

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**CABINET
MINUTES**

Date: Wednesday, 15 January 2025

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 Time: Start Time: 2.00pm
End Time: 2.55pm

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

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

2 **MINUTES - CABINET - 11 DECEMBER 2024**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 11 December 2024 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

3 **GARAGES ASSET MANAGEMENT REPORT**

Cabinet received a report on the Garage Asset Management Programme.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Performance advised that since the commencement of the Garage Improvement Programme in 2016, the number of garage voids had reduced and income had increased. During the next phase of the programme, it was proposed that the focus would be on the planned replacement of asbestos roofs and day to day repairs and maintenance.

Members were in support of the proposals in the report and agreed that garages were pivotal to the Council's future income.

It was noted that although the voids figures of garages had decreased considerably, the ultimate ambition was to secure zero voids. Cabinet was also advised that best use of the garage sites would always be carefully considered including the potential for some locations to be repurposed for Housing Development. As a cross cutting key council issue, the Portfolio Holder stated that Member oversight could be provided via an approach similar to the Executive Housing Board.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

1. The Council's new Garage Asset Management Plan 2025 to 2035, set out at Appendix A to the report be approved.

2. That the financial plan as set out in paragraph 4.20 to 4.30 to help support the delivery of the plan be approved.
3. Council be recommended to approve a £4.5Million budget for planned preventive maintenance (PPM) asbestos roof replacements over 7 years.
4. Council be recommended to approve a budget of £250K per annum for the life of the plan (ten years) for reactive capital repairs, and that will be built into the Capital Strategy 2025/26.
5. That it be noted that an increase in garage income of £179K as identified in paragraph 4.28 of the report, to be incorporated in the final General Fund (GF) Budget 2025/26 report that will be presented to the February 2025 Cabinet to fund:
 - i. An increase in the reactive revenue repairs budget of £29k to £120k per annum.
 - ii. The remaining £150K to support the cost of borrowing.
6. That the proposed procurement route for a new repair works contract as outlined in paragraphs 4.4 to 4.7 of the report be approved.
7. That a specialist asbestos contractor be appointed to undertake the replacement of asbestos roofs, as outlined in paragraphs 4.8 to 4.13 of the report.
8. That the Strategic Director (RP), after consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Transformation, be given delegated authority, to award and finalise the terms of both contracts.
9. That disposal of garage sites will come back to Members on a case-by-case basis for decision.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

4 **COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGY 2025 - 28**

Cabinet received a report considering the draft Community Safety Strategy for 2025-8 which outlined the emerging priorities of the SoSafe Partnership for the next three years.

The Portfolio Holder for Stronger Communities outlined the critical work being done in this area to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the community. He advised that the Council and its partners had continued to work together to tackle anti-social behaviour and crime by delivering initiatives supporting some of the most vulnerable people in the town making best use of partners' resources and targeting them effectively. This strategy would build upon that progress.

The Chief Executive reiterated that the Council benefitted from great support from partners including the Police, Fire and Rescue and the Probation Service and their contributions to the SoSafe Partnership were strongly welcomed. He advised that with the help of the Head of Community Advice and Support and her Team, £2.2million had been secured towards the activities of the Partnership over the last three years which was a huge achievement.

Members were supportive of the continued commitment by the Council and partners to make Stevenage a safer place.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the Community Safety Strategy (the Strategy) accompanying the report for onward transmission to Council be approved and;
2. That the work of the SoSafe Partnership in both the development and delivery of the Strategy be noted.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

5 **LICENSING ACT 2003 - REVIEW OF STATEMENT OF LICENSING POLICY**

Cabinet received a report relating to a review of the Statement of Licensing Policy which the Council as the Licensing Authority had a duty under section 5 of the Licensing Act 2003 to prepare and publish every 5 years.

Members were advised that the revised policy statement had been subject to a 28 day consultation period where two responses had been received resulting in very minor wording changes which were outlined in the report.

It was noted that this matter had been considered by the General Purposes Committee where it had been agreed that the Policy should be amended to grant powers to Licensing Officers, the Licensing Manager and the Head of Environmental Health and Licensing in their capacity as the 'Licensing Authority'. Officers advised that a revision to the Constitution would be made to reflect this amendment.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

1. That the proposed Stevenage Borough Council Licensing Act Statement of Licensing Policy 2025-2030, attached at appendix A to the report be approved.
2. That the proposed Stevenage Borough Council Statement of Licensing Policy be recommended to Council for adoption.
3. That it be recommended to Council that Licensing Officers, the Licensing Manager and the Head of Environmental Health and Licensing, in their capacity as 'The Licensing Authority', be approved to act on behalf of the Council as a Responsible Authority as prescribed in the Licensing Act 2003 (13.4 & 69.4).
4. That it be noted that sections 6.3.1 and 16.6.5 of the draft policy have been amended accordingly to remove any wording which conflicts with the above proposed recommendation.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

6 **GAMBLING ACT 2005 - REVIEW OF STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES**

Cabinet considered a report reviewing the Gambling Act 2005 Statement of Principles which, the Council as the Licensing Authority had a duty under Section 349 of the gambling Act 2005 to prepare and publish.

