

Council
26 July 2022

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL held on Tuesday 26 July 2022 at 7.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Campus East, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE.

PRESENT: Councillors B.Fitzsimon (Chairman)

M.Birleson, 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, R.Lass, F.Marsh,
S.McNamara, G.Michaelides, T.Mitchinson, G.Moore,
L.Musk, N.Pace, D.Panter, R.Platt, J.Quinton,
J.Ranshaw, D.Richardson, T.Rowse, B.Sarson,
P.Shah, M.Siewniak, P.Smith, C.Stanbury, S.Thusu,
F.Thomson, K.Thorpe, T.Travell, S.Tunstall, J.Weston,
P.Zukowskyj

OFFICIALS Chief Executive (K. Ng)
PRESENT: Assistant Director (Legal and Governance) (M. Martinus)
Governance Services Manager (A. Marston)
Planning & Policy Implementation Manager (S. Tiley)
Information Governance & Member Support Assistant (K. Houston)

12. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Annual Council held on 23 May 2022 were approved as a correct record and noted by the Mayor.

13. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Bond, G. Ganney, J. Lake, J.P. Skoczylas, R. Trigg and F. Wachuku.

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS BY MEMBERS

Councillors S.Boulton, 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.

15. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor made the following announcement:-

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15.1. Welcome Kieran back

Following the By-election at the beginning of the month the Mayor was pleased to welcome back Kieran Thorpe as a Member of the Council.

Councillor Chesterman also welcomed Councillor Thorpe back to the Council.

15.2. Afternoon Tea at Mill Green

The Mayor announced that she raised nearly £800 for her Charity, the Women's Refuge.

15.3. Save the Dates for Future Events

The Mayor also asked members to save dates for future events, these were:

- Curry Night at Bengal Paradise on Monday 3 October 2022
- Quiz Night at Campus West on Friday 2 December 2022
- Mayor's Dinner at Brocket Hall on Friday 17 March 2023

16. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS

16.1. Question to the Leader from Councillor Lynn Chesterman

"Following the debacle of £100,000 of taxpayers money being spent on electric charging points in the Borough (none of which are accessible to wheelchair users) we now have the issue of the disabled parking bays in Stonehills. This was a joint venture with Herts County Council but there is a serious issue with the disabled bays. Wheelchair users are unable to use them as they cannot transfer from their car to their chair as there are no dropped kerbs Would the Leader please agree that this is an issue that needs to be rectified soonest?"

Answer

Thank you, Councillor Chesterman for your question.

With regard to accessibility of electric charging points, as mentioned previously there is currently no national guidance for the provision of disabled EV bays, but Officers are aware that this is currently being reviewed. In the meantime, Officers are identifying suitable locations for larger EV bays. In particular, officers will work with our Contractor (EB Charging) to ensure charge points are accessible wherever possible and feasible to do so.

The disabled bays in Stonehills were installed by Hertfordshire County Council. I'm happy to follow up the details with my colleagues at the County, however officers have confirmed that the disabled bays in Stonehills are placed as per guidance with full height kerbs, as it allows wheelchair users easier access from the kerbside to and from a vehicle. Dropped kerbs have been provided at the

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crossing points outside Lloyds Bank and Greggs which are located less than the stated guidance of 100 metres to the disabled parking in this area.

It is unusual to provide dropped kerbs, as this would create a steeper slope close to parked vehicles. A level surface allows for balance and stability for wheelchair users transitioning from a chair to a vehicle.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Chesterman asked that it should be obligatory that the Council consult a specialist access organisation to have a look and make sure that the spaces meet the needs of disabled people.

Councillor Kingsbury stated that he will raise the issue with Hertfordshire County Council and take on board the comments.

16.2. Question to the Leader from Councillor Frank Marsh

“I have been made aware that there are an increasing number of occurrences where the Council Environmental services department are duplicating maintenance and repair work, an example of this is in my own ward when old broken fencing was replaced in Digswell Park Road which was a good job done, only for it to be removed with additional old fencing six months later. Now there is no fencing, a complete waste of money and resources.

How and why has this been allowed to happen and is this symptomatic across the Borough?”

Answer

The Leader asked Councillor S.Kasumu (Executive Member, Environment and Climate Change), to answer:-

Thank you, Councillor Marsh for your question.

I understand that minor repairs were carried out back in Summer 2019, the general condition of the fence has been slowly deteriorating with several large sections have collapsed in places, which were beginning to look very unsightly.

The wooded area has no need to be fenced off as it does not restrict access, nor provide protection to the tree belt, so it was felt that the best course of action was to remove the fence completely and we did this at the beginning of this month.

I could reassure you that the concern you have raised is not symptomatic. We have a number of systems in place to manage service requests and jobs so work is not duplicated.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Marsh asked why was the matter not looked at as a whole first before they replaced the old fence that had been broken? Why did they not replace the whole of the old fence first?

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Councillor Kasumu stated that this happen three years ago so would be hard to find out what happen. In 2019 it could have been easier to repair the damage whilst looking further into it before coming to a conclusion to remove the whole fence.

16.3. Question to the Leader from Councillor Margaret Birleson

“As revealed in a recent FOI request submitted to the Housing Ombudsman, Welwyn Hatfield has seen more private tenant complaints than anywhere else in the east of England over the past five years.

How many complaints has this Council received from its own housing stock and of those what are the main themes?”

Answer

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

Thank you Councillor Birleson for your question.

We take our responsibility to protect private tenants very seriously and figures show that people in Welwyn Hatfield know they can turn to us when their landlords let them down. In the last six months we've secured a banning order, successfully prosecuted a landlord for serious breaches, and resolved multiple legal disputes through what are known as first-tier tribunals – proof that we will take action when appropriate, and we do not believe that our private sector landlords or properties are any worse than in other areas of Hertfordshire.

In terms of complaints received from our own housing stock, I can report that a total of 633 complaint cases were received since we launched our corporate complaint system Jadu in November 2020, of which 314 cases were upheld.

The main themes were related to two parts:

- The complainants were dissatisfied with the time it had taken to carry out the repairs
- There was inconsistent communication following a repair request

Unfortunately, a backlog of repairs was built up during the pandemic and this has undoubtedly increased the number of complaints.

We are fully committed to working with our new housing maintenance contractor, Morgan Sindall, to improve our repairs service. Having discussed with the Leader, we have recently signed off a decision to set up a cross party group to monitor the performance of the new contractor during the first year of the contract. Once the nominations have been received, we are planning to hold our first meeting in the coming weeks.

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In a supplementary question, Councillor Birleson asked that until a few years ago members used to get Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) at Cabinet Housing Panel, and appreciated that housing is a busy department but think it would be really good if we could had some of the KPIs back at the Cabinet housing panel.

Councillor Thomson stated that obviously things did change when the council set up the new Overview and Scrutiny committee it impacted where the performance went but was happy to look into it.

16.4. Question to the Leader from Councillor Michal Siewniak

“Since becoming a councillor, I have been contacting the Council Officers, pretty much on a daily basis. Most of the time, Officers respond quickly, and with relevant information, which is great as it enables me, and my fellow Cllrs, to get back to my resident with an update and manage their expectations.

I understand that during the pandemic, many of us had an opportunity to work from home. The hybrid model is important as it also gives us an opportunity to strike the right work-life balance. However, due to these exceptional circumstances, many of our more vulnerable residents have struggled to get hold of Council and at times, Council Officers.

As a Council, I know that we want to "champion" residents' engagement and ensure that we always put our community first. It is absolutely critical. With this in mind, I would like to ask the following question. What is the Council tangibly doing to ensure an excellent access to our services, on and off-site? I also wonder whether the 'service level agreement' for responding to councillor's and residents queries, has been implemented?”

