

Council
16 March 2022

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL held on Wednesday 16 March 2022 at 7.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, The Campus, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE.

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

D.Bell, J.Boulton, S.Boulton, L.Brandon,
L.Chesterman, J.Cragg, G.Ganney, G.Hayes,
M.Holloway, T.Jackson-Mynott, C.Juggins, S.Kasumu,
T.Kingsbury, J.Lake, R.Lass, F.Marsh, S.McNamara,
G.Michaelides, L.Musk, N.Pace, H.Quenet,
J.Ranshaw, D.Richardson, A.Rohale, B.Sarson,
P.Shah, J.Skoczylas, P.Smith, C.Stanbury,
F.Thomson, T.Travell, R.Trigg, S.Tunstall, F.Wachuku,
J.Weston, P.Zukowskyj

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

54. MINUTES

The Minutes of the special meeting held on 22 February 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and noted by the Mayor.

55. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M.Birleson, J.Bond, S.Elam, A.Hellyer, R.Platt, J.Quinton, K.Thorpe and S.Thusu.

56. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS BY MEMBERS

Councillors S.Boulton, P.Hebden, 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.

57. ANNOUNCEMENTS

57.1. Armed Forces Covenant

In recognition of the service provided by the men and women of our armed forces, both past and present, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council had re-affirmed its commitment to the aims, ethos and spirit of the armed forces community

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covenant. Councillor G.Hayes in his role as Armed Forces Community Covenant Champion and the Mayor had signed the certificate of continued commitment, affirmation and attestation.

57.2. Elections

As this was the final Full Council meeting before the elections, The Mayor thanked all those Councillors who were standing down for their contributions, and also wished everybody who was re-standing good luck for the elections.

57.3. Leader's announcement

The Leader announced that the Council had been shortlisted in the prestigious LGC Awards 2022 for a campaign spearheaded by the Council's communications team, "SAVE OUR SUMMER" working in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council and other Local Resilience Forum partners.

The campaign had already been awarded a gold medal by the Cabinet Office in the 2021 Public Sector Communications awards, and had a significant impact on the amount of young people testing regularly for Covid last summer.

The Leader thanked officers, especially Thom Burn, the Corporate Strategy and Engagement Manager, and Rosy Vega, the Digital Communications Officer, for their work. Council wished them all the best for the final judges interviews on the 6 June 2022.

58. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS

58.1. Question to the Leader from Councillor Gail Ganney

"The Council commissioned an independent review into how the Council's Housing compliance issues arose.

That report was published in February and identified the root causes contributing to non-compliance.

Can the Leader kindly outline what actions are now being taken to firstly, addressing the findings in the report and secondly, to prevent this or similar situations from happening again?"

Answer

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

"Thank you Councillor Ganney for your question.

Members will recall that following issues found in the way that housing compliance was managed, we made a decision to make a self-referral to the Regulator for Social Housing in May last year. Our priority has been to focus on making significant improvements in our housing compliance service, and as members would have seen the latest progress report presented to Cabinet

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Housing Panel last week, very good progress has been made in all the six compliance areas.

We have also worked with our Chief Executive to commission Eversheds Sutherland to carry out an independent review in order to provide further assurance that historic concerns have been identified and that remedial measures that are being put in place are effective.

We have further demonstrated openness and transparency on the matter by waiving legal privilege and published the independent review report in the public domain. Officers have acted swiftly on the matter by presenting the management actions to Cabinet earlier this month to address the twelve root causes identified in Eversheds report. This is combined with a complete change of management team to oversee the Housing Property Service.

