

Cabinet
1 February 2022

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL CABINET held on Tuesday 1 February 2022 at 5.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, The Campus, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE.

PRESENT: Councillors T.Kingsbury (Leader of the Council) (Chairman)
D.Bell (Deputy Leader and Executive Member, Resources)

S.Boulton (Executive Member, Environment, Planning, Estates and Development)
B.Sarson (Executive Member, Leisure and Community Safety)
F.Thomson (Executive Member, Housing and Climate Change)

OFFICIALS Chief Executive (K. Ng)
PRESENT: Head of Resources (R. Baker)
Head of Law and Administration (M. Martinus)
Governance Services Manager (A. Marston)
Communications Officer (A. Wildey)

79. APOLOGY

An apology for absence was received from Councillor N. Pace (Executive Member, Governance and Public Health).

80. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings held on 4 January and 18 January 2022 were approved as a correct record and noted by the Chairman.

81. ACTIONS STATUS REPORT

The status of actions agreed at the Cabinet meeting on 4 January 2022 and for decisions taken by Cabinet Members exercising their individual delegated powers between 22 December 2021 to 24 January 2022 in the report of the Head of Law and Administration was noted.

82. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS BY MEMBERS

Councillors S.Boulton, T.Kingsbury and F.Thomson each declared a non-pecuniary interest in items on the Agenda as Members of Hertfordshire County Council.

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Councillor F.Thomson declared an interest in item 13b of the agenda and stated she would not take part in the discussion nor vote on the item.

83. ITEMS REQUIRING KEY DECISION

The following item for decision in the current Forward Plan was considered:-

83.1. LGA - Corporate Peer Challenge (Forward Plan Reference FP1102)

Report of the Chief Executive on the Local Government Association's (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge.

(1) The Decision Taken

**RESOLVED:
(unanimous)**

(1) Cabinet noted the Corporate Peer Challenge feedback report and recommendations at Appendix 1.

(2) Cabinet agreed the Corporate Peer Challenge action plan at Appendix 2.

(2) Reasons for the Decision

Members recalled that the Council had the first LGA Corporate Peer Challenge back in January 2019. A follow up visit was due to take place in 2020, but this was delayed by the global pandemic. The Council has changed substantially since the last review, including a new Chief Executive and politically it has transitioned from no overall control Conservative control to a Conservative majority. It was more appropriate to undertake a second peer challenge.

The Peer Challenge took place back in October 2021 and initial feedback was given to all the Group Leaders, Cabinet and senior officers. The full Peer Challenge feedback report was shown in Appendix one. As members would have seen, overall the report was very positive and it recognised that Welwyn Hatfield is a good Council with committed officer and political leadership. It also praised the Council for continuing to deliver on its modernisation programme, corporate peer challenge action plan and capital projects throughout the pandemic. The peer team was also impressed with the progress made given the other competing priorities during that time.

The Peer team made six recommendations and an action plan was developed (shown in appendix 2) to take forward and implement these recommendations. The Leader stated that while he did not disagree with recommendation four that the Council needed a Local Plan, the housing targets set out by the Inspector of 15,200 were far too

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excessive. He believed it was only right that the Council adopt a Local Plan that protects the valuable green belt.

Cabinet thanked the Peer Review Team for the work that they had done.

84. RECOMMENDATION FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The following recommendation from the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny committee on 6 January 2022 was considered:-

84.1. Revision of the Council's Window Repairs and Replacement Policy

Recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) on the 6 January 2022 on the Revision of the Council's Window Repairs and Replacement Policy.

At Council in November 2021, the Housing Maintenance Task and Finish Group was asked to review the Window Repairs and Replacement Policy with specific regard to the replacement of 'priority' windows.

Currently the policy advises that in instances where there is a pool of water or misting between the panes of glass, the Council would consider replacement of the glazed sealed unit, but only in the lounge, kitchen or dining room as these rooms were considered priority for viewing. The Task and Finish Panel and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had agreed that the glazed seals unit should be replaced regardless of what room had been affected. The revised policy was shown in Appendix A of the report.

Cabinet thanked the Housing Maintenance Task and Finish Group for their work on the policy.

**RESOLVED:
(unanimous)**

- (1) Cabinet agreed the proposed amendments to the Window Repairs and Replacement Policy recommended by OSC (as set out in Appendix A).
- (2) That once agreed, the proposed amendments were circulated to the Cabinet Housing Panel for their review.
- (3) Should the Cabinet Housing Panel agree the amendments, that the policy be agreed by the Executive Member under delegated powers.

