
Policy and Resources Committee MINUTES

Of a meeting held in the Watersmeet Theatre, High Street, Rickmansworth, WD3 1EH, on Monday, 26 January 2026 from 7.00pm to 10.00pm.

Present: Councillors Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst OBE Councillor Sarah Nelmes

Oliver Cooper, Stephen Cox, Steve Drury, Vicky Edwards, Rue Grewal, Philip Hearn, Chris Lloyd, Chris Mitchell, Louise Price and Jon Tankard

Officers in Attendance:

Joanne Wagstaffe – Chief Executive Officer
Alison Betts – Associate Director for Finance
Emma Sheridan – Associate Director for Environment
Lucy Smith – Committee and Elections Manager
Jonathan Boyle – Deputy Monitoring Officer
Matthew Barnes – Principal Planning Lawyer
Marko Kalik – Head of Planning Policy and Conservation
Aaron Roberts – Senior Planning Policy Officer
Sally Riley – Finance Business Partner
Jason Hagland – Head of Strategic Housing
Katie Stacey – Policy and Performance Manager
Shivani Dave – Partnerships manager
Jess Hodges – Trees and landscape Officer
Joanna Hewitson – Climate Change and Sustainability Manager

External in Attendance:

Jon Bishop – Three Rivers Joint Residents Association

PR124 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Reena Ranger, with Councillor Reed substituting.

PR224 MINUTES

The minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee held on 17 November 2025 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair of the meeting.

PR324 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Nelmes declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 5 (Community and Voluntary Sector Agreements) As a member of a Community Centre management committee which was a tenant and a grant recipient.

Councillor Drury declared a pecuniary interest in Items 5 and 14 due to his wife's employment with an organisation referenced in the agenda.

Councillor Cooper declared, for transparency, that a site within the Local Plan allocations was owned by a member of the Conservative Group (not a pecuniary or disclosable interest).

PR424 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS

There were no items of other business.

The Committee agreed to consider late-published papers relating to the Local Plan and HMO Licensing due to their urgency and relevance.

PR524 COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR GRANT AGREEMENTS

The Committee considered a report seeking approval to enter into grant agreements exceeding £25,000 and to delegate authority for limited extensions and amendments. Officers outlined the proposed three year grant arrangements and highlighted continued match funding for mental health provision, support for youth services, transport, and family support and increased funding for Citizens Advice Service.

Members welcomed the clarity and quality of the report and expressed strong support for the voluntary and community sector.

Officers provided detailed performance information for the CAS, including; 617 residents supported with benefit entitlement in the last quarter (exceeding target), £228,601 secured in financial gains for residents. Over £100,00 of debt written off and the average finance benefit per client of approximately £22,000. Members highlighted the preventative value of early advice, mental health support, and community based services in reducing demand on statutory services.

The motion was put to the vote and was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That:

- P and R Committee entering all contracts and/or grant agreements above £25,000.
- P and R to delegate authority to the Associate Director of Corporate, Customer and Community for grant extensions of up to 6 months and amendments to grant agreements.

Organisation	2026-29 Funding allocation (£)
Citizens Advice Service Three Rivers (CASTR)	260,000
Watford and Three Rivers Trust (W3RT)	40,000
Home-Start Watford and Three Rivers	4,800
Watford FC Community, Sports and Education Trust	5,000
Roundabout Transport	5,500

Services for Young People (Hertfordshire County Council)	2,000
Mental Health	10,000
Total	327,300

PR624 FINANCIAL PLANNING - CAPITAL STRATEGY AND THE TREASURY MANAGEMENT POLICY

This item was discussed with item 7 and 8.

RESOLVED:

That:

- The report is noted.

PR724 FINANCIAL PLANNING - REVENUE SERVICES

This item was discussed with item 6 and 8.

RESOLVED:

That:

- The report is noted.

PR824 FINANCIAL PLANNING - RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee considered Items 6-8 together. Officers confirmed that the Capital Strategy and Treasury Management Policy had been considered by Audit Committee. The Council had low external borrowing and no affordability concerns. Cash Balances were being managed effectively, benefiting from higher interest rates. Capital programme monitoring showed savings and additional grant income.

