

HARBOROUGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES OF AN ORDINARY MEETING OF COUNCIL on

Monday 26 February 2024 commencing at 6.30 p.m.

Held at **The Council Chamber, The Symington Building**, Adam & Eve Street,
Market Harborough, LE16 7AG

Present:

Councillor Johnson (Chairman)

Councillors: Anderson, Asher, Bannister, Bateman, Beadle, Birch, Burrell, Dann, Elliott, Finan, Forman, Gair, Galton, Grafton-Reed, Graves, Hallam, Hollick, James, King, Knight, Mahal, Modha, Mrs Page, Rickman, Sarfas, Taylor, Whelband, Whitmore, Woodiwiss, Worrell

Officers present: S. Baldwin, L. Elliott, S. Hamilton, C. Mason and J. Young

J. Richardson- Chief Executive Officer

CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chief Executive announced at Cabinet on the 12th of February that Cllr Simon Galton has been appointed as the Deputy Leader of Harborough District Council. Cllr Galton has a wealth of experience having been a district councillor since 1986.

Among my events, some more remarkable than others, on a Thursday and Friday in January, I delighted to accept the invitation, as a Civic Dignitary, to join academic procession and witness two of the University of Leicester's winter degree ceremonies in De Montfort Hall.

In the same month, I and my Consort were invited to a De Montfort University event to mark National Holocaust Day. The event, held in the Hugh Aston Building, reflected on the Fragility of Freedom. Students and pupils from Leicester schools provided their reflections on the Fragility of Freedom, which turned out to be a thought-provoking and moving experience.

On 16 February, as Chairman, I attended the funeral of Tony D'Costa, in remembrance of his good citizenship and positive and generous contribution to the good of our community.

And on 19 February, I accepted a Rotary Club invitation to their Dinner and Awards Ceremony, where the guest speaker, Frances Quinn, a winner in the popular Bake Off competition, gave an entertaining insight into her career. During the course of the evening, I was delighted to witness a former colleague, Councillor and Chairman of Harborough District Council, Brian Smith of Husbands Bosworth receive an award in recognition of his considerable contribution to the work of Rotary.

On behalf of the Council I would like to congratulate Councillor Anderson on the recent birth of his son.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Leader, Councillor Knowles, offered his apologies as well as Councillors Bilbie and Nunn.

DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillors King, Bateman, Bannister and Galton declared themselves to be Members for Leicestershire County Council.

MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL 11.12.2023

In respect of the ordinary meeting of the Council on 11 December 2023 it was :-

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting of Council held in the 11 December be received and adopted.

MINUTES OF THE ADJOURNED COUNCIL 18.12.2023

Councillor Mahal highlighted that her she was included in both attendance and apologies in these minutes for the meeting, however she had in fact, given her apologies. This error was accepted.

In respect of the adjourned ordinary meeting of Council on 18 December 2023 it was

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Adjourned Meeting of Council held on the 18 December be received and adopted.

REPORT OF THE LEADER

The Deputy Leader made the report in the absence of the Leader.

Firstly, to confirm the announcement made by the Chief Executive at Cabinet on the 12th February that **Cllr Simon Galton has been appointed as the Deputy Leader** of Harborough District Council. Cllr Galton has a wealth of experience having been a district councillor since 1986.

The Issues and Options public consultation is the first stage of public consultation of the new Local Plan and seeks views on a range of planning issues and potential options for the future development of Harborough district. We have been hosting drop-in events across the district inviting residents to find out more about proposals for the Local Plan and answering questions about what happens next.

More than 345 people have visited the series of events with a good number of people responding to the consultation online via the dedicated web pages and sending in comments via email.

The detail will be shared once the consultation closes on 27 February and the feedback has been reviewed and considered. Many thanks to the council's planning policy officers who, as subject matter experts, pulled together the detailed display and attended the sessions to answer queries from visitors. The Local Plan display is still accessible to visit this week on the ground floor at The Symington Building.

We were pleased to launch the **Environmental Grant Scheme** earlier this month. The grants will provide important funding for 'not for profit' organisations in Harborough district to support capital projects that provide a demonstrable positive impact on the environment and benefit our communities.

Village groups, community enterprises, registered charities, and town or parish councils can apply for grants ranging from £5,000 to £20,000.

