

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**CABINET
MINUTES**

Date: Wednesday, 24 July 2024

Time: 2.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

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

Start / End Start Time: 2.00pm

Time: End Time: 3.39pm

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

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

2 **MINUTES - 5 JUNE 2024**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 5 June 2024 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

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

The Leader on behalf of the Cabinet thanked the Members of the Scrutiny Committees for their work particularly in relation to the focus on fly tipping and graffiti removal and the link to Biodiversity issues.

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

Overview & Scrutiny Committee 11 June 2024

Community Select Committee 13 June 2024

4 **RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY AND FRAMEWORK**

The Cabinet was presented with a report including a pre-consultation draft Resident Engagement Strategy along with the supporting Resident Engagement Framework and Scrutiny Implementation Plan. It was noted that the Strategy and supporting documents had been developed to ensure that the Council could meet the duties placed upon it by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH), to deliver effective engagement and be able to demonstrate that residents had a range of meaningful opportunities to scrutinise, influence and shape the services that they received.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing advised that given the new regulatory requirements, the Strategy proposed that the Council committed greater focus and

resources to evolve and strengthen specific engagement with social housing residents and leaseholders to ensure their influence was demonstrated and measured, whilst working in synergy within the Co-operative Neighbourhood model to bring communities and neighbourhoods together.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing also thanked the previous Portfolio Holder for Housing for her work in progressing this matter.

Officers agreed to follow up the suggestion of an additional KPI focussing on Member Engagement with discussions with the relevant Portfolio Holders.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- 1 That it be noted that the duty placed on the Council to provide a broad range of resident engagement and influencing opportunities that 'give genuine consideration of tenants' views and providing equitable opportunity to be involved in influencing and scrutinising strategies, policies and services and to foster a strong organisational culture of fairness, courtesy and respect where tenants are listened to and that they trust their landlord.
- 2 That the previous resident engagement delivered through the Council's Co-operative Neighbourhood Model be acknowledged.
- 3 That the draft Resident Engagement Strategy 2024-2027, as seen at Appendix A be approved and adopted.
- 4 That delegated authority be given to the Strategic Director (RP) after consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing to approve the Resident Framework of Engagement and the Scrutiny Implementation Plan after further consultation with residents.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

5 **HOUSING ANNUAL REPORT**

Cabinet received the Housing Annual Report which provided an overview of Council Housing performance between 2023-2024, including the results of the Tenant Satisfaction Measure (TSM) survey results that the council must publish, as prescribed by the Regulator for Social Housing.

Cabinet was also presented with the Housing Complaints and Service Improvement report, which the Council was obligated, by the Housing Ombudsman Service, to publish annually. The report detailed the significant work that had gone into addressing housing complaints and demonstrated how the Council was using resident feedback to learn and deliver services in different ways. Cabinet noted the significant reduction in the number of complaints received and the positive improvement to response times. Officers also highlighted the frameworks now in place which monitored and measured complaint handling and identified improvements for 2024/25.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the Housing Annual Report as seen at Appendix A be approved, and the planned measures to improve performance be endorsed.
2. That delegated authority be given to the Strategic Director (RP) to approve after consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing a fully designed 'tenant friendly' Annual Report and Housing Strategy that will set out the priorities of the housing service over the next 12 months. Both documents will be published in September 2024.
3. That the Housing Complaints and Service Improvement Report, including three Housing Ombudsman maladministration judgements from 2023/24 and the actions taken by the Council in response, as seen in Appendix B be noted.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

6 **HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPER STRATEGY 2025 - 2030**

Cabinet received a report which presented a new Stevenage Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy for 2025 to 2030.

Members noted that the current Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-2024 indicated an upward trajectory of homelessness acceptances in Stevenage and a significant increase in the number of people in the Council's temporary accommodation. It was advised that currently on average, 5 families per week were being placed in hotel accommodation.

Cabinet welcomed the Strategy in particular the focus on addressing the increase in the number of people in the Council's temporary accommodation along with the aim of eradicating rough sleeping within Stevenage. This included the new hostel at Dunn Close which had ground floor accommodation with access for people with physical disabilities.

