

THREE RIVERS DISTRICT COUNCIL

At a meeting of the Full Council held in the Penn Chamber, Three Rivers House, Northway, Rickmansworth, on Tuesday 12 December 2023 from 19:30 to 22:00

Present:

Councillors Matthew Bedford, Lisa Hudson, Andrea Fraser, Stephen Giles-Medhurst, Philip Hearn, Tony Humphreys, Khalid Hussain, Stephen King, Chris Lloyd, David Major, Keith Martin, Abbas Merali, Chris Mitchell, Debbie Morris, Sarah Nelmes, Louise Price, Kevin Raeburn, Paul Rainbow, Reena Ranger, Ciaran Reed, Andrew Scarth, Roger Seabourne, Jon Tankard, Narinder Sian, Jonathan Solomons, Chris Whately-Smith and Anne Winter

Officers in Attendance:

Kimberley Grout, Associate Director of Strategy, Partnerships and Housing
Stephen Rix, Associate Director of Legal and Democratic
Alison Scott, Director of Finance
Joanne Wagstaffe, Chief Executive

49 ELECTION OF CHAIR

RESOLVED that Councillor Raj Khiroya be elected Chair for the remainder of the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

Councillor Khiroya signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office and was invested with the Chair's Chains of Office.

COUNCILLOR KHIROYA IN THE CHAIR

50 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR

RESOLVED that Councillor Tony Humphries be elected Vice-Chair for the remainder of the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

Councillor Humphries signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office and was invested with the Vice-Chair's Chains of Office.

51 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ruth Clark, David Coltman, Oliver Cooper, Stephen Cox, Steve Drury, Joan King and Ian Morris.

52 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Full Council held on 17th October 2023 are approved as being a correct record and are signed by the Chair.

53 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Councillor Khiroya thanked former Councillor Phil Williams for his work as the previous Council Chair and thanked all councillors for giving him the opportunity to become Chair.

54 PETITIONS RECEIVED UNDER PROCEDURE RULE 18

It was noted that no petitions had been received by the Council under Procedure Rule 18.

55 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC RECEIVED UNDER PROCEDURE RULE 15

The Council received and noted the three questions submitted by members of the public under Procedure Rule 15 and their written responses.

56 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE ON 13 NOVEMBER 2023 & 4 DECEMBER 2023

Council considered recommendations arising from resolutions passed by the Policy and Resources Committee at its meetings on 13th November 2023 and 4th December 2023.

The following recommendations were moved by Councillor Keith Martin, seconded by Councillor Sarah Nelmes and agreed by common assent:

Budget Monitoring Report

- i. That the revenue budget virements, set out in appendices 1 to 3 be approved and incorporated into the three year medium term financial plan.
- ii. That the revenue budget supplementary estimates as set out in appendices 1 to 3 be approved and incorporated into the three year medium-term financial plan.
- iii. That the revenue variances to be managed as set out in appendices 1 to 3 be noted.
- iv. That the capital variances as set out in appendices 1 to 3 be approved and incorporated into the three-year medium-term financial plan.

Climate Emergency and Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan Update.

- i. That the revised Climate Emergency and Sustainability Strategy 2023-2027 be adopted
- ii. The updates arising from the Climate Change and Sustainability Action Plan are noted.

Adaptation and Resilience Risk Register Recommendation:

- i. That the Adaptation and Resilience Risk Register be adopted.
- ii. That it be noted that the actions arising from the register will form part of service plans.
- iii. That it be noted that the finance and budgetary risk register should add a direct reference to the adaptation and resilience risk register.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy 2023-26

- i. That the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy 2023-26 is adopted.

Safeguarding Children and Adults Policy 2023

- i. That the new Safeguarding Children, Young People and Adults at Risk Policy 2023-2026 is adopted.

Three Rivers Community Strategy 2023-28

1. That the Three Rivers Community Strategy 2023-28 is adopted.

Fees and Charges 2024

In respect of the recommendation arising from the Policy and Resources Committee meeting on 4th December 2023 it was noted that this had been added to the agenda as a late item because the meeting had taken place after the agenda for council had been published and the recommendations were for implementation from the 1st January 2024. The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Keith Martin, seconded by Councillor Sarah Nelmes, put to the vote and carried.

RESOLVED that the Fees and Charges set out in the Schedules appended to the report, and as amended by the Committee following the verbal update provided by the Director of Finance at the meeting, be approved as follows:

- i. That the Fees and Charges set out in the schedule at Appendix 1, as amended, to be effective from 1 January 2024
- ii. That the Fees and Charges set out in the schedule at Appendix 2, as amended, to be effective from 1 April 2024
- iii. That Section 106 monitoring fees are introduced from 1 January 2024 as per the schedule provided at the meeting

The vote in favour of the recommendations was as follows: For 21, Against 8, Abstain 0.

