hours.*

*This year, I am delighted to announce that the chosen charity is the Willow Foundation.*

*Based in the borough, the Willow Foundation Charity are dedicated to supporting seriously ill young adults and their families. Each year the charity supports over 1200 young adults and our support will help provide special days and breaks, offering a distraction from the day-to-day challenges of hospital appointments, financial worries and stress that dealing with serious illness brings. Our donation will help create everlasting memories for families, children and loved ones and we look forward to announcing the donation amount in the coming months.*

*I sincerely hope you will all be able to come along to my fundraising events this year in support of my chosen charity, Herts Young Homeless. The first of which will be my Afternoon Tea at Mill Green Watermill and Museum. You will have received an official invite for this event on Sunday 11th August from 3pm to 5pm. I do hope that you can make it.”*

The Chief Executive made the following announcement:

*“Our staff continues to work hard to deliver many of the vital services to our community. Our communications team has produced a short video, highlighting some of the achievements in the recent months which we would like to share with Members tonight.”*

A video showing the Council’s staff achievements was played at this point in the meeting.

106. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS

Councillor Kingsbury asked the following question of the Executive Member for Environment:

*“During May and June this year, and for several locations into July, the grass across the Borough remained uncut, leading to numerous complaints from*

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*residents. This has been noted by many as the worst period of uncut grass anyone can remember. Could the Cabinet member explain how this has been allowed to happen and outline the measures being taken to restore the previous standards of grass maintenance?"*

Answer

*Thank you Cllr Kingsbury for your question as well as giving me the opportunity to inform both yourself and the public about the grass cutting situation.*

*First of all, I would like to express my disappointment in the grass cutting that has taken place over the last months. I made it a point to work extensively with the grass cutting during my first year in this position. I saw how long the grass gets during this time of year and I was determined to make sure we would tackle this effectively this year. I will continue to work with the grass cutters to make sure we get the quality and consistency of grass cutting expected by the public.*

*The primary issue causing the state of the grass cutting was predominately due to a period of alternate days and nights of significantly more than usual rainfall for this period (the wettest Spring since 1986) and higher temperatures than the seasonal norm (the warmest Spring on record). This combination led to a significant increase in grass growth over this period. Welwyn Hatfield is of course not alone in this as several authorities in Hertfordshire and beyond, including Hertfordshire County Council, have expressed their difficulties with the grass cutting during this period as well.*

*Grass was cut during these months. However, the long grass produced by the weather coupled with periods of extensive rain and wet ground conditions make this very challenging, meaning having to cut at a slower speed and causing some machinery breakdowns. I am pleased to say that the situation is recovered, and the 4th scheduled cut commenced over 2 weeks ago and is on schedule. Nevertheless, residents may still be aggrieved upon encountering areas of the borough overgrown - unfortunately these are not areas covered by this contract or indeed this Council. Given the widespread concerns regarding this issue, this Council will seek to make clearer to the public what areas this Council is responsible for.*

*Despite this natural phenomenon, myself and officers engaged early with the contractor to ensure that this issue was being addressed. As a result, CLL brought in additional measures and resources at their expense including:*

- Additional machinery*
- Additional staff*
- Increased working into the evenings and on Saturdays*
- Additional management support*

*Myself and Cabinet have also met with CLL and we have already started discussions with CLL about planning for the grass cutting season for next year.*

*I regret that I was not able to effectively communicate during this period. The announcement of a general election earlier this month caused us to be put under the pre-election period, and thus hampered the effective communication of these realities at the worst possible time.*

*It should also be clear to the public that the quality and consistency of the grass cutting has been entirely in line with the contract signed by the previous Conservative administration. I will be working with CLL to ensure that where possible, we adapt the*

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*contract to focus more on the priorities of the Joint Administration such as quality as well as delivery of the number of scheduled cuts. We will also look at other ways we can work with CLL to ensure that, despite changing weather patterns, we avoid the issues of this summer.*

Supplementary question

*“You say that the cut is in line with the contract but it is still the worst cut it has ever been ever since we had that contract, and ran the Council. You say we're up to the fourth cut at the moment that's underway, but I understand we should be at 5 or 6 now, is that correct?”*

Answer

*“For the first part to say that “it's been the worst cut” is a very subjective response. I would encourage you to provide more quantitative evidence for that and I would definitely look into that.*

*My understanding is you're suggesting we should be on the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> cut. I have no reason to believe that is the case. If you can prove that is the case it would be very helpful information, I do hope we can work together on this situation.”*

107. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE CABINET

The Council considered the following recommendation from the Cabinet meeting held on the 9<sup>th</sup> July 2024:

107.1. FP2067 Tenancy Policy and Strategy

Council was asked to approve the Tenancy Strategy and Policy as set out in the report from the Cabinet meeting held on the 9<sup>th</sup> July 2024.

The Tenancy Strategy set out the Council's commitment as a provider of social housing for provision of high quality housing, thriving neighbourhoods and sustainable communities, as well as the Council's expected approach towards tenancies.

The Council were required to consult with registered housing providers and housing associations as they are required by law to have regard to the Strategy. The consultation took place from 2<sup>nd</sup> of February to the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 2024 and included 19 registered providers in the borough private landlords and agents as well as the residents panel.

The Council received responses from 7 registered providers with stock levels of between 25 and 700 properties locally. All of them were in support of the tenancy strategy and the move to ending the use of flexible fixed term tenancies.

It was agreed by Cabinet in 2023 to end the use of fixed term tenancies.

The proposal was moved and seconded by Councillors Moore and Holloway.

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Following a member question it was clarified that flexible tenancies were brought in by the previous central government via the Localism Act and the Government moved away from the policy in 2016. The Council moved away from that policy following its review.

It was discussed whether the Council can compel registered providers not to use continued flexible tenancies. The Cabinet Member agreed to find this out.

RESOLVED:  
(unanimous)  
That the Tenancy Strategy and Policy be approved.

108. NOTICES OF MOTIONS UNDER PROCEDURE RULE 16

No motions were received.

109. APPOINTMENT OF MONITORING OFFICER

Council received a report seeking approval of the appointment of Gavin Ramtohal as the Council's Monitoring Officer. Under section 5 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, Council is required to appoint one of its officers as Monitoring Officer.

Members of the Council expressed their thanks to the Legal Services Manager for her high standard of work as interim Monitoring Officer.

The proposal was moved and seconded by Councillors Thorpe and Panter.

RESOLVED:  
Council approved:  
A) That Gavin Ramtohal be appointed to the statutory post of Monitoring Officer;  
B) That delegated responsibility be given to the Human Resources Manager, in consultation with the Executive Director (Finance and Transformation), to finalise the arrangements for this appointment.

110. URGENT MATTERS

There were no items of urgent business.