

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

DECISION SHEET

**Meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, District Council Offices, Gernon Road,
Letchworth Garden City, SG6 3JF
on Tuesday, 16th January, 2024 at 7.30 pm**

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ruth Brown.

2 MINUTES - 14 NOVEMBER 2023 AND 12 DECEMBER 2023

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meetings of the Committee held on 14 November 2023 and 12 December 2023 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

3 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business notified.

4 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

- (1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded.
- (2) Members were reminded that this Council had declared a Climate Emergency. This was a serious decision and meant that, as this was an emergency, all of us, officers and Members had that in mind as we carried out our various roles and tasks for the benefit of our District.
- (3) The Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.
- (4) The Chair advised for the purposes of clarification that 4.8.23(a) of the Constitution did not apply to this meeting.
- (5) The Chair advised of a change in the order of the agenda. Agenda Items 17 and 18 would be considered after Agenda Item 10.

5 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation at this meeting.

6 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

The Chair advised that the items referred from the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be taken with the respective items on the agenda.

7 MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY 2024-2028

RESOLVED: That Cabinet approved the 2024 - 2028 Marketing and Communications Strategy.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

- (1) With residents facing a cost-of-living crisis and council budgets being tightened further, it has never been more important for councils to communicate effectively with their audiences.
- (2) Effective communication is critical as it has the power to engage communities, challenge misconceptions, build trust and confidence in the council and through that, strengthen relationships with residents, stakeholders, and staff.
- (3) Although communications help to tell the story of North Herts Council (and improve resident perceptions of the council), marketing is needed to promote and raise awareness of our vision, priorities, and themes, to ensure that the right people, get the right message, at the right time through their preferred channel of choice.
- (4) It is therefore recommended, that the 2024 - 2028 strategy is a Marketing and Communications Strategy.

8 COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS (MARCH - JUNE 2023)

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Commented on and noted the key findings and observations from round one of the Community Survey and comment on the approach to future surveys (as detailed in section 8.5).
- (2) Supported the suggested approach set out at 8.5, save for 8.5.4 whereby Cabinet would encourage future survey results and associated action plans, being brought to Cabinet.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To ensure that Cabinet is aware of the results of the Community Survey (our first digital residents' survey) and how they compare to the Local Government Association (LGA) June 23 Resident Satisfaction phone survey results.

9 LOCAL PLAN REVIEW

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Cabinet noted the results of the review of the policies of the NHLP set out in Appendix A and the PAS toolkit in Appendix B.
- (2) That Cabinet agreed that a full review and update of the NHLP is undertaken.
- (3) That work commenced during 2024/25 on updating the technical studies needed to provide a robust evidence base to inform an update of the Local Plan and early community engagement take place.
- (4) That a further report on the detailed scope of the update and the timetable for its preparation, submission and examination was prepared at the earliest opportunity once the implications of the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) are better understood and the statutory framework required to implement the reforms has been approved.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To ensure that North Herts Council fulfils its commitments as set out in Policy IMR2 of the North Herts Local Plan which requires the Council to undertake a whole plan review by the end of 2023 to determine whether the plan needs to be updated either in whole or in part.

10 STRATEGIC PLANNING MATTERS

RESOLVED: That the report on strategic planning matters was noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To keep Cabinet informed of recent developments on strategic planning matters.

17 ICKLEFORD NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Examiner's report for the Ickleford Neighbourhood Plan was noted.
- (2) That following the inclusion of the Examiner's proposed modifications to the Ickleford Neighbourhood Plan, as set out in Appendix A, the Ickleford Neighbourhood Plan was approved and it was approved to proceed to a referendum.
- (3) That the Counting Officer was instructed to conduct a referendum on the Ickleford Neighbourhood Plan.
- (4) That the decision to "make" the Ickleford Neighbourhood Plan would be delegated to the Service Director – Regulatory in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Transport, as previously agreed by Cabinet in July 2018 (Minute 21).

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To progress the Ickleford Neighbourhood Plan, enable a referendum to take place and if more than 50% of those voting in favour of the Ickleford Neighbourhood Plan to "make" the Ickleford Neighbourhood Plan.

18 WALLINGTON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Examiner's report for the Wallington Neighbourhood Plan was noted.
- (2) That following the inclusion of the Examiner's proposed modifications to the Wallington Neighbourhood Plan, as set out in Appendix A, the Wallington Neighbourhood Plan was approved and it was approved to proceed to a referendum.
- (3) That the Counting Officer was instructed to conduct a referendum on the Wallington Neighbourhood Plan.
- (4) That the decision to "make" the Wallington Neighbourhood Plan be delegated to the Service Director – Regulatory in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Transport, as previously agreed by Cabinet in July 2018 (Minute 21).

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To progress the Wallington Neighbourhood Plan, enable a referendum to take place and if more than 50% of those voting in favour of the Wallington Neighbourhood Plan to "make" the Wallington Neighbourhood Plan.

11 Q2 UPDATE ON PROGRESS AGAINST THE COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN

RESOLVED: That Cabinet noted the progress against Council projects as set out in the Council Delivery Plan (Appendix A) and approved changes to milestones, performance indicators and risks.

REASON FOR DECISION: The Council Delivery Plan (CDP) monitoring reports provide Cabinet with an opportunity to monitor progress against the key Council projects, and understand any new issues, risks or opportunities.

12 SECOND QUARTER REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2023/24

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Noted this report.
- (2) Approved the adjustments to the 2023/24 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.2, a £475k decrease in net expenditure.
- (3) Noted the changes to the 2024/25 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.2, a total £799k increase in net expenditure. These will be incorporated in the draft revenue budget for 2024/25.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: Members are able to monitor, make adjustments within the overall budgetary framework and request appropriate action of Services who do not meet the budget targets set as part of the Corporate Business Planning process.

13 SECOND QUARTER INVESTMENT STRATEGY (CAPITAL AND TREASURY) REVIEW 2023/24

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Noted the forecast expenditure of £8.225M in 2023/24 on the capital programme, paragraph 8.3 refers.
- (2) Approved the adjustments to the capital programme as a result of the revised timetable of schemes detailed in table 2, increasing the overall estimated spend in 2024/25 and beyond by £3.898M.
- (3) Noted the position of the availability of capital resources, as detailed in table 4 paragraph 8.6 and the requirement to keep the capital programme under review for affordability.
- (4) Approved the additional £40K spend on CCTV Replacement, as detailed in table 3.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:

- (1) That it notes the position of Treasury Management activity as at the end of September 2023 including the new Capital items.
- (2) That it confirms the addition of the Local Authority Housing Fund Phase 2 to the capital programme for 2023/24 and approves the reprofiling of Bancroft & Priory Splash Pads from 2024/25 into 2023/24. Both as detailed in table 3.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) Cabinet is required to approve adjustments to the capital programme and ensure the capital programme is fully funded.
- (2) To ensure the Council's continued compliance with CIPFA's code of practice on Treasury Management and the Local Government Act 2003 and that the Council manages its exposure to interest and capital risk.

14 MID YEAR UPDATE ON RISK MANAGEMENT GOVERNANCE

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Noted the mid-year Risk Management Governance update, including the update on completion of audit recommendations.
- (2) Commented on the type of Risk Management training they would like to receive going forward.
- (3) Noted the review of the Performance and Risk Management Group Terms of Reference.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) The responsibility for ensuring the management of risks is that of Cabinet.
- (2) This Committee has responsibility to monitor the effective development and operation of Risk Management.

15 DRAFT BUDGET 2024/25

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Noted the latest funding forecasts for 2024/25 onwards and the significant uncertainty that still remains.
- (2) Confirmed that it will be necessary to increase Council Tax by the maximum amount allowed without a local referendum, as this is what will be assumed by Government in determining the Business Rates that the Council can retain and calculating the Council's Core Spending Power.
- (3) Noted the comments made at the budget workshops, and comment on the inclusion of the revenue savings and investments in the budget to be brought back for consideration in February, for referral on to Council at the end of February.
- (4) Considered the additional revenue investment proposals that are detailed in paragraph 8.8 and confirm that they should be included in the February budget report.
- (5) Noted the comments made at the budget workshops, and comment on the inclusion of the capital investments in the Investment Strategy to be brought back for consideration in February, for referral on to Council at the end of February.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To ensure that all relevant factors are considered in arriving at a proposed budget, Investment Strategy and Council Tax level for 2024/25, to be considered by Full Council on 29 February 2024.

16 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2024/2025

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Noted that the new scheme has had a greater financial impact than expected, and any resultant Collection Fund shortfall will be split between the Council and its Major Precepting Authorities. The Councils share will be around 12.5%.
- (2) Noted that the Discretionary Exceptional Hardship Scheme, previously agreed to provide additional transitional support, has been underspent, largely due to the positive impacts of the main scheme. (The surplus of this will be used to off-set the impact on the District Council in relation to the main scheme).

- (3) Noted a further review is being undertaken during 2024/2025, to ascertain any further changes to be considered for the scheme in 2025/2026.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:

- (1) That the new branded scheme for working age applicants remains unchanged for 2024/2025.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To ensure that the Council has a Council Tax Reduction Scheme that continues to:

- Provide the greatest support to the lowest income households.
- Reduce the administrative burden that has been placed on the Council since the introduction of Universal Credit (UC).
- Be simple to understand, meaning that customers will be able to calculate entitlement and assess the impact of potential changes in circumstance.