

Cabinet  
8 September 2020

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the CABINET held on Tuesday 8 September 2020 at 5.00pm.

This Cabinet meeting was held remotely in line with new regulations passed under the Coronavirus Act 2020, using the Zoom application.

These regulations have been passed under to ensure Local Authorities can conduct any necessary business under the current public health emergency.

PRESENT: Councillors T.Kingsbury (Leader of the Council) (Chairman)  
D.Bell (Deputy Leader and Executive Member, Resources)  
  
S.Boulton (Executive Member, Environment and Planning)  
T.Mitchinson (Executive Member, Leisure, Culture and  
Communications)  
N.Pace (Executive Member, Housing and Community)  
B.Sarson (Executive Member, Regeneration, Economic  
Development and Partnerships)  
F.Thomson (Executive Member, Governance, Public  
Health and Climate Change)

ALSO Councillor L.Chesterman (for item 9a)  
PRESENT:

OFFICIALS Chief Executive (R.Bridge)  
PRESENT: Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) (N.Long)  
Corporate Director (Resources, Environment and Cultural Services) (K.Ng)  
Head of Law and Administration (M.Martinus)  
Head of Community and Housing Strategy (S.Chambers)  
Head of Property Services (P.Gray)  
Compliance Manager (T.Warren)  
Governance Services Manager (A.Marston)  
Communications Officer (N.Burrows)

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161. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5 August 2020 were approved as a correct record and noted by the Chairman.

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162. ACTIONS STATUS REPORT

The status of actions agreed at the Cabinet meeting on 5 August 2020 in the report of the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) was noted.

163. ITEMS REQUIRING KEY DECISION

The following items for decision in the current Forward Plan were considered:-

163.1. Review of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (Forward Plan Reference FP989)

Report of the Corporate Director (Resources, Environment and Cultural Services) on the summary of the Review of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

(1) The Decision Taken

RESOLVED:

Cabinet noted the contents of the report and approved the principles to be adopted for the 2021/22 budget setting process as highlighted in section 3.3.6, in particular the 2021/22 budget setting process should focus on closing the indicative budget gap beyond next year.

(2) Reasons for the Decision

The report provided a recap of the three-year Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) approved by the Council in February 2020, together with any major changes in assumptions since that date.

The report therefore served as the starting point for the 2021/22 Budget, and set out the key principles to be adopted in setting the Budget.

The Council started the process in a strong financial position, with General Fund reserves of £8.6M at the end of the last financial year. The Council has approved a sustainable long-term Housing Revenue Account Business Plan. The Peer Review late last year referred to our proven track record of delivering savings.

The General Fund MTFS as approved in February 2020 was set out in Table 1. It indicated that the Council would need to find further annual savings of £1.6M in 2021/22 to close the General Fund budget “gap”, and a further £0.3M of annual savings in 2022/23.

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Since the MTFS was approved, the most significant change in budget assumptions was related to COVID-19. The latest estimated COVID financial impact was reported to Cabinet in August 2020, and is summarised in paragraph 3.2.1. The General Fund adverse impact is estimated at £0.9M for the current year, 2020/21, and at £0.7M in each of the following three years up to 2023/24. The later year impacts are the result of estimated Council Tax and business rate shortfalls, which can be spread via the Collection Fund over 3 years. For the current year, 2020/21, it is likely that the Council will receive further government support through the income guarantee scheme, but the amount is not yet known.

Although the COVID impact has inevitably increased the estimated Budget Gap for the years through to 2023/24, the approach to closing the gap will need careful consideration.

Generally speaking, it has always been the intention to close the original budget gap of £1.9M by 2022/23 shown in the original MTFS by identifying annual savings. These are referred to in Section 3.3, and highlighted in particular, the Modernisation Review in paragraph 3.3.6.

But the additional gap brought about by the COVID impacts poses a somewhat different problem. Although spread over 3 years through the Collection Fund process, and although recovery may be drawn out, COVID is essentially a “one off” event. It would be both difficult, and probably unnecessary, to try and absorb the COVID impact from annual savings over the period of the MTFS, without creating an unacceptable impact upon service delivery.

Accordingly, the use of reserves will be considered as part of the Council’s options, as noted in paragraph 3.3.6.

This approach will also allow time to refine the Council’s COVID impact estimations, as we learn more about the government’s income guarantee scheme, and gather more information to crystallise our assumptions on income flows such as commercial rents, and council tax and business rate collection levels.

There remain many uncertainties for the General Fund about the speed of economic recovery from COVID.

The estimated COVID impact upon the Housing Revenue Account, (HRA), is less material than for the General Fund. So far, rent collection levels have been holding up well. The original HRA MTFS is set out in paragraph 3.4.2. As noted, the estimated additional COVID deficit amounts to just £168,000.

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The Council have already held a well-received Member briefing on the MTFs recap, and the COVID impact. A further all Member briefing will be held later in the year as the budget process advances.

163.2. Queensway House Cladding (Forward Plan Reference FP1000)

Report of the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) on the cladding works at Queensway House. An exempt Part II report relating to the contract can be found under item 12b (minute 160.2 refers).

(1) The Decision Taken

RESOLVED:

- (1) That pursuant to Contract Procedure Rule 14 (k) (Alternative Procedures in Prescribed Circumstances) Cabinet agreed to waive the requirement for a competition to be carried out and for five (5) tenders to be obtained, on the basis that it is to the advantage of the Council that the rule should be waived”;
- (2) Cabinet approved the direct award of contract to Borrás Construction Limited for Phase 2 Cladding Removal at Queensway House.
- (3) Further information relating to the contract is contained within the associated Part II report, this being exempt from Part I on the basis that it contains financial information relating to the contract, as such exempt from publication.