Members expressed the importance of 'wrap around' support ensuring that appropriate advice and guidance was available for clients.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the draft Stevenage Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2025 to 2030 be received.
2. That the public consultation on the Strategy commence during August 2024, for not less than 8 weeks.
3. That the final Strategy be reported to the Cabinet for approval in November and published in December 2024.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

7 **TENANCY POLICY**

Cabinet was presented with a report setting out a revised Tenancy Policy and which included a list of associated Housing Management and Property Services policies and strategies that the Council intended to update and deliver this financial year, in line with the 2023 Social Housing Regulation Act.

It was noted that as a Registered Provider the Council was required to meet a range of regulatory and legislative responsibilities including producing and publishing up to date policies related to key housing management functions. The Tenancy Standard obligated housing providers to specifically have a Tenancy Policy in place that set out the types of tenancies the Council granted and under what circumstances, how changes to tenancies could be made and the Council's approach to tenancy fraud, mutual exchange and sustaining tenancies.

Members were advised that the Tenant Handbook was being refreshed and would be available in different formats to ensure ease of accessibility for Tenants.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- 5 That the duty placed on the Council via the Tenancy Standard to produce and publish clear and accessible policies related to key housing management functions and the on-going work to bring the Council's housing policies in line with new Regulations be noted.
- 6 That the content and the adoption of the draft Tenancy Policy 2024-2026, as seen in Appendix A be approved.
- 7 That the Strategic Director (RP), after consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, be given delegated authority to make minor updates and changes to this policy arising from new legislation.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

8 **RESPONSIVE REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE POLICY**

Cabinet was presented with a pre-consultation Responsive Repairs and Maintenance Policy. It was noted that this policy would be subject to further consultation with tenants and leaseholders ahead of a final version being presented to Cabinet for approval later in the year.

Officers advised that in response to tenant feedback and complaints in 2023 the Council had commissioned an external review of its Repairs and Maintenance service and that the Community Select Committee had also completed a scrutiny of the service. The findings of the Review had been incorporated within an improvement plan which was being implemented. This included the need to have a Repairs and Maintenance Policy, which set out clear roles and responsibilities of the Council as landlord.

Members noted that as part of the policy review, work was being undertaken to

identify possible recharges to be applied in relation to missed appointments. This would be incorporated into the recommendations for the final version of the policy which, following a further period of consultation with tenants and leaseholders, would be presented to Cabinet for approval during Quarter 3 of 2024/2025.

The Portfolio Holder thanked the Community Select Committee for their review of the Service.

Members noted the significant challenges for the Council particularly in relation to fencing repairs and the rise in material costs which resulted in added financial and operational pressures. The importance of providing appropriate service for those tenants needing additional support and the Council being responsive to their needs was acknowledged.

It was **RESOLVED**:

4. That the draft Responsive Repairs and Maintenance Policy, which will be subject to further tenant and leaseholder consultation, for no less than 6 weeks be approved.
5. That the final Responsive Repairs and Maintenance Policy be presented to the Cabinet for approval in Quarter 3, 2024/25.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

9 **CORPORATE PERFORMANCE SUITE 2024/25, PRODUCTIVITY PLAN 2024/25 AND ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24**

Cabinet was presented with the Council's Annual Report which outlined key achievements across the range of Council services and the Future Town Future Council (FTFC) programme in 2023/24. The report also summarised the key priorities for 2024/25 under the new Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan which would inform the focus of quarterly reporting on the MSEB programme this year.

The Leader thanked Councillor Speller Portfolio Holder for Environment and Performance, for his significant input into how the Council would be approaching performance management in 2024/25. It was noted that the proposed Corporate Performance Suite 2024/25 would form the basis of quarterly performance reports to Cabinet throughout the year.

Members thanked Officers for the new approach to setting out the Annual Report which clearly highlighted the Council's achievements and priorities.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the significant progress in the delivery of the Future Town, Future Council programme as set out in the Annual Report 23/24 (Appendix A), be noted and agreed, and that a fully designed version of the report will be shared with the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council for agreement post

Cabinet.

2. That the draft Key Performance Indicator (KPI) Corporate Performance Suite (Appendix B), MSEB Plan(s) on a Page (Appendix C) and Productivity Plan (Appendix D) for 2024/25 be agreed.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

10 **4TH QUARTER MONITORING REPORT GENERAL FUND, HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT, CAPITAL AND GROUP COMPANIES**

Cabinet received a report setting out the 2023/24 Outturn position for the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account, Capital spending and the Council's Subsidiary Companies. The report sought approval for changes to 2024/25 working budgets, including an additional £2.434Million for the HRA which also required Council approval.

Officers advised that in relation to the General Fund, a full breakdown of the service net expenditure of £346k of underspends was outlined in the report. The report also highlighted an underspend of £367k from the General Fund Core Resources which predominately related to a reduction in the levy charge to the Council as a result of less business rates yield.

In relation to the Housing Revenue Account for 2023/24, an in-year surplus of £106k represented a decrease of £411k against the working budget. The report also highlighted some continuing pressures for the HRA in 2024/25 which required funding. These included service pressures around Repairs and Void costs and other Regulatory demands.

In terms of Capital, the report set out the outturn position for capital for the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account and recommended approval of budget carry forwards for both the General Fund of £4.4m and Housing Revenue Account of £3.2m which would be moved into 2024/25 and future years.

It was **RESOLVED**:

General Fund

1. That the 2023/24 actual General Fund net expenditure of £13.397Million be noted, subject to the 2023/24 audit of the Statement of Accounts.
2. That the 2023/24 actual core resources (government grants, business rates and council tax) of £12.747Million be noted, subject to the 2023/24 audit of the Statement of Accounts (paragraph 4.4).
3. That carry forward/spend requests totalling £535,600 be approved for the General Fund (paragraph 4.1.3 and 4.3).
4. That the Transfer to reserves of £1.902Million be approved for the General Fund (paragraph 4.7.1).
5. That Members note the transfer from allocated reserves in 2024/25 of £78,628 as detailed in paragraphs 4.6.1 - 4.6.3

6. That the increase in the new tenant administration fee on allotments from £15 to £25 with effect from September 2024 be approved for the General Fund (paragraph 4.6.6).
7. That the increase in the deposit for outbuildings on allotment plots, from £30 to £50 with effect from September 2024 be approved for the General Fund (paragraph 4.6.6).
8. That the introduced charge for the woodchips delivered to the allotment sites with effect from September 2024 be approved for the General Fund (paragraph 4.6.6).

Housing Revenue Account

1. That the 2023/24 actual in year HRA surplus of £106,271 be noted, subject to the audit of the Statement of Accounts.
2. That a carry forward requests for decant costs totalling £47,350 (paragraph 4.11.1) **be** approved.
3. That the 2024/25 budget pressure of £2,434,050 detailed at paragraph 4.11.2 and in Appendix C, be recommended to Council for approval on 31 July 2024.

Capital Programme

1. That the General Fund capital budget re-phasing of £4.4Million from 2023/24 to future years and that £1.2Million be re-phased from 2026/27 to 2024/25 be approved.
2. That the Housing Revenue Account capital budget re-phasing of £3.2Million from 2023/24 to future years be approved.
3. That the 2024/25 virement and in year growth funded from ringfences receipts detailed on paragraph **Error! Reference source not found.** of the report be approved.

Council's Subsidiary Companies

1. That Members note the 2023/24 outturn position for the Council's subsidiary companies as set out in paragraphs 4.20 to 4.25.
2. That additional funding for the Building Control Company be approved in principle and the decision delegated to the Strategic Director (CFO) after consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Transformation (paragraph 4.24.3).

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

11 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

12 **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

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.

13 **MINUTES - 5 JUNE 2024**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 5 June 2024 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

14 **SOCIAL HOUSING DECARBONISATION PROGRAMME CONTRACT AWARD**

The Executive considered a Part II report in respect of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Programme Contract Award.

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.

15 **TOWNS FUND - SKILLS AND ENTERPRISE**

The Executive considered a Part II report in respect of the Towns Fund – Skills and Enterprise.

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.

16 **INVESTING IN THE TOWN CENTRE ASSETS**

The Executive considered a Part II report in respect of Investing in the Town Centre Assets.

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.

17 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR