

Cabinet  
7 January 2025

## WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL CABINET held on Tuesday 7 January 2025 at 6.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, The Campus, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE.

PRESENT: Councillors

M.Holloway (Leader of the Council)

J.Quinton (Deputy Leader of the Council)

S.Bonfante (Executive Member, Environment)

R.Grewal (Executive Member, Planning)

G.Moore (Executive Member, Housing)

K.Thorpe (Executive Member, Governance)

OFFICIALS PRESENT: K.Ng, Chief Executive  
R.Baker, Executive Director (Finance & Transformation)  
Z.Al-Jawad, Executive Director (Place)  
G.Sampson, Assistant Director (Regeneration & Economic Development)  
M.Sherry, Communications Service Manager  
C.Cade, Governance Services Manger

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335. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2024 were approved as an accurate record.

336. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Broach.

337. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME AND PETITIONS

The following question was received in accordance with the Council's Constitution

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1. **Question to the Executive Member for Environment from Natalie Evans**

"In Greenfield, we have 21 houses and 11 parking spaces, making people park on the grass verges. Please can you let us know what ration of house to car parking space do you think is appropriate and what are you going to do to enable more parking for the residents?"

**Answer – Executive Member (Environment**

"Thank you for the question. As we know, finding solutions for parking is a complex exercise and each site is assessed on its own merits. In terms of Greenfield, I fully acknowledge that there is insufficient parking spaces to meet the modern demand. To help support residents in this, we are following up with Hertfordshire County Council to install additional parking based on that site and I will be saying more under item 10A of the agenda. Thank you. Thank you very much."

338. **ACTIONS STATUS REPORT**

Cabinet noted the Action Status report.

339. **NOTIFICATION OF URGENT BUSINESS TO BE CONSIDERED UNDER ITEM 11**

No notifications for urgent business were received.

340. **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS BY MEMBERS**

No declarations of interest were received.

341. **ITEMS RELATING TO THE BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE COUNCIL**

The following items relating to the Budget and Policy Framework were considered for recommendation to Full Council:

341.1. **FP2093 Budget Proposals and Medium Term Forecasts 2025/26**

Cabinet received a report of Executive Director (Finance and Transformation) on budget proposals for recommendation to Full Council in relation to:

- General Fund and Housing Revenue budgets.
- The Capital Programme and Financing Strategy.
- Fees and Charges.
- The Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- Special Expense Details

The proposals would be considered by the Budget Task and Finish Panel, who will make report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 9<sup>th</sup>

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January, who in turn, may make recommendations for our consideration at Special Cabinet on the 21<sup>st</sup> January. The budget proposals would then be considered by Full Council on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2025.

During the discussion the following points were raised:

- Officers were thanked for their work and support in the budget setting process.
- it was noted that the costs associated with temporary accommodation were increasing.

#### Decision taken

1. Cabinet noted:

- a) the Statement of the Chief Financial Officer on the robustness of budgets and adequacy of reserves (appendix N).
- b) that the following amounts for the year 2025/26 have been set in accordance with regulations made under Sections 31A and 31B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992:

	100% TAX BASE	99.40% TAX BASE
Welwyn Garden City	18,089.9	17,981.3
Hatfield	12,726.7	12,650.3
Welwyn	4,823.4	4,794.5
Ayot St Lawrence	68.3	67.9
Ayot St Peter	114.2	113.5
North Mymms	4,496.3	4,469.3
Essendon	436.9	434.3
Northaw & Cuffley	3,139.3	3,120.5
Woolmer Green	622.5	618.8
Total	44,517.5	44,250.4

2. Cabinet approved the budget proposals as set out in the agenda and note that any comments from Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be returned to Special Cabinet on 21 January 2025 for consideration, before final recommendations are made to Council.

#### Reason for decision

The budget proposals were aligned to the Council's Business Plan targets for 2025/26.

The Council's ability to deliver a balanced budget has become more challenging each year, after a period of significant grant reductions,

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inflationary increases and the ongoing impacts of the pandemic. There had been a rise in demands on services such as homelessness which had added even more pressures. A multi-year settlement would be provided next year which will provide much needed certainty.

The Medium Term forecasts were updated and approved in October 2024, which showed an increased budget gap for 2025/26 of around 4.5 million pounds.

### General Fund

The General Fund budget was summarised in Appendix A, and split by service in Appendix B.

The starting point for 2025/26 is a forecast, General Fund reserve balance, of £6.5m.

The 2025/26 budget included an increase in the Net Cost of Services of £1.5m, to £16.1m which included the inflationary impacts, along with growth and savings as set out in appendices C and D.

The changes were summarised in Section 3.1.6 of the report.

Savings had been identified to the Council's base budget of just over £1.8m, which would support the Council to meet its growth areas of spend of £2m, and inflationary impacts of £1.4m.

It was proposed to increase Council Tax by just under 3% per Band D property, the maximum allowed without a referendum.

A full review of fees and charges had been undertaken as set out in Appendices E and H which had included looking at cost recovery of discretionary services and benchmarking with other councils.

Appendix E also included a cover sheet to highlight those fees and charges which have deviated from a purely inflationary increase, and the justification for these deviations.

The provisional settlement from the Government was higher than anticipated when setting the MTFS, which had assisted the Council in balancing the budget for 2025/26, but it was not certain these grants would continue, the use of these for one year, puts additional pressures on later years in the MTFS.

The new Medium Term Financial Strategy in Appendix L set out further gaps of £1.7 m in 2026/27 rising to a cumulative gap of £6m by 2028/29, after a planned use of reserves of £2.7m over the MTFS period.

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The planned use was a response to funding reductions expected, details of which are set out in the Council's Reserves Policy.

It would be challenging to continue to find savings without impacting upon services as the Council enters the next medium-term period.

The final government settlement was awaited and was not expected to materially change the 2025/26 budget, although it should be noted the grant for National Insurance had been estimated as was not included in the provisional settlement.

#### Housing Revenue Account

The HRA budget proposals were summarised in Appendix F, and principal variances were set out in Appendix G.

Rent increases had been proposed in line with rent policy of CPI+1%, which for 2025/26 equates to 2.7%.

It was intended to maintain HRA balances at a minimum level of just under £3.3 million.

#### Capital

The proposed Capital budget of just over £68m was set out in Appendix I, and included nearly £22m of rephasing from the current financial year.

Around £4m of related to the General Fund, and around £64m related to the HRA. Included in the HRA budget, was £6m on the Affordable Housing Programme, with the remaining £58m being investment into existing stock.

#### Capital Financing

Appendix J summarised the Council's estimated 5 year borrowing requirements through to 2029/30.

For the General Fund, the increase in the borrowing requirement continues. The increase included the completion of some of the regeneration projects already underway, along with new items such as the works arising from the asset conditions reports on our commercial and operational estate.

For the HRA, the significant investment programme for the Council's existing housing stock over the next few years, and continued investment in new housing, mean that our HRA borrowing requirement is now predicted to reach around £370m by 2029/30.

It was noted that due to increased requirements on the HRA from the social housing regulations, a review of borrowing rates, and increased capital spend, the debt repayments for the HRA now stand at 33 years. This is just outside of the 30 year business plan. This could be considered as affordable, as the life of the stock is longer than 33 years. However, the report included

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recommendations to consider options over the coming year to seek to bring borrowing repayments back into a 30 year window, to provide future flexibility and buffers to and future legislative changes.

#### Medium Term Financial Strategy

The MTFS set out in Appendix L highlighted the challenges faced by the Council in the period through to 2027/28 notably the likely requirement to find a further £1.7m of annual General Fund revenue savings by 2026/27, after a planned use of reserves.

The Council's financial position would be affected by the Governments reform of local government finance, which was currently being consulted upon, along with the planned business rates reset in 2026/27. The outcome of these was unknown at this stage.

As with the MTFS update in previous years, alternative scenarios had been modelled due to volatile and uncertain economic conditions, which show the three year savings target could range between £4.7m and £7.5m.

Our level of General Fund Capital Reserves was now depleted, which would constrain the Councils options for major capital spend over and above those projects already planned, unless sources of funding could be identified.

Within the HRA, the core income was more stable than the General Fund. However, the level of capital spend and related borrowing over the next few years is significant, and borrowing repayment now stands at 33 years.

The document demonstrated the Council's commitment to achieving financial stability. It is intended that the situation would be improved by the driving out of further efficiencies from our Transformation Programme, the identification of further opportunities to increase income generation, and, opportunities to repurpose or dispose of assets to reduce the councils borrowing costs.

#### Special Expenses

Special Expenses, whereby Council Tax amounts are adjusted by settlement to take account of differing expenditure levels, are set out in Appendix M.

### 341.2. FP2109 Business Plan 2025/26

Cabinet received a report of the Executive Director (Finance and Transformation) on the Council's Business Plan 2025-2026.

During the discussion the following points were raised:

- A member highlighted they were looking forward to the regeneration of Hatfield Market place, and the reductions in fly tipping, increases in cycling and the continued work which goes into Anglia in Bloom; and

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- It was felt that the Nicer Neighbourhoods Task Force had been a positive initiative.

Decision taken

The Cabinet noted the Council's Business Plan for 2025/26 in Appendix 1 of the report and approved the recommendation to Full Council for approval.

Reason for decision

Each year, the Council would publish a Business Plan with measurable actions supporting each of the below priorities, including major projects and Key Performance Indicators which measure the performance of a range of services throughout the year.

342. ITEMS REQUIRING KEY DECISION

The following Key Decision items were considered:

342.1. FP2095 AWARD OF CONTRACT FOR AIDS AND ADAPTATIONS

Cabinet received a report of the Executive Director (Resident Services and Climate Change) on the award of the contract for aids and adaptations.

Decision taken

That Cabinet agreed to award the contract for Aids and Adaptation Services to Gracelands Complete Maintenance Services Limited to commence on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 and continue for an initial period of 3 years with a possible extension of a further one year.

Reason for decision

The Council had a duty to provide Aids and Adaptation services to private and public sector housing. This included adaptations such as level entry showers/wet rooms and external ramps

The contract also includes a requirement for the contractor to provide administration services in relation to private sector disabled facility grant applications

Twelve bids were received for the contract. Gracelands Complete Maintenance Services scored highest against the evaluation criteria. Details of all scores from bidders for the contract were included in the Part 2 report

342.2. FP2094 VARIATION TO HOUSING MAINTENANCE CONTRACT

Cabinet received a report of the Executive Director (Resident Services and Climate Change) on a variation to the Housing Maintenance contract.

Decision taken

Cabinet agreed the variation to the Equans contract which would change the way payments were made.

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Reason for decision

In February 2023, Cabinet agreed to award a contract to Equans for planned housing works. The scope of the contract includes replacement kitchens, bathrooms, windows and roofs.

An opportunity had arisen to change contract prices in relation to the preliminaries and scaffolding costs which result in a significant saving. Full details were included in the Part 2 report.

343. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

343.1. Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report for 2023-24

Cabinet received a report of the Executive Director (Finance and Transformation) on the Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2023/24 following recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Decision taken

The Cabinet noted and approved the Action Plan as set out in Appendix 1 of the report

Reason for decision

This report set out the Council's annual complaints performance and service improvement for 2023-24. It also summarised key lessons learned, compliance against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code and Action Plan to ensure improvements identified are implemented to improve complaint handling and to continue to develop a positive complaints culture across the organisation.

Several improvements had been made to the complaints process this year including additional resources and a new complaints policy.

344. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CABINET PANELS

The following reports were considered following recommendation from Cabinet Panels:

344.1. Introduction of Resident Permit Parking Scheme, Other Waiting Restrictions and Verge & Footway Prohibition - Sherrards Ward

Cabinet received a report of the Assistant Director (Regeneration and Economic Development) on the Introduction of Resident Permit Parking Scheme, Other Waiting Restrictions and Verge and Footway Prohibition, in Various Roads, Sherrards Ward, Welwyn Garden City following its recommendation to Cabinet by the Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel.



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During the discussion the following points were raised:

- A member had reviewed areas within the proposals and understood the frustrations of residents, and the implications a lack of parking had caused.
- It was highlighted that the borough Council does not have responsibility for the grass verges as these are owned by the County Council. Conversations between the Council and the County Council were ongoing, and the Executive Member (Environment) had proposed that an exception would apply to Greenfields until additional parking was provided.
- A 6 month period would taken place to monitor the effectiveness of the implementation of the traffic orders.

#### Decision taken

Cabinet agreed the recommendations and included an amendment that the verge footway prohibition order only be implemented once additional parking bays had been installed in Greenfield by Hertfordshire County Council.

#### Reason for decision

A review of restrictions would be considered if feedback was received by residents as with all parking consultation there would be a 6 month period for review.

Discussions had taken place with Hertfordshire County Council to provide additional parking in Greenfields.

### 344.2. Transition To Net Zero Strategy (TTNZS)

Cabinet received a report of the Executive Director (Resident Services and Climate Change) on the Transformation to Net Zero Strategy following recommendation from the Climate and Biodiversity Cabinet Panel.

During the discussion the following points were raised:

- It was felt that the Strategy would highlight how the community could support the net zero target.
- It was felt that the Strategy was an important incentive.

#### Decision taken

The Cabinet approved the Net Zero Strategy.

#### Reason for decision

On 10 July 2024, the Climate Biodiversity Cabinet Panel approved the Transition to Net Zero Strategy (TTNZS) for public consultation. A total of 88 responses were received by the deadline and this report outlines feedback from the Transition to Net Zero Strategy consultation.

The Transition to Net Zero strategy was written as Members of the Climate Biodiversity Cabinet Panel had previously asked for a robust standalone climate change strategy document.

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This strategy replaced the old one and was more aligned with a new corporate priority, 'Action on Climate'. It supports all four objectives within that priority and sets out an overall vision for the borough”

345. SUCH OTHER BUSINESS AS, IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIRMAN, IS OF SUFFICIENT URGENCY TO WARRANT IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION

There were no items of urgent business.

346. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

347. ITEMS OF AN EXEMPT NATURE REQUIRING KEY DECISION

347.1. FP2095 AWARD OF CONTRACT FOR AIDS AND ADAPTATIONS

Cabinet received the Part 2 report

Decision taken

That Cabinet agreed to award the contract for Aids and Adaptation Services to Gracelands Complete Maintenance Services Limited to commence on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 and continue for an initial period of 3 years with a possible extension of a further one year.

Reason for decision

The reasons for the decision are set out in paragraph 342a.

347.2. FP2094 VARIATION TO HOUSING MAINTENANCE CONTRACT

Cabinet received the Part 2 report.

Decision taken

Cabinet agreed the variation to the Equans contract which would change the way payments were made.

Reason for decision

The reasons for the decision are set out in Paragraph 342b.