Members explored the adequacy of planning related budgets and reserves, particularly in light of anticipated costs associated with Local Plan examination, potential planning appeals and public inquiries and historic expectations around conservation area appraisals.

Officers advised that a planning reserve had been created to manage variable and unpredictable planning costs. Exact examination costs could not be predicted in advance.

Budgets would continue to be monitored, with in-year adjustment made if required. Additional reserves and potential external funding opportunities could be considered if necessary.

Members noted the explanation and indicated that budget sufficiency could be revisited during the forthcoming budget process.

The motions for Items 6 and 7 were declared CARRIED by the Chair with the voting being by General Assent.

The substantive motion was put to the vote and declared CARRIED by the Chair with the voting being by General Assent.

RESOLVED:

That:

- The Policy and Resources Committee notes that the Administration will publish its final recommendations on Financial Planning 2026/27 to 2028/29 five working days prior to the Council meeting on 24 February 2026 and present them at this meeting.

PR924 DRAFT EQUALITY AND INCLUSION POLICY 26-30 AND DRAFT EQUALITY OBJECTIVES 26-30

The Committee reviewed the draft policy and objectives. Officers summarised that progress achieved under the existing equality objectives and the rationale for updated objectives focused on trust building, accessibility, inclusive culture, and fair delivery of services. The use of Equality Impact Assessments across council functions and alignment with partnership working and new deprivation data.

Some members debated the inclusion of the term equity alongside equality, diversity and inclusion. Concerns were raised including the potential conflict between equity and statutory equality duties, legal clarity and consistency with the Equality Act 2010.

Officers clarified that equity reflected practical steps already taken by the Council to address differing needs and barriers, examples included accessible venues, Healthy Hubs, targeting funding, and service adaptations.

Councillor Cooper proposed an amendment, seconded by Councillor Hearn.

- “Delete paragraph 2.2
- In paragraph 3.2, in the sixth bullet, delete ‘equity’
- In paragraph 5.2, in the fourth bullet, replace ‘inclusion and equity’ with ‘and inclusion’.

The amendment was put to the vote and declared be LOST by the Chair, the voting being For 4 and 9 Against.

The substantive motion was put to the vote and declared CARRIED by the Chair, the voting being For 9, Against 0, Abstentions 4.

RESOLVED:

That:

- The committee review, and if required amend the draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy for 2026-30.
- The committee review, and if required amend the draft Equality Objectives for 2026-30.
- The committee agrees to a public consultation on the draft Policy and Objectives.
- That public access to the report be immediate
- That public access to the decision be immediate.

PR1024 COUNCIL PLAN 2026-2029 - FINAL

The Committee considered the proposed Council Plan. Officers outlined the engagement undertaken, including over 600 consultation responses, and explained that the plan was intended to be strategic, supported by service plans and KPIs.

Members welcomed the engagement and ambition of the plan but queried whether the plan was sufficiently specific and deliverable and discussed historic challenges in delivering previous Council Plans.

Officers advised that delivery would be monitored through quarterly performance reporting. The service plans and committee scrutiny would provide operational detail. A mid term review of the Council Plan would take place.

The motion was put to the vote and declared CARRIED by the Chair, the voting being For 9, Against 0, Abstentions 4.

RESOLVED:

That:

- Committee to approve the progression of the proposed Council Plan 2026-2029 to Full Council on 24 February 2026 for adoption.

PR1124 SME SOLAR PV AND BATTERY GRANT PROPOSAL

The Committee considered a proposal to launch a £50,000 grant scheme for SMEs. Members supported the scheme, noting the environmental benefits, support for local businesses and leveraging private investment into the district. Clarification was provided that carbon offsetting benefits were not a legal requirement, decisions on reinvestment would be for the Council. Alternative mechanisms such as business rates relief were outside the scope of this report. The motion was put to the vote and declared CARRIED by the Chair, the voting being For 9, Against 4.

RESOLVED:

That:

- Committee approve the launch of the SME Solar PV and Battery Grant, using £50,000 of existing climate change budgets across the financial years 25/26 and 26/27.