I think it's worth highlighting some of the actions being taken on the twelve root causes that were reported to Cabinet on 1 March 2022:

- There is more transparency on the sharing of compliance data. Our Housing Compliance Manager sends compliance statistics covering all six compliance areas to senior management every fortnight. Cabinet Housing Panel also receives an update on housing compliance in every meeting since November last year. Both the Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing also receives a monthly briefing.
- The Council now has a comprehensive record of the properties for which we are responsible for in terms of housing compliance. We have also put procedures in place to ensure the record will continue to be kept up to date.
- Our governance framework on the corporate reporting of Health and Safety matters have been strengthened, in particular there is a direct reporting line to the Corporate Governance group which is chaired by the chief executive. This ensures that significant health and safety issues are flagged to senior management at the earliest opportunity.
- A new asset system is due to go live in April, which will create a centralised asset register in the housing property team.
- There is now a greater focus corporately on compliance matters.
- The proposed senior management structure, which is currently subject to staff consultation, will reduce silo working on health and safety matters. Once the structure is in place, there will be a comprehensive review and reset of our organisation values and there will continue to be regular staff briefings to nurture and develop an open and honest culture within the council. Again, the very fact that we have decided to publish Eversheds report in the public domain shows the openness and transparency that we want to develop in the council.

Officers have also been meeting with the Regulator for Social Housing to keep them up to date with the progress on housing compliance. They are pleased with our progress so far and no concerns have been raised to date.

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I am particularly assured by Eversheds report, which states that the changes made during 2021/22 have put the Council in a much stronger position. In their words, the changes have created a sustainable solution to achieve compliance whilst also recognising the resource pressures and other challenges that exist in local government. There is now a transparency and frankness around matters of compliance that appears to have been missing. I am confident that the actions that officers are putting in place will put us in a much stronger position going forward.”

58.2. Question to the Leader from Councillor Jane Quinton

“With the continuing lack of an EV charging strategy from National Government it is incumbent on local councils to make the best choices when installing public charging points.

Given that research published by CENEX in Jan 2018 for the Committee on Climate Change states that:

- a) Of the fast and standard [EV] chargers required 55% of chargers need to be fast (22kW) and 16% standard (7kW), to enable drivers stopping for varying amounts of time to top up.
- b) a 5-fold increase in fast chargers is needed compared to a 2-fold increase in standard chargers.
- c) The number of public chargers needed for ‘top-up charging’ during parking based charging around towns and local areas needs to rise from 2,700 in 2016 to over 27,000 by 2030.

Yet the council are continuing to install EV charging points at only standard (7KW) charging rates instead of fast (22Kw).

I have been assured that at least some of the recently installed points can be upgraded to 22Kw or at least 22Kw per post (2 cars) so why is this not being done?

Are plans being made with UKPN (UK power networks) to supply the majority of future charging points at fast (22KW) rates?”

Answer

The Leader asked Councillor D.Bell (Executive Member, Resources), to answer:-

“Thank you for your question, Councillor Quinton.

The implementation of electric vehicle charging points in the Borough is part of a nationwide strategy to reduce emissions and meet the net zero target by 2050. It acknowledges that for the scheme to be effective, different types of chargers will need to be introduced at locations across the UK.

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As members will be aware, the Council received over £100k of funding from the Office of Low Emission Vehicles (OLEV) earlier this year. This provided 90% of the funding to install 16 EV charging points in the borough, the remaining 10% being funded by the Council. The funding was intended to allow local authorities to introduce residential EV charging points at locations where residents would otherwise be unable to charge their vehicles overnight, rather than shoppers requiring faster charging. We understand that OLEV considers 7KW units to be sufficient for most applications of this type.

At the six locations within the Borough that have benefited from OLEV funding, the currently grid capacity on the grid would not support anything like as many fast 22KW chargers. Adding grid capacity, both for EV charging points and other demands, is a more complex matter than simply working with UK Power Networks, even if this were within the remit of the Council. A September 2021 report by Ofgem set out Ofgem's role in ensuring that energy networks can meet future demands in the context of the transition to electric vehicles, something that will have to be managed nationally.

But in the meantime it is important that the Council works with an approach that enables us to secure OLEV funding. If we did not, the result would be that our council taxpayers, the majority of whom cannot afford electric vehicles, would end up subsidising those that can afford them. This is surely inequitable.

The Council is fulfilling an important enabling role with these recent EV charging points, but I do not think that local authorities should be the primary providers of vehicle refuelling infrastructure, be it electric or internal combustion. The existing infrastructure of filling stations is not provided by local authorities, and so I do not believe that we should assume that the infrastructure to support electric vehicles should be primarily our responsibility either."

