

Cabinet
6 December 2022

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL CABINET held on Tuesday 6 December 2022 at 6.00 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)
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)
Service Director (Resident & Neighbourhood) (S. McDaid)
Assistant Director (Legal and Governance) (M. Martinus)
Governance Services Manager (A. Marston)
Communications Officer (S. Davids-Lyle)

54. APOLOGIES

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

55. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2022 were approved as a correct record and noted by the Chairman.

56. PUBLIC QUESTION

Question from Karen Winbow

“With regards to the Local Plan, please explain why the Council have not responded to the Inspector’s letter of 6 September 2022 requesting additional information and another revised timetable. Suggesting that the Council is waiting for a response to their letters to an ex-minister and ex-PM is insufficient. The Local Plan is limping to certain doom. Either do what the Inspector says or withdraw the Local Plan and waste £10m. This constant

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delay is now resulting in planning by appeal as evidenced by the latest Appeals' Report.

The Council submitted an ill-thought through and defective Local Plan for examination. They then sought to remove sites including Brookmans Park and Symondshyde but the Inspector wouldn't allow it. If they withdraw the Local Plan they lose £10m of our money and developers will have a field day. If the Council do what the Inspector says then Brookmans Park will have a large development near the station. What cannot happen is nothing which is what is happening. When are the Council going to make a decision as to whether they:

1. Agree to the Inspector's demands and proceed to a sound Local Plan,
2. Withdraw the Local Plan, or
3. Allow the Local Plan to be found unsound?

There are no alternatives and the sooner the Council realise that the better."

Answer:

The question was answered by the Executive Member, Resources and Planning:-

"Thank you for the question. The Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan has been at examination for a number of years, and its progress has been well documented. In September, it was right for Cabinet to formally write to the then new Prime Minister and Secretary of State to request that they translated their Leadership promises in to tangible changes to the planning system. It is also right for us, as a responsible Cabinet, to ensure that no stone is left unturned in the pursuit of a sound Local Plan, which balances such a wide range of factors, and I make no apology for ensuring that we have done this for residents. Whilst there has undoubtedly been some areas of contention with the plan, a lot of good work has gone in to producing it, and I do not agree with the assertions in the question. Cabinet are continuing to work with Officers in response to the Inspector's letter of September, and Council will be deciding a way forward."

57. **STATEMENT FROM EXECUTIVE MEMBER, HOUSING**

I am sure you will all agree that the tragic death of Awaab Ishak who died because of prolonged exposure to mould in his home must not be repeated again or anywhere else.

There has been a renewed focus nationally on what landlords are doing about damp and mould across the whole of the housing sector, in particular the social housing sector. As the Executive Member responsible for housing, I would like to set out the steps we have taken and are taking to reduce the risks of damp and mould to the tenants we provide homes to.

The council have created approximately 150 million capital investment programme to improve conditions in energy efficiency of the council's housing

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stock and this will also help to tackle the root cause of some of the damp and mould issues.

The council have created a dedicated corporate officer team to review the way that the council manage reported damp and mould issues in the stock and this includes reviewing all policies, procedures and strengthening processes to ensure that all newly reported cases are effectively tracked and monitored through to completion.

The council have submitted a project of £4.3M with a grant bid for £1.9M to the social housing decarbonisation fund programme to address homes which are harder to retain heat and therefore prone to damp and mould issues this will improve more than 180 homes in the housing stock.

The council have provided a range of support available to help with the cost of living, in particular, help with energy bills and heating, and this information is available on the front page of the council website and was also published last month in the One Welwyn Hatfield magazine which, as you know, is distributed to every household in the borough.

The council have started a project to proactively review all of the communication materials that are made available to tenants regarding reported, damp, mould and condensation issues. We are also working with the Residents' Panel to ensure that such materials are fit for purpose and of course it's important to understand that the council will be delivering these communications through a range of media channels.

The council have reviewed the staffing structure of the Property Maintenance and Climate Change directorate. Staff are aware of the importance of assessing and addressing damp, mould and condensation issues, and a new team of surveyors have been recruited to strengthen the service the council provide with tenants. A training plan is being developed for all frontline housing teams.

Working with the council's new housing maintenance repairs provider, Morgan Sindall, we are working together to ensure that processes are aligned and that we record all of our damp and mould cases in a consistent way, in order to track and manage repeat cases.

Like many other councils and housing associations, we do have properties where our residents have reported damp, mould and condensation. The council also know that we will continue to have cases reported to us and we will work hard to combat this issue through the significant investment in our housing stock.

We have taken steps to review, learn and overhaul how we work, upgrade processes, improve our data collection and use of systems and to invest in our people and in their training. We also welcome input from members of all political parties, and today I've agreed with the Leader to extend the terms of reference of the recently formed Cross-Party Housing Maintenance Contract Mobilisation Board to include discussions on damp and mould properties.

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I think this is a very important issue going forward, so I am pleased that this will be happening.

