

**CABINET
MINUTES**

Date: Wednesday, 12 February 2025

Time: 2.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Richard Henry (Chair) (Chair), Jeannette Thomas (Vice-Chair) (Vice Chair), 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

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillors Sandra Barr and Lloyd Briscoe.

There were no declarations of interest.

At this juncture, Councillor Richard Henry, Leader of the Council wished Councillor Sandra Barr, Cabinet Member for Co-operative Council and Neighbourhoods well for a speedy recovery. Councillor Henry also sent condolences on behalf of the Cabinet and Senior Leadership Team to Councillor Anne Wells following her husband's recent passing.

2 MINUTES - CABINET 15 JANUARY 2025

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 15 January 2025 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

3 MINUTES OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY AND SELECT COMMITTEES

Cabinet were advised that the work of the Community Select Committee had included receiving updates on damp and mould focussing on the stock condition survey and case management approach within the Decent Homes programme. Additionally, Members considered the revised Housing Antisocial Behaviour Policy. A further meeting of the Committee had been held relating to the Council's Equality Diversity and Inclusion activities where Members had received a presentation from the Stevenage Equalities Commission.

The Environment and Economy Select Committee had discussed various topics including the Local Skills Agenda, the Step2Skills programme and had reviewed the final report and recommendations of the Skills Review.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had reviewed a number of Cabinet reports and covered several key topics as well as receiving an update on the Council's

website improvements which were aimed at enhancing accessibility and user experience.

The Leader and other Members thanked Scrutiny Councillors for their time, comments and work and advised that there was regular collaboration between Scrutiny and Cabinet on many of these matters had taken place.

Members expressed the importance of including Ward members in any initiatives that the Council was undertaking in their areas.

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

Community Select Committee – 28 November 2024 and 8 January 2025
Environment and Economy Select Committee – 12 December 2024 and 14 January 2025
Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 17 December 2024 and 21 January 2025

4 **FINAL SOSAFE COMMUNITY STRATEGY**

Cabinet received the Final SoSafe (Community Safety) Strategy 2025/26 which had been reviewed by Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their meetings in January with no additional comments.

It was noted that the Strategy would help to deliver meaningful crime reduction outcomes whilst remaining committed to building upon progress achieved in recent years. It was noted that in the last three years SoSafe had introduced initiatives which would support some of the most vulnerable people in the Town.

The Portfolio Holder thanked Matt Partridge the Council's Chief Executive for chairing the SoSafe Partnership during the previous 6 years.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the duty placed on the Council and other responsible authorities to publish and implement a Community Safety Strategy that addresses the reduction of crime and disorder be noted.
2. That the feedback from Cabinet (January 2025) and Overview and Scrutiny Committee (January 2025) be noted and that the Community Safety Strategy be recommended to Council for approval.
3. That delegated authority be given to the Strategic Director (RP) after consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Stronger Communities and the So-Safe partnership, to agree and publish an annual Community Safety Action Plan and to make minor amendments to the Strategy.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

5 **FINAL GENERAL FUND AND COUNCIL TAX SETTING 2025/26**

The Cabinet received the final 2025/26 General Fund Budget report which incorporated the finance settlement for the next year that had been announced on

the 3 February 2025.

The Portfolio Holder advised that the Council had received more national insurance compensation than previously anticipated which had helped to balance the budget without making service reductions and allow the contribution of a small sum to general reserves. She advised that the 2.99% increase on Council Tax for next year which would add an extra £7.15 per year on a band D property. In total, this would result in a 40p per week increase for working age claimants on maximum benefit if they claimed Council Tax Support.

Members were reassured by the Strategic Director and Chief Finance officer that work had begun on next year's budget to identify the required savings of £900k.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following proposals be recommended to Council on 26 February 2026:

1. That the 2024/25 revised net expenditure on the General Fund of **£12,251,910** be approved as set out in paragraph 4.8.1 as summarised in Appendix B be approved;
2. The draft General Fund Budget for 2025/26 of **£10,656,540** be proposed for consultation purposes, with a contribution to balances of **£6,053** and a Band D Council Tax of **£246.41**, (assuming a 2.99% Council Tax increase), as summarised in Appendix B.
3. The updated position on the General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as summarised in section 4.10 be noted.
4. The minimum level of General Fund reserves of **£3,421,625**, which is in line with the 2025/26 risk assessment of balances, as shown at Appendix C to this report, be approved.
5. The contingency sum of **£500,000** within which the Cabinet can approve supplementary estimates, be approved for 2025/26, (reflecting the level of balances available above the minimum amount).
6. The 2025/26 Balancing the Budget options as set out in section 4.5 and Appendix A, totalling **£275,907** and **£29,651** for the General Fund and HRA respectively, be approved.
7. The use of the Business Rate reserve to fund a Graduate and Apprentice scheme as set out in section 4.6 be approved for inclusion in the 2025/26 General Fund (**£202,760**).
8. That a first call on underspends of **£150,000** (in total from the General Fund and HRA) be approved to support the Graduate and Apprentice scheme as set out in section 4.6.
9. That the growth bid for graffiti removal of **£75,000** as set out in section 4.6 be approved.
10. That the pressures identified in sections 4.2 and 4.7 to this report be noted;
11. That the Council Tax Support scheme for 2025/26 as set out in paragraphs 4.3.8-4.3.9 be approved;
12. That the Section 25 Statement on Robustness of Estimates and Adequacy of Reserve as set out in Appendix D be approved;
13. That the Equalities Impact Assessment appended to this report for the Council Tax increase (Appendix E) be noted.
14. That the feedback on the budget from Overview and Scrutiny as set out in Para.4.13.1 and public consultation in Para. 4.13.2 onwards be noted.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.
Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

6 **FINAL CAPITAL STRATEGY 2024/25 - 2029/30**

Cabinet received a report updating Members on the Capital Strategy for the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) including revisions to the 2024/25 programme and the presentation of the final Capital Programme for 2025/26.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources and Transformation advised that the General Fund Capital proposals had increased since the January 2025 Cabinet report which reflected the Garage Improvement Programme along with works for the new Market in Park Place.

It was noted that commentary from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been included in the report.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following proposals be recommended to Council on 26 February 2025:

1. The final General Fund Capital Budget for 2025/26 of £52Million, as set out in Appendix C to the report, be approved.
2. Revisions to the 2024/25 General Fund Capital Budget for 2024/25 of £244k, as set out in Appendix C to the report, be approved.
3. Final HRA Capital Budget for 2025/26 of £51.4Million, as set out in Appendix B to the report, be approved.
4. Forecast of resources and approach to resourcing the capital programme as outlined in the report (General fund Paragraph 4.4 and HRA paragraph 4.10) be approved.
5. Final General Fund growth bids identified for inclusion in the Capital Strategy (paragraph **Error! Reference source not found.**, and Appendix A to the report) be approved.
6. To enable the use of Community infrastructure levy of up to £5Million, to fund future infrastructure projects as outlined in paragraph 4.6.3. be approved.
7. The approved capital de-minimis expenditure limit of £10,000 be noted.
8. The approved revenue surplus in any year of up to £500K that can be allocated to the capital reserve to support capital expenditure be noted.
9. That the comments from Council Financial Security Group set out in section 4.14 are noted.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.
Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

7 **ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY INCLUDING PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS 2025/26**

Cabinet received a report setting out the Council's Annual Investment Strategy and the prudential indicators and agreeing the boundaries for the Council's borrowing

and investments for 2025/26.

Members were pleased to note that there had been no breaches of the Treasury Management Strategy so far this year and that it was in line with the latest CIPFA Treasury Management and Prudential Codes.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources and Transformation thanked the Strategic Director and her Finance Team for the work undertaken in connection with this and other budget activities throughout this year.

It was **RESOLVED** that the 2025/26 Treasury Management Strategy be recommended to Council for approval.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

8 **ADOPTION OF THREE REVISED SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENTS**

Cabinet received a report relating to three revised Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD's) covering Parking and Sustainable Transport, Developer Contributions and Design Guidance, which had been updated to reflect changes in policy and national guidance since they had been adopted.

Members were advised that the SPD's had been subject to a round of public consultation and had now been updated and reflected the representations made. The SPD's would support the Stevenage Borough Local Plan and emerging Local Plan Partial Review and Update.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Performance thanked the Planning Team for their work on these SPD's and the work undertaken on the whole of the Planning framework to ensure that the Council maintains a robust planning infrastructure.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the content of the three revised Stevenage Supplementary Planning Documents: Parking Provision SPD, Developer Contributions SPD and Design Guidance SPD be noted; and that the public consultation on the three revised Supplementary Planning Documents, held between 14 October and 24 November 2024 be noted.
2. That the adoption of the three revised Supplementary Planning Documents: Parking Provision SPD, Developer Contributions SPD and Design Guidance SPD, from 28 February 2025 be approved.
3. That delegated powers be granted to the Interim Assistant Director: Planning and Regulation, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Performance, to make minor amendments as necessary in the final preparation of the SPD documents prior to adoption.
4. That the comments of the Planning & Development Committee on the content of this Report be noted.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

9 **VULNERABILITY POLICY**

Cabinet received a report detailing how the Council would consider vulnerability in line with expectations from the Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman.

Members agreed the importance for the Council as a landlord to be able to recognise and respond to challenges and to anticipate the need for reasonable adjustments in how services were provided in a non-judgemental way. It was noted that a further round of consultation would be undertaken with tenants and prospective tenants on the Policy.

In response to a question, it was agreed that the issue of residents who had experienced the care system also had special vulnerability and should be considered as part of this policy. Officers advised that a Joint Housing Protocol with Herts County Council was in place in relation to care leavers to ensure additional support was available. Following further discussion, the Leader of the Council asked that further consideration be given by the Assistant Director and the Portfolio Holder for Housing to the suggestion of suspending the local connection criteria for those who had left the care system but had also left the area.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the duty placed on the Council under the Equality Act 2010, The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard and the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code for landlords to recognise and respond to vulnerability and to approve the Housing Services Vulnerability Policy at Appendix A be noted.
2. That it be approved that the Vulnerability Policy be consulted on with tenants and prospective tenants for no less than four weeks and that following, the Strategic Director (RP), in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, be given delegated authority to approve the Policy and to implement minor updates and changes arising from new legislation or best practice.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

10 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

There was no Urgent Part 1 business.

11 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. 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 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 the reasons for the following reports being in Part II were accepted, and that the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

12 **PROCUREMENT OF SUPPORT CONTRACTORS FOR THE REPAIRS AND VOIDS SERVICE**

The Cabinet considered a Part II report in respect of the Procurement of Support Contractors for the Repairs and Voids Service.

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

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

13 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

There was no urgent Part 2 business.

CHAIR