(2) Reasons for the Decision

The report sought approval from Members to approve the recommendations in item 2 to directly award the contract to Borrás Construction Limited in accordance with section 14k (Alternative Procedures in Prescribed Situations) of the Contract Procedure Rules”.

The companion report in Part II contained commercially sensitive financial information and as such was exempt from publication.

As part of the ongoing fire protection work and measures at Queensway House that are required until the block is demolished, an External Wall Fire Safety Review (EWS1) of Queensway revealed that the removal of cladding panels is required.

Consultation with the remaining residents of Queensway House had been extensive over the last 18 months with drop-in meetings and letters communicating each stage of the various works carried out.

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It is also important to note that measures agreed by the fire service were in place including a 24/7 waking watch.

164. RECOMMENDATION FROM CABINET PANEL

The following recommendation from the meeting of the Cabinet Housing Panel on 14 July 2020 was considered:-

164.1. Homelessness Process Report

Recommendation from the meeting of the Cabinet Housing Panel on 14 July 2020 on the Council's current Homelessness Process.

The report gave an overview of the structure of the housing options team and summarised the nature of the demand on the service, including the increased demand resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. It set out in detail the processes that were followed when someone becomes homeless and when someone is homeless or threatened with homelessness as a result of termination of a private rented tenancy.

RESOLVED:

Cabinet noted the report and agreed the continuation of the current processes as outlined within the report.

165. RECOMMENDATION FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The following recommendation from the meeting on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 28 July 2020 was considered:-

165.1. Scrutiny on Anti-Social Behaviour

Recommendation from the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 28 July 2020 on the Scrutiny on Anti-Social Behaviour.

Councillor L.Chesterman, as Vice-Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Chairman of the Scrutiny Sub-Committee presented the report at the meeting.

The report set out the scope of the scrutiny, aims and objectives and findings. Some key issues were noted by Members, which were set out in the report, but included some highlights:

Anti-social Behaviour was "very low" but there was a higher prevalence of ASB in Welwyn Garden City than Hatfield. This may be due to transport connectivity, a relatively safe public realm, free Wi-Fi and well-lit internal space such as the Howard Centre.

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Whilst there was a fair spread of youth diversionary activities between Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield, many are targeted at vulnerable young people and there are a lot of sports-based activities.

It was resolved unanimously that the committee agree to the recommendations in the report, as well as an additional recommendation. The recommendations are set out in detail in the report, but in summary included:

- To review the current method of communicating with young people about youth provision and activities and consider additional methods that could improve the reach.
- To support the use of the additional budget made available by Cabinet for this financial year to help modernize the Wheels Park at King George V and to provide a small grant fund for one year, as part of the council's community grant fund, but to be made available for youth provision.
- That a report be brought to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 12 months' time to look at the impact of the grants and other recommendations in this report.

And

- For the Executive Member to take the findings to Hertfordshire County Council and lobby them for more resources in the Welwyn Hatfield area
- and for Officers to engage with voluntary and charitable groups in the area to encourage them to provide more youth activities.

Councillor T.Mitchinson thanked the Community Partnership Manager and his team on their hard work to help the youth of the Borough and helping to tackle Anti-social behaviour.

RESOLVED:

Cabinet approved the recommendations as agreed by Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

166. 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 item 12 (Minute 167 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 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.

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167. ITEMS OF AN EXEMPT NATURE REQUIRING KEY DECISION

The following items of an exempt nature for decision in the current Forward Plan were considered:-

167.1. Award of Arboriculture Contracts (Forward Plan Reference FP998)

Exempt report of the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) on the current contracts for Arboriculture Services.

(1) The Decision Taken

**RESOLVED:  
(unanimous)**

Cabinet, in accordance with the unanimous recommendation of the General Procurement Board agreed to award the contract (and reserve bidder status for Lot 1) as follows:

Lot 1 – Maintenance of Urban Trees : Contractor – Maydencroft Limited

Lot 1 – Maintenance of Urban Trees – Reserve Bidder – John O’Conner (Grounds Maintenance) Limited

Lot 2 – Maintenance of Young Trees - Maydencroft Limited

Lot 3 – Maintenance of Woodland Trees - Maydencroft Limited

(2) Reasons for the Decision

The current contracts for Arboriculture (Tree Maintenance) Services expire at the end of December 2020.

The new contract is for three years plus an optional one year extension.

The General Procurement Board agreed the evaluation criteria for each Lot to be 60% in quality and 40% in price.

167.2. Queensway House Cladding (Forward Plan Reference FP1000)

Exempt report of the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) on the cladding works at Queensway House.

(1) The Decision Taken

**RESOLVED:**

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**(unanimous)**

- (1) That pursuant to Contract Procedure Rule 14 (k) (Alternative Procedures in Prescribed Circumstances) Cabinet agreed to waive the requirement for a competition to be carried out and for five (5) tenders to be obtained, on the basis that it is to the advantage of the Council that the rule should be waived”;
- (2) Cabinet approved the direct award of contract to Borrás Construction Limited for Phase 2 Cladding Removal at Queensway House.

(2) Reasons for the Decision

The report asked Members to approve the recommendations in item 2 to directly award the contract to Borrás Construction Limited in accordance with section 14k (Alternative Procedures in Prescribed Situations) of the Contract Procedure Rules.

The cost to undertake the Phase 2 cladding removal is based on the phase 1 cost and specification.

Meeting ended 5.33pm  
AM