Answer

The Leader asked Councillor T.Mitchinson (Executive Member, Leisure and Community), to answer:-

Thank you, Councillor Siewniak for your question.

As many of the members know already, 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.

We are all committed to putting customers at the centre of what we do and one of the first actions we have undertaken is to create a new Assistant Director post with dedicated responsibilities of customers and transformation. The new postholder has already carried out a number of staff workshops to review the current systems and policies. Our next stage is to engage with members in the

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coming weeks as part of the development of the new Customer Service Strategy and agreeing new SLAs will be part of this.

We are fully aware that some of our customers will still want to talk to us via telephone. We have recently rolled out an integration between Microsoft teams and our phone system, along with a review of our call groups which should assist officers with customer contact on and off site. Further improvements are being made to our phone messaging for our busier teams, including Repairs, Council Tax and Benefits, which will allow customers to understand their position in a call queue.

We are also continuing to roll out our new customer contact system, Jadu and promote customers contacting us online where possible. Jadu has the capability for customers to receive clear acknowledgements and timescales for a response, giving the customer confidence that their query is being dealt with. We will also be shortly trialing an online booking appointment system for the planning team, which if successful, will be rolled out for other services.

We look forward to working on the Customer Service Strategy with you, but 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?"

16.5. Question to the Leader from Councillor Max Holloway

"There has been an increase in complaints about antisocial behaviour caused by speeding cars, scooters, and motorbikes in residential streets and outside schools.

This is an accident waiting to happen, causing nuisance to residents and great concern among parents and carers who are understandably concerned about the welfare of both their own children but also those potentially involved in this behaviour.

Would the Leader confirm what direct interaction this Council has had with relevant authorities to tackle this nuisance behaviour, to keep our residents safe on the road and pavements?"

Answer

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

Thank you Councillor Holloway for your question.

The council has not directly seen an increase in complaints concerning speeding cars, scooters and motorbikes, however we are aware that these issues have been highlighted in feedback from members of the public via Echo, which is a community feedback platform managed by the Police.

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As members may have heard already, the new policing priorities for Welwyn Hatfield published a couple of weeks ago have specifically listed speeding, anti-social behaviour, E-scooters in a number of geographical locations, which were a direct response to the feedbacks received via Echo.

The Safer Neighbourhood Teams are tasked with focussing on these priorities and will work closely with local partners including the council and schools. The progress on these priorities will also be discussed with partners at regular Community Safety Partnership meetings and ASB Forum, and the Council plays an active role in them.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Holloway asked whether it would be possible to get some time with portfolio holder to go over the areas with issues and discuss what the council can do to highlight the areas and take things forward.

Councillor Sarson stated that he would be happy to do that and to email him with dates and times for a meeting.

16.6. Question to the Leader from Councillor Russ Platt

“As councillors, I am sure that we have all received comments or complaints about overgrown hedges, hedge maintenance, unkempt hedges, hedges encroaching onto footpaths or lack of clearing up after hedge maintenance.

I understand that where hedges are on public land and footpaths, maintenance was contracted from county to Welhat. Can the council confirm what the approach is regarding hedge maintenance? Is it still the case that they are responsibility of Welhat Borough Council and if so, what is the schedule that should be kept to for maintenance and cutting, and is this being achieved?”

Answer

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

Thank you Councillor Platt for your question.

The Council are responsible for cutting hedges in amenity areas, the town centres and those that are on our land. We also maintain hedges for tenants who may be older and vulnerable and are unable to do this themselves. Hedges are cut twice per year between June and the end of October. At each visit, hedges are cut back to the point of growth. If a further reduction is required and is not urgent, this is scheduled within the winter months, outside of bird nesting season. Hedge cutting is undertaken by our Grounds Maintenance contractor, Continental Landscapes Ltd, and is currently on schedule.

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We also provide guidance on our website for our residents who are concerned about high hedges on private land. Private landowners are responsible for removing vegetation that overhangs from their land. Issues of this nature should be reported to Hertfordshire County Council who can issue notice to the landowner to remove any obstruction.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Platt asked to what level are the plans and the SLA being achieved?

Councillor Kasumu stated that they are on schedule. If there are any issue please can Hertfordshire County Council or the Portfolio Holder. Often the best thing to do is to ensure Hertfordshire County Council are aware and that they are notifying the landowner.

16.7. Question to the Leader from Councillor Kieran Thorpe

“Can the Leader of the Council confirm how much money the Council has spent on the Local Plan Process since 2010?”

Answer

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

Thank you Councillor Thorpe for your question.

The Council has spent £8.8m since 2010, of which £6m is for direct staff or agency and the rest is on external items including consultancy and professional studies.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Thorpe asked in light of that figure and the likely reality of the end of the process, does the portfolio holder consider that to be good value for the residents of WHBC?

Councillor S. Boulton stated that if the Council does reach a conclusion it will be good value as the Council will have a 15 year plan in place so money well spent. The method in which the Council have had to involve themselves in has been complicated and would have wished for a simpler and cheaper method to get through the Local Plan process.

16.8. Question to the Leader from Councillor Lucy Musk

“In recent weeks I have been contacted by some residents who for their mental and physical health and based on recommendations from their own GPs need to be moved. Does the portfolio holder for Health and Housing agree with me that the current policy of a medical assessment is and I quote ‘a desktop exercise’ is similarly not good enough?”

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Answer

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

Thank you Councillor Musk for your question.

There is legislation and case law that governs how councils must assess housing need, prioritise the allocation of social housing and assess homelessness.

Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 states that the council must give reasonable preference to applicants who fall within certain categories. This includes people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, people who are overcrowded and/or living in insanitary conditions and people who need to move on medical or welfare grounds.

The council must balance all these factors when assessing applications and determining priority. To ensure that this is a transparent process and that all applications are treated in a fair and consistent way, the council has a published Housing Allocations Policy, which sets out how we prioritise applications.

The Housing Needs team, comprising the Housing Allocations and the Housing Options teams, deal with many applicants where there are medical factors to consider (both physical and mental health).

The priority, when assessing medical circumstances, is to be consistent, to ensure fairness.

Professional medical advice is sought in all cases, and that can include information from the applicant's own clinician and advice from clinicians engaged by the Council. The information received is then used to determine an outcome in accordance with the Council's policies and legislation.

Housing Allocations Officers always raise cases they feel may need further consideration/where the customer is unhappy with the outcome. These cases are then considered by the Housing Allocations Manager. In certain circumstances additional priority can be given, through the award of Social Circumstances.

In cases where there are other factors to consider, such as threats of violence, significant anti-social behaviour, or domestic abuse, which may exacerbate the applicants' circumstances and/or impact on a medical condition, cases can be referred to the Exceptional Circumstances Panel (ECP); this is a Panel of Senior Officers, who will consider collectively the information, and where exceptions to the usual policy can be made.

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In the first six months of 2022, a total of 196 cases were passed to the Independent Medical Advisor for assessment. For more complex mental health issues, cases can also be sent to the psychiatric advisors for their assessment.

The process followed to assess cases seeking medical priority is similar to that used by neighbouring authorities.

In terms of decisions made under the homeless legislation, where medical information may be considered to determine an applicant's vulnerability, there are safeguards to ensure that decisions meet the legal standard. There is a statutory right of review of all decisions around medical issues. The review process involves a senior officer who was not involved in the original decision looking at the facts of the case and making their own finding. The finding can then be appealed to a County Court (although there needs to be an error of law for the appeal to be successful).

To sum up, yes, I do think that the current policy is adequate.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Musk asked are you saying that a desktop exercise from a medical examiner should supersede the evidence from medical assessment from a professional when that evidence has been handed over from customers and people in need.

Councillor Thomson stated that it is clear that the Council have a policy but obviously cases can be complex and things can change over time. The process is fair and takes a huge amount of information into account. In the legislation it is set out how the Council follow the process and the Council is following it in the right way.

17. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE CABINET

The Council considered a recommendation from the meeting of the Special Cabinet on 25 July 2022:-

17.1. Local Plan - Inspector's Letter and Proposed Modifications to the Plan

Recommendation from the meeting of the Special Cabinet on 25 July 2022 on the Inspector's Letter and Proposed Modifications to the Plan.

Members were reminded of the key stages in producing the Local Plan, the Council's January 2022 Strategy and the Inspector's response; the housing requirement, housing supply, the recommendations from Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel and Cabinet, the considerations and risks.

In January 2022, Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel considered options to meet the Full Objective Assessment for Housing Need (FOAHN) of 15,200. The panel proposed that the Council's strategy agreed in November 2020 be put forward for consideration by Cabinet and Council.

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The strategy had identified a supply of sites for 13,277 dwellings to meet what the Council considered should be the FOAHN OF 13,800.

There were also changes to windfall allowance, updated completions and commitments and amendments to the strategy as a consequence of decisions made by the inspector, this resulted in a distribution of 13,279 dwellings.

This had been presented to Council at a special meeting on 27 January 2022.

The Council wrote a letter to the inspector setting out the strategy and noting that the availability and size of sites resulted in most of the development being delivered in the first ten years post adoption.

It was noted that the planning policies should identify specific deliverable site for years 1-5 of the plan period. They should also identify specific developable sites or broad locations for growth for years 6-10 and where possible for years 11-15.

The Inspector responded to the Council's letter and had advised that the Local Plan requirement of 15,200 was still appropriate. He had advised an approach based on identifying sites for the year period following adoption could be sound with a commitment to a review, to be undertaken in the context of housing need and national policy.

The Inspector had now found HS24 in Little Heath and SDS6 in Symondshyde unsound. HS29 and HS30 in Cuffley were also not found sound. A fifth site, HS22 has previously been found sound and the Inspector confined that the site was still sound.

The inspector advised the Council that the plan can only move forward if the Council identified sufficient sites for the first ten years post adoption and carried out consultation on an agreed set of main modifications. The inspector also required sound evidence to demonstrate that the plan can deliver five years' worth of housing against the plan's housing requirement.

The Inspector had concluded that the housing requirement for the plan period 2016-36 was 15,200 dwellings with an average 760 dwellings per annum. A 20% buffer had to be provided to reflect under delivery resulting in a 10 year target of 7,938.

Completions during the plan period to 31 March 2022 equated to 2,731 dwellings, resulting in a residual requirement for 12,469 dwellings for the plan period, an average of 891 dwellings per annum.

The Inspector stated that the five years needed to start from April 2023 rather than 2022. Therefore it was necessary to estimate the number of completions for 2022/23 and this resulted an increase in the shortfall from 1,829 to 1,976 dwellings.

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It was noted that at the Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel meeting on 21 July 2022 members had rejected both recommendations in the report. Members agreed to recommend the proposed sites agreed at Special Council on 27 January 2022 and their updated dwelling numbers specifically as shown in table 3 of the report and Appendix A Table 1 of the report giving a total updated capacity of 12,775 with 8,517 in the first ten years. It was also noted that at the Special Cabinet meeting on 25 July 2022 Cabinet agreed with the CPPP recommendations.

It was noted that the plan had not increased the five year land supply or made full provision for the shortfall. The inspector had already rejected the 13,277 and 13,279 strategies and there was a strong likelihood that the plan will be found unsound.

It was moved and seconded by Councillors S.Boulton and T.Kingsbury that the recommendation be approved.

The Liberal Democrats Group proposed an amendment to the recommendation to include HS22, HS29 and HS30 back in the Local Plan.

