

**CABINET
MINUTES**

Date: Wednesday, 18 September 2024

Time: 2.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Richard Henry (Chair) (Chair), Jeannette Thomas (Vice-Chair) (Vice Chair), Sandra Barr, Lloyd Briscoe, Jackie Hollywell, Conor McGrath, Loraine Rossati and Simon Speller

Start / End Start Time: 2.00pm

Time: End Time: 3.20pm

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no apologies for absence and no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES - CABINET - 24 JULY 2024**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on 24 July 2024 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

3 **MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY AND SELECT COMMITTEES**

The Leader on behalf of the Cabinet thanked the Members of the Scrutiny Committees for their work particularly with their contribution in the run up to the RSH Housing Inspection currently underway. Members were also informed that the Chief Executive of the Citizens Advice had been pleased to contribute to the work of the Environment and Economy Select Committee which highlighted strong partnership working.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following Minutes of meetings of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Environment and Economy Select Committee be noted –

Environment and Economy Select Committee 16 July 2024

Overview & Scrutiny Committee 30 July 2024

4 **WORKFORCE STRATEGY**

Cabinet received a report seeking approval of the new Workforce Strategy, *People, Even Better*, for 2024-2027. The document had been reviewed and revised to cover the period from 2024 – 2027.

Members were advised that the Strategy was pivotal in addressing the varied challenges presented by the current evolving work environment and that it aligned with the Council's Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the Workforce Strategy for 2024-2027 be approved.
2. That it be noted that the implementation plan may be revised due to changing circumstances and workforce requirements and that approval for changes be delegated to the Heads of HR&OD, after consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Transformation which reflect this dynamic environment.
3. That it be noted that the Heads of HR&OD following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Transformation will have delegated authority for the production and implementation of an annual action plan for each of the key themes within the strategy.

5 **EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION ACTION PLAN - PROGRESS UPDATE**

Cabinet received a report highlighting the progress made in advancing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) across the Council since the introduction of the EDI Action Plan for 2023-24, whilst also looking to the Council's proposed EDI actions for next year as part of the EDI Action Plan for 2024-25.

Members were advised that the Action Plan had been introduced to bring together all of the Council's existing activities that sought to advance equality across the community and within the Council's workforce. The Plan also took account of the Council's Strategic Partnerships including Healthy Stevenage and Mission 44. The report summarised the progress that had been made over the past year across a variety of projects and programmes.

In presenting the report, the Portfolio Holder for Stronger Communities thanked the officers involved in producing the Action Plan. He was also pleased to inform Members that the first Stevenage Equalities Commission Conference would be held on 15 October at the Gordon Craig Theatre where Leaders, Organisations and Advocates would be coming together to tackle the critical issues of race and equality.

Cabinet welcomed the report and the proposed approach particularly in the work that would be undertaken linking with communities. Members looked forward to the October Conference but were keen to ensure that other protected characteristics such as disabilities, gender and sexual orientation would all be looked at in the same detail in due course.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the progress in the delivery of the EDI Action Plan in 2023-2024 (Appendix A), be noted and agreed.
2. That the revised EDI Action Plan for 2024-25 (Appendix B) be noted and agreed, and that the Strategic Director (RP) be given delegated authority to agree a final version of the action plan in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Stronger Communities and the Leader of the Council.

6 **CORPORATE PERFORMANCE - QUARTER 1 2024/25**

Cabinet were presented with a report highlighting the Council's performance across key priorities and projects for Quarter 1 2024/25 and updating the progress against Cost-of-Living support for residents and current strategic risks.

The report provided Members with an update on the delivery of the Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan, along with corporate performance results across the Council's business units. Officers were pleased to report that Quarter 1 had been another successful period for the Council.

The Chief Executive then gave a presentation summarising Quarter 1 performance highlighting achievements and performance.

A number of questions were asked in relation to the report and in particular the Rent Collection Rate which was a key area of focus for the Council. Officers responded as follows:

- 95.4% of Council Homes met the Government's decency standards which represented an improvement against quarter one last year. A rolling decent homes capital works programme was in place that would move the Council closer to 100% decency over the next 12 months. When compared to other stock holding authorities, SBC was performing well;
- In relation to rent collection, at the end of Quarter One, 737 tenants were registered to pay their rents by direct payment with 570 of those tenants in arrears. Officers were in contact with those tenants to try and get alternative payment arrangements in place. This issue was also being closely looked at by the Housing Executive Working Group;
- Officers agreed to look at the way performance figures were reported including confirmation of cumulative figures and whether the data provided represented whole numbers or percentages to ensure the indicators were clear;
- In relation to tenant Satisfaction Measure T11 relating to the contribution to neighbourhood, officers explained that this related to how residents perceived that the Council was looking after the areas immediately outside of residential properties.

Members were pleased to note the progress on the delivery of the Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan including the highlights of Transforming Our Town, More Social and Good Quality Housing, Thriving Neighbourhoods, Balancing the Budget and Tackling Climate Change. Members were particularly pleased to see the increasing artwork around the Town including the Multi Storey Car Park mural, the underpasses and media cabinets.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the service performance against 49 corporate performance measures and delivery of key milestones in Quarter 1 2024/25 through the Making Stevenage Even Better Programme (Appendix A) be noted.
2. That the performance challenges in relation to rent collection (section 4.3.2)

be noted, and the planned measures to improve performance be endorsed and that it be noted that the challenges related to rent collection are not just specific to Stevenage.