Successful applicants will need to demonstrate a clear benefit and a positive, proven impact on the environment, aligning with one or more of the following outcomes:

- Reduce the carbon footprint of the community
- Reduce the waste produced in the community
- Create, or protect & enhance, biodiversity or environmental assets such as green spaces & waterways
- Educate and/or raise awareness of climate change that will result in one of the above outcomes

Please share and help promote this fantastic scheme to residents through the following link <https://www.harborough.gov.uk/environmentalgrant>

With the **ongoing challenging weather this winter**, we have been proactive in working in partnership with other local authorities and agencies to prepare for potential flooding in the district.

Sandbags stocks have been replenished with additional deliveries made to local parishes ready for local distribution including;

- Broughton Astley
- Glooston
- Scraftoft
- Peatling Parva
- Fleckney

Flood response actions also include the continuation of monitoring flooding hot spots and our contractors, FCC being on standby for additional sandbag deliveries when flooding is likely.

The council's emergency response team are fully prepared to co-ordinate any action required, with CMT ready to attend any Tactical Co-ordinating Group meetings, day

or night. Our leisure contractor is aware they might be required to act as a rest centre alongside the Local Resilience Forum.

Our Communications team continue to share official forecasts and real-time weather information with helpful signposting to the wide range of support available for both businesses and residents. This includes how and where to report a flood, what steps to take if residents are affected by flooding and how to access grant support. Again, please share the details on our dedicated [flooding support pages on our website](#).

We are also proud to announce that our Land Charges Team have been shortlisted for a national award!

Harborough District Council are officially listed in the Top 3 for the Best Performing Migrated Local Authority award.

HM Land Registry works in partnership with local authorities in England and Wales to standardise and migrate local land charges register information to one accessible place.

Our Land Charges Team successfully migrated data comprising of an incredible 97,000 records which had to be cleansed and technical rules were created to ensure the data was migrated into the HMLR systems accurately. The process was long and tough with intricate checking in place to manage the transfers which were completed smoothly and without issue.

The nomination for this national award reflects the hard work, dedication, and attention to detail which has been part of the team's project over a number of years. It is great that they have been recognised for this work and our congratulations them on their success!

The council are pleased to support **a new initiative which provides a safe drop-off zone**, between 8.20am and 8.50am on weekdays for children to be dropped off for school.

Although the council promotes active travel, we understand that parents and carers may also need to go to work directly after school drop-off so this is not always possible. The first scheme will see the Commons car park to be used as a safe drop-off zone for the children at St Joseph's Primary School on Coventry Road in Market Harborough.

Officers have spoken with the head teacher and agreed that the children will design a permit and the winner will have theirs rolled out, with a new design chosen annually.

The council are now looking at supporting other schools with similar issues near to District owned car parks and officers are also in the process of convening a meeting of interested parties at Harborough Leisure Centre to look at improving car parking arrangements around the site at peak times.

Comments on the Leader's Report

Councillor Bateman highlighted that there had been some disquiet from parish councils in the West of the district around the Issues and Options Public Consultation regarding how this was presented in that there was a lack of hard paper copies for them to access. He commented that the Leader made promise that a member of cabinet would be present at each of the consultation events, he questioned whether this was correct. Councillor Bateman mentioned that he was encouraged to see the Environmental Grant Scheme up and running and he echoed the congratulations to the Team for winning the Best Performing Migrated Local Authority award. He also asked whether the school drop-off allowances would be for after school collections as well as drop-offs.

Councillor King commented on some of the problems that have occurred with the consultation process. He also asked for clarification around the regulations and rules with members responses and the consultation period. Councillor King also raised his concerns around car parking permits for school traffic and car parking availability in the areas.

Councillor Bannister expressed his thanks to the emergency response teams for their work with the inclimate weather recently. He enquired as to an assurance that enough sandbags would be accessible in the next instance of bad weather.

Councillor James commented that the response to the local plan consultation events using the online system had been met with some difficulty, he enquired as to whether responses could be received by email. He also queried whether other organisations in the district had been invited to respond to the consultation.

Members were also given the opportunity to ask questions that were not related to the report.

The Deputy Leader provided a response to each of these queries and comments.

QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS SUBMITTED BY THE PUBLIC

Mandate Public Display of Animal Activity License Star Ratings by Councils and Businesses -Submitted by Victoria Owen

On 20th July 2023, our beloved dog Bella was left at a doggy daycare & home boarding setting. Tragically, we never saw her again. We were told that the two safety barriers failed, and Bella escaped the property. She was chased up the road where she was then hit by a car; the incident was fatal; she did not survive.

