

Cabinet
10 August 2021

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL CABINET held on Tuesday 10 August 2021 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)
Head of Housing Operations (S.Pearson)
Governance Services Manager (A.Marston)

22. APOLOGY

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

23. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2021 was approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

24. ACTIONS STATUS REPORT

The status of actions agreed at the Cabinet meeting on 13 July 2021 in the report of the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) was noted.

25. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS BY MEMBERS

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

26. ITEM REQUIRING KEY DECISION

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

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26.1. Community and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy (Forward Plan Reference FP1068)

Report of the Chief Executive setting out a proposed new community and stakeholder engagement strategy.

(1) The Decision Taken

**RESOLVED:
(unanimous)**

(1) Cabinet approved the Council's community and stakeholder engagement strategy (CASES) for 2021-24 as set out in Appendix A and noted the supporting action plan in Appendix B.

(2) Cabinet gave delegated authority to the Corporate Management Team to oversee the development and implementation of strategies linked to the CASES as set out in paragraph 13.2 of the report, except where there were existing governance arrangements in place for Member approval and/or scrutiny of those strategies.

(2) Reasons for the Decision

The Leader was pleased to bring the new Community Engagement Strategy to Cabinet. It would help the Council improve the way it connects with all of its communities, specifically how it involves local people and stakeholders in the decisions that affect them.

The Council had consulted widely, both internally and externally, in producing the strategy. In doing so the Council had been guided by the Local Government Association's (LGA) latest research on effective community engagement, by borough-wide consultation, and by workshop sessions at the latest Welwyn Hatfield Alliance Conference. The insight gained in doing so was reflected in the proposals.

The strategy contained five broad themes, supported by an action plan and overseen in its delivery by an officer-led working group. The group will have representation from all services and will report progress to the Leader of the Council.

27. QUARTER 1 REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2021-22

Report of the Chief Executive on the revenue outturn position as at 30 June 2021 (Quarter 1) for the financial year 2021/22 and outlined the main variances from the original budget for both the General Fund (GF) and Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

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General Fund

The original budget for the current year forecast a drawdown from non-ring-fenced General Fund reserves of £220,000. At the time of setting the budget, it was unclear how Covid might continue to impact the Council beyond the end of 2020/21, so the budget was largely drawn up on a business as usual basis, though with some funding being put aside in earmarked reserves to cover potential future impacts.

The first three months of 2021/22 had seen further Covid losses, mainly to the income, of a forecast £2M on a full-year basis.

The principal components of this were loss of Campus West income of £1.1M, loss of parking income of £538,000, delays to the opening of Hat Tech of £144,000, and housing and homeless costs in excess of subsidy of £100,000.

Partially offsetting these losses was anticipated government support of £300,000 through the Sales Fees and Charges (SFC) scheme. But this scheme only covered losses up to 30 June, 2021, whereas in 2020/21 it covered the whole year.

The net impact from the above of £1.7M on the General Fund would be partly absorbed by drawing down £425,000 of earmarked reserves for Covid established at the end of last year. Furthermore, a planned transfer to earmarked reserves of £610,000 in 2021/22 will not take place now.

The net result was that the Council were now forecasting a drawdown from non-ring-fenced General Fund reserves of £878,000, instead of the £220,000 originally envisaged.

After only one quarter, it was customary to note a number of risks and opportunities without actually adjusting the forecast outturn, as to do so would be premature. This was true of 2021/22, but whereas in past years, such items would frequently form into positive variances as the year went on, but it might not be the case this year.

As noted in the report, risks still existed to originally envisaged Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) savings, and to originally envisaged increases in parking income. Furthermore, risks still exist to commercial rental income, although collections were holding up.

In the last quarter of 2020/21, a significant negative variance occurred on housing and homeless costs not covered by government grants. Although this was not thought likely to recur on such a scale in 2021/22, analysis of the issue, which mainly concerns costs associated with supported housing providers was still continuing.

Councillor D.Bell, (Executive Member, Resources) believed the approach of not adjusting the forecast prematurely at Quarter 1 until more information was

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available was correct, and consistent with past years. But thought that we should all be conscious that the risk to the General Fund was probably on the downside for the rest of the year.

We had always stressed that the financial impacts of Covid upon the Council would lag the pandemic itself, and this was now proving to be the case.

Nonetheless, Covid impacts should start to lessen, and the Council's financial position remains strong.

Housing Revenue Account

The forecast drawdown from HRA reserves is £87,000 greater than budgeted, as set out in the report.

In Appendix D3, an adverse variance of £415,000 was highlighted on Mears responsive repairs. Part of this was due to catch up from Covid delays, and so was unlikely to recur through the whole year, and no adjustment had yet been made to the HRA forecast for this. Nevertheless, there was quite likely to be an adverse variance on a whole year basis, and an adjustment would be made to the forecast at Quarter 2 if necessary.

**RESOLVED:
(unanimous)**

- (1) Cabinet noted the revenue forecast outturn position as at Quarter 1.
- (2) Cabinet approved the virements, detailed in section 3.2.
- (3) Cabinet noted the position on debts set out in section 5 of the report.

28. QUARTER 1 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 1 for 2021/22.

The only significant variances from the original budget were due to re-phasing.

Progress on significant capital projects was shown in Section 3.3 of the report.

Forecast financing was set out in Section 4.1. The first General Fund borrowing within the 2021/22 forecast took place in July, with £20M being obtained from the Public Loans Works Board, as highlighted on the monthly Treasury portfolio report distributed to members.

**RESOLVED:
(unanimous)**

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- (1) Cabinet noted the capital forecast outturn position as at Quarter 1 as shown in Table 1.
- (2) Cabinet noted the forecast position as at 30 June 2021 for funding of the capital programme and reserve balances as reflected in Table 2.

29. AFGHAN LOCALLY EMPLOYED STAFF RELOCATION SCHEME ACCELERATION

Report of the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) providing information about the accelerated relocation of locally employed staff from Afghanistan.

The report set out the request from government for local Councils to provide homes and resettlement support for up to twelve months via the accelerated Afghan Locally Employed Staff Relocation Scheme.

Whilst there was a great deal of pressure on housing locally, balancing the needs of these pressures against the serious situation in Afghanistan, it was recommended that the Council participate in the scheme and offer help to a maximum of three families with a two-bedroom need.

There was government funding to support the scheme, which, since the writing of the report, has been increased. So now the integration support package, referred to in 5.3 of the report, was now £10,500 per person

Subject to agreement the Council would look to commission a suitable organisation to provide the support.

Cabinet members were in support of the scheme and noted that it had been a difficult time for people in Afghanistan.

**RESOLVED:
(unanimous)**

- (1) Cabinet agreed to participate in the Scheme and offer help to a maximum of three families, with a two-bedroom need. Cabinet authorised the Head of Community and Housing Strategy to formally notify the Home Office of the Council's intended participation in the Scheme.
- (2) Cabinet delegated authority to the Head of Community and Housing Strategy, in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and Climate Change, to agree suitable arrangements for the provision of housing, support and any other services necessary for successful implementation of the resettlement scheme, in line with the government's requirements.

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(3) Cabinet agreed to waive the Contract Procedure rules in accordance with paragraph 14 (k) (Council's Contract Procedure Rules) for the reasons set out in the report.

30. 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 13 (Minute 31 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.

31. ITEMS OF AN EXEMPT NATURE REQUIRING KEY DECISION

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

31.1. Independent Living (Forward Plan Reference FP1067)

Exempt recommendation from the meeting of the Cabinet Housing Panel on 19 July 2021 on Independent Living - 24 Hour Control Centre Service Review.

(1) The Decision Taken

RESOLVED:
(unanimous)

- (1) Cabinet considered the options set out in the report and approved one of the three options for delivery of the 24/7 Control Centre and out of hours council service cover.
- (2) The preferred option recommended was option one – full 24/7 emergency alarm and out of hours council service cover.
- (3) If option one was agreed, it was also recommended to bring the existing contracts to an end through appropriate contract clauses, and save the council entering into sub-contracting arrangements.

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(2) Reasons for the Decision

The overarching objectives of the review was to explore alternative delivery models that could deliver a more efficient and cost-effective service, reduce the demand for ongoing investment in technology and to mitigate risks associated with the current service.

The Council's Modernisation Board agreed for a service-led project review project, leading to a desk top review of the potential options for future service delivery.

A review of the existing service to explore how the Council could retain direct delivery, but done differently and still deliver efficiencies, had not been explored in detail at that point given the perceived benefits that could be realised through possible external delivery models.

The review therefore prioritised exploring the option to outsource the service to a 3rd party contractor.

Soft market testing with a market leading organisation had allowed for a good understanding of the potential estimated contract costs.

The preferred option that was recommended for further exploration is for a 3rd party organisation to cover the full 24/7 emergency alarm monitoring service and the existing out of hours cover for other council services.

There were 12 members of staff that would be impacted by the proposed changes, 11 of which would be at risk of redundancy.

Any staff at risk of redundancy would be subject to the current Redundancy and Redeployment Policy and TUPE regulations may also apply.

Dependent on whether TUPE regulations were applied, the financial implications for staff payments, contract costs and overall efficiency savings realised could be affected. However, it was not possible to provide a definitive position at this stage as this would be dependent on the outcome of further exploration of the proposed option through completing a tender and procurement process.

31.2. Award of Land Survey Framework (Forward Plan Reference FP1065)

Exempt report of the Chief Executive on the Award of Ground and Land Survey Framework.

(1) The Decision Taken

RESOLVED:

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(unanimous)

- (1) Following unanimous agreement at the General Procurement Board on 30 June 2021, that contracts / reserve bidder status were awarded as follows:

	Lot 1 – Land Surveys and Searches	Lot 2 – Ground Investigations
Contractor	MK Surveys	EPS Ltd
Reserve bidder 1	Catsurveys	Tetratec
Reserve bidder 2	Carter Jonas	Leyden Kirkby Associates

- (2) The frameworks would be for a period of 3 years (with an option to extend by a further year) commencing on 1 September 2021.

(2) Reasons for the Decision

The report provided details of the procurement process that has been undertaken to establish a number of framework contracts.

The awards were set out in Section 2.1 of the report.

The award process was supervised by the General Procurement Board, and the scoring was set out in Appendix 1.

Meeting ended 5.19pm
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