The proposed amendment was moved and seconded by Councillors J.Quinton and D.Jones.

The following points were raised and discussed:

Members wanted clarification on if HS29 and HS30 were found sound as the report said 'they were found unsound'. Officers confirmed there was an error in the report and confirmed that HS29 and HS30 were found sound.

Members were concerned that the majority of proposed buildings were flats and not homes for families.

Members acknowledged that the Green Belt must be protected given the benefits it brings to the borough and the community.

Members did not want many high harm sites to be added to the plan. It was noted that the high harm site in Hatfield was larger than sites that had been removed from the plan.

Members thought it was a good decision that the numbers at the Wheat Quarter site had been reduced by about 600 and that it was also protecting its heritage in Welwyn Garden City.

Members wanted to see more sites in the villages added to the Local Plan.

On the amendment being put to the meeting there voted:

RESOLVED:
(10 voting FOR, 31 voting AGAINST and 1 ABSTENTION)

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And the Amendment was declared LOST.

The original recommendation was then put to the meeting.

The following points were raised and discussed:

Members thanked officers for their continued hard work on the Council's Local Plan.

Some Members stated that the process was a waste of time and money for council to propose a plan that was likely to be found unsound.

Members felt that the plan had inadequate infrastructure to meet the needs of the residents in the borough and would be unsustainable.

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

RESOLVED:

(21 voting FOR, 21 voting AGAINST with Mayor's casting vote of FOR)

Council agreed the proposed sites recommended by the Special Council on 27 January 2022 and their updated dwelling numbers specifically as shown in table 3 of the report and Appendix A Table 1 of the report giving a total updated capacity of 12,775 with 8,517 in the first ten years.

18. NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

18.1. The following motion has been submitted by Councillor L. Musk and was seconded by Councillor L.Crofton:-

"This council notes that Tuesday 14 June marked the 5 anniversary of the Grenfell disaster.

The Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry recommended that the owner and manager of every high-rise residential building be required by law to prepare Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) for all disabled residents. However, last month the Government rejected this recommendation and revealed downgraded plans, which have been largely criticised by Grenfell campaigners, disability rights campaigners and the Fire Brigade Union.

Within Welwyn Hatfield we have seen critical failures in housing safety.

This council resolves, that due to the number of multi storey/ high rise developments being proposed in this borough, that the leader

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1. Writes to Lord Greenhalgh, Minister of State for Building Safety, Fire and Communities urging for a reversal of the government's rejection of PEEPs
2. Looks at resolving national failure locally by enshrining PEEPs for the borough."

It was moved and seconded by Councillors L.Musk and L.Crofton that the motion be approved.

Councillor Thomson stated that the Council had not seen critical failures in housing safety.

On being put to the meeting there voted:-

FOR the Motion – 21
AGAINST the Motion – 21
With Mayor's casting vote AGAINST

The Motion was declared LOST.

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

"Welwyn Hatfield Council notes that we're living through a Cost of Living crisis not seen for a generation.

Residents are seeing increases in their rents, Council Tax, food prices and fuel prices.

Inflation in the UK is rising and the Bank of England expects inflation to hit 11% this year.

Welwyn Hatfield Council notes that Energy prices increased on average by 54% in April of this year, and are predicted to rise substantially again in October.

This Council is concerned about the October energy price increase and the impact this will have on our residents' ability to keep manage their finances this winter and keep their households warm.

The Council calls on the Government to act now to reduce energy prices and resolves to write to the newly appointed Chancellor expressing these views and demanding action for our residents."

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

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

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Welwyn Hatfield Council notes that we're living through a Cost of Living crisis not seen for a generation.

Residents are seeing increases in ~~their rents, Council Tax, various expenditure~~ especially food prices and fuel prices.

Inflation in the UK is rising and the Bank of England expects inflation to hit 11% this year.

Welwyn Hatfield Council notes that ~~E~~energy prices increased on average by 54% in April of this year, and are predicted to rise substantially again in October.