The investigating authority formally identified several matters which, as per current guidelines, constitute minor failings (which led to Bella's death). Consequently, they then reduced the business' Animal Activity rating to one star.

Despite being a DEFRA recommendation, crucial information about Animal Activity star ratings is often not publicly available on council websites, with the majority of councils directing the public to email them to request information. This seems to be an unnecessary hurdle and lacks transparency.

A licensing certificate shows the star rating yet more often than not, owners have no knowledge that the system exists. This is not the owners fault, this is because the criteria and results are not talked about enough!

I propose legislation that requires councils to display these ratings on public-facing platforms transparently. Furthermore, businesses should be mandated to visibly display their star rating on their doors ,just like with food hygiene ratings.

**** It's time to get the 'Paws on the Doors'**

If this change were to happen, it would have a direct and positive impact on licensed establishments which are:

- a) selling animals as pets
- b) providing or arranging for the provision of boarding for cats or dogs (including the provision of boarding for cats; kennels for dogs; home boarding for dogs; or day care for dogs)
- c) hiring out horses

As a result of the proposed change, I believe that the quality of care which the animals receive will improve dramatically as businesses would be more stringent in ensuring both basic and higher standards are met. These changes would also support the public in making informed decisions about which service to trust with their beloved pets.

Dogs and other animals are more than just pets; they bring joy, companionship, and positive impacts to our lives. They deserve better treatment and protection under the law. Unfortunately, my story is not unique - countless pet owners have faced difficult situations, often due to lack of transparency about animal welfare standards in businesses.

In 2019 alone, there were over 1 million registered complaints about animal welfare in England and Wales (RSPCA). Yet many owners remain unaware of the licensing star ratings awarded to businesses they trust with their pets' care. Every pet deserves safe care in licensed establishments with transparent ratings.

This incident has broken our hearts in a way we did not believe was possible. The least we can do is to try to bring about positive change from such tragic circumstances.

The petition was supported by Councillors Woodiwiss, King, Sarfas, and Asher. The Petition was debated and Councillor King proposed a report be submitted to the Regulatory Committee in consideration of this. The Chair acknowledged this and highlighted that this could be taken to the Regulatory Committee or to the Performance Scrutiny Panel. A vote was taken and it was unanimously decided that a report would be taken forward for consideration and it was therefore **RESOLVED** that:

a report considering the Mandate of Public Display of Animal Activity License Star Ratings by Councils and Businesses would be submitted

to either the Regulatory Committee or a Scrutiny Panel for consideration.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FROM MEMBERS

The following question was submitted by Councillor James to The Leader:

“Several members will recall that in November 2019 I put forward a case for the review of the Councils open spaces strategic plan whereas newly developed open spaces should be handed over a private management company. The review was supported at the time by my fellow ward member Councillor McHugo. The review was duly undertaken and no change to the strategic plan was recommended. We are now some 4 years on from that review and serious problems still exist. The Overstone House development still has no residents company in place. The major Kettering Road development has several concerns around public engagement, cycle routes and on-site community provisions let alone the future maintenance requirements for the open spaces. The Hearsely Park development in Great Bowden has run up against the very same open space problems at Overstone House did some 4 years ago. The council has made no progress to satisfy residents caught up in this situation.

Given the lack of progress regarding the Councils open spaces strategy and the dissatisfaction of many residents will the leader commission the Scrutiny Communities Committee look at this matter again?”

The **Leader responded** that:

“The administration are aware of concerns being expressed by some residents across the district around the management and maintenance of public open space in new housing developments which has been transferred by a developer to a land management company. The Director of Planning is going to undertake a review of our current policy framework (set out below) for members to consider. It is expected that the review will be undertaken during quarter 1 of 24/25 with an initial report back to Scrutiny in quarter 2.

Current council policy on this matter is set out in the Council’s Corporate Property Strategy that was reported to Council on 27th January 2020 and the Open Spaces Strategy reported to Council in June 2021.”

REPORT FROM CABINET

The Deputy Leader introduced the report. He highlighted the main points of the report including the Medium-Term Financial Budget, the supply and installation of Solar PV System for the Harborough Innovation Centre the progression of the work being undertaken on the Local Plan and Delegated Authority decisions.

Council discussed the subject matter presented in the report and asked for clarification on certain points. The Deputy Leader responded.

It was therefore **RESOLVED that:**
Council receive and note the report.

REPORT ON COMMITTEES

The Deputy Leader presented the report. There were no further comments or questions.

It was therefore **RESOLVED that:**
Council receive and note the report.

REPORT ON JOINT ARRANGEMENTS

Councillor Beadle presented this report. He gave an update on arrangements since the last meeting.

Councillor King requested that a list of the current joint arrangements in place be made available and circulated to members for clarity. The Chief Executive Officer confirmed this would be taken away as an action and facilitated.

It was therefore **RESOLVED that:**
Council note the joint arrangements activity since the last meeting.

PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2024/2025

The Deputy Leader introduced this report and highlighted the main points. This was motion was proposed by the Deputy Leader, seconded by Councillor Graves and the motion was carried, and it was therefore **RESOLVED that Council:**

- 1. Note and adopt the Pay Policy Statement for 2024/25 as attached at Appendix A.**
 - i. This Pay Policy Statement is a statement of fact and is a legal requirement to produce and publish a Pay Policy Statement which is published on the Council website annually.
 - ii. The Pay Policy Statement reflects the factual position in respect of payments to those employed by the council.

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW- MOWSLEY

Councillor Beadle presented the report and set out the aim of the Community Governance Review to establish a Parish Council in Mowsley.

This was debated and commented on. The motion was carried and it was therefore **RESOLVED that:**

the Council agree to carry out a community governance review to establish a parish council for the parish of Mowsley.

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND PLACES 2023/2024

Councillor Beadle presented the report. The report was discussed and commented on. Councillor Hallam requested that clear signage is put in place if the location of the polling stations is changed to clearly inform members of the public, especially if this is the first time of change. The Chair acknowledged this be taken forward as an action.

The motion was proposed and carried and it was therefore **RESOLVED that:**

Council approves the Returning Officer's recommendations –

- **St Cuthberts Community Hall Great Glen is designated as the polling station for Glen Ward**
- **MH Church of St Nicholas extension is ratified as a designated polling station for Little Bowden Ward**
- **MH Congregational Hall is designated the polling station for voters within the airfield farm area of Lubenham Ward until a suitable building is available within the area**
- **Community Hub in Scraftoft is designated as a polling station for the Thurnby & Houghton Ward**
- **Tur Langton Village hall is ratified as a designated polling station for the Kibworths Ward**

2024/25 BUDGET AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (2025/26-2028/29)

Councillor Graves presented the report and set out the main highlights to Council including the various funds set out to help in the community and the freeze of Council Tax rates. He emphasised that the budget proposed is balance and reflects the continuous improvements made by the Council. He commented that this budget also reflects the stability of finances in the Council currently and going forward.

Councillor King proposed an amendment to the motion. A proposed amendment to the recommendation was circulated to Council.

Councillor King introduced and explained the proposed amendment which laid out plans to reduce the Band E Council Tax in the Harborough District by £5 per household per annum and the reasons for this as well as the strategized budget to support this amendment. The amendment was debated.

The motion for the amendment was **proposed** by Councillor King and **seconded** by Councillor Bateman. A recorded vote was taken and supported by the requisite number of Councillors and the result was:

For the motion: 14

Against the motion: 15

Abstentions: 1

The proposal for the amendment was therefore **LOST**.

The Deputy Leader continued to speak on the budget in favour of the substantive motion.

Those who spoke on the amended motion were invited by the Chair to speak on the substantive motion for a total of 5 minutes each as per Rule 40.4 of the Council Procedure Rules.

Councillor Graves **proposed** the motion, and it was **seconded** by Councillor Galton. A recorded vote was taken and supported by the requisite number of Councillors and the result was:

For the motion: 18

Against the motion: 0

Abstentions: 13

There proposal was therefore **CARRIED**, and it was therefore **RESOLVED that:**

Council is to determine the following recommendations “en-bloc” and:

1. APPROVE:

General Fund

- For 2024/25, the Council’s net revenue budget requirement of £15.3m [paragraph 3.7, Table 1], including the budget allocations to portfolios as set out at Appendix 1 (Annex 1).

- The 6.7% increase in Fees and Charges for 2024/25 [paragraph 3.15 of the report], as set out at Appendix 4
- The planned net contribution to the General Fund (Unallocated) Reserve of £4m, and from Earmarked Reserves of £1.5m to finance the budget requirement in 2024/25 [paragraph 3.7 of the report, Table 1]
- The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (2025/26 to 2028/29) [paragraph 3.7 of the report, Table 1] as set out at Appendix 1 (Annex 1), which includes forecasts on matters such as inflation and wage increases.

Capital Programme and Capital Strategy

- The Capital Programme 2024/25 to 2028/29 and its method of funding [Paragraph 3.26 and 3.27 of the report, Table 6]
- The Capital Strategy 2024/25 as set out at Appendix 7 [Paragraph 3.28 of the report and Appendix 7].

Reserves

- The Reserves Statement, including 2024/25 General Fund (Unallocated) Reserves of £3.1m [Paragraph 3.19 of the report, Table 5]

Council Tax, including resolution

- That the Council Tax Requirement for Harborough District Council's own purposes for 2024/25 (excluding Parish precepts) is £6,926,931. [Appendix 9]
- The following amounts be calculated by the Council for the year 2024/25 in accordance with Sections 30 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as amended (the Act):
 - a. £36,318,633 - being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (2) of the Act taking account of all precepts issued to it by Parish Councils;
 - b. £26,859,829 - being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (3) of the Act;
 - c. £9,458,804 - being the amount by which the aggregate at (a) above exceeds the aggregate at (b), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31A (4) of the Act, as its Council Tax requirement for the year including special expenses items and Parish precepts [Item R in the formula in Section 32B of the Act]
 - d. £243.02 - being the amount at c above [Item R] divided by the amount of 38,921.9 [Band D equivalent, Appendix 9 1 (a) Item T above] in accordance with Section 31B of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the

year [Average Band D Council Tax including special expense items and Parish precepts];

- e. £3,189,591 - being the aggregate amount of all special items (special expense items of the Council and Parish precepts) referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act
- f. £161.07 being the amount at (d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at (e) above by Item T (38,921.90), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its areas to which no special item relates. [Band D Council Tax for general expenses only excludes special expenses items and Parish precepts]
- g. Harborough District Council's element of Council Tax 2024/25 as set out at Appendix 9; being the amounts given by adding to the amount at (e) above the amounts of the special item or items relating to dwellings in those parts of the Council's area mentioned above divided in each case by the amount at Appendix 9, 1(b), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(3) of the Act, as the basic amounts of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which one or more special items relate.
- That the Harborough District Council's council tax level for a Band D equivalent of £177.97 [Paragraph 3.5 of the report] and each property band for 2024/25 be approved as set out in Appendix 9.

Special Expenses

- The Special Expenses for 2024/25 as set out at Paragraph 3.16 (Table 4) of the report and Appendix 5.

Treasury Management Strategy

- The Treasury Management Strategy as set out at Paragraph 3.29, Appendix 8;

2. DELEGATE to the Director of Resources, as the council's Chief Finance Officer, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Portfolio Holder for Finance & Assets, authority to:

- incorporate all outstanding precepts and levies once received from the relevant authorities.
- set aside sufficient sums in Earmarked Reserves as are considered prudent for both adequacy and purpose.

3. NOTE:

- The budget consultation process followed, and the feedback received set out at Appendices 10 and 11.
- The statement of the Director of Resources, as the council's Chief Finance Officer, that the Budget proposals for 2024/25 are robust and that the proposed level of reserves is adequate, as set out at in Appendix 1, Annex 3 to this report.
- The Council Tax base for 2024/25 adopted by Council on 11 December 2022:
 - of £38,921.9, [Item T in the formula in Section 31B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended for the whole district];
 - for dwellings in those parts of its district to which one or more special items relates as listed at Appendix 5 and 9.

NOTICES OF MOTION

One Notice of Motion had been received by the Council and accepted in accordance with the Council Procedure Rules. Councillor Anderson **proposed** the Motion and Councillor Woodiwiss **Seconded**. The motion was debated.

A recorded vote was taken and supported by the requisite number of Councillors and the result was:

For the motion: 17

Against the motion: 13

There were no abstentions, and the motion was therefore **CARRIED**, that this Council therefore **RESOLVES:**

to write to H.M. Government and the leader of the Labour party calling for a change in our outdated electoral laws and to enable Proportional Representation to be used for all UK elections.

URGENT ITEMS

There were none.

The Meeting closed at 9:10pm.