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85. QUARTER 3 CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2021-22

Report of the Chief Executive on the capital expenditure and associated capital funding as at the end of Quarter 3 (December 2021) for 2021/22.

Variances to the original budget were summarised in Table 3.2, and detailed in Section 3.5. Progress on key schemes was set out in Section 3.6 of the report.

All General Fund capital variances were due to the re-phasing of projects. Cabinet noted the re-phasing into 2022/23 of £11.5M of loans to Now Housing. This may imply that the £60.5M of budgeted loans to Now Housing for 2022/23 was unlikely to be required in full. However the 2022/23 capital budget would remain at present, as over a 5 year horizon the total Now Housing capital budget was reasonable, even if the trajectory ended up being flattened. There were Housing Revenue Account (HRA) changes in the forecast that were mainly due to re-phasing.

**RESOLVED:
(unanimous)**

- (1) Cabinet noted the capital forecast outturn position as shown in Table 1.
- (2) Cabinet noted the forecast position as at 31 December 2021 for funding of the capital programme and reserve balances as reflected in Table 2.

86. QUARTER 3 REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2021-22

Report of the Chief Executive on the forecast revenue outturn position as at 31 December 2021 for the financial year 2021-22 and outlines the main variances from the original budget for both the General Fund (GF) and Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

General Fund

At the end of the second quarter, as reported to Cabinet in November 2021, the Council were forecasting a drawdown of non-ring-fenced General Fund reserves of £997,000. The forecast drawdown had now been adjusted downwards to £617,000.

Variances for the year to date were explained in Sections 3.2 and 3.3 of the report. The key additional variances that had arisen in the 3rd quarter were set out in table 3.2.2. The most significant of these was positive staffing variances of £299,000.

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The third quarter outcome gave the Council good visibility for the full year, and therefore provided stability going into the 2022/23 proposed budget which was to be discussed at Full Council on the 2 February 2022.

Appendix F set out the progress being made on savings originally identified for 2021/22. The realization of savings for garage income, parking, and Campus West had been undermined by the continuing impact of Covid. These trends had been allowed for the Council's proposed 2022/23 budget.

Risks still existed for commercial rental income, although collections were holding up, and the bad debt provision was currently felt to be adequate.

The trends observed in the General Fund revenue account in Quarter 3 supported the predictions the Council had for the 2022/23 budget proposals.

Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

The forecast drawdown from HRA reserves was £96,000 greater than budgeted, as set out in Appendix C1 of the report.

At the net cost of service level, the forecast adverse variance for 2021/22 was approximately £3.4M, almost entirely due to additional maintenance costs, as explained in Appendix D3. There had been an increased volume of repairs, partly due to post-Covid catch up, and also higher material prices.

Part of the variance was due to a catch up process, and it was felt that the 2022/23 budget was consistent with experience to date.

To maintain the HRA reserves at the desired level, the Revenue Contribution to Capital had been reduced.

RESOLVED: (unanimous)

- (1) Cabinet noted the revenue forecast outturn position as at Quarter 3 (31 December 2021).
- (2) Cabinet noted the position on debts set out in section 5 of the report.

87. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

That under Section 100(A)(2) and (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be now excluded from the meeting for Agenda items 13 and 14 (Minute 88 and 89 refer) on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of confidential or exempt information as defined in Section 100A(3) and paragraph 3 (private financial or

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business information) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).

In resolving to exclude the public in respect of the exempt information, it was considered that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

88. ITEMS OF AN EXEMPT NATURE REQUIRING KEY DECISION

The following items of an exempt nature for decision were considered:-

88.1. Housing Maintenance Procurement Update (Forward Plan Reference FP1093)

Exempt report of the Chief Executive on an update on the Housing Maintenance Procurement.

(Note: a more detailed record of the Cabinet discussion is contained in exempt item 88a).

88.2. Minor Building Works (Forward Plan Reference FP1100)

Exempt report of the Chief Executive on the Award of Minor Building Works Contract.

(Note: a more detailed record of the Cabinet discussion is contained in exempt item 88b).

89. PROPOSAL TO CONSULT WITH TENANTS ABOUT THE REDEVELOPMENT OF A HOUSING SCHEME, WELWYN GARDEN CITY

Exempt report of the Chief Executive on the proposal to consult with the tenants at the site in Welwyn Garden City.

(Note: a more detailed record of the Cabinet discussion is contained in exempt item 89).

Meeting ended 5.22pm
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