3. That improvements to voids works management (4.3.9) be noted.
4. That the strategic risk updates (section 4.7) be noted.

7 **GENERAL FUND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY REVIEW**

Cabinet received a report giving an update on the General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

The report set out the 5 year projection of expenditure, income and reserves for General Fund services and identified the past and ongoing financial challenges that the Council was facing, having had to save £15million cumulatively since 2010.

Members were advised that after taking inflation and other pressures into account, assuming a 1.99% increase in Council Tax, that £1.285million in savings would be required for 2025/26. In addition to this, over the next four years, a total of £3.685million would need to be found if the Council was to remain financially resilient. It was advised that savings had already been identified and that further options would come forward in the Fees and Charges report to the October Cabinet with the Balancing the Budget report considered at the November meeting.

Members agreed that the potential for a 3 year budget settlement following the Government's Autumn Spending Review and Budget Statement would be welcomed which would allow the Council's Budget to be managed on a longer term basis.

Cabinet also agreed the importance and good work of the Commercial and Investment Working Group in contributing to alleviating Budget pressures.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the change to the MTFS principles, as outlined in paragraph 3.11 to the report and as amended in paragraph 4.9.7 be approved.
2. That for modelling purposes, Council Tax increases be set at the maximum threshold allowed by the Government in order to help achieve a balanced budget as set out in paragraph 4.6.10. The MTFS has modelled a 1.99%, but the CFO recommends that if the threshold is set higher by the Government this should be applied.
3. That the updated inflation assumptions used in the MTFS as set out in Section 4 of the report be approved.
4. That the approach to the 'Balancing the Budget' options as set out in section 4.8 be approved.
5. That a Balancing the Budget Target of £2.985million, (of which £1.285million relates to 2025/26), be approved for the period 2025/26 – 2027/28, as set out

in section 4.9 of the report.

6. That General Fund growth is only approved for the Council's FTFC priorities and that any growth would need to be funded from increased savings in addition to the £2.985million target identified.
7. That a minimum level of balances for the General Fund of £3.45million be approved for 2025/26 as set out in paragraph 4.10.7.
8. That the MTFS be regularly reviewed and revised to reflect any material financial pressures so forecasts are updated and re-presented to the Cabinet for approval.
9. That the Trade Unions and staff be consulted on the key messages contained within the MTFS and more specifically when drawing up any proposals where there is a risk of redundancy.

8 **FIRST QUARTER REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2024/25 (INCLUDING FIRST QUARTER CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING 2024/25)**

Cabinet received a report on the projected General Fund (GF), Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Capital 2024/25 net expenditure which sought approval to amend the General Fund, HRA and Capital budgets as part of the quarterly revenue monitoring review. The report also gave an update on the reserves and balances available to support revenue expenditure and sought approval for revisions to the allocated reserves.

It was **RESOLVED**:

5. That the 2024/25 first quarter projected net decrease in General Fund expenditure of £617,420 be approved.
6. That the cumulative changes made to the General Fund net budget remains within the £400,000 increase variation limit delegated to the Executive be noted.
7. That the proposed movement on reserves as detailed in paragraph 4.2.1 be noted.
8. That the use of additional income from garages of £75,000 to fund responsive garage works within the Capital Garage Improvement Programmer (paragraph 4.1.7) be approved.

9 **ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW OF 2023/24 INCLUDING PRUDENTIAL CODE**

Cabinet received a report reviewing the operation of the 2023/24 Treasury Management and Investment Strategy.

The report presented the outturn position against the parameters that were set as

part of the Strategy Report in February 2023. It was also noted that there were no breaches to the Treasury Management Policy in 2023/24 and no treasury limits had been breached during the year. Further to this Members were advised that the Council had no liquidity difficulties during the year.

It was **RESOLVED** that the 2023/24 Annual Treasury Management Review be approved.

10 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

The Leader firstly reminded Cabinet that the then Executive in July 2023 had agreed to extend the conditional phase of the SG1 Development and start the process of forming a Joint Venture to bring forward the 'Plot A' site of the former Swingate House.

The Leader was then pleased to report to Cabinet the positive news that the negotiations had completed and both organisations had signed legal documents to allow works to begin on the site in early October 2024.

Members were advised that the build would take approximately two and a half to three years to complete with residents moving into the homes from 2026.

It was noted that the Swingate Car park would be closed from 7th October for the duration of construction. In response to a question, it was advised that the Council would be working with season ticket holders and Everyone Active to highlight alternative parking facilities nearby. Officers would also be asked to ensure there was a clearly signposted disabled access through to the Gordon Craig Theatre.

It was **RESOLVED** that the update be noted.

11 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That, under Section 100(A) 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 they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1 to 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by SI 2006 No. 88.

2. That having considered the reasons for the following item being in Part II, it be determined that maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

12 **PART II MINUTES - 24 JULY 2024**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 24 July 2024 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

13 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR