

**CABINET
MINUTES**

Date: Wednesday, 13 November 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: 2.45pm

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

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

2 **MINUTES - CABINET 9 OCTOBER 2024**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 9 October 2024 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

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

The Cabinet thanked the Scrutiny Members for their work and agreed that the Committees were adding great value to the work of the Council in meeting residents and business needs. In particular Members were pleased to hear about the work of the Environment and Economy Select Committee and their focus on young people following the launch of the Stevenage Skills Framework earlier this year. The Committee had interviewed Theresa Kilworth from Barnados Children Services to look at barriers to learning and employment along with the Assistant Headteacher of Barnwell Secondary School who spoke of some of the challenges in supporting young people to think about STEM and other career routes. The Committee also heard from the Youth Mayor and Deputy Youth Mayor who talked through their experiences of career and learning routes.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Performance referred to a recent meeting of the Select Committee which had received an update on the Council's Climate Change performance and delivery and was pleased to report the effective contributions and challenges from new Members which he had taken on board and would be following up.

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

Environment and Economy Select Committee 8 October 2024

4 **LOCAL PLAN PARTIAL REVIEW AND UPDATE: REGULATION 18 CONSULTATION FEEDBACK AND REGULATION 19 CONSULTATION**

The Cabinet received a report highlighting the feedback from the first round of consultation on the Local Plan Partial Review and next steps in the planning process.

Members were pleased to note that over 40 comments had been received from interested groups, some supporting the approach and others seeking more details on the climate change policies. It was noted that HCC had requested further policies around Highways which were detailed in the report.

The Assistant Director (Planning and Regulation) advised that the revised Plan would give the Planning and Development Committee and Officers significant weight in determining planning applications going forward.

It was also clarified for Members that the second round of consultation on the Local Plan would be slightly amended to run from 21 November 2024 until 29 January 2025, to allow full engagement with communities and key stakeholders.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the content of the Stevenage Borough Local Plan – Partial Review and Update Regulation 18 Consultation Statement (the Consultation Statement) be noted.
2. That the Stevenage Borough Local Plan – Partial Review and Update for Regulation 19 public consultation in November 2024, for not less than 10 weeks be approved.
3. That should there only be minor comments arising from the Regulation 19 consultation, delegated authority be granted to the Assistant Director: Planning & Regulation, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder: Environment and Performance to progress to Submission of the Local Plan – Partial Review and Update to the Secretary of State for Examination in Public.
4. That the revised Local Development Scheme be approved.
5. That the comments of the Planning & Development Committee and the Environment & Economy Select Committee on the content of this Cabinet Report be noted.
6. That delegated authority be granted to the Assistant Director: Planning & Regulation in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder: Environment and Performance, to make changes to the Stevenage Borough Local Plan – Partial Review and Update, prior to going out to public consultation.
7. That it be noted that informal engagement with key stakeholders will continue, ahead of and during public consultation on the Stevenage Borough Local Plan – Partial Review and Update.

5 **SECOND QUARTER REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2024/25 (INCLUDING SECOND QUARTER CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING 2024/25)**

The Cabinet received a report setting out the second quarter monitoring for the 2024/25 General Fund, Housing Revenue Account, and Capital and seeking approval for changes to 2024/25 working budgets.

Members were advised that timing differences had resulted in some of the figures within the HRA appearing relatively high. These would be re-phased in the HRA Capital Programme with the funding allocated to be spent in later years.

It was **RESOLVED**:

General Fund

1. That the 2024/25 second quarter projected net decrease in General Fund expenditure of £292,080 be approved.
2. That the proposed movement on reserves as detailed in paragraph 4.2.1 be approved
3. That a revenue contribution to capital for garages of £104,870 to fund works within the Capital Garage Improvement Programme (paragraph 4.1.2) be approved.

Housing Revenue Account

4. That the 2024/25 second quarter net decrease in HRA expenditure of £4,129,020 be approved.

Capital Programme

5. That the General Fund capital budget re-phasing of £13Million from 2024/25 to future years be approved.
6. That the Housing Revenue Account capital budget re-phasing of £3.4Million from 2024/25 and £6Million from 2025/26 to future years be approved.
7. That the budget of £94.6K for remedial works, funded by developers' contributions and £599K for the new spur road as part of Swingate works, funded by One Public Estate be noted (paragraphs 4.8.1 and 4.8.2).
8. That the General Fund capital budget virements in paragraph 4.9 be approved.

6 MID YEAR TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW 2024/25

The Committee received a report updating Members on the mid-year position for Treasury Management as part of the statutory reporting requirement.

It was noted that there were no recommended changes to the Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2024/25 which had been approved by Council in February 2024. There had also been no breaches of the Strategy in this year to date.

Cabinet were advised that at its recent meeting, the Audit Committee had approved the report with no comments.

It was **RESOLVED** that the 2024/25 Mid-Year Treasury Management Review and Prudential indicators report be recommended to Council for approval.

7 **COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME REVIEW 2025/26**

Cabinet received a report on the Council Tax Support Scheme.

In moving the report, the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Transformation advised that for next year it was proposed that the scheme remained the same except for any benefit uprating.

For 2026/27, however, it was proposed to change the scheme to a banded one so that when small changes to claimant's income occurred it would not impact on the amount of claimable council tax support. Consultation would be undertaken with the Police, County Council and Council Tax payers and the proposals would be considered thoroughly to make sure there were no unintended consequences. The cost of the scheme would be approximately £33thousand and it was intended that other preceptors, the County Council and the Police would be asked to contribute.

Members welcomed the planned revision of the Scheme which would make it easier for residents to pay their Council tax and for the Council to collect it. Members also thanked the Strategic Director (CF) and the Finance Team for their due diligence and work on considering changes to the scheme.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the current Council Tax Support scheme for 2025/26 be retained;
2. That a policy Overview and Scrutiny meeting be held to consider a revised discount scheme as a result of the number of Housing Benefit caseload transitioning to Universal Credit in line with the timetable set out in Para 4.5.1.
3. That the use of the directive contained in the Social Security Administration Act 1992 to disregard, in full, awards of War Widows, War Disablement and Armed Forces Compensation when determining entitlement for housing benefit and/or council tax support be re-approved.
4. That the £33,250 for inclusion in the General Fund budget as set out in paragraph 4.3.2 be approved.

8 **HRA MTFs REVIEW**

The Cabinet received a report setting out the Housing Revenue Account Medium Term Financial Strategy up to 2028/29. The report took account of the growth that was built into the HRA earlier in the year which was approved by Council in July

2024 related to repairs and voids and compliance.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing reminded members of the Council's commitment to deliver many new Council homes with over 590 delivered so far and more on the way. She also advised that significant investment was being made into existing housing stock to make sure it was safe, warm and fit for purpose.

Members were pleased to see detail in the report setting out what the Council was doing in regards to resident engagement and improvements to how the Council was meeting and linking with residents and tenants.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Performance requested the support of the Member of Parliament and the Leader of the Council to follow up the Government's reported ambitions to develop a green economy and provide match funding to help Councils deliver on a full de-carbonisation programme.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the 2024/25 revision of the HRA MTFs be approved.
2. that the level of balances for the HRA MTFs be set as a minimum £7Million.
3. That the Immediate Capital Options proposal to reduce the funding gap, as reported in paragraph **Error! Reference source not found.** be approved.
4. That the Immediate Revenue Option proposals to reduce the funding gap, as reported in paragraph **Error! Reference source not found.** be approved.
5. That the service areas to be reviewed as part of mechanism to identify the remaining savings gap as reported at paragraphs **Error! Reference source not found.** to **Error! Reference source not found.** be noted.

9 **BALANCING THE BUDGET OPTIONS 2025/26**

The Cabinet received a report setting out proposals to balance the budget for 2025/26 and updating projections on funding for next year following the Autumn budget.

Members noted that although the Council was close to meeting its funding gap for next year it would continue to focus on this over the next few weeks and that over the medium term the Council would be looking at reviews for Independent Living, Service Charges, Housing Management Service and Temporary Accommodation.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources and Transformation reported a correction within the report in that the higher business rate multiplier applicable from 2026/27 announced in the Autumn budget affected 35 businesses and not 15 as outlined. She also thanked the Finance Team and officers from across the Council's Business Units for their hard work in getting to this point of the budget setting process.

The Strategic Director (CF) advised that a further report would be brought back with

further savings options, to Cabinet in January 2025 which will also take account of the prescribed levels in the increase in Council Tax.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the Balancing the Budget options as set out in the report and Appendix A, totalling £184,749 (saving) for the General Fund and £13,951 HRA respectively for 2025/26 be approved and incorporated into the Council's budget setting processes.
2. That the remaining savings target to find set out in paragraph 4.8.11 be noted and reported back to the Cabinet in December 2024.
3. That the revised GF MTFs financial summary, as shown in section 4.11 to this report be noted.
4. That the completion of the Business rates for 2024/25 (NDR 1) be delegated to the Strategic Director (S151) after consultation with the Resources and Transformation Portfolio holder (paragraph 4.3.5 refers).
5. That the Council's recognised unions be consulted regarding the proposed budget package.
6. That key partners and other stakeholders be consulted, and their views considered as part of the 2025/26 budget setting process.

10 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

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 involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1 – 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as amended by Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.
2. That Members consider the reasons for the following reports being in Part II and determine whether or not maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

11 **PART II DECISIONS OF THE CABINET**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 9 October 2024 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

12 **APPROVAL OF PROCUREMENT**

The Executive considered a Part II report in respect of the Approval of Procurement.

It was **RESOLVED** that the recommendations set out in the report be approved.

13 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

There was no urgent Part II business.

CHAIR