PR1224 BIODIVERSITY DUTY REPORT 2026

The Committee considered the updated Biodiversity Policy and reporting framework. Members supported the biodiversity net gain principles, emphasised the importance of securing meaningful local environmental benefits and raised caution against approaches that prioritised lowest cost over community value. Officers confirmed statutory compliance and developer responsibilities under biodiversity legislation.

The motion was put to the vote and declared CARRIED by the Chair, the voting being by General Assent.

RESOLVED:

That:

- To note the report.
- To approve the updated Biodiversity Policy.
- To adopt a five-year reporting cycle.

PR1324 BATCHWORTH DEPOT SOLAR ARRAY EXTENSION

The Committee considered a proposal for an expanded solar array and battery installation. Members welcomed the strong payback period, the environmental benefits and the contribution of the decarbonisation of the Council estate.

The motion was put to the vote and was declared CARRIED by the Chair with the voting being by General Assent.

RESOLVED:

That:

- Policy and Resources Committee approve a 22 kWp solar array and a 10.36kWh battery to Batchworth depot offices, requiring investment of £20,708 excluding VAT with a capital payback period of 5.5 years.

PR1424 REVIEW OF HMO ADDITIONAL LICENCING AND CONSIDERATION OF ARTICLE 4 DIRECTION

The Committee considered a report reviewing the Council's additional Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) licensing scheme and the potential introduction of an Article 4 Direction. Officers advised that HMOs formed a recognised part of the housing mix and were already regulated through the Council's additional licensing scheme. It was explained that the introduction of an Article 4 Direction would remove permitted development rights and require planning permission for changes of use, but that such an approach would need to be supported by clear and proportionate evidence of harm. Officers advised that there was currently insufficient evidence to justify an immediate Article 4 Direction and highlighted the potential financial risks involved, including the possibility of compensation claims if action were taken without adequate justification.

Members discussed the impact of HMOs on local communities. Some Members raised concerns about concentrations of HMOs in certain areas and the associated effects on parking, residential amenity and community cohesion. Others emphasised that HMOs should

not be stigmatised, noting that many operated without issue and provided necessary accommodation, and that problems such as parking pressures were not unique to HMOs. Members agreed on the importance of basing decisions on evidence rather than perception and of using existing licensing and enforcement powers to address individual problem properties.

Councillor Cooper proposed an amendment, seconded by Councillor Edwards

- “In paragraph 2.2, replace 'is not progressed' with 'is progressed', and remove everything after 'progressed'.
- In paragraph 2.3, replace 'is not progressed' with 'is progressed', and remove everything after 'progressed'.
- Add new paragraph 2.4 that reads: "As soon as the draft Local Plan has been adopted, Supplementary Planning Guidance is developed prescribing standards that HMOs would have to meet before receiving planning permission.

So that the amended recommendations read:

That:

1. Based on evidence at this time, additional licensing for HMOs is progressed.
2. Based on evidence at this time, that an Article 4 direction is progressed.
3. After the draft Local Plan has been adopted, Supplementary Planning Guidance be adopted prescribing standards that HMOs would have to meet before receiving planning permission.
4. Resident input into HMO licence applications to be included as part of the forthcoming HMO Licensing Policy that will be presented to Committee later this year.
5. The address of any property subject to an application for a HMO licence to be added to the council's HMO Register.
6. Ward Councillors, County Councillors and Parish Councillors (if applicable) are advised if a HMO licence application is received for their area.
7. Neighbours of a property that has applied for an HMO licence application will be notified by Officers upon receipt of that application. (pending approval of the council's Data Protection and Resilience Manager)”

The amendment was put to the vote and declared LOST by the Chair, the voting being For 4, Against 8, Abstention 1.

The substantive motion was put to the vote and declared CARRIED by the Chair, the voting being by General Assent.

