

ASANORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERONON ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY, SG6 3JF
ON TUESDAY, 19TH MARCH, 2024 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Elizabeth Dennis (Chair), Ruth Brown (Vice-Chair), Ian Albert, Amy Allen, Keith Hoskins, Steve Jarvis, Sean Prendergast and Alistair Willoughby.*

In Attendance: *Isabelle Alajooz (Legal Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer), Deborah Coates (Principal Strategic Planning Officer), Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), Susan Le Dain (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Jo Doggett (Service Director - Housing & Environmental Health), Andrew Figgis (Economic Development Officer), Ian Fullstone (Service Director - Regulatory), Chloe Gray (Enterprise Manager), Lee Griffett (Homelessness and Housing Advice Manager), Frank Harrison (Environmental Health Manager), Sarah Kingsley (Service Director - Place), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Jeanette Lowden (Contracts Manager - Waste), Louise Overington (Service Development and Support Manager), Callum Reeve (Democratic Services Apprentice) and Anthony Roche (Managing Director).*

Also Present: *There were no members of the public present for the duration of the meeting.*

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2 minutes 28 seconds

No apologies for absence were received from Councillors.

2 MINUTES - 16 JANUARY 2024 AND 6 FEBRUARY 2024

Audio Recording – 2 minutes 38 seconds

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Ruth Brown seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 16 January 2024 and 6 February 2024 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

3 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 24 seconds

There was no other business notified.

4 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 29 seconds

- (1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be recorded.
- (2) Members were reminded that this Council had declared both a Climate Emergency and an Ecological Emergency. These were serious decisions and meant that, as these 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.

5 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 4 minutes 38 seconds

There was no public participation at the meeting.

6 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Audio recording – 4 minutes 43 seconds

The Chair advised that items 6A, 6B and 6C, referred from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, would be taken with their respective items on the agenda.

7 ADOPTION OF A NEW HOUSING STRATEGY (2024-2029)

Audio recording – 4 minutes 58 seconds

Councillor, Sean Prendergast, as Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health, presented the report entitled 'Adoption of a New Housing Strategy' and advised that this was the Housing Strategy for the next five years which set out the housing priorities for the district and highlighted some of the key points:

- To bring back empty homes into use to help reduce housing needs.
- To continue to work with the victims of domestic abuse who were some of the most vulnerable people in the community.
- The soft launch of the Tenants Charter which would enable residents to be aware of their rights and responsibilities.
- Ensuring the maximum level of 40% affordable housing in the District as outlined in the Local Plan was achieved, by working with partners.

In response to a question from Councillor Ian Albert, Councillor Sean Prendergast advised that although challenges were significant and the funding from local government was not enough, the housing team worked incredibly hard with housing providers to prevent homelessness in the community.

The following Members took part in a debate:

- Councillor Alistair Willoughby
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis

Points raised in the debate included:

- This was an excellent report and commended the hard work of all involved.
- This report complemented the Empty Homes Strategy and Members looked forward to the launch of the Tenants Charter.
- The robust strategy to support communities going forward which was the result of the hard work of the Officers working with partners, was highlighted in Annex 1 of the report.

Councillor Sean Prendergast proposed, and Councillor Alistair Willoughby seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Approved the adoption of the Council's Housing Strategy (2024-2029).
- (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 Strategy.
- (3) Delegated to the Director of Housing and Environmental Health in conjunction with the Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health, the power to agree an annual action plan which will set out the specific actions to be undertaken to implement the Housing Strategy.
- (4) For matters that are not reserved for Cabinet, delegated to the Director of Housing and Environmental Health in conjunction with the Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health, the power to decide on the specific allocation of homelessness funding received from central government in order to meet homelessness priorities, for the duration of the Strategy.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: The current Housing Strategy is coming to the end of its life. The proposed new Strategy will enable the Council to continue to undertake its strategic housing responsibilities over the next five years in a planned, transparent and inclusive manner.

8 EXPANSION OF THE SOFT PLASTICS COLLECTION TRIAL

Audio recording – 13 minutes 12 seconds

Councillor Amy Allen, Executive Member for Recycling and Waste Management presented the report entitled 'Expansion of the Soft Plastics Collection Trial' and advised that:

- This report sought approval for the expansion of the kerbside collection of soft plastics.
- A trial had taken place in Knebworth since November 2023, where approximately 2,000 households had fortnightly collections of soft plastics, which had been successful.
- The proposed expansion across North and East Hertfordshire would reach around 6,250 homes by 2025.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis

In response to questions the Contracts Manager – Waste advised that:

- As the trial in Knebworth had been successful the next areas to be trialled would be Royston and some of the villages around Royston, to gain a wider demographical picture.
- An initial flyer had been posted to residents, followed by a hand delivery of a leaflet and a pack of sacks to enable residents to participate in the trial.
- There had been positive feedback received from residents and more sacks had been requested.
- This project would be fully funded up to April 2025.
- North Herts Council would be introducing this across the district from 2025 which was ahead of the government deadline of 2027.
- Work was ongoing with the current processor to look at what was working well with the collections and what was not going so well, to produce a final service design for the contract.

Councillor Amy Allen proposed, and Councillor Ruth Brown seconded, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Agreed to the expansion of the Flex Collect trial and kerbside collections of soft plastics.
- (2) Delegated to the Service Director Place any necessary change to the collection demographic and area for the trial.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) One of the key aims of the project is to give insight into the types and quantities of soft plastics available for collection. The current Knebworth collections partially mimic the 2025 services, however the expansion of the service seeks to gather data from a wider demographic.
- (2) North Herts residents' current participation in the trial has yielded good participation levels with high volumes of soft plastics being collected per household. The Shared Waste Service is also gathering information on collection issues and the effectiveness of communication methods. Expanding the project will give the Council an opportunity to further test operational implications of collections, quantities and types of plastic collected from different areas and exploring processing requirements. The expanded trial more closely mimics the new service roll out in 2025.
- (3) The expanded trial coincides with the Shared Waste Service undertaking market testing in advance of considering processing options for material from 2025. The additional trial data will inform our future Material Recovery Facility (MRF) contract procurement or extension needs for 2025 and provide data for the wider industry to better prepare for the anticipated mandated collection of soft plastics.
- (4) The expansion of the trial is fully funded until April 2025 by the Flexible Plastics Fund.

9 SHARED PROSPERITY FUND PROCESS

Audio recording – 23 minutes 58 seconds

Councillor Keith Hoskins, Executive Member for Enterprise and Arts, presented the report entitled 'Shared Prosperity Fund Process' and advised that:

- This report highlighted the recommendations for the allocation of the remainder of the funds in the Shared Prosperity Fund.
- He was pleased to report the Parish and Community Projects had been allocated £210,000 as detailed in paragraph 8.1 item (b).

The following Members took part in a debate:

- Councillor Alistair Willoughby
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Steve Jarvis
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis

Points raised in the debate included:

- It was important for the wellbeing of residents to improve the town centres and local environments where people lived.
- All these projects would support local communities.
- There was a need to publicise the improvements of town centres and local environments across the district.
- The Parish and Community Projects should be considered by the Panel before being approved by relevant Executive Members and Service Directors.
- The solar business pilot was an excellent project and would generate income for the Council and would save on carbon emissions.

In response to a question by Councