

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 12 March 2025

Time: 2.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

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

Start / End Start Time: 2.00pm
Time: End Time: 3.30pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillor Sandra Barr. On behalf of the Cabinet, Councillor Richard Henry, Leader of the Council wished Councillor Barr well with her recovery from illness.

There were no declarations of interest.

A this juncture, the Leader informed the Cabinet that the Manager of Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP), Helen Burrridge, had advised that the organisation had been presented with a gold award in the category of Green Public Space at the national IESE Awards event and a specific mention had been given to both Councillor Simon Speller, Chair of the HCCSP and the Chief Executive, Matt Partridge who is the lead Hertfordshire Chief Executive.

2 MINUTES - CABINET 12 FEBRUARY 2025

3 MINUTES - SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEES

Cabinet were advised that the recent work of the Community Select Committee had included:

- gathering information from guest contributors relating to the Equality Act 2010, in particular Age and Disability, by receiving evidence from guests and community members. The meeting also covered transport accessibility challenges for visually impaired individuals;
- a presentation from the Aids and Adaptations Project Manager outlining the scope of adaptations for tenants with health conditions. The Committee addressed eligibility, types of adaptations, reasons for refusal and the need for transparency.

Councillor Conor McGrath thanked the Committee for its work and said that he would be following up some of the issues raised in his role as the Portfolio Holder for Stronger Communities.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following Minutes of meetings Select Committees be noted –

Community Select Committee – 29 January and 5 February 2025.

4 **CORPORATE CO-OPERATIVE PROCUREMENT STRATEGY REVIEW**

The Cabinet received a report regarding a new Co-operative Procurement Strategy 2025-2028 which would help to support delivery of the Making Stevenage Better Corporate Plan, alongside addressing legal changes set in the new national Procurement Act 2023.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources and Transformation advised that the Strategy included principles relating to community wealth building, social value as well as commercial and insourcing which would allow the Council to look at bringing services in house where it made sense to do so and where the best procurement results would be secured.

It was **RESOLVED** that delegated authority be granted to the Strategic Director (S151) after consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Transformation to sign off the Co-operative Procurement Strategy 2025-2028 following further consultation with the community and stakeholders.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

5 **CONFIRMATION OF 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 providing a summary of responses received following consultation relating to the use of an Article 4 Direction covering the Gunnels Wood area and Pin Green employment areas.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Performance reminded members that the Article 4 Direction enabled local authorities to bring a level of control to certain types of development or changes of use, which would normally be 'permitted development'.

The Leader welcomed Alex Robinson, Assistant Director Planning and Regulation to his first meeting of Cabinet since joining the authority.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the responses from consultation, 22 January to 18 February 2025, on the serving of the notice of the revised Article 4 Directions be noted.
2. That the confirmation of the revised 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)) be approved.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

6 **CORPORATE PERFORMANCE QUARTER 3 2024/25**

Cabinet received a report and presentation on the Corporate Performance for Quarter 3.

The Leader of the Council thanked the Chief Executive and the Strategic Leadership Team for their work with Cabinet Members across the Council more broadly in ensuring that continuous improvements were being made in relation to the Council's performance.

In relation to the Chief Executive's presentation, the following comments were made:

- It was noted that the difficulty of accessing properties affected the indicator relating to the percentage of dwellings with a valid Electrical Certification, however, the Council was still performing well compared with other Councils;
- In relation to the performance figure for garage voids, it was noted that ongoing work was taking place in this area including the implementation of a proactive marketing strategy and on-line garage booking service;
- In relation to Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM's) the Portfolio Holder for Housing was pleased to see the improved performance but assured Members and tenants that the Council was continuously working to improve the figures across the service;
- The Leader paid tribute to the Portfolio Holders and Officers involved in the Arts and Heritage Trail along with the artwork on the communication boxes in the Town. All Members were encouraged to identify cabinets in their area which could benefit with potential use of Local Community Budgets;
- It was noted that the next phase of the underpass scheme would shortly be underway with the Regeneration Team and the Portfolio Holder for Culture and Leisure judging potential images;
- The success of the Beryl Bikes scheme around the town was welcomed.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the service performance against 52 corporate performance measures and delivery of key milestones in Quarter 3 2024/25 through the Making Stevenage Even Better Programme (Appendix A) be noted.
2. That the current status of Electrical Certification be noted (section 4.3.2).
3. That the issues with Garage Voids and planned improvements be noted (section 4.34).
4. That the Regulator of Social Housing Provider Improvement Plan be noted (section 4.6).
5. That the strategic risk updates (section 4.8) be noted.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

7 THIRD QUARTER REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2024/25 (INCLUDING THIRD QUARTER CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING 2024/25)

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

The Portfolio Holder for Resources and Transformation reported the current position in respect of:

- General Fund – a net decrease made up of a number of variances but predominantly an increase in investment interest, an increase in audit fees and a reduction in planning income;
- Housing Revenue Account – a net increase predominantly relating to a reduction in transformation improvements costs due to resources required to facilitate last year's Housing Regulator Inspection. The increase was, however, offset by tenants' payments for compensation, relocation incentive payments and decant costs;
- Capital – members were requested to approve the re-phasing of £5m of General Fund and £1m of HRA capital budgets from 2024/25 into future years.

It was **RESOLVED**:

General Fund

1. That the 2024/25 third quarter projected net decrease in General Fund expenditure of £32,480 be approved.
2. That Members note the proposed movement on reserves as detailed in paragraph 4.2.1
3. That the UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF) use of £327K is approved as detailed in section 4.4.

Housing Revenue Account

4. That the 2024/25 third quarter net increase in HRA expenditure of £26,270 be approved.
5. That a permanent virement of £76,940 is approved for 2025/26 from the repairs and maintenance subcontractor budgets to the salary budgets to enable the audit of payments and ensure the accuracy of contractor claims, as detailed in 4.6.12.

Capital Programme

6. That the General Fund capital budget re-phasing of £5Million from 2024/25 to future years be approved.

7. That the Housing Revenue Account capital budget re-phasing of £1Million from 2024/25 to future years be approved.
8. That net changes to budgets fully grant funded of (£186K) in paragraph 4.8.8 be noted.
9. That the budget changes of £86k in paragraph 4.7.10 be approved.
10. That the addition of £60,400 UK Shared Prosperity Funded capital budget 2025/26 in paragraph 4.7.11 be noted.
11. That General Fund and HRA virements in section 4.8 be approved.
12. That the proposed changes to the funding of the General Fund and HRA capital budgets in section 4.10 be approved.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

8 VOIDS POLICY AND LETTABLE STANDARDS

Cabinet received a report requesting approval for a new Void Management Policy and a revised Lettable Standard.

Members were advised that the key objective of the policy was to outline how the Council managed properties within the housing stock when they became vacant and the Lettable Standard would help provide consistency in the standard of properties when they were relet.

It was **RESOLVED** that the new Void Management Policy (Appendix A) and revised Lettable Standard (Appendix B) be approved.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

9 AIDS AND ADAPTATIONS POLICY

Cabinet received a report relating to approval of the revised Aids and Adaptations Policy.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing advised that the Council had a legal duty to provide reasonable adaptations to support residents to live independently within their homes.

Members were advised that no significant changes were proposed but there were revisions relating to legal requirements, improving transparency on decision making and expected timescales.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- 1 That the outcomes from the consultation with tenants on the Aids and Adaptations Policy and how these have been reflected in the final version attached at **Appendix 1** be noted.
- 2 That it be noted that the Policy will become effective from 1 April 2025 and

will be publicised on the Council's website. This policy will replace the previous version from 2020.

- 3 That the updated Aids and Adaptations Policy be approved.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

10 HIGH STREET RENTAL AUCTIONS

Cabinet received a report proposing designation of the Town Centre and Old Town High Street as areas for High Street Rental Auctions.

Members were advised that the Government had introduced new legislation handing powers to local authorities to breathe new life back into high streets and transform long-term empty shops.

Officers advised that this was a relatively new tool which would be considered as a last resort for persistent vacant properties, as the Council would continue to strive to work with owners and landlords before having to make use of the powers.

Members requested that officers ensure that the consultation on the designated areas for High Street Rental Auctions should include the Old Town and Bedwell Ward Councillors. Consultation on designated areas in Stevenage would be for a minimum of 28 days, in accordance with Regulations.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the content and detail relating to High Street Rental Auctions and how they would be applied in Stevenage be noted.
2. That a future consultation on designated areas for High Street Rental Auctions in Stevenage, for a minimum of 28 days in accordance with Regulations be authorised.
3. That the support from the Planning & Development Committee for the report was noted.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

11 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION – INTERIM PLAN SUBMISSION

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Richard Henry advised that he would be accepting an urgent item of business relating to the Interim Plan Submission on the Government's plans for Local Government Reorganisation. The Leader advised that as Chair of the meeting he was of the opinion that the report was urgent as there was a requirement for local authorities to submit an interim plan to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government by 21 March 2025.

The Leader advised that the report included a number of proposals from 1 through to 4 unitary councils which had been worked through with all districts and boroughs in Hertfordshire, although this would not prevent further options being developed or explored ahead of the final November deadline.

Cabinet noted that to support the process, a Cabinet Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution and Officer Working Groups had been established which was currently meeting on a weekly basis.

Members thanked the officers involved for the amount of work undertaken in preparing the submission and looking ahead, what would be required to meet the November deadline. It was agreed that the Council would be working towards what was best for the residents and businesses of the Town.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the Government's devolution and local government reorganisation requirements and the progress being made to develop options for Hertfordshire be noted.
2. That delegated authority be given to the Leader of the Council to submit an interim plan for Local Government Reorganisation in Hertfordshire, to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government by 21 March 2025.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

12 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

13 **PROVISION OF AGENCY WORKERS**

The Cabinet considered a Part II report in respect of the provision of Agency Workers.

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.

14 **SPORTS AND LEISURE CENTRE - DESIGN AND PLANNING SUBMISSION**

The Cabinet considered a Part II report in respect of the Design and Planning Submission for the Sports and Leisure Centre

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 **SBC LAND AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (LOCALITY REVIEW UPDATE)**

The Cabinet considered a Part II report in respect of SBC Land and Development Programme (Locality Review Update)

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 **MAJOR PROJECT BRAGBURY END**

The Cabinet considered a Part II report in respect of the major Project Bragbury End.

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**

There was no Urgent Part II Business.

CHAIR