58. ACTIONS STATUS REPORT

The status of actions agreed at the Cabinet meeting on 31 October 2022 and for decisions taken by Cabinet Members exercising their individual delegated powers between 21 October 2022 to 28 November 2022 in the report of the Assistant Director (Legal and Governance) were noted.

59. 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.

60. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION (LGA) - CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE

Report of the Chief Executive to update members on the Corporate Peer Challenge progress review.

Members will recall that the Council had the second LGA Corporate Peer challenge back in October 2021.

At the time the peer team recognised that Welwyn Hatfield council was a good council, the council have committed officer and political leadership. It also praises the council for continuing to deliver on the modernisation programme and capital projects throughout the pandemic. The Council agreed an action plan in February this year following the recommendations received from the peer team.

Key members of the peer team visited the council for a progress review back in October 2022. The Leader, along with the Senior Management Team, were interviewed by the peer team. The progress review report is shown in Appendix II.

The Leader was delighted to report that overall the peer team concluded there has been good progress made on the action plan. Particularly there has been strong and decisive leadership to implement a full Senior Management Team restructure over the past ten months. The Senior Management Team is united, respected and full of enthusiasm.

**RESOLVED:
(unanimous)**

Cabinet noted the Corporate Peer Challenge progress review report at Appendix 2.

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61. ITEMS REQUIRING KEY DECISION

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

61.1. Transformation Strategy (Forward Plan Reference FP1152)

Report of the Executive Director (Finance and Transformation) recommending the Transformation Strategy for approval.

(1) The Decision Taken

RESOLVED:
(unanimous)

(1) Cabinet approved the Transformation Strategy.

(2) That the Modernisation Reserve be amended to the Transformation Reserve, and that delegated authority be amended from the Modernisation Board to the Transformation Board, in consultation with the Leader and Executive Member for Resources and Planning.

(2) Reasons for the Decision

The council's Customer Strategy, Digital Strategy and Modernisation Programme had now come to the end, and the opportunity to align these with other aspects, such as the Workforce Strategy had been taken, to ensure all strategies were working in the same direction.

There are five key strands to the strategy, which with an aligned direction, will come together to enable transformation and embed a culture of continual improvement within service teams. These are:

- Customer experience and channel shift
- Technology and automation
- Culture and workforce
- Project management and service improvement
- Data and performance.

The commitments under these strands have been developed using staff workshops, and learnings from the previous modernisation programme. The council have also held a meeting of the Customer Services Member Project Board at which the customer and channel shift key commitments were agreed.

Each strand will have a central lead, and the service-led projects will be overseen by the Transformation Board, each with an allocated project sponsor from the Senior Management Team.

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The council will be taking the opportunity as part of bringing in the strategy, to reset the approach to communication with staff and members, with more communications planned, and more regular updates on the monthly bulletins and the member hub.

The strategy was presented to the peer team at their recent visit, who recognised the fantastic ambitions set out in the strategy.

61.2. Localised Council Tax Support Scheme 2023/24 (Forward Plan Reference FP1137)

Report of the Executive Director (Finance and Transformation) recommending that our localised council tax support scheme continues.

(1) The Decision Taken

RESOLVED:
(unanimous)

Cabinet recommended to Council that the localised council tax support scheme continues in 2023/24 to help people on low/no income to receive a reduction on their council tax.

(2) Reasons for the Decision

The report presented the proposal to retain the localised council tax support scheme in its current format, for 2023/24.

The scheme was implemented in 2013 and has had no changes since this time. Hertfordshire County Council and the Police have been consulted and had no comments to raise.

61.3. Community Bus Service (Forward Plan Reference FP1149)

Report of the Service Director (Resident and Neighbourhood) setting out the outcomes of the consultation and a new proposed option for the future delivery of the Community Bus Service.

(1) The Decision Taken

RESOLVED:
(unanimous)

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- (a) Note the outcome of the consultation;
- (b) Agree in principle to the Council working in partnership with Communities 1st (Charity number: 1187164) to deliver the Council's Community Bus Service, subject to due diligence being completed;

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- (c) Agree to waive Contract Procedure Rules as set out in Section 8 of the report; and
- (d) Delegate authority to the Service Director (Resident and Neighbourhood), in consultation with the Executive Member (Housing), to enter into an agreement with Communities 1st.

(2) Reasons for the Decision

The Council has been reviewing the Community Bus Service as it is recognised that significant capital investment is needed to replace the existing fleet of buses and due to changes in the use of the service post COVID.

A consultation took place during the summer to review the current use of the service and to get feedback on a different service delivery model, which would have seen both the Shopper Hopper and Dial A Ride service delivered by Hertfordshire County Council (HCC). HCC's existing Dial-A-Ride fees would apply and based on the consultation feedback; some service users indicated they would stop using the community bus service because of this increase in cost.