(Note: Apologies were received from Councillor Quinton, so the question was read out by an officer).

58.3. Question to the Executive Member (Resources) from Councillor Paul Smith

"I noted at a recent Budget Task and Finish Panel, the hugely positive financial impact that the crematorium being constructed in Hatfield will have for our Borough. Could the cabinet member for resources please update members on the progress of this project, and perhaps set out the key benefits to our community that this will deliver once completed?"

Answer

Councillor D.Bell (Executive Member, Resources), to answer:-

"Thank you Councillor Smith for your question.

The development of the new crematorium is in response to the identified need for a new facility in the area following extensive research by the Council, which

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showed that nearly 70,000 residents would need to travel more than 30 minutes to their nearest crematorium.

The development will enhance the character of the existing cemetery, through both careful, modern design and thoughtful landscaping.

Part of the works also includes the removal of the existing unsightly buildings that do not meet current needs of our residents and wider communities.

The Council has appointed RG Carter to undertake the construction, with enabling works commencing in January 2022. It is anticipated that the crematorium will be complete by Spring 2023.

The new state of the art chapel can be used for cremation, burial and other remembrance services.

We will be using local contractors to deliver grounds and cleansing services on site and we will be increasing the size of our in-house Bereavement team, creating local employment opportunities.”

58.4. Question to the Leader from Councillor Stan Tunstall

“Could the Leader tell us about the HAPpy program and our borough's involvement?”

Answer

The Leader asked Councillor B.Sarson (Executive Member, Leisure and Community Safety, to answer:-

“Thank you Councillor Tunstall for your question.

Hertfordshire's Holiday Activity Programme, the HAPpy program is a collaboration between Herts Sports Partnership, Hertfordshire County Council and Hertfordshire Community Foundation.

The program funds a range of activity camps across Hertfordshire using funding made available by the Department for Education. Delivered through various clubs and organisations, its aims are to support children from disadvantaged backgrounds who are less likely to access organised out of holiday activities and are more likely to experience social isolation and holiday hunger.

Partners delivering the program of activities will provide thousands of free places for children who are aged 5-16 and in receipt of free school meals.

The Hive community centre in Hatfield has successfully bid for a grant in the last three rounds of the program since Summer 2021, and have so far delivered a wide range of holiday activities to 470 eligible children, with 180 more spaces available for the upcoming Easter holidays.

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The Easter program will be running over 9 days delivering a range of fun and interactive activities focusing on the key fundamentals of the initiative to include physical activity, enrichment and nutritional education.”

58.5. Question to the Leader from Councillor Glyn Hayes

“Since my accident my eyes have been opened to all manner of areas Welwyn Hatfield Council fails to consider the needs of disabled people.

Skips placed in disabled parking areas in Council car parks, a lack of disabled friendly electric charge points, and to my frustration but certainly not my surprise - the removal of ALL disabled parking at the Highview shopping area while the building works are taking place.

Does the Leader agree with me that Welwyn Hatfield Council is failing in its duty to consider Disabled people in Welwyn Hatfield?”

Answer

“Thank you Councillor Hayes for your question.

Firstly, let me assure you that this Council and I take our duty to people with disabilities seriously.

I do not agree that the Council is failing in its duty to consider disabled people within Welwyn Hatfield.

The Common car park was designed in accordance with National Parking Standards and there was no specific guidance at the time for the requirement to install accessible charging points. The car park was also subject to public engagement and planning consultation, and we were not aware of any comments made about disabled electric charge points.

The government are working with disability charities to set standards for electric vehicle charge points and that guidance will be made available on how to make individual charge points more accessible.

We understand that the charity has now undertaken user engagement and are developing prototypes for testing with disabled people this summer. Once the guidance is released, we will be considering this for the Common car park, the Campus West decked car park, and the wider EV charging point scheme.

In relation to High View whilst a bay and accessible route were in place from the new car park in phase one of the development, it was recognised that the bay in the new car park was a lengthy distance from the existing parade, and last week, we were able to install an alternative disabled bay much closer to the parade.

The council continues to work closely with AccessAble to ensure information is available to residents on the accessibility of our town centres and businesses.

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Following the launch of the Welwyn Garden City access guide, we are now working with them on Hatfield Town Centre and other buildings.

We have made changes to our website to ensure its accessibility, and our accessibility score improved significantly in January following a project to change our hosting provider to improve accessibility. Our new digital platform, Jadu, was also selected with the accessibility of residents in mind.

However, I do appreciate your views where you consider improvements could be made and I would be more than happy in future if you could bring any concerns to me or portfolio holders when they arise.”

In a supplementary question, Councillor Hayes stated that the public sector equality duty only has three aims, these were 1.) to eliminate unlawful discrimination, 2.) advance equality of opportunity 3.) foster good relations. Of the three aims, the Council was failing on the last two of the aims. Did the Leader read the quick start guide on the public sector equality duty before considering the original answer?

Councillor Kingsbury stated that having sat on the Equalities Group at Council, he was aware of the aspects of the act and the requirements. Councillor Kingsbury stated that if there were any specific points to be raised, he was happy to take them away and look into them. The Council takes equalities and disabilities seriously.

58.6. Question to the Leader from Councillor Frank Marsh

“In September 2021, Cllr Ayesha Rohale asked the following question that is still effectively unanswered. I ask the council to now respond appropriately and answer the question as stated, namely “Would the leader of the council explain the role Mears had in ensuring electrical safety testing for council owned properties and if this took place over the life of the contract that has recently been terminated?”

Answer

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

“Thank you Councillor Marsh for your question.

I’m not sure why there was no follow up contact from either Councillor Rohale or Councillor Marsh in the past six months if they felt that I did not provide an effective answer at the September meeting. This could have saved all of our precious time at the final Full Council meeting of this Municipal year, nonetheless I’ll be obliged to provide an answer.

The current contract with Mears is due to end in October 2022 and they are responsible for ensuring electrical testing programme is carried out in accordance with the programme produced by the Council. They are also

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responsible to ensure any CAT1 defects are completed at the time of the test. Their role also covers carrying out electrical safety tests at void properties.

Since the compliance issue came to light, the Council has revised a number of procedures and produced a rolling 5-year testing programme to ensure all properties are covered and completed on time. Robust contract management procedures have also been put in place to monitor the rolling programme and that any issues reported by Mears are addressed straightaway.”

In a supplementary question, Councillor Marsh asked for assurance that Mears be looked into in relation to asbestos, legionnaires and water problems in the same context as health and safety.

Councillor Thomson stated that in relation to all compliance areas, the Council had implemented a new robust procedure. The Council are looking at and monitoring all of the compliance areas. As of this week, the Council was fully compliant.

58.7. Question to the Leader from Councillor Russ Platt

“Since becoming a Councillor, I have noticed that Council response levels and times to my enquiries vary wildly from department to department, and indeed person to person. Some respond quickly, and with relevant information, and this is great as it enables me to get back to my resident with an update and manage their expectations.

Sadly though, this is not the norm and, in many cases, Councillors get no response until it has been chased once, twice or sometimes three or more times. Councillors do not expect an immediate answer or resolution to enquiries, we know that is not possible or realistic in most cases. What I think we should expect though is an acknowledgement that the issue has been received, details of the next steps to be taken or who is dealing with it, and a date that we will be updated.

To be clear, this is not about getting issues resolved at the initial stage, it is about acknowledgement and communication, so that the residents that we represent can be kept informed. It is also not a case that Councillors are more important than the public, but commonly, we are asked to intervene either on behalf of residents or when residents have not been able to get a resolution from the council themselves.

Delays and/or inefficiency reflect badly on the council and on Councillors, and more importantly can mean that maintenance or safety work can be delayed. In light of the recent housing maintenance failures, there is a need for this to be addressed as part of the council's commitment to keeping the momentum going.

So, my question is as follows. Will the council agree to implement a 'service level agreement' for responding to Councillor's queries, an SLA that ensures that

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within 24 hours Councillors are aware of what the next stage of the enquiry will be, who will be dealing with it and when the next update will be given?"

Answer

"Thank you Councillor Platt for your question.

I am sure members are aware, as reported to our Cabinet earlier this month, we are carrying out a council-wide review of customer service as our contact centre and reception will be brought in-house at the end of the Sopra Steria contract in December this year. This will also be developed into a brand new Customer Service Strategy, which will set out our commitments to residents and members. The setting of SLA will be very much part of this strategy.

It is our intention to engage with members after the Election to seek your views on our Customer Service Strategy and also to brief you more about our new customer contact system, Jadu, which we are planning to develop this further to capture member enquiries. The system will have the capability for members to receive an acknowledgement, clear timescales for response and name of the investigating Officer in the future.

This is a sizable project and that I do not believe it is right to set SLA on members queries in isolation without considering the implications on the overall Customer Service strategy. Otherwise I fear there is a danger that our members may be inundated with residents enquiries and they may simply by-pass all the other means of customer contacts.

To sum up, we have already embarked on a new customer improvement journey and agree in principle that it is helpful to set SLA on members enquiries, but we cannot agree to a specific SLA at this stage, without considering the wider picture.

In the meantime, if members are not receiving a response on your queries in a timely manner, can I please ask you to contact the relevant Head of Service and / or Portfolio holder?"

(Note: Apologies were received from Councillor Platt, so the question was read out by an officer).

58.8. **Question to the Leader from Councillor Lucy Musk**

"In view of the recently published report by this Council into its regulatory failings on housing safety, does he agree with me that it is disgraceful that we currently have residents and young children living in homes affected by black mould, crumbling plaster work, and general conditions that would not be tolerated in the private sector?"

Answer

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

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“Thank you Councillor Musk for your question.

As I am sure members will recall, the Housing Maintenance Task and Finish Group, chaired by Councillor Holloway met on numerous occasions to examine the extent of the damp and mould issues in our properties. The group concluded there was no one prevailing cause of mould. The age and condition of certain properties are also significant contributing factors, which will require a long term robust maintenance programme.

Since I became the Housing Portfolio Holder, I have visited a large number of properties. I really wish every single housing property that we own is in a perfect state, however the reality is that we have an aging stock holding. As reported to the Task and Finish Group, we have commissioned an asset grading exercise and the work is very much under way. The result of this exercise will give us a comprehensive picture of the stock conditions and will be used to inform our housing maintenance programme going forward.”

In a supplementary question, Councillor Musk stated that residents were not only living in these terrible condition but they are stuck in them. Will the Cabinet Member for housing agree that the Council urgently need to review the policies and allow residents living in these conditions the ability to join the housing needs register?

Councillor Thomson stated that the Council were conducting an asset grading exercise looking at the conditions of the Council’s housing stock. This was important information needed to inform the housing maintenance programme so it can move forward and address the issues. Councillor Thomson encouraged members with specific concerns to highlight them with officers and herself.

58.9. Question to the Leader from Councillor Paul Zukowskyj

“On Monday 1st March, cabinet ‘noted’ the management response to the Eversheds report, by implication therefore condoning it. That management response was not seen prior to publication by most Councillors, nor was it presented to CHP, leading to a failure of appropriate governance. The response has clear and demonstrable failures to actually address the fundamental problem, namely a failure to deliver an appropriate health and safety minded culture across the Council.

Will the leader join me in rejecting the management response as both inadequate and potentially dangerous?”

Answer

“Thank you Councillor Zukowskyj for your question.

First of all, a minor typo, I thought 1st March was a Tuesday.

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The Cabinet Member for Housing and Climate Change has already answered a similar question at the Cabinet Housing Panel meeting last week. The Eversheds report was commissioned in light of the housing compliance issue. The terms of reference of the independent review were shared with the Group Leaders. The Eversheds report was published on Friday 25 February and the management response was circulated as part of an urgent Cabinet report on 28 February and this was circulated to all members. The aim of the management response was to address the twelve root causes identified by Eversheds and if Councillor Zukowskyj had read the report carefully, it does cover the wider health and safety aspect, namely, management actions 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10 and 12. Some of these key responses were also covered in an earlier question tonight. I have no reason to reject the management action plan.

If there are any specific actions that Councillor Zukowskyj thinks we should take, I would be more than happy to hear about them but I keep hearing negative comments about the report, and I am sure if officers did not draft the management response presented to Cabinet, this would have given him more ammunition to score political points. This is demoralising to the staff that had a very tough time in the past ten months doing their best to achieve such a marked improvement on the housing compliance position.”

In a supplementary question, Councillor Zukowskyj asked if the Leader believed that the response from management, that was solely focused on compliance meets the requirements for the health and safety act given that the Council’s solicitor suggested that the Council was falling short of that.

Councillor Kingsbury stated that the Eversheds reported focused on the housing compliance issues. There is an action plan in place to address that. Part of the action plan looks at health and safety in various different ways. The Council is going through a senior management review to which the health and safety team are going to be brought closer to the health and safety team for housing. Councillor Kingsbury believed that the actions in the Evershed report addressed the housing compliance issues. Health and safety is looked at in different ways across the Council and not just in Housing. Work was being done and the Council needs to focus on health and safety. Councillor Kingsbury was confident the Council was doing that.

59. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE CABINET

The Council considered a recommendation from the meeting of the Cabinet on 1 March 2022:-

59.1. Procurement Boards

To consider a recommendation from Cabinet to disband the General Procurement Board and make subsequent amendments to the constitution and Contract Procedure Rules.

Cabinet at its meeting on 1 March 2022, considered a report agreed by the cross-party Constitution Review Group at its meeting on 12 January 2022.

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The report recommended the disbandment of the General Procurement Board, together with the streamlining of the procurement approval process to make greater use of Executive Member Decision Notices.

It was felt that Procurement board discussions had focused on matters unrelated to procurement, and in reality members had little effective input to procurement decisions as these are driven by strict scoring criteria. A review of other Hertfordshire authorities highlighted little or no member involvement in procurement.

However the intention was to retain the use of member project boards where these were appropriate to oversee major projects as a whole, but to no longer focus on just the procurement element.

The recommended changes should be seen as part of the Council's modernisation process.

The changes require amendments to the Council's Constitution and its Contract Procedure Rules.

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

**RESOLVED:
(28 voting FOR and 10 AGAINST)**

Council agreed the Cabinet recommendations that the Constitution was amended to reflect any approved consequential changes to the Constitution, including Executive Member and Officer delegations and the Contract Procedure Rules.

60. NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

60.1. The following motion had been submitted by Councillor T.Kingsbury and was seconded by Councillor P.Zukowskyj:-

"Welwyn Hatfield Council is appalled at the invasion of Ukraine by Russia and Belarus. Welwyn Hatfield stands together with our residents of Ukrainian heritage, who are understandably worried about their loved ones in the country.

Noting that the waging of aggressive war is a criminal act under both international law and the Russian constitution, the Council joins with the civilised world in condemning the actions of President Putin in initiating the war which is taking an increasing toll of military personnel and non-combatant civilians alike.

The Council fully backs the United Kingdom government in partnership with other NATO allies in deploying measures aimed at ending the illegal Russian

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invasion and supporting the Government and people of Ukraine in the defence of their country and the lives and liberties of their people.

The Council stands ready to assist in all appropriate ways with humanitarian support and refuge to the people of Ukraine in this ordeal.

Welwyn Hatfield Council is reminded that peace, stability and democracy cannot be taken for granted even in Europe and stresses the value and importance of international institutions including the United Nations and NATO in continuing to safeguard and advance democracy, mutual security and economic prosperity across Europe and beyond.

The Council requests the Leader of the Council to write to Andrei Kelin, Ambassador of the Russian Federation in the UK, conveying the Council's condemnation of the actions of his Government."

It was moved and seconded by Councillors T.Kingsbury and P.Zukowskyj that the motion be approved.

On being put to the meeting there voted:-

FOR the Motion – 38
AGAINST the Motion – 0
ABSTENTIONS for the Motion – 0

The Motion was declared CARRIED.

60.2. The following motion had been submitted by Councillor G.Hayes and was seconded by Councillor L.Chesterman:-

"This Council:

- Stands firmly behind our UK Armed Forces and fully supports the aims of the Armed Forces Covenant.
- Welcomes the new Armed Forces Act but sees the legislation as a missed opportunity to further improve the lives of veterans in the Welwyn Hatfield area.
- Notes with disappointment that the Act makes Welwyn Hatfield Council and local public bodies legally bound to have "due regard" to the Covenant when providing support to Forces communities, but exempts central government from any such duty, creating a two-tier Covenant for veterans.
- Notes with further disappointment that the Labour led proposals backed by the Royal British Legion and ex-Service chiefs plans which were among others, to improve Armed Forces accommodation, employment support and ensuring central government has the same responsibility to deliver the Act that local authorities have, were voted down so not included in the Act.

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This Council resolves:

- To write to the Defence Secretary Ben Wallace asking him to reconsider the decision to not include in the Armed Forces Act, Widen the scope of the Bill to ensure it takes in all areas like service accommodation, employment, pensions, compensation, social care, criminal justice and immigration. Ensure central government has the same responsibility to deliver the Covenant that the Bill gives to local authorities and other local public bodies. Force the MOD to review its treatment of LGBTQ+ personnel pre-2000 and options for restoring ranks in full.
- This Council will continue the campaign with the Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant board and Forces charities to see the Government continue to strengthen the Covenant and improve vital services to veterans.”

It was moved and seconded by Councillors G.Hayes and L.Chesterman that the motion be approved.

It was then moved and seconded by Councillors T.Kingsbury and D.Bell that the motion be amended as follows:-

“This Council:

- Stands firmly behind our UK Armed Forces and fully supports the aims of the Armed Forces Covenant.
- Welcomes the new Armed Forces Act but sees the legislation as a missed opportunity to further improve the lives of veterans in the Welwyn Hatfield area.
- Notes with disappointment that the Act makes Welwyn Hatfield Council and local public bodies legally bound to have “due regard” to the Covenant when providing support to Forces communities, but **recognises that the Statutory Guidance has yet to be published when the new duty comes into force. This council notes that at present the Bill appears to exempt**—central government from any such duty, creating a two-tier Covenant for veterans.
- Notes with further disappointment that the **Labour-led** proposals backed by the Royal British Legion and ex-Service chiefs plans which were among others, to improve Armed Forces accommodation, employment support and ensuring central government has the same responsibility to deliver the Act that local authorities have, ~~were voted down so~~ were not included in the Act.

This Council resolves:

- To write to the Defence Secretary Ben Wallace asking him to reconsider the decision to not include in the Armed Forces Act, Widen the scope of the Bill to ensure it takes in all areas like service accommodation, employment, pensions, compensation, social care, criminal justice and immigration. Ensure central government has the same responsibility to deliver the Covenant that the Bill gives to local authorities and other local

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public bodies. Force the MOD to review its treatment of LGBT personnel pre-2000 and options for restoring ranks in full.

- This Council will continue the campaign with the Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant board and Forces charities to see the Government continue to strengthen the Covenant and improve vital services to veterans.”

On being put to the meeting there voted:-

FOR the Amendment – 38
AGAINST the Amendment – 0
ABSTENTIONS for the Amendment – 0

The amendment was CARRIED.

The Motion, as amended, was then put to the meeting and there voted:-

“This Council:

- Stands firmly behind our UK Armed Forces and fully supports the aims of the Armed Forces Covenant.
- Welcomes the new Armed Forces Act but sees the legislation as a missed opportunity to further improve the lives of veterans in the Welwyn Hatfield area.
- Notes with disappointment that the Act makes Welwyn Hatfield Council and local public bodies legally bound to have “due regard” to the Covenant when providing support to Forces communities, but recognises that the Statutory Guidance has yet to be published when the new duty comes into force. This council notes that at present the Bill appears to exempt central government from any such duty, creating a two-tier Covenant for veterans.
- Notes with further disappointment that the proposals backed by the Royal British Legion and ex-Service chiefs plans which were among others, to improve Armed Forces accommodation, employment support and ensuring central government has the same responsibility to deliver the Act that local authorities have were not included in the Act.

This Council resolves:

- To write to the Defence Secretary Ben Wallace asking him to reconsider the decision to not include in the Armed Forces Act, Widen the scope of the Bill to ensure it takes in all areas like service accommodation, employment, pensions, compensation, social care, criminal justice and immigration. Ensure central government has the same responsibility to deliver the Covenant that the Bill gives to local authorities and other local public bodies. Force the MOD to review its treatment of LGBT personnel pre-2000 and options for restoring ranks in full.
- This Council will continue the campaign with the Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant board and Forces charities to see the Government

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continue to strengthen the Covenant and improve vital services to veterans.”

On being put to the meeting there voted:-

The Motion, as amended, was declared carried UNANIMOUSLY.

60.3. The following motion had been submitted by Councillor H.Quenet and was seconded by Councillor F.Marsh:-

That Welwyn Hatfield Council recognises:

- that very large financial setup and running costs involved in selling locally generated renewable electricity to local customers result in it being impossible for local renewable electricity generators to do so,
- that making these financial costs proportionate to the scale of a renewable electricity supplier's operation would create significant opportunities for local companies and community groups to be providers of locally generated renewable electricity directly to local people, businesses and organisations, if they wished, and
- that revenues received by such local companies or community groups that chose to become local renewable electricity providers could be used to help improve the local economy, local services and facilities and to reduce local greenhouse gas emissions;
- Notes that the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, as a result of its 2021 Technological Innovations and Climate Change inquiry, recommended that a Right to Local Supply for local energy suppliers be established to address this
- Accordingly resolves to support the Local Electricity Bill, currently supported by a cross-party group of 295 MPs and which, if made law, would establish a Right to Local Supply which would promote local renewable electricity supply by making the setup and running costs of selling renewable electricity to local customers proportionate to the size of the supply company; and

Further resolves to:

- inform the local media of this decision,
- write to Grant Shapps MP, asking them to support the Bill, and
- write to the organisers of the campaign for the Bill, Power for People, (at Camden Collective, 5-7 Buck Street, London NW1 8NJ or info@powerforpeople.org.uk) expressing its support.

It was moved and seconded by Councillors H.Quenet and F.Marsh that the motion be approved.

On being put to the meeting there voted:-

FOR the Motion – 14
AGAINST the Motion – 24
ABSTENTIONS for the Motion – 0

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The Motion was declared LOST.

61. INDEPENDENT PERSONS' ALLOWANCE

Report of the Chief Executive on the proposals to introduce new annual allowances for Independent Persons and members of the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP).

The Localism Act 2011 and other regulations require relevant authorities to appoint independent persons to advise and investigate matters relating to a number of areas, including alleged breaches of the Members' code of conduct and recommendations in relation to the conduct of Statutory Officers.

Similarly, regulations were in place that require local authorities to appoint at least three independent persons to an Independent Remuneration Panel which reviewed and advised the council on its Members' Allowance Scheme.

At present no allowances were paid to the Independent Persons who undertake these important statutory roles for the council.

The Council was asked to approve the introduction of a modest annual allowance from the next Municipal Year to all Independent Persons, as outlined in paragraph 2.1 of the report.

Whilst the allowance would not compensate entirely the Independent Persons for the time and skills they provide on a voluntary basis to the Council, it would go some way to show the Council's appreciation for the work they undertake and would help the Council retain the independent persons they already had and attract new candidates when vacancies arise.

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

RESOLVED:

(37 voting FOR and 1 AGAINST)

That Council agreed to introduce the following Independent Persons' Allowances from 2022/23:

- 1.) An annual sum of £500 per annum for those appointed as Independent Persons by the Council.
- 2.) An annual sum of £500 per annum for members of the Independent Remuneration Panel during designated review years for the Member Allowance Scheme; and £200 per annum for intervening years.
- 3.) Reasonable travel expenses will continue to be reimbursed in line with current Council policies.

Meeting ended 9.04pm
AM