Members were advised that the principle proposed changes related to formatting, declaration amendments, addressing typographical errors and the updating of contact details. The 28-day consultation period resulted in five responses received which involved minor wording changes outlined in the report.

It was noted that the draft statement of principles had been considered by the General Purposes Committee which did not propose any further amendments.

Members were in support of the Policy and agreed the importance of the Council's responsibility to vulnerable residents.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the proposed Stevenage Borough Council Gambling Act Statement of Principles 2025-2028 (attached at appendix A) be approved.
2. That the Stevenage Borough Council draft Statement of Principles be recommended to Council for adoption.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

7 **CONSULTATION ON AN AMENDMENT TO TWO ARTICLE 4 DIRECTIONS TO REQUIRE CHANGES OF USE FROM CLASS E(G)(I) (OFFICES AND CLASS E(G)(III) (LIGHT INDUSTRIAL) TO CLASS C3 (RESIDENTIAL) TO OBTAIN PLANNING PERMISSION**

Cabinet received a report relating to an amendment to two Article 4 Directions which included protection to existing employment uses within the Gunnels Wood and Pin Green Employment Areas.

Officers advised that the public consultation on the Amended Directions would commence on 22 January 2025 for a minimum of 4 weeks before resubmission to Cabinet in March seeking approval of the Article 4 Directions. It was also noted that there had been no substantive comments received from the Planning and Development Committee on this matter.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the reason for the amendment to the existing Article 4 Directions be noted, and that there are no changes to the areas of the existing Article 4 Directions which came into force on 16 December 2022.
2. That the amendment of the Article 4 Directions under Article 4 (I) of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 (as amended), to remove permitted development rights in relation to changes of

use from Use Class E(g)(i) and E(g)(iii) to Use Class C3 (as defined in the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended).

3. That the public consultation on the made (revised) Article 4 Directions, for a minimum period of four weeks commencing from 22 January 2025 be approved.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

8 **COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY (CIL): DRAFT CHARGING SCHEDULE – PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

Cabinet received a report on the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Draft Charging Levy.

Cabinet was reminded that CIL money allowed local authorities to raise funds from developers undertaking new building projects which could be used to fund a wide range of infrastructure needed as a result of the development taking place.

Members were advised that the CIL rates proposed were in line with the current indexed figures which should help ensure that the Council could provide the infrastructure needed to support growth.

It was noted that the public consultation would commence on 22 January for a minimum period of four weeks prior to submission to the Secretary of State for Examination. Officers advised that no substantive comments had been received from the Planning and Development Committee.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

1. That the feedback from the first round of consultation on the CIL Preliminary Draft Charging Schedule (PDCS) be noted.
2. That the CIL Draft Charging Schedule (attached as Appendix A) be approved for the second round of public consultation, for a minimum period of four weeks commencing from 22 January 2025.
3. That delegated authority be approved to progress to Submission of the revised Charging Schedule to Government, should representations at the second round of consultation result in minor amendments to the CIL Charging Schedule.
4. That delegated powers be granted to the Assistant Director Planning and Regulation, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Performance, to make such amendments as are necessary in the final preparation of the Draft Charging Schedule.
5. That it be noted that there were no substantive comments received from the Planning & Development Committee.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

9 **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) - FINAL BUDGET AND RENT SETTING 2025/26**

Cabinet received a report presenting the Final Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget for 2025/26.

Members were advised that the report proposed a 2.7% increase in dwelling rents. Service charges had been based on cost recovery or actual costs, with the largest increases being driven by utility costs.

The final budget would ensure support to the achievement of the Council's key housing priorities and ensure the continued delivery of high-quality housing services.

Members noted the Chief Finance Officer Statement within the report which advised of the significant pressures on the HRA from repairs and voids and that additional measures had been taken to reflect this.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing also advised that the Council would be investing £51million, with nearly £28million on desperately needed new social and affordable homes.

That it be **RESOLVED** that the following proposals be recommended to Council on 22 January 2025

1. That HRA dwelling rents be increased (week commencing 1 April 2025) by 2.7%. This equates to an average increase of £3.21 for social rents, £5.02 for affordable rents and £3.94 for Low Start Shared Ownership homes per week (based on a 52-week year).
2. That the 2025/26 service charges are approved as set out in paragraph 4.2.
3. That the HRA budget for 2025/26, set out in Appendix A, is approved.
4. The 2025/26 growth options as set out in section 4.4 are approved.
5. That the additional repair pressures of £2,674,860, as set out in 4.4.6, and the net salary savings of £551,920 at 4.4.10, are approved to be included in the working budget for 2024/25.
6. That the 2025/26 Fees and Charges as set out in Appendix B are noted.
7. That the revised minimum levels of balances for 2025/26 shown in Appendix C are approved.
8. That Members note the Rent Increase Equalities Impact Assessments (EqIA) appended to this report in Appendix D and the Rent Flexibility EqIA in Appendix F.
9. That Members note the Aids and Adaptations Policy Equalities Impact Assessments appended to this report in Appendix E.

10. That the contingency sum of £500K, within which the Cabinet can approve supplementary estimates, be approved for 2025/26 (£400K in 2024/25) as set out in paragraph 4.9.3.
11. That the decisions taken on recommendations 2.1 – 2.10 above be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration in accordance with the Budget and Policy Framework rules in the Council's Constitution.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

10 **DRAFT GENERAL FUND AND COUNCIL TAX SETTING 2025/26**

Cabinet received a report updating members on next year's draft General Fund budget including the Government finance settlement and the level of savings required and achieved through the Making Stevenage Even Better Balancing the Budget Programme.

Members were advised that none of the savings proposed would result in any cuts to services. The proposed increase to Council tax was 2.99% equating to £7.15 per year on a band D rated property.

Members were also pleased to support a number of growth bids including one related to the important graffiti removal programme and the partnership with Junction 7 Creatives to produce a programme of art around the Town, alongside a much needed apprentice and graduate programme.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

1. The 2024/25 revised net expenditure on the General Fund of **£12,248,970** be approved as set out in paragraph 4.8.1.
2. The draft General Fund Budget for 2025/26 of **£9,910,330** be proposed for consultation purposes, with a contribution from balances of **£77,949** and a Band D Council Tax of **£246.41**, (assuming a 2.99% Council Tax increase).
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 E 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 included into the Council's budget setting processes for consideration by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
7. The new food waste collection and legal fees and charges as set out in paragraph 4.5.6 (and Appendix B) be approved.

8. The use of 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**).
9. 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.
10. That the growth bid for graffiti removal of **£75,000** as set out in section 4.6 be approved.
11. That the pressures identified in sections 4.2 and 4.7 to this report be noted.
12. That the Section 25 Statement on Robustness of Estimates and Adequacy of Reserve as set out in Appendix F be approved.
13. That the decisions taken on recommendations 2.2 – 2.11 above be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration in accordance with the Budget and Policy Framework rules in the Council's Constitution.
14. That the Equalities Impact Assessment appended to this report for the new fees and charges (Appendix C & D) be noted.
15. That engagement to take place with key partners and other stakeholders in order for their views to be considered as part of the 2025/26 budget setting process be approved.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

11 **DRAFT CAPITAL STRATEGY 2024/25-2029/30**

Cabinet received a report introducing the draft Capital Strategy for 2025/26 which was subject to consultation prior to coming back to Cabinet and Council for formal approval in February 2025.

Members noted that the Council's Financial Security Group had supported new scheme proposals totalling £2.6million which were all fully funded.

It was **RESOLVED** that

1. The draft General Fund Capital Budget for 2025/26 of £37Million, as set out in Appendix C to the report, be approved.
2. The Consultation responses in relation to General Fund proposed growth bids by the Council Financial Security Group (CFSG) 19 November 2024, be considered (section 4.14).
3. Draft HRA Capital Budget for 2025/26 of £51.3Million, as set out in Appendix B to the report, be approved.
4. Updated forecast of resources 2025/26 be approved, General Fund section 4.4, HRA section 4.9.

5. General Fund capital budget virement of £40,000 from the deferred works reserve to fund boiler replacement and hot water systems work at Ridlins be approved (paragraph 4.2.3).
6. Approach to resourcing the General Fund capital programme as outlined in the report (Paragraph 4.4) be approved.
7. General Fund growth bids identified for inclusion in the Capital Strategy (paragraph 4.2, and Appendix A to the report) be approved in principle, including the increase in the deferred works reserve budget of £282K (section 4.2).
8. Budget for the refitting of the space currently occupied by the indoor market for re-letting and the capital works to make the new indoor market location at Park Place fit for purpose (paragraphs 4.8.1 and 4.8.2) be approved.
9. Community infrastructure levy of up to £5Million, can be used to fund future infrastructure projects as outlined in paragraph 4.6.1.
10. HRA budget changes identified for inclusion in the Capital Strategy (section 4.9 and Appendix B to the report) be approved.
11. Approach to resourcing the HRA capital programme as outlined in the report (Paragraph 4.10) be approved.
12. The approved capital de-minimis expenditure limit of £10,000 (section 4.11 of the report) be noted; and
13. 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.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

12 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

13 **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.

14 **MINUTES - CABINET 11 DECEMBER 2024**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the Cabinet held on 11 December be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

15 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR