

Cabinet
29 March 2022

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL CABINET held on Tuesday 29 March 2022 at 5.00pm 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)
N. Pace (Executive Member, Governance and Public Health)
B. Sarson (Executive Member, Leisure and Community Safety)
F. Thomson (Executive Member, Housing and Climate Change)

OFFICIALS Chief Executive (K. Ng)
PRESENT: Legal Services Manager (S. Saunders)
Governance Services Manager (A. Marston)
Communications & Marketing Manager (M. Sherry)

101. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 1 March 2022 were approved as a correct record and noted by the Chairman.

102. ACTIONS STATUS REPORT

The status of actions agreed at the Cabinet meeting on 1 March 2022 and for decisions taken by Cabinet Members exercising their individual delegated powers between 21 February 2022 to 21 March 2022 in the report of the Head of Law and Administration was noted.

103. 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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104. RECOMMENDATION FROM CABINET PANELS

A recommendation from the meeting of the Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel on 10 March 2022 was considered:-

104.1. Local Plan - Annual Monitoring Report 2020/21

Recommendation from the meeting of the Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel on 10 March 2022 on the Local Plan Annual Monitoring Report 2020/21.

The Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) covered the period between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021. It reported on a number of social environmental and economic indicators as well as more specific planning indicators related to the performance of the Local Plan.

Office for National Statistics (ONS) Mid-year Population Estimates

- The AMR presented the most recently available mid-year population estimates, published by the Office for National Statistics. These are the 2020 Mid-year estimates, which estimated Welwyn Hatfield's population at 123,893 persons. This was an increase of 0.7% on the mid-2019 estimates.
- These were however estimates and the results of the 2021 Census will confirm the Borough's population. These were expected to be released around late Spring/early Summer of this year.

Retail Vacancy

- The AMR reports the Council's latest retail vacancy survey, which was undertaken following the end of the monitoring year in September/October 2021.
- Vacancy rates in both Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield Town Centres increased further. In Welwyn Garden City, vacant frontage length increased to 9.9% in 2021 from 8.6% in the 2020 survey.
- In Hatfield Town Centre vacant frontage also increased, to 21.7% from 16.5% in the 2020 survey. However, part of the vacancy in Hatfield is due to the redevelopment at 1-9 Town Centre.
- Vacancy at the out-of-town centre, the Galleria, continued to increase to 28.2% in 2021 from 22.4% in 2020.
- At the neighbourhood centres in Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield vacancy largely remained unchanged, with nine of the 16 centres fully occupied. Vacancy remained unchanged in the Borough's Northern villages. Meanwhile in the Borough's Southern villages two units became vacant in Brookmans Park and Cuffley remained unchanged at 5.1% and all units in Welham Green remained occupied, with vacancy at 0%.

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Housing Completions

- Between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, 352 net new housing units were completed, which included 48 new affordable homes.
- The local authority level figures published by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, which include new build as well as acquisitions from the private sector, indicate a much higher number of affordable housing additions for Welwyn Hatfield at (358) for the same period.

Future Housing Supply

- In the absence of an up to date housing target the default housing requirement position is the figure derived from the standard methodology. This takes the average annual household growth projections over a ten-year period as a baseline, then applies an affordability adjustment using the latest median workplace-based affordability ratio. Any increase was capped at 40% of the projected household growth. The AMR sets out that the required number of homes for Welwyn Hatfield, calculated using the standard methodology, had slightly increased to 878 dwellings per annum (for 21/22) from the 875 dpa previously required (in 2020/21). However, since the publication of the Cabinet Paper, the ONS has published data on affordability ratios for 2021/22. The ONS affordability ratios inform the required number of homes under the standard method. The latest ratios result in an increase to 888 dwellings per annum for the year 2021/22), a slight increase over the 878 dwellings per annum reported in the AMR.
- The Council would also have to produce an updated Housing Delivery Action Plan (which is required by the Housing Delivery Test when delivery over the past three years fall below 95% of the requirement). This will assess the causes of under-delivery and identify actions to increase delivery in future years.

Economy

- The Borough continued to see a net loss of employment floorspace which totalled just over -2,200m² in 2020/21.
- Office loss from permitted development was expected to slow now that many of the earlier opportunities for this type of conversion have now taken place as well as the Article 4 directions which have now taken effect. These mean that planning permission is again required for change of use from office to residential as well as demolition and rebuild of offices to residential, in four of the key employment areas.
- Data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) for the number of claimants of Job Seekers Allowance or Universal Credit shows that the rate of claimants in Welwyn Hatfield has been steadily declining since April 2021. The rate of claimants had more than doubled in March 2021

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at 4.7%. The latest data for January 2022 still remained somewhat above the level prior to the pandemic which was now at 3.1% compared with 1.9% in March 2020.

RESOLVED:
(unanimous)

Cabinet agreed to the publication of the Annual Monitoring report and, that the Head of Planning be given delegated authority to agree any minor alterations to finalise the AMR, following consultation with the Executive Member for Environment, Planning, Estates and Development.

105. ITEM REQUIRING KEY DECISION NOT IN THE FORWARD PLAN

The following item for decision not in the current Forward Plan was considered:-

105.1. Social Housing De-Carbonisation Fund

Report of the Chief Executive on the Social Housing De-Carbonisation Fund.

(1) The Decision Taken

RESOLVED:
(unanimous)

Cabinet agreed to give delegated authority to the Chief Executive (in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and Executive Member for Housing and Climate Change) to award the contract for an agent to manage the Social Housing Decarbonisation Project.

(2) Reasons for the Decision

During the 2021 spending review the government had committed a further £800M across 3 years for the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. Wave 2 of this fund will open for bidding in Spring of 2022. To assist with this project the Council required an agent to bid for funding and if successful, to manage the project.

(Note: The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been given notice that it was impracticable to comply with the requirement that at least twenty eight days' notice must be given of the intention to make a key decision not in the Forward Plan in accordance with Regulations 5 and 10 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 because it was urgent and could not reasonably be deferred for the reason specified).

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The reason for this item is to enable the company to be appointed as soon as possible as the grant applications period is in Spring and therefore cannot wait until the Cabinet meeting in June as it will be too late.

106. THANK YOU

As this was his last meeting, Cabinet thanked Councillor D. Bell (Executive Members for Resources) for his hard work over the years as a Cabinet Member and Councillor.

Meeting ended 5.12pm
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