
Full Council MINUTES

Of a meeting held in the Penn Chamber, Three Rivers House, Rickmansworth, on Tuesday, 25 February 2025 from Times Not Specified

Present: Councillors Councillor Raj Khiroya, Tony Humphries, Oliver Cooper, Stephen Cox, Harry Davies, Steve Drury, Vicky Edwards, Andrea Fraser, Stephen Giles-Medhurst, Elinor Gazzard, Philip Hearn, Khalid Hussain, Joan King, Stephen King, Chris Lloyd, David Major, Keith Martin, Abbas Merali, Chris Mitchell, Sarah Nelmes, Louise Price, Kevin Raeburn, Reena Ranger, Ciaran Reed, Andrew Scarth, Narinder Sian, Tom Smith, Cheryl Stungo, Jon Tankard, Chris Whately-Smith and Anne Winter

Kimberley Grout, Associate Director, Corporate and Community Services
Leah Mickleborough, Interim Committee and Elections Manager
Stephen Rix, Associate Director, Legal and Democratic Services
Alison Scott, Director of Finance
Emma Sheridan, Associate Director for Environment
Jo Wagstaffe, Chief Executive

External in Attendance:

6 members of the public

45 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Chris Alley, Rue Grewal, Lisa Hudson, Debbie Morris, Ian Morris, Mike Sims and Jonathon Solomons

46 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

47 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Members considered the minutes of the meeting of 10 December 2024. In relation to minute 35b, Councillor Oliver Cooper confirmed that the amendment had been proposed by himself and seconded by Councillor Philip Hearn. Also in relation to minute 35b, Councillor Stephen Cox requested an amendment so that the minute reflected that Councillor Joan King, as a disabled councillor, had gone to use the toilet and therefore could not vote. This was seconded by Councillor Stephen King.

Both amendments, and the minutes, were agreed by general assent.

48 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair noted the recent events he had attended, most notably the moving Holocaust Memorial Service. He reminded members of his forthcoming charity quiz night at Watersmeet on 9 May.

The Chair then turned to note the sad passing of 3 former councillors and 2 officers, and asked members to pay tribute to their contributions to the Council.

Councillor Chris Whately-Smith spoke regarding former Councillor Richard Peutherer. Councillor Peutherer had represented the Langleybury ward, and then Abbots Langley until 2010 when he retired from the Council. He was well known and respected in the local community and always put the needs of local residents and community first.

Councillor Chris Lloyd talked to the service of former Councillor Hilda Brew, who he reflected was a trailblazer in the community and the council. A keen golfer, Councillor Brew organized the first Three Rivers Calendar and between 1983 and 1984 served as the first female Chair of Three Rivers Council.

Councillor Giles-Medhurst spoke of former Councillor Richard Struck's 35 years of public service representing Moneyhill, Maple Cross and West Hythe. Councillor Struck had served on the Council's executive committee and a year as Council leader but could not attend his final council meeting, having been stranded abroad due to a volcanic eruption.

Councillor Andrew Scarth reflected on the fond memories many officers had of building surveyor Ross Pettifer. He noted that Ross's dedication to service had shone to the end, and it was a very sad loss to the Council and his family.

Councillor Sarah Nelmes spoke of Paul White, barrow beat officer for Croxley. He was well known to councillors and the local community, and with great fondness by his colleagues.

Councillor Oliver Cooper and Stephen Cox, on behalf of their groups, echoed the sentiments made by the Councillors who had spoken, reflecting that each individual had shown true dedication to public service.

The Chair invited Council to hold a minutes silence in their memory.

49 PETITIONS

No petitions had been received for the meeting.

50 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

In introducing the item, the Chair confirmed that the representative of Eastbury Residents Association was unable to attend the meeting, however a revised response to their question had been circulated to members and would be attached to the minutes of the meeting.

The Chair then invited Michael Charnock to ask his question in relation to the cost of parking permits at Moneyhill Parade, to which Councillor Sarah Nelmes responded. In response, Michael Charnock queried why the parking permit was so expensive at £530, and when it would reduce to the minimum £50. Councillor Nelmes confirmed it would not be possible to answer the points raised that evening, but that a further response would be given in writing.

The Chair invited Rachel Clarke to ask her question on a tribute to Barbara Owen OBE. Councillor Chris Lloyd, in response, confirmed he was aware of the significant contribution made by Barbara Owen, and, in response to a supplementary question regarding the length of time to resolve the issue, that he would happily meet with Rachel Clarke to discuss the matter further the week after the Council meeting.

51 FINANCIAL PLANNING

The Chair reminded the meeting of the requirements of Council procedure rule 17 and called on the Leader to introduce the administration's budget proposal.

Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst proposed the Liberal Democrat group budget, and that due to sound financial management, his group budget would not require cuts to services, redundancies or reduced operations. He set out what he believed to be some of the key positive elements of the budgets including funding for local transport, leisure services, parking, housing, council tax support and carbon reduction measures. He noted that the budget included funding to support the local plan delivery and local government reorganisation.

During his presentation, Councillor Giles-Medhurst set out the financial implications including the level of council tax proposed and the level of reserves. He thanked officers for their support and members of the Labour and Green Groups for their suggestions. Addressing the conservative budget proposals, Councillor Giles-Medhurst raised concern that the full revenue impact of proposals had not been considered; a lower increase in council tax would result in a permanent reduction in the revenue available to the Council and the use of reserves as proposed in their budget would not be sustainable.

The proposed budget was seconded by Councillor Sarah-Nelmes.

Councillor Oliver Cooper was invited to present the Conservative budget proposals. In doing so, he outlined what he considered to be a clear distinction in the position between the two parties and proposals and the policy ideas within their budget which he felt delivered a greener environment, made the council more efficient and helped preserve the built environment. This included additional CCTV cameras and funding to support initiatives that could reduce burglaries and environmental crime, and proposals to invest in conservation areas and specific car parking schemes alongside other initiatives he felt would make the district cleaner and safer.

Councillor Cooper set out proposals to improve Council service efficiency, most notably through the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI); he noted his concern that the Council may be spending disproportionately in areas such as communications. He felt that the Liberal Democrat budget proposals represented a position to charge tax and spend money, rather than to invest in service efficiency.

The proposed budget was seconded by Councillor Philip Hearn.

The Chair invited members to debate the budgets.

Councillor Chris Mitchell thanked the Conservative group for putting forward an alternative, and noted that many of the ideas were worthy of consideration. He expressed concern regarding the sustainability impact of AI, which could impact on the Council's net zero ambition, and raised concern regarding the potential of the fair funding review negatively impacting on the council's financial position.

Councillor Stephen Cox focused on the disabled facilities at Three Rivers House, and noted that neither budget included proposals for improving these. Other members expressed support for improving the facilities even though that had not been included in the present budget proposals.

Several members discussed the proposals within the Conservative budget to help fund community safety initiatives including CCTV. On the one hand, some members considered that Three Rivers was generally considered a safe community, with low levels of crime, that the council should not fund safety equipment for those individuals who could afford it and the revenue implications of CCTV had to be considered. On the other hand, some members felt that there were specific areas with burglary and crime and initiatives should be supported to reduce this.

Members also considered the Conservative proposals related to environmental crime. The potential benefits of an environmental crime task force were considered, which could be self-funding to reduce issues such as persistent fly-tipping. On the other hand, the council had a good track record of dealing with fly-tipping where it occurred.

Discussion took place regarding the proposals for AI. Some members noted the merits of this proposal, in that it could create service efficiencies, but on the other hand some members were concerned the proposals had not been fully developed, for example whether potential redundancy costs had been considered.

Consideration was given to the environmental considerations in both budgets; to what extent the budgets had factored in biodiversity and how the £500k included in the Liberal Democrat budget for carbon net zero projects would be spent.

During the debate, a wide range of other points were also considered including (but not limited to) how car park utilization could be improved; the funding of conservation areas; the impact of Hertfordshire County Council proposals on the Three Rivers Council budget.

At the conclusion of her speech, Councillor Louise Price called for the question to be put. Whilst the Chair indicated he felt sufficient debate had occurred, members generally dissented with the proposal and the debate continued.

During the debate, the meeting adjourned from 8:50 to 9:01 to provide members a comfort break.

Once debate had concluded, the Chair called on Councillor Cooper to summarize the debate from the perspective of his budget proposals. Councillor Cooper recognised the budget would utilise reserves, but this would be done with the intention of transforming the organisation, making it fit for the long term. He welcomed supportive comments made to the Conservative budget and ideas within it but raised concern that there was not sufficient recognition of some of the issues within the community which his groups budget sought to address.

The Chair then called on Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst to give his reply to the budget debate. He recognised that some of the Conservative proposals had merit, but they needed fully costing. He contradicted information provided regarding communications budgets, and provided a number of examples where he believed that the proposals within the Conservative budget could not be achieved within the costings provided or did not accord with the current service performance.

The Chair called for a recorded vote on the budget proposals.

Conservative budget proposals:

For: Councillors Cooper, Edwards, Fraser, Hearn, Merali, Ranger, Reed (7)

Against: Councillors Davies, Drury, Gazzard, Giles-Medhurst, Humphreys, Hussain, Khiroya, Lloyd, Major, Martin, Mitchell, Nemes, Price, Raeburn, Scarth, Smith, Tankard, Whately-Smith, Winter (19)

Abstentions: Councillors Cox, J King, S King, Sian, Stungo (5)

The Conservative budget fell.

The Chair called for the recorded vote on the Liberal Democrat Budget:

For: Councillors Cox, Davies, Drury, Gazzard, Giles-Medhurst, Humphreys, Hussain, Khiroya, J King, S King, Lloyd, Major, Martin, Mitchell, Nemes, Price, Raeburn, Scarth, Sian, Smith, Stungo, Tankard, Whately-Smith, Winter (24)

Against: Councillors Cooper, Edwards, Fraser, Hearn, Merali, Ranger, Reed (7)

The Liberal Democrat budget was carried.

52 SPECIAL EXPENSES

The Chair called on the Leader of the Council, Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst, to propose the special expenses. The Leader confirmed that this was a technical calculation and encouraged the Council to support the proposals.