Note: Councillor Rue Grewal left the room during the consideration of the last item and did not participate in the vote.

57 2024/25 COUNCIL TAX BASE

Council considered a report setting out the details of the Authority's Council Tax base for 2024/25.

The Local Government Finance Act 1992 Section 31B(1) placed a legal requirement on the Council, in its capacity as the billing authority, to calculate a Council Base using a standard methodology for 2024/25 by 31st January 2024. This base would then be used to calculate Council Tax levels as part of the annual budget setting process.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Keith Martin, seconded by Councillor Sarah Nelmes and carried by general assent.

RESOLVED that:

- i. The calculation of the Council's Tax Base for the year 2024/25 be approved.
- ii. In accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base)(England) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by Three Rivers District Council as its council tax base for the year 2024/25 shall be:

Parish	Band D Equivalents 2024/25
Abbots Langley	8705.2
Batchworth	6526.9
Chorleywood	6326.6
Croxley Green	5799.5
Sarratt	1095.0
Watford Rural	7683.7
Unparished Area	3713.9
Total District	39850.8

58 MEMBERS ALLOWANCE SCHEME RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

Council considered a report summarising the recommendations arising from the Independent Remuneration Panel's (IRP) review of member expenses for 2024/25. It was noted that a typographical error had been made in the Basic Allowance rate when collating the summary data in the original annex and the corrected data had subsequently been published in the supplementary agenda paper.

It was suggested that the Independent Remuneration Panel give consideration to ensuring that any future increases in member allowances were in-line with National Pay Policy and the National Joint Committee Local Government Settlement to ensure they were inline with staff salary uplifts.

The recommendations of the Independent Remuneration panel were proposed by Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst, seconded by Councillor Sarah Nelmes, and carried by general assent.

RESOLVED that:

- i. That Member Allowances be increased by 5%
- ii. The relativity of the Special Responsibility Allowances to the Basic Allowance remain unchanged.
- iii. The Dependant Carers Allowance remains at £12.50 per hour.
- iv. Mileage rates remain at 52.2p per mile.
- v. A benchmarking exercise on the cost of employing professional carers is completed prior to the 2024/25 decision making cycle to ensure that the Dependent Carers Allowance meet Living Wage requirements.
- vi. The IRP give consideration to the possibility of index linking members' allowances in future years during their deliberations in 2024.
- vii. The IRP give consideration to the possibility of introducing a Co-optees allowance during their deliberations in 2024.
- viii. That the new rates for Members' Allowances be implemented from 1 April 2024.

59 LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING FUND UPDATE AND PROPOSED TRANSFER OF LAND

Council considered a report detailing proposals to transfer the ownership of three garage sites from the Council to Three Rivers Homes Limited in order to facilitate the development of the sites to provide sixteen new affordable homes.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Sarah Nelmes, seconded by Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst, put to the vote and carried by General assent.

RESOLVED that:

- i. The progress of the LHAF scheme in the District is noted.
- ii. The transfer of the two garage sites at Pollards, Maple Cross and the single garage site at The Queens Drive, Mill End to Three Rivers Homes Limited is approved.
- iii. Any minor variations or amendments to the proposed transfer as may be necessary are delegated to the Chief Executive and Director of Finance, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Lead Member for Resources.
- iv. The intended use of the allocated capital programme funds to be invested into the LHAF scheme be noted.

60 PLANNING COMMITTEE CHANGE OF MEMBERSHIP

Council noted that Councillor Andrea Fraser had replaced Councillor Ian Morris on the Planning Committee.

61 QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER, LEAD MEMBERS AND REPORTS FROM LEAD MEMBERS

Council noted the written reports provided by the Leader and Lead Members.

It was reported that since the Local Plan Regulation 18 consultation had been launched there had been over 4000 views of the consultation web pages and 2078 active engagements with the site. A total of 815 responses had been submitted through the online platform and written

responses were being accepted until 22nd December 2023. The Lead Member thanked officers for their work on the consultation. The outcomes of the consultation would be available in the New Year.

It was questioned whether a comprehensive District wide review of car parking schemes across the District should be carried out rather than the current seeming piecemeal approach and it was agreed that a written response would be provided.

It was confirmed that maintenance of the bike stands was the responsibility of Hertfordshire County Council.

It was confirmed that the budget for the 2024/25 financial year would be taken to the Policy and Resources Committee on 29th January 2024. The possibility of providing a briefing for members beforehand would be discussed with officers.

The written responses to the questions submitted to Lead Members and the following responses to supplementary questions were noted:

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Reena Ranger, it was confirmed that it was not the business of Councillors to comment on Human Resources investigations.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Chris Lloyd, it was clarified that the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities had confirmed that a Brown Field First approach to housing site allocations in the Local Plan must be taken. If it wasn't then there was a risk that Local Plans would be found to be unsound at Examination.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Paul Rainbow, it was confirmed that an update on the extension of the Metropolitan underground line into the Borough would be given at the next Public Services Committee meeting in January. It was acknowledged that it was important that unless the Council had a planned scheme ready to go it was there was the possibility that any funding opportunities would be missed due to the tight deadlines being imposed by the Government. It was stressed that the Council would only support an extension if it linked directly into Croxley station.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Sian, it was agreed that a written response would be provided setting out how much Community Infrastructure Levy funding had been received from the Killingdown Farm development..

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Philip Hearn it was stressed that planning applications for any of the sites listed in the Regulation 18 Consultation document would be considered on their merits and site constraints would be taken into account in relation to planning policies in place at the time an application was submitted.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst it was confirmed that a response from Hertfordshire County Council on the outcomes of the Local Cycling and Walking Implementation Plan consultation was expected in the new year.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Chris Mitchell, it was confirmed that payment machines had now been installed in Croxley Green and the lining was due to be completed imminently. Following a short grace period enforcement would commence in the New Year.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Narinder Sian it was agreed that details of success metric for the Beryl Bike Pilot scheme would be provided in a written answer.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Philip Hearn it was clarified that no funding was available for additional car parks at the current time.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Chris Mitchell it was agreed that the possibility of widening access to water fountains in Barton Way Recreation Ground would be followed up with officers however it was stressed that budgets were limited.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Abbas Merali it was agreed that a written answer would be provided.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Chris Mitchell it was acknowledged that the lack of any financial settlements being detailed in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement was concerning. It was incumbent on local authorities to produce a balanced budget and it was expected that more local authorities would find themselves in financial difficulties in the coming year.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Chris Mitchell it was agreed that a written answer setting out the investment in indoor community space in Croxley since the 1960s would be provided.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Ciaran Reed it was stressed that it was the Government's audit system that was failing and it was for the Government to resolve.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Andrea Fraser it was agreed that a written response would be provided in respect of the ongoing cleaning of the war memorial in Rickmansworth.

62 WRITTEN REPORTS FROM, AND QUESTIONS TO THE CHAIRS OF AUDIT, PLANNING, LICENSING AND REGULATORY SERVICES COMMITTEE.

Council noted the report provided by the Chair of the Planning Committee.

63 MOTIONS UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 11

Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst proposed that Council standing orders be suspended to enable two of the motions to be heard prior to item 13 Questions to the Leader, Lead Members and reports from Lead Members. It was considered necessary to do this due to the length of the meeting agenda and the urgency of two of the motions. The motion was seconded by Councillor Sarah Nelmes, put to the vote and carried.

The voting in favour of the motion to suspend standing orders was: For 19, Against 10, Abstain 1.

RESOLVED that Standing Orders be suspended to enable Motions to be considered out of order. Motions 1 and 8 were then heard prior to item 13.

Motion 1: Voter Identification

It was moved by Councillor, Sara Bedford and seconded by Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst that:

Council notes that:

1. The Elections Act 2022 requires voters to present an approved form of Photo ID at a polling station in order to vote.
2. There is little evidence that voter fraud is a systematic issue in UK elections, with only 4 convictions resulting from allegations of in-person voter fraud out of 58 million votes cast at the 2019 General, Local, European and Mayoral Elections combined.
3. In the 2021 local elections just one caution for election fraud was issued by the police.

Council agrees with the comments made by the Electoral Commission in September 2022 that the new rules could not be delivered in a way which is fully secure, accessible and workable, pointing out that 7.5% of voters do not hold an acceptable form of ID and over 1000 voters were denied the opportunity to vote during Voter ID trials in the 2018 and 2019 local elections.

Council is deeply concerned that the requirement to provide Photo ID presented a barrier for residents in Three Rivers to exercise their right to vote, and that these barriers disproportionately affect ethnic minority, low income, disabled, LGBT+, elderly and young voters.

Council notes:

1. The acceptable forms of ID listed by the Government are weighted towards more affluent and older voters who are more likely to possess passports, driving licences or older persons bus passes, whilst forms of photo ID most likely to be held by younger people have been excluded.
2. The Electoral Commission's research showed that, of those that didn't vote in May 2023, 1 in 25 gave Voter ID as a reason.
3. Whilst the number who came to a polling station in Three Rivers without identification is relatively low, it still represents a proportion of the electorate who were inconvenienced or disenfranchised by the Government-imposed requirements.
4. The comments of Jacob Rees-Mogg to the National Conservatism Conference, admitting the attempt of the Conservative government to gerrymander elections using voter ID.

Council therefore instructs the Chief Executive to write to the Cabinet Office to express the Council's continued opposition to Voter ID and its damaging effects on democracy, and to demand that this section of the legislation is repealed immediately.

Council noted that nationally the number of prosecutions for personation was currently in single figures and as such the imposition of the requirement for photographic identification to be presented when voting was disproportionate. It was also felt that the number of people recorded as having been turned away by polling stations for not having appropriate identification did not present a full picture because it did not include those who had made a decision not to attend a polling station because they did not have identification. It was also noted that the requirement for identification in order to be able to vote was increasingly the norm in other countries and that efforts should be focused on encouraging and assisting local residents without suitable identification to obtain free voter authority certificates which would enable them to vote.

Having concluded the debate, the motion was put to the vote and carried. The vote in respect of the motion was as follows: For 20, Against 10, Abstain 0.

RESOLVED that the motion in respect of Voter Identification is carried.

Motion 8: Nutrient Neutrality

It was moved by Councillor Narinder Sian, seconded by Councillor Chris Mitchell, that:

This Council notes the statement from Secretary of State Michael Gove that the government plans to remove the 'Nutrient Neutrality' requirement for Natural England to advise councils not to approve housing schemes that will add to nutrient pollution in already damaged rivers and waterways.

This Council believes this would be a retrograde step which will further damage our already struggling waterways. The associated £280m 'offsetting' funding is an open acknowledgement that scrapping these rules will increase pollution. The amount is a drop in the ocean and, as Feargal Sharkey has pointed out, 'you can't offset a dead river'. Further, this plan transfers responsibility and costs of dealing with pollution from profitable developers to the public.

This Council believes that instead of allowing housebuilders to pollute, Government should require water companies and housebuilders to invest in upgrading the infrastructure needed as a prerequisite to development whilst continuing to enforce mitigation schemes. We further believe that with the right investment and appropriate regulation of all sources of pollution to our waterways, from treatment works to agriculture, communities can have both high-quality affordable homes and healthy waterways.

We call on the Leader of the Council to write publicly to the Secretary of State and to our MPs to express the Council's views.

Council noted that residents were increasingly concerned about the level of pollutants in local rivers, with a study having identified in excess of 250 different pollutants in the River Colne, and the impacts that these were having on the area's biodiversity. A situation that would be compounded by the expected increase in run-off from new and future developments into the District's water courses. It was acknowledged that the removal of nutrient neutrality requirements whilst easing pressure of developers would do further damage to the District's biodiversity and rare chalk river habitats.

Having concluded the debate, the motion was put to the vote and carried. The vote in respect of the motion was as follows: For 21, Against 0, Abstain 9.

RESOLVED that the motion in respect of nutrient neutrality requirements is carried.

Motion 2: Prostate Cancer UK Boys Need Bins Campaign

It was moved by Councillor Chris Lloyd and seconded by Councillor Sara Bedford that:

Council notes Prostate Cancer UK's campaign of Boys need bins, which highlights the growing numbers of those who suffer with incontinence issues as a result of prostate treatment.

Prostate Cancer UK cites that 1 in 8 men will get prostate cancer and that 1 in 3 men over 65 are estimated to have a urinary incontinence problem. Council believes that it is important to make life more comfortable and dignified for those who suffer such problems.

Council supports the provision of sanitary bins in all toilets so that waste products can be disposed of in a discreet and hygienic manner.

Council therefore requests that council officers design and implement a programme to provide sanitary bins, in council owned or managed male toilets by the end of the current financial year and encourages partners to do likewise.

It was acknowledged that this was a subject that impacted a large number of people and that this was something that the Council should be doing. It was suggested that if the motion was carried then the possibility of including messages encouraging people to go for testing in communications messages should be considered.

Councillor Chris Lloyd thanked all members for their support of the campaign.

Having concluded the debate, the motion was put to the vote and carried by common assent.

RESOLVED that the motion in respect of Prostate Cancer UK's Boys Need Bins campaign is carried.

Meeting Concluded

Note: In accordance with Part 4, Rule 1, Paragraph 7 of the Council's Constitution, the meeting concluded at 10pm. In accordance with Part 4, Rule 6, Paragraph 3 of the Council's Constitution all remaining items on the agenda fell and were not considered.

CHAIRMAN