RESOLVED:

That:

- Based on evidence at this time, additional licensing for HMOs is not progressed, however, this will be reviewed in 12 months' time.
- Based on evidence at this time, that an Article 4 direction is not progressed. However, Officers agree to keep this under review and if circumstances change, Officers will consider the position.
- Resident input into HMO licence applications to be included as part of the forthcoming HMO Licensing Policy that will be presented to Committee later this year.
- The address of any property subject to an application for a HMO licence to be added to the council's HMO Register.
- Ward Councillors, County Councillors and Parish Councillors (if applicable) are advised if a HMO licence application is received for their area.
- Neighbours of a property that has applied for an HMO licence application will be notified by Officers upon receipt of that application. (pending approval of the council's Data Protection and Resilience Manager)

The Committee considered the Regulation 19 Part 2 Site Allocations document for the Local Plan, which sets out the proposed allocation of sites for development and protection prior to submission for examination.

Jon Bishop of Three Rivers Joint Residents Association addressed the committee and thanked Officers and Members for the extensive work undertaken on the local plan, noting that the proposed policies represented a significant improvement on the current plan and reflected resident engagement, even where not all points had been accepted. He acknowledged the proposed level of housing growth as a pragmatic balance between meeting housing need and protecting the green belt.

Mr Bishop drew attention to a numerical inconsistency within Policy SP1, which he believed to be a typographical error, and raised concerns about the use of the term “overdevelopment” in relation to areas of fundamental importance, suggesting that clearer and more prescriptive wording would provide greater certainty. He also highlighted a technical issue relating to the 45 degree splay line in the appendices.

Mr Bishop further explained that the Association had submitted written suggestions seeking stronger policy wording, particularly where “should” was used instead of “must”, and emphasised the importance of clear, enforceable policies in light of potential changes to the planning system. He concluded by encouraging the Committee to progress the Local Plan to Regulation 19 without delay.

Officers introduced the report and explained that this represented the final stage of plan preparation before submission to the Planning Inspectorate, with the forthcoming Regulation 19 consultation focused on matters of legal compliance and soundness. Officers advised that the Site Allocations document had been developed alongside the Part 1 Policies document and reflected the outcomes of extensive evidence gathering, sustainability appraisal and engagement through the Local Plan Sub-Committee process. It was emphasised that the allocations sought to balance identified development needs with environmental constraints, including Green Belt considerations.

Members discussed the report and acknowledged the significant amount of work undertaken by officers and the Local Plan Sub-Committee. Some Members reiterated concerns raised previously about individual sites, particularly in relation to deliverability, infrastructure capacity and consistency with the Council’s wider spatial strategy. Other Members noted that while individual site concerns remained, the Regulation 19 stage was necessarily narrow in scope and that unresolved objections would be tested through the independent examination process. Members also discussed the importance of ensuring that the Site Allocations document was robustly evidenced, internally consistent with the Part 1 Policies, and capable of being defended at examination. Officers confirmed that minor factual or typographical corrections could be made prior to publication under delegated authority, but that the Council must be satisfied that the document was sound in principle before proceeding to consultation.

The Committee recognised that delaying progression at this stage would risk undermining the overall Local Plan timetable and agreed that the appropriate mechanism for resolving outstanding objections would be through representations to the Planning Inspector.

An amendment was raised by Councillor Edwards and seconded by Councillor Reed.

“Provision for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople

5.59 Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople have particular accommodation needs that require additional consideration. To ensure that members of these communities are able to access decent and appropriate housing with access to services including health and education, the council must make provision for accommodation to meet identified needs.

5.60 Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (PPTS) sets out the Government’s planning policy for traveller sites and should be read in conjunction with the National Planning Policy Framework. HOU4 - Provision for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople

1) The council’s Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (July 2025) sets out that there is a need for 37 pitches for Gypsies and Travellers who meet the definition set out in the PPTS and a need for 6 plots for Travelling Showpeople who meet the planning definition set out in the PPTS.

2) When considering planning applications for sites for Gypsies and Travellers or Travelling Showpeople, a criteria based approach will be used. The following criteria will be taken into account:

- a) Avoid areas at risk from all sources of flooding, or affected by environmental hazards that may affect residents' health or welfare;
 - b) Avoid causing an adverse impact on areas of recognised wildlife, heritage or landscape importance, and on the openness of the Green Belt with improvements sought;
 - c) Have reasonable access to local services and facilities, including shops, schools and healthcare;
 - d) Be well located to the highway network, with safe and convenient vehicular and pedestrian access to the site;
 - e) Sites should be suitably designed and the layout include sufficient space to accommodate the proposed number of caravans, provision of day rooms, space for tourer caravans, landscaping, SuDs mitigation, Biodiversity Net Gain, vehicles and ancillary areas as appropriate. Adequate on-site facilities for parking, storage, waste collection, play and residential amenity should be provided;
 - f) The site must be capable of being adequately serviced by drinking water, utilities and sewerage disposal facilities;
 - g) The size and scale of the site, alone or in combination with other nearby traveller sites, respects the size and density of the local settled community and does not dominate the nearest settled community; sites must not be adjacent to existing residential homes;
 - h) Provide adequate levels of privacy and residential amenities for occupiers and not have an adverse impact on the amenities of any nearby occupiers; including being able to achieve a reasonable level of visual and acoustic privacy for both people living on the site and those living nearby;
 - i) The site must be capable of being adequately serviced by drinking water, utilities and sewerage disposal facilities; and
 - j) The circumstances of the applicant and their need for pitches on the application site;
- 3) Existing Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople sites will be safeguarded unless there is no longer a need for their retention, or they are no longer viable.

Reasoned Justification:

5.61 The NPPF sets out that within the context of establishing need (housing), the size, type and tenure of housing needed for different groups in the community should be assessed and reflected in planning policies and specifically refers to travellers as one of these groups.

5.62 The PPTS states that the Government's overarching aim is to ensure fair and equal treatment for travellers, in a way that facilitates the traditional and nomadic way of life of travellers while respecting the interests of the settled community.

5.63 The council seeks to reduce tensions between settled and traveller communities and promote peaceful and integrated co-existence between the site and the local community. Central to this policy is ensuring that sites are not located next to residential housing and that those sites close to residential housing do not erode the amenity of the existing settlement.

5.64 The council will seek to meet identified needs on suitable sites in sustainable locations and to maintain a five-year supply of deliverable pitches/plots taking into account the findings of the council's Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (July 2025) and any subsequent updates. All the identified Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople sites/yards within the district will be 'safeguarded' to ensure that the permitted use as a traveller site is not lost through the grant of any subsequent planning permission whilst there remains a need for sites.

5.65 The table below sets out the identified need for gypsy and traveller pitches within the district by year periods. There is a need of 37 pitches arising from those households who meet the planning definition and a need of 4 pitches arising from households with undetermined need.

5.66 The table below sets out the identified need for travelling showpeople plots within the district by year periods. There is a need of 6 plots arising from those households who meet the planning definition and a need of 10 plots arising from households with undetermined need.

Year Period	Dates	PPTS Need	Undetermined Need
0 - 5	2025 - 29	6	5
6 - 10	2030 - 34	0	2
11 - 15	2035 - 39	0	2
16 - 20	2040 - 41	0	1

0 - 5 2025 - 29 6 5

6 - 10 2030 - 34 0 2

11 - 15 2035 - 39 0 2

16 - 20 2040 - 41 0 1

0 - 20 2025 - 41 6 10

5.67 The GTAA has not identified the requirement for transit sites within the district, as such we have not planned for such a facility at the current time, although will keep this approach under review as suggested by the GTAA.

5.68 There are a range of different methods to meet identified need, and often a combination of methods is often most effective. The approaches can be categorised as a criteria-based policy approach, extension of existing sites/yards, allocating entirely new gypsy and traveller sites/travelling showpeople yards, or allocating parts of strategic general needs housing sites. A combination of approaches will be utilised in order to meet the need identified within the GTAA.”

Officers advised that Gypsy and Traveller provision was subject to a distinct national policy and legal framework and that the Local Plan approach had been developed in accordance with that framework supported by specific evidence relating to need and deliverability. It was explained that the wording within the Regulation 19 documents reflected the outcomes of earlier stages of consultation, sustainability appraisal and consideration by the Local Plan Sub Committee, and that any changes at this stage would need to be justified by clear evidence to avoid undermining the soundness of the Plan at examination.