Councillor Sarah Nelmes seconded the proposal.

The Chair called for debate on the item. Concern was raised by some members in relation to the proposals for the Batchworth Community Council area, most notably the special expenses charged for Watersmeet and the Aquadrome. It was felt that the Watersmeet venue was too reliant on public subsidy, and reviewing the operating model could result in the venue becoming more viable. In terms of the Aquadrome, it was felt that the facility attracted a much wider range of visitors and a usage study should be undertaken to evaluate the benefit to the whole District, rather than expecting Batchworth residents to support the cost.

In concluding the debate, Councillor Giles-Medhurst reminded members that the Watersmeet venue had previously been operated by a commercial vendor who had ceased trading, hence it had been taken back in-house.

The Chair called for the recorded vote on special expenses:

For: Councillors Cox, Davies, Drury, Gazzard, Giles-Medhurst, Humphreys, Hussain, Khiroya, J King, S King, Lloyd, Major, Martin, Mitchell, Nelmes, Price, Raeburn, Scarth, Sian, Smith, Stungo, Tankard, Whately-Smith, Winter (24)

Against: Councillors Cooper, Edwards, Fraser, Hearn, Merali, Ranger, Reed (7)

The motion was carried.

53 COUNCIL TAX - DISTRICT ELEMENT

In proposing this item, the Leader of the Council confirmed this was a technical calculation arising from the adoption of the Liberal Democrat budget earlier in the evening. Councillor Sarah Nelmes seconded the motion.

With no members wishing to debate the item, the Chair called for the recorded vote:

For: Councillors Cox, Davies, Drury, Gazzard, Giles-Medhurst, Humphreys, Hussain, Khiroya, J King, S King, Lloyd, Major, Martin, Mitchell, Nelmes, Price, Raeburn, Scarth, Sian, Smith, Stungo, Tankard, Whately-Smith, Winter (24)

Against: Councillors Cooper, Edwards, Fraser, Hearn, Merali, Ranger, Reed (7)

The motion was carried.

54 SETTING OF COUNCIL TAX, 2025-26

Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst, as proposer, confirmed to Council that the final budget vote summarised all previous votes taken that evening. The motion was seconded by Councillor Sarah Nelmes.

With no members wishing to debate the item, the Chair called for the recorded vote:

For: Councillors Cox, Davies, Drury, Gazzard, Giles-Medhurst, Humphreys, Hussain, Khiroya, J King, S King, Lloyd, Major, Martin, Mitchell, Nelmes, Price, Raeburn, Scarth, Sian, Smith, Stungo, Tankard, Whately-Smith, Winter (24)

Abstained: Councillors Cooper, Edwards, Fraser, Hearn, Merali, Ranger, Reed (7)

The motion was carried.

55 COUNCIL PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2025

Due to the time left in the meeting, the Chair determined to bring forward this item as it had to be adopted by the council and then called Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst to move the report. Councillor Giles-Medhurst confirmed this was a statutory document setting out the Council's pay policies. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Sarah Nelmes.

In debate, a member raised the roles subject to market supplement and that it would be useful to review these.

With no further members wishing to comment, the Chair called on the vote and the motion was carried by general assent.

56 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

56a ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING STRATEGY - PUBLIC CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst was called on to propose the report. In doing so, he reflected on the extensive debate that had already taken place at previous committee meetings, and hoped the Council could move to adopt the report. This was seconded by Councillor Sarah Nelmes.

A member highlighted that at the Policy and Resources Committee meeting it had been agreed to bring forward an action plan at a future meeting alongside the strategy, and sought confirmation this was still the case.

Councillor Vicky Edwards raised concern that electric vehicle charging spaces would be allocated for exclusive use by electric vehicles, and may sit empty at other times. Councillor Edwards therefore proposed an amendment to the strategy to add, after 5.1: "Spaces next to rapid or ultra rapid chargers are generally expected to be reserved for electric vehicles. However, other spaces - such as fast chargers - should not be reserved solely for electric vehicles, to minimise the loss of parking spaces to users of other vehicles"

This was seconded by Councillor Oliver Cooper, who requested a further amendment to include the words "where possible". This was agreed by the proposer of the motion. The amendment was circulated to members and read out by the committee officer.

Councillor Giles-Medhurst spoke against the amendment, raising concern that Hertfordshire County Council may not provide funding for charging schemes if this clause was included within the strategy.

The amendment moved to a vote; with 7 votes in favour and 24 against, the amendment fell.

The Chair called for a vote on the substantive motion and with 24 votes in favour, and 7 abstentions, the motion was carried.

56b AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION

The Chair called on Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst to move the motion. Councillor Giles-Medhurst reminded members the motion had been discussed at Policy and Resources Committee, and the amendments recommended at that meeting had been circulated to group leaders to comment on prior to the meeting of Councillor. The motion was seconded by Councillor Sarah Nelmes.

In light of the time remaining in the meeting, the Chair asked Councillors to move the item to the vote and with 24 voting in favour, and 7 against, the motion was carried.

As the time had reached 10:30pm, the Chair closed the meeting. Remaining items of business would be dealt with in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 6(3)

CHAIR

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