This Council is concerned about the October energy price increase and the impact this will have on our residents' ability to ~~keep~~ manage their finances this winter and keep their households warm.

Inflationary pressures will also have a significant impact on the Council's finances with pressures on key services to residents.

The Council notes the significant help already given to residents but calls on the Government to ~~act~~ consider further measures now to ~~reduce~~ support residents with energy price rises as well as considering the financial situations councils will face and resolves to write to the newly appointed Chancellor expressing these views and asking for help ~~demanding action~~ for our residents and the Council.

On being put to the meeting there voted:-

FOR the amendment – 42
AGAINST the amendment – 0
ABSTENTIONS for the Motion – 0

The Motion was declared CARRIED.

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

Welwyn Hatfield Council notes that we're living through a Cost of Living crisis not seen for a generation.

Residents are seeing increases in various expenditure especially food prices and fuel prices.

Inflation in the UK is rising and the Bank of England expects inflation to hit 11% this year.

Welwyn Hatfield Council notes that energy prices increased on average by 54% in April of this year, and are predicted to rise substantially again in October.

This Council is concerned about the October energy price increase and the impact this will have on our residents' ability to manage their finances this winter and keep their households warm.

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Inflationary pressures will also have a significant impact on the Council's finances with pressures on key services to residents.

The Council notes the significant help already given to residents but calls on the Government to consider further measures now to support residents with energy price rises as well as considering the financial situations councils will face and resolves to write to the newly appointed Chancellor expressing these views and asking for help for our residents and the Council.

On being put to the meeting there voted:-

The Motion, as amended, was declared carried UNANIMOUSLY.

18.3. The following motion has been submitted by Councillor G. Moore and was seconded by Councillor M.Siewniak:-

"This council notes with concern a number of planning applications that, if granted, will have a detrimental impact on the heritage of Welwyn Hatfield.

This council believes that protection of the cultural heritage of all Welwyn Hatfield conservation areas is critical to passing on a worthwhile legacy to future generations.

This council therefore reaffirms its commitment to the protection of our cultural heritage, through support for conservation areas, and will resist robustly any planning applications it believes will be detrimental to such areas and the wider heritage in which those areas sit.

In particular this council is concerned about the number and scale of applications which impact conservation areas, including 5G mast applications, and asks officers to deal with them robustly."

It was moved and seconded by Councillors G.Moore and M.Siewniak that the motion be approved.

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

This council notes ~~that sometimes proposed with concern a number of~~ planning applications ~~that, if granted, will~~ could result in developments which have a detrimental impact on the heritage, surrounding and character of Welwyn Hatfield.

This council believes that ~~appropriate consideration for, and protection of, the particular character cultural heritage of all Welwyn Hatfield conservation areas~~ is important ~~critical~~ to passing on a worthwhile legacy to future generations.

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This council therefore reaffirms its commitment to the protection of our cultural heritage and environmental surroundings, through the framework of local and national planning policies support for conservation areas, and will continue to carefully consider, as part of the planning process, resist robustly any planning applications it believes will be detrimental to such areas and the wider heritage in which may impact on such these areas within Welwyn Hatfield sit.

In particular this council will ask officers to ensure the impact on is concerned about the number and scale of applications which impact conservation areas from planning applications, including 5G masts of which three proposed 5G applications have been rejected by the Council so far, will continue to be considered applications, and asks by planning officers as part of the planning balance in the usual manner to deal with them robustly.

On being put to the meeting there voted:-

FOR the amendment – 41

AGAINST the amendment – 0

ABSTENTIONS for the amendment – 0

The amendment was declared CARRIED.

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

This council notes that sometimes proposed planning applications if granted, could result in developments which have a detrimental impact on the heritage, surrounding and character of Welwyn Hatfield.

This council believes that appropriate consideration for, and protection of, the particular character of Welwyn Hatfield is important to passing on a worthwhile legacy to future generations.

