

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, 6th February, 2024 at 7.30 pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

2 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business notified.

3 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 both a Climate Emergency and an Ecological Emergency. These are serious decisions and meant that, as they were emergencies, 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.

4 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation at this meeting.

5 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

The Chair advised that items 5A, 5B and 5D, referred from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, would be taken with their respective items on the agenda. Item 5C would be considered as a standalone item.

- 5C) Finance, Audit and Risk Committee – Second Quarter Investment Strategy (Capital and Treasury) Review 2023/24

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That Council:

- (1) Approve the adoption of the Investment Strategy (as attached at Appendix A), including the capital programme and prudential indicators. This incorporates the changes referenced in paragraphs 5.1 to 5.3.
- (2) Approve the adoption of the four clauses in relation to the Code of Practice on Treasury Management (as detailed in paragraphs 8.10 to 8.16).

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (1) To ensure that the capital programme meets the Council's objectives and officers can plan the implementation of the approved schemes.
- (2) To ensure the Council's compliance with CIPFA's code of practice on Treasury Management, the Local Government Act 2003, statutory guidance from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and the CIPFA Prudential Code. As well as determining and managing the Councils risk appetite in respect of investments.

6 UPDATE TO COMMON HOUSING ALLOCATION SCHEME

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Approved the updated Common Housing Allocation Scheme.
- (2) Delegated to the Director of Housing and Environmental Health in conjunction with the Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health, the power to make minor amendments to the Common Housing Allocation Scheme from time to time and to agree the date for its commencement.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To update the Common Housing Allocation Scheme (CHAS), to ensure that scarce affordable housing in the district continues to be prioritised for households in the greatest need. Also to ensure that the CHAS remains up-to-date following changes in the policy environment and working practices.

7 EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Adopted the Empty Homes Strategy 2024-29.
- (2) Noted that although there is no legal requirement for the Council to have an Empty Homes Strategy, there have been several significant Government-focussed documents and papers highlighting their importance, including a House of Commons Briefing Paper stating that each local authority should have such a strategy to help reduce the number of long-term empty homes in their districts.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) The recommendation and considerations are being made to allow the Council to formerly adopt the 5-year Empty Homes Strategy 2024-29 to allow the Environmental Health service to work directly or with others to identify and deliver the most appropriate intervention programme to allow the Council to aim to bring as many long-term empty homes back into occupation as practicable.
- (2) The strategy allows the Council to state its intention to consider every aspect linked to the housing sector to bring into use as many opportunities as it can to meet the district's housing needs, without having to rely solely on new build. Whilst the number of long-term empty homes is small, and the number likely to be brought back into occupation will be smaller still, this strategy does address this sector which would otherwise be omitted from the overall resource potentially available to form our housing stock.
- (3) By adopting the strategy and allowing for the development of a culture of greater awareness of vacant homes, allows for homes which become vacant to be highlighted sooner, and so they can be monitored and their owners challenged at an earlier point, thus also contributing to hopefully having more homes available for the residents of the district.

8 NORTH HERTS DIGITAL STRATEGY

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Adopted the Digital Strategy (Appendix A).
- (2) Agreed to delegate any minor changes (to include reference to Council priorities) in relation to the Digital Strategy to the Service Director – Customers in consultation with the Executive Member for the Finance and IT.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To ensure the Council has an approved digital strategy.

9 COUNCIL TAX PREMIUMS FOR EMPTY AND SECOND HOMES

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: The following changes to the Council Tax premiums on empty and second homes:

- (1) That from 1 April 2024 until 31 March 2025 the following interim premiums are introduced:
 - Properties empty for one year but less than two will not receive a Premium
 - Properties empty for more than two years, but less than five years will receive a 100% Premium.
 - Properties empty for five years but less than ten years a 150% Premium.
 - Properties empty for more than ten years a 200% Premium.
- (2) That from 1 April 2025 the Council adopts the following full Premium levy rates:
 - Properties empty for one year but less than five will receive a 100% Premium.
 - Properties empty for five years but less than ten years a 200% Premium.
 - Properties empty for more than ten years a 300% Premium.
- (3) That from 1 April 2025 a 100% Premium is levied on all properties that are determined as a second home, subject to any exceptions once these have been confirmed by Regulations and that the Service Director – Customers in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and IT is delegated authority to make any amendments following further confirmation of the Regulations.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (1) To support the principle of bringing unoccupied properties back into occupation in line with the proposed empty homes strategy. At the time of writing there are 43 properties that have been unoccupied for over five years.
- (2) The introduction of a phased approach of increasing the premiums enables us to advertise the changes. As the introduction of premiums for properties unoccupied for between one and two years is new there will be no expectation on the owners of these properties of an additional premium and therefore it is recommended that this aspect is deferred until 2025 to allow time to advertise the change.
- (3) In respect of a premium on Second Homes the Council is required to give one year's notice as this is the Council's first determination in this regard and therefore a resolution must be made before the end of the 2023/24 financial year in order to bring in the premium from 01 April 2025.
- (4) The Council does have the ability to revoke the decision in relation to Second Homes premium, during the year should any consultation that is carried out provide evidence that this would not be effective.

10 REVENUE BUDGET 2024/25

RESOLVED: That Cabinet approved the decrease in the 2023/24 working budget of £301k, as detailed in table 7.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:

- (1) To note the position on the Collection Fund and how it will be funded.
- (2) To note the position relating to the General Fund balance and that due to the risks identified a minimum balance of £2.48 million is recommended.
- (3) To note the net revenue savings that are likely to be required in future years, combined with the Chief Finance Officer's section 25 report (Appendix D) which provides a commentary on the risks and reliability of estimates contained in the budget.
- (4) To approve the revenue savings and investments as detailed in Appendix B.
- (5) To approve a net expenditure budget of £20.365m, as detailed in Appendix C.
- (6) To approve a Council Tax increase of 2.99%, which is in line with the provisions in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS: To ensure that all relevant factors are considered in arriving at a budget and Council Tax level for 2024/25. To ensure that the budget is aligned to Council priorities for 2024/25 as set out in the Council Plan.