It is recognised that this service supports users' independence and is valued by those and the families of those that use it. Therefore, Officers have been exploring a possible partnership with Communities 1st, who are a charity who offer multiple support services across Hertfordshire, including community transport services.

If the Council were to deliver the community bus service through this partnership, it would be delivered on the basis that:

- The Council would continue to subsidise the cost of this service.
- Three buses from the Council's existing fleet would be transferred to Communities 1st to support the delivery of the service initially, with replacement buses to be provided by Communities 1st as soon as practicable, once the service is established.
- There would be no change to the service for users and bus fares will be frozen until April 2024. After this, fees would increase by £1 per return journey each year up to 2026/27, making the maximum fee £6 per return journey.

Several added value initiatives would also be included to support the service and users. This could include:

- (a) Use of established volunteer pool of 'bus buddies' to support shopping in store, fetching items, carrying bags and additional support for users with boarding on/off bus.
- (b) Additional access to volunteer support services e.g., additional volunteer support for local community car scheme and volunteers

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within this district to support 'bring shopping to you' service which is funded by HCC.

- (c) Offer of organised coach trips and day trips, including private hire of transport for local community groups and charities.
- (d) Additional support with the marketing and promotion of the scheme to encourage more service users.

61.4. Review of 24-Hour Control Centre (Forward Plan Reference FP1151)

Report of the Service Director (Resident and Neighbourhood) to award the contract for the delivery of the council's lifeline services and note the proposals for the delivery of other out of hours' services.

(1) The Decision Taken

RESOLVED:
(unanimous)

Cabinet agreed:

- (a) The award of contract to PPP Taking Care Limited (Company Number: 01488490) for a term of 3 years (with the option for an additional 1-year extension) to deliver the council's emergency alarm (Lifeline) services.
- (b) To note the proposals to deliver the Council's other out of hours' services.

(2) Reasons for the Decision

The Council provide a 24/7 Control Centre to respond to emergency out of hours calls and alerts from Lifeline, which is the Council's Emergency Alarm Service.

The service has been reviewed as it is recognised there are current operational risks, and the service does not deliver good value for money.

It was considered to tender the Lifeline service separately to make the tender more attractive to the market solely dealing with emergency alarm callouts. Four bids were received, with PPP Taking Care scoring highest on both cost and quality. A further breakdown is provided in the Part 2 report.

A review of the remaining out of hours services have been carried out and it is proposed to enter into short term agreements with external providers to ascertain more accurate contact data before a longer-term agreement is made. Any agreement will be made in line with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.

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62. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM GRANTS BOARD

62.1. Grants Board - 2 November 2022

Recommendation from the Board on the payment of annual grants in 2023/24.

On 2 November 2022, Grants Board met to consider the applications for the Council's Annual Community Grant scheme. Over £200,000 of bids were submitted to the Council, from a range of organisations within the Borough. The funding will enable some great projects to be delivered in the next financial year, and make a real difference to the lives of many of our residents, including those who are most vulnerable. The Grants Board have set out their recommendation on the allocation of funding in the report, and have asked Cabinet to note how difficult it was this year to reach a decision, given the number of bids and how strong they were. Officers will be offering support to those who were unsuccessful to explore any other suitable funding opportunities.

**RESOLVED:
(unanimous)**

Cabinet agreed the recommendations from Grants Board in relation to the applications for annual grants for 2023/24 as set out in table 3.2, subject to Council budget-setting.

63. TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID-YEAR REPORT

Report of the Executive Director (Finance and Transformation) to note the current treasury position and Treasury Management Indicators.

The report included an economic update from the treasury management advisors. The council continue to see very volatile and challenging economic conditions, and this report importantly confirms that there has been adherence to the prudential indicators set in the strategy, which ensures the council's finances are prudently managed and are not exposed to unnecessary risk.

**RESOLVED:
(unanimous)**

Members noted the current treasury position and Treasury Management Indicators.

64. 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 14 (Minute 65 refer) on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of confidential or exempt information as defined in

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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.

65. ITEMS OF AN EXEMPT NATURE REQUIRING KEY DECISION

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

65.1. Community Bus Service (Forward Plan Reference FP1149)

Exempt report of the Service Director (Resident and Neighbourhood) setting out the outcomes of the consultation and a new proposed option for the future delivery of the Community Bus Service.

(1) The Decision Taken

RESOLVED:
(unanimous)

Cabinet noted the details as set out in the exempt report.

(2) Reasons for the Decision

As set out in the public report.

65.2. Review of 24-Hour Control Centre (Forward Plan Reference FP1151)

Exempt report of the Service Director (Resident and Neighbourhood) to award the contract for the delivery of the council's lifeline services and note the proposals for the delivery of other out of hours' services.

(1) The Decision Taken

RESOLVED:
(unanimous)

Cabinet noted the details as set out in the exempt report.

(2) Reasons for the Decision

As set out in the public report.

Meeting ended at 6.36pm
AM