

Cabinet
6 September 2022

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL CABINET held on Tuesday 6 September 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)
S.Boulton (Deputy Leader and Executive Member, Resources and Planning)

S.Kasumu (Executive Member, Environment and Climate Change)
T.Mitchinson (Executive Member, Leisure and Community)
N.Pace (Executive Member, Governance, Public Health and IT)
B.Sarson (Executive Member, Community Safety and Parking)
F.Thomson (Executive Member, Housing)

OFFICIALS Chief Executive (K. Ng)
PRESENT: Executive Director (Finance and Transformation) (R. Baker)
Executive Director (Place) (C. Barnes)
Service Director (Resident & Neighbourhood) (S. McDaid)
Assistant Director (Legal and Governance) (M. Martinus)
Governance Services Manager (A. Marston)
Senior Democratic Services Officer (C. Francis)
Communications & Marketing Manager (M. Sherry)

33. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 August 2022 were approved as a correct record and noted by the Chairman.

34. ACTIONS STATUS REPORT

The status of actions agreed at the Cabinet meeting on 9 August 2022 and for decisions taken by Cabinet Members exercising their individual delegated powers between 1 August 2022 to 26 August 2022 in the report of the Assistant Director (Legal and Governance) were noted.

35. 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.

Cabinet
6 September 2022

36. ITEMS REQUIRING KEY DECISION

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

36.1. Medium Term Financial Strategy (Forward Plan Reference FP1133)

Report of the Chief Executive which summarises the review of the MTFS as the opening stage of the 2023/24 Budget Setting process.

(1) The Decision Taken

**RESOLVED:
(unanimous)**

Cabinet noted the contents of the report and approved the principles to be adopted for the 2023/24 budget setting process as highlighted in section 3.3.6, in particular the 2023/24 budget setting process should focus on closing the indicative budget gap.

(2) Reasons for the Decision

Since setting the previous Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), there have been significant ongoing increases and pressures associated with the cost of living, including general inflation, proposed pay award for staff and ongoing increases in fuel and utility costs.

The government was to consult over the summer on a two-year local government settlement. This is looking increasingly unlikely due to the leadership contest (now completed), and there is a growing feeling that a one year settlement would be given again.

It is unclear what will happen with the single year grants announced last year and new homes bonus. The Council's revised MTFS assumes a business rates reset with some transitional protection payments for one year.

The government has recently opened applications for business rates pooling applications, which does give some indications that there may be no material changes the business rates retention scheme for next year, but this cannot be guaranteed.

Due to the significant uncertainties and unprecedented inflationary increases, along with variances in market forecasts, the Council have not only completed our standard approach to forecasting but also considered upside and downside risk scenarios. These would not necessarily be the best and worst cases, but do give some context to the wide range of uncertainties the council faces. These were shown in table 3.2.28.

Cabinet
6 September 2022

Based on the standard approach to forecasting, the budget gap for 2023/24 has risen from 1.514M at the start of the year, to £4.479M, with the three year gap rising from £2.274M to £6.492M.

The table in section 3.2.31 sets out the key changes to the forecasts, and as you will see, all adverse impacts relate directly to inflationary and cost of living increases outside of the councils control.

The budget setting principles for Cabinet to agree were set out in paragraph 3.3.6.

As things stand, if the gap is not closed the council will go below minimum reserves within one year. The Council will need to consider fees and charges, transformation strategies, and other savings proposals to meet the budget gap to ensure the council balances its budget.

This Council has an excellent record of sound financial management, and previous prudent budgets set by officers and the previous portfolio holder. The budget gap in the coming years is exceptionally challenging and not of a level the Council has previously seen. Whilst the Council will of course aim to protect frontline services, given these extraordinary pressures and uncertainties, it is acknowledged there may need to be difficult decisions taken in relation to front line services.

On the HRA, no material changes have been made to assumptions at this stage, as the Council will be undertaking a full review of the business plan. This will include the new repairs and maintenance contractor changes, an ambitious stock investment programme, and ensuring resource is available to deliver the programme. One of the key considerations for the council will be the rent increases, for which the government has recently started consulting on a cap of 5%.

On the capital programme no updates have been made to the forecasts at the current time, but there will be specific focus on the stock investment programme and our operational and commercial estate investment programme. It is important to note existing schemes not yet started will need to be reviewed in light of inflationary increases on material and labour costs.

36.2. Assisted Transfer Scheme (Housing) (Forward Plan Reference FP1139)

Report of the Chief Executive on the changes to the Assisted Transfer Scheme (AST) that is currently offered to council tenants and to rename the policy the Rightsizing Transfer Scheme (RTS).

(1) The Decision Taken

Cabinet
6 September 2022

**RESOLVED:
(unanimous)**

Cabinet noted the review of the Assisted Transfer Scheme and approved the changes to the scheme and rebranding, which were set out in the report.

(2) Reasons for the Decision

The report set out a proposal to replace the existing Assisted Transfer Scheme with the Rightsizing Transfer Scheme to make the allocation of the limited budget fairer and more accessible to tenants wishing to move to smaller homes. In addition, due to the interest from tenants in downsizing in the Minster House scheme, it recommends the virement, under officer delegations, of £20,000 of additional budget during this financial year only.

The new proposed scheme would enable more households to benefit from the limited budget available and offer a small incentive as it would help to alleviate some of the financial pressures of moving home. The new scheme will pay eligible households £750 for the first spare bedroom they give up by moving and a further £250 for each room thereafter.

It is anticipated that there will be an increased desire from tenants to downsize due to the increases in the cost of living and in particular fuel costs. Alongside this proposed new scheme there is a team of officers working hard to help tenants with other practical issues relating to downsizing to encourage and support them explore and hopefully achieve a successful move to accommodation that meets their needs.

It was noted that the Assisted Transfer Scheme went to Cabinet Housing Panel and members were in agreement of the recommendations.

37. RECOMMENDATION FROM CABINET PANEL

A recommendation from the meeting of the Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel on 18 August 2022 was considered:-

37.1. Introduction of Resident Permit Parking Schemes, and other waiting restrictions, in various roads, High Dells and Hilltop, Hatfield

Recommendation from the meeting of Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel on 18 August 2022 on the Introduction of Resident Permit Parking Schemes, and other waiting restrictions, in various roads, High Dells and Hilltop, Hatfield.

The first four Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel (CPPP) recommendations related to the creation of Traffic Regulation Orders. A total of 89 objections were received out of 2031 properties consulted, and officers' comments to

Cabinet
6 September 2022

those objections were shown in the CPPP report. It was noted that CPPP reached unanimous decisions on recommendations 1 to 4.

**RESOLVED:
(unanimous – recommendations agreed)**

- (1) “The Borough of Welwyn Hatfield (Various Roads, High Dells, Hatfield) (Restriction of Waiting and Permit Parking Zones) Order 2022”**

That the Panel considers the objections received in Section 9 in addition to the issues raised in Section 20 around equalities and diversity and recommends to Cabinet to proceed with permit zones with amended days and times – Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm as set out in Section 4 and the creation of the traffic regulation order for resident permit zones; and to note the delegated powers conferred to Executive Member for Community Safety and Parking to sign an executive member decision to proceed with the creation of the traffic regulation order as advertised, subject to unanimous recommendation of the Panel.

- (2) “The Borough of Welwyn Hatfield (Various Roads, High Dells, Hatfield) (Prohibition of Stopping and Waiting on Verge or Footway) Order 2022”**

That the Panel considers the objections received in Section 9 in addition to the issues raised in Section 20 around equalities and diversity and recommends to Cabinet to proceed with the creation of the traffic regulation order as advertised; and to note the delegated powers conferred to Executive Member for Community Safety and Parking to sign an executive member decision to proceed with the creation of the traffic regulation order as advertised for the verge and footway prohibition, subject to unanimous recommendation of the Panel.

- (3) “The Borough of Welwyn Hatfield (Various Roads, Hilltop, Hatfield) (Restriction of Waiting and Permit Parking Zones) Order 2022”**

That the Panel considers the objections received in Section 9 in addition to the issues raised in Section 20 around equalities and diversity and recommends to Cabinet to proceed with permit zones with amended days and times – Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm as set out in Section 6 and the creation of the traffic regulation order for resident permit zones; and to note the delegated powers conferred to Executive Member for Community Safety and Parking to sign an executive member decision to proceed with the creation of the traffic regulation order as advertised, subject to unanimous recommendation of the Panel.

Cabinet
6 September 2022

(4) “The Borough of Welwyn Hatfield (Various Roads, Hilltop, Hatfield) (Prohibition of Stopping and Waiting on Verge or Footway) Order 2022”

That the Panel considers the objections received in Section 9 in addition to the issues raised in Section 20 around equalities and diversity and recommends to Cabinet to proceed with the creation of the traffic regulation order as advertised; and to note the delegated powers conferred to Executive Member for Community Safety and Parking to sign an executive member decision to proceed with the creation of the traffic regulation order as advertised for the verge and footway prohibition, subject to unanimous recommendation of the Panel.

With regards to recommendation 5, in particular setting up of a hardship fund for any resident within any permit parking area in the borough.

The current price of a resident parking permit within Welwyn Hatfield is £30 a year, this is much lower compared to the average price of £42 in Hertfordshire. The council already provides discounts to Blue Badge holders living in the permit area. There is also a discounted permit for doctors and carers who need to visit the permit areas. Moreover, residents in receipt of state pension may buy visitor vouchers at a 50% concession rate with proof of pension. The Council have therefore already targeted support to the most vulnerable group.

The council's own finances have been adversely affected by the high inflation rate and utility prices. Whilst the Council are providing a lot of help and support to residents in dealing with the current cost of living crisis (the details of the various schemes are shown on the front page of our website), the Council need to ensure their financial position is sustainable in order to preserve the vital frontline services as far as possible. The Leader wrote to the Chancellor the previous month voicing concerns about the current cost of living crisis and urging the government to provide more financial support to the local government sector.

The wording of the CPPP recommendation as it stands is likely to result in more resources being diverted to set up and manage the hardship fund, to cover the cost of a permit that is equivalent to cost at around 58p a day. The Council feel that such resources would be better focused on continuing to provide other means of support to our residents. The Executive Member, Community Safety and Parking, could not support the recommendation from CPPP to set up a hardship fund and asked Cabinet to reject it.

**RESOLVED:
(unanimous – recommendation rejected)**

Cabinet
6 September 2022

- (5) To recommend to Cabinet to rapidly explore setting up a hardship fund for any resident within any permit parking area within the borough who can demonstrate the impact the additional cost of a permit or permits would have upon them financially and/ or socially to allow for a defined process to alleviate this pressure until it is deemed that this fund is no longer required.

38. 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 11 and 12 (Minute 39 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.

39. OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION WITH RESIDENTS ON PROPOSAL TO CONSIDER REDEVELOPMENT OF A HOUSING SCHEME, WELWYN GARDEN CITY

Exempt report of the Chief Executive on the outcome of consultation with residents on proposal to consider redevelopment of a housing scheme in Welwyn Garden City.

(Note: a more detailed record of the Cabinet discussion is contained in exempt item 39a).

Meeting ended 5.20pm
AM