This council therefore reaffirms its commitment to the protection of our cultural heritage and environmental surroundings, through the framework of local and national planning policies and will continue to carefully consider, as part of the planning process, any planning applications which may impact on such those areas within Welwyn Hatfield.

In particular this council will ask officers to ensure the impact on conservation areas from planning applications, including 5G masts of which three proposed 5G applications have been rejected by the Council so far, will continue to be considered by planning officers as part of the planning balance in the usual manner.

On being put to the meeting there voted:-

The Motion, as amended, was declared carried UNANIMOUSLY.

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(Note: Councillor Brandon left part way through the debate for the motion so did not vote on the item or any subsequent items).

19. APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEES 2022/23

The Mayor asked the Council to approve the membership of Non-Executive Committees.

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

RESOLVED:
(unanimous)

The membership of non-executive Committees as set out in Agenda, be approved.

20. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

Report of the Assistant Director (Legal and Governance) on the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for 2021/22.

As the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the 2021/22 Municipal Year, the Mayor brought the report to Council summarising the work carried out by the Committee last year.

The report outlined the subjects the committee had presented to them as well as the work carried out by the task and finish panels set up last year.

It was moved and seconded by Councillors B.Fitzsimon and L.Chesterman and

RESOLVED:
(unanimous)

That the Council note the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2021/22.

21. LOCALISM ACT 2011 - APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT PERSON

Report of the Monitoring Officer on the appointment of the Council's independent person to advise on standards matters for councillors.

Under the Localism Act 2011, the Council is required to have an Independent Person or persons appointed (the IP).

The statutory role of the IP was set out in the report to Council and the appointment of the IP must be made by full Council under the legislation.

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The Standards Committee at its meeting on 15 June 2022, considered a draft report on the proposed appointment and had no comments on the report and have recommended it to Council.

The current term of appointment for the IP expires this month and the Council is required to make a fresh appointment for a further five-year term.

In order to do so, the Council conducted an external advertising campaign both through the Council website and the use of social media to try to attract as many applications as possible.

An officer interview panel took place on 20 May 2022. The Panel consisted of the Chief Executive, Governance Services Manager and Assistant Director.

The unanimous recommendation of the officer panel was to re-appoint the current IP, Mr Ian Jobson. Mr Jobson's background and credentials were set out in paragraphs 3.10 to 3.13 of the report.

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

**RESOLVED:
(unanimous)**

Council agreed the appointment of Mr Ian Jobson as a Council Independent Person for a further term of five years, commencing on the date after this meeting.

22. MEMBERS' ALLOWANCE SCHEME

Report of the Chief Executive on the Members' Allowance Scheme.

The Independent Remuneration Panel had met in December 2021 to consider the annual review of members' allowances for 2021/22 and subsequent years.

The Panel carried out a comprehensive review of Members' Allowances during 2021 and the recommendations were for new levels for the Basic Allowance as well as for the various Special Responsibility Allowances payable to those in specific roles.

The Panel also recommends an annual index linked adjustment to be applied in line with the Consumer Price Index.

The current and proposed rates were set out at Appendix B to the report.

The additional cost of these recommended increases was estimated to be £9,863 and can be met from within the existing budget.

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

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RESOLVED:

(25 voting FOR and 7 AGAINST and 8 ABSTENTIONS)

- (1) Council agreed the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel and approved the proposed level of Members' Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) as set out in Appendix B, payable with effect from 1 July 2021.
- (2) Council agreed that an annual index linked adjustment to be made in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) (capped at 4% per annum) and applied with effect from 1 June in 2022, 2023 and 2024.
- (3) Note that the proposed Member Allowance Scheme would end in May 2025, with a new four-year scheme required to be developed by Officers and the IRP in 2024/25 and take effect from 1 June 2025.

(Note: Councillor B. Fitzsimon did not vote on this item).

Meeting ended at 11.34pm
AM