Members discussed the amendment, with some expressing concern about ensuring fairness and clarity in how Gypsy and Traveller needs were addressed within the Local Plan, while others emphasised the importance of maintaining a consistent, evidence-led approach that complied with national policy and minimised risk at examination.

The amendment was put to the vote and declared LOST by the Chair, the voting being For 4, Against 6, Abstentions 3.

The substantive motion was put to the vote and declared CARRIED by the Chair, the voting being For 9, Against 4.

RESOLVED:

That:

- Approve and recommend to Full Council the Local Plan Regulation 19 Part 1: Policies document as set out in Appendix 1 for public consultation in accordance with the regulations and the Local Development Scheme
- Grant delegated authority to the Head of Planning Policy & Conservation and the Director of Finance in consultation with the Lead Member for the Local Plan to make any subsequent changes that are required before the documents are published for consultation
- Grant delegated authority to the Head of Planning Policy & Conservation and the Director of Finance in consultation with the Lead Member for the Local Plan to propose minor modifications to the Local Plan and submit the plan to the Planning Inspectorate for examination in public.
- Agree significant proposed modifications to the Local Plan be agreed by Urgent Decision under the council’s constitution prior to submission to the Planning Inspectorate for examination in public.

PR1624 WORK PROGRAMME

The Work Programme was noted.

PR1724 OTHER BUSINESS - IF APPROVED UNDER ITEM 3 ABOVE

PR1824 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Chair moved, duly seconded, the following motion:

“that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined under paragraph (X) of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Act. It has been decided by the Council that in all the circumstances, the public

interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.”

PR1924 REGULATION 19 SITE ALLOCATION

Officers introduced the report and explained that the Site Allocations document formed the second part of the Regulation 19 Local Plan, identifying specific sites for development and protection in accordance with the spatial strategy set out in Part 1. It was explained that this stage represented the final opportunity for the Council to approve the document for consultation prior to submission to the Planning Inspectorate for independent examination. Officers reiterated that the Regulation 19 consultation was narrowly focused on matters of legal compliance and soundness, and that representations would be considered by the Inspector rather than revisited by the Council.

Members acknowledged the extensive work undertaken by officers and the Local Plan Sub-Committee in developing the Site Allocations, including consideration of sustainability appraisal, deliverability, infrastructure capacity and environmental constraints. Some Members reiterated concerns previously raised about individual site allocations, particularly in relation to local impacts, infrastructure provision and consistency with settlement character. It was noted, however, that these matters had been considered through earlier stages of the plan-making process and that outstanding objections would be tested through the examination process.

Members discussed the importance of ensuring that the Site Allocations document was internally consistent with the Part 1 Policies document and supported by robust evidence. Officers confirmed that minor factual or typographical corrections could be made prior to publication under delegated authority, but emphasised that the Council must be satisfied that the document was sound in principle before proceeding.

The Committee recognised that delaying progression of the Site Allocations at this stage would risk undermining the overall Local Plan timetable and increase exposure to speculative development. Members agreed that the appropriate mechanism for resolving remaining disagreements was through the independent examination process.

Councillor Cooper proposed an amendment, seconded by Councillor Edwards,

“Remove the allocation of the following sites:

- H5 (ACFS9b, Little How Croft)
- H12 (CFS56, Church Hill Road, Bedmond)
- H15 (CFS13, land at Oxhey Lane, Watford Heath)
- H16 (CFS14, land north of Oxhey Lane, Carpenders Park)
- H17 (NCFS11, Grange Wood, Carpenders Park)
- H20 (CFS16, Chorleywood station car park)
- H32 (CFS65, Bucknalls Lane)
- H36 (CFS26c, west of Kings Langley estate)
- H37 (NSS20, land adjacent to the RES site, Egg Farm Lane)
- H41 (EOS7.0, land to the south of Shepherds Lane and east of M25)
- H53 (CFS47c, Adams Nurseries, Sarratt)”

The amendment was put to the vote and declared LOST by the Chair, with the voting being For 4, Against 9.

The substantive motion was put to the vote and declared CARRIED by the Chair, with the voting being For 9, Against 0, Absentions 4.

CHAIR