

**CABINET  
MINUTES**

Date: Wednesday, 11 December 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: 3.04pm

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

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

2 **MINUTES - CABINET 13 NOVEMBER 2024**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 13 November 2024 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

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

Cabinet were advised of the recent consideration by the Community Select Committee of the performance of the new Leisure Contract which included a presentation from Everyone Active. In response to a question, officers confirmed that the delivery of the Social Value aspect of the Contract would be closely monitored and regular updates would be provided to the Leisure programme Board. The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee also emphasised T The meeting the Council's commitment to addressing damp and mould in Council homes and outlined plans for intensified action.

It was noted that the Environment and Economy Select Committee had continued its work on Climate Change. The Committee had considered issues such as the sustainability of the proposed Civic Hub, Stevenage's zero landfill policy and the use of Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) as an interim solution until greener vehicle infrastructure became more viable.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Performance thanked the Chief Executive for his work representing Stevenage as the lead officer at both Regional and County level on the Herts Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership and the Regional Climate Change Forum.

Cabinet thanked the Scrutiny Members for the quality work undertaken by both of the Select Committees.

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

Environment and Economy Select Committee 4 November 2024  
Overview & Scrutiny Committee 12 November 2024

#### 4 **CORPORATE PERFORMANCE - QUARTER 2 2024/25**

Cabinet received a report and presentation on the Corporate Performance for Quarter 2.

The Leader of the Council thanked the Chief Executive and the Strategic Leadership Team, working alongside the Cabinet and Members more broadly for their work to deliver continuous improvements in the Council's performance. He was also pleased to report that Quarter 2 had been another successful period for the Council resulting in no red indicators during this period.

Cabinet was advised that although it was recognised that there remained room for further improvement in relation to the Tenant and Customer Satisfaction Measures, the reports performance measures were encouraging. The Tenants Satisfaction Measure improvement work would be driven by the Action Plan resulting from the recent Housing Inspection.

In relation to the Key Corporate Plan areas, the following comments were made:

- Alongside ongoing efforts to secure best value, the Council must continue to work to ensure the accessibility of all parks, play areas and open spaces to all groups across the community including adults with learning disabilities;
- In relation to automated debt messaging, it was important that the wording in any automated messaging used by the Council reflected the SBC values. Officers agreed that this would be looked at to ensure the messages were in line with the Council's values;
- Members were pleased to see the illustration of the Ellis Avenue development which was in keeping with the surrounding area;
- In regard to the Oval development, the consultation with residents and engagement activities had been extensive and welcomed by residents.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the service performance against 52 corporate performance measures and delivery of key milestones in Quarter 2 2024/25 through the Making Stevenage Even Better Programme (Appendix A) be noted.
2. That the performance improvements in relation to rent collection (section 4.3.2) be noted.
3. That the introduction of three new measures in relation to Fire Remedial Actions be noted (section 3.5).
4. That the strategic risk updates (section 4.7) be noted.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in the report.*

5 **COUNCIL TAX BASE 2025/26**

Cabinet received a report seeking approval of the Council Tax Base for 2025/26 which would be included in the draft 2025/26 General Fund Budget report submitted to Cabinet in January 2025.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources and Transformation advised that the taxbase included the latest Council Tax Support Scheme which had been agreed at the Cabinet Meeting in November 2024.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by Stevenage Borough Council for the year 2025/26 will be 29,154.9 equivalent "Band D" properties, reduced to 28,571.8 equivalent "Band D" properties after making allowances for a 98.0% collection rate.
2. That the 2025/26 Council Tax Base be approved subject to any changes made to the Council Tax Support Scheme (CTS) for 2025/26. The Cabinet approved the CTS scheme at its meeting on 13 November 2024.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in the report.*

6 **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) - DRAFT BUDGET AND RENT SETTING 2025/26**

Cabinet received a report on the proposals for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budgets and rent setting for 2025/26, which would also be considered by Council on 22 January 2025.

The report recommended that rents on dwellings be increased by 2.7% which was in line with Government policy for rent setting. The report also advised Members of some new pressures for the HRA including potential changes to National Insurance and responsive repair costs.

Members noted that although there were pressures on the HRA and the rents were increasing in line with Government Policy, a substantial amount of money was being allocated for the building of new homes and for the improvement of the Council's current housing stock. The pressures would be monitored regularly through the Housing Executive Working Group.

It was noted that the pressures were similar across the Country for those local authorities with HRA budgets.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the proposals for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budgets and rent setting for 2025/26, to be considered by Council on 22 January 2025 be

noted.

2. That Members be updated on the formula for setting rents for 2025/26.
3. That the HRA rents for 2025/26 be approved.
4. That the HRA service charges for 2025/26 be approved.
5. That the 2025/26 HRA budget, incorporating the decisions included in the HRA Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) report that was approved at the Cabinet meeting on the 13 November 2024 and the proposed 2025/26 fees and charges be noted.
6. That the further financial pressures identified since the HRA MTFS was approved in November 2024 be noted.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in the report.*

## 7 HOUSING INSPECTION OUTCOME

Cabinet were pleased to receive a report concerning the on-site inspection of the Housing Service by the Regulator of Social Housing which took place in September 2024, following which the Council had received a very strong C2 grading.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing advised Members that she had found the inspection process extremely insightful. She advised that whilst some areas for improvement were identified, the Regulator had commented that they were confident that those areas had been identified and improvement plans were already in place.

It was noted that throughout the Country only one Local Authority had achieved a C1 rating and only nine had received a C2 rating. Members congratulated all those involved. The Improvement Plans in place for those areas identified for improvements in the Service would be the considered at a further meeting in the new year which would take place with the Regulator to develop a provider improvement plan with the aim of moving the Council to a C1 grading when the next inspection took place in 4 years time.

The Leader thanked all the officers involved in the inspection as well as the Portfolio Holders for Housing and Resources and Transformation for their involvement in the inspection which had involved a substantial amount of work.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- 1.1. That the Regulatory Judgement of a C2 Grade issued by the Regulator of Social Housing on the 27 November 2024, following a proactive planned inspection of Stevenage Borough Council, as a Registered Social Landlord be noted.
- 1.2. That the ongoing work in place which will include actions to ensure continuous improvement to address both the areas of improvement required as part of the inspection process but to also complete the improvement plans already in place as considered by the Regulator as part of their Inspection be endorsed.

- 1.3. That delegated authority be given to Strategic Director (RP) after consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing to develop and approve a Provider Improvement Plan with the Regulator for Social Housing.
- 1.4. That the Executive Housing Working Group receive progress updates on the planned improvements on a bi-monthly basis.
- 1.5. That the efforts of the Leader, Members and Officers be congratulated for the achievement of a C2 grade and the strong level of assurance of the housing service that this judgement provides.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in the report*

## 8 **REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE POLICY - APPROVAL**

Cabinet received a report presenting the final version of the Responsive Repairs and Maintenance Policy for approval following consultation with tenants and leaseholders.

A summary of the feedback was provided in the report and it was noted that the majority of respondents stated that the respective Tenant and SBC responsibilities were clear. Members were pleased to note that easy read versions of the Policy had been produced and that the wording had been amended in relation to tenant and landlord responsibilities.

It was noted that the final version of this Policy and the recommendations set out in the report had been considered and endorsed by the Executive Housing Working Group at their meeting in November 2024.

It be **RESOLVED:**

- 1.6. That the outcomes from the consultation with tenants and leaseholders on the Repairs and Maintenance Policy and how this is reflected in the final version be noted.
- 1.7. That the inclusion of a recharge policy for missed appointments by tenants which aligns with the compensation payable to tenants for missed appointments by the Council be approved.
- 1.8. That subject to recommendation 2 above Cabinet approve the Responsive Repairs and Maintenance Policy attached at Appendix A to the report.
- 1.9. That it be noted that the Policy will become effective from 1 January 2025 and that this will be publicised on the Council's website.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in the report*

## 9 **HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPER STRATEGY**

Cabinet received a report setting out a final version of the Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy 2025-2030 and associated action plan for approval, following

engagement with residents and key stakeholders.

Members agreed that tackling and preventing homelessness remained a key priority for the Council.

It was noted that following approval, the post consultation draft strategy and associated action plan would be published before the deadline of 31 December 2024.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the duty placed on the Council to publish a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy every five years be noted.
2. That the outcome of public consultation of the Strategy with residents and key stakeholders be noted.
3. That the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2025-2030 and the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Action Plan, attached at Appendix A & C be approved.
4. That it be agreed that the Action Plan and Strategy outcomes be reviewed on an annual basis by the Executive Housing Working Group.
5. That delegated authority be given to the Strategic Director (RP) after consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, to approve any amendments to the strategy and action plan, post the Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in the report*

## 10 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

## 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 **HOUSING BENEFIT OVERPAYMENTS AND SUNDRY DEBT WRITE OFF  
GREATER THAN £10,000**

The Executive considered a Part II report in respect of the Housing Benefit Overpayments and Sundry Debt Write Offs greater than £10,000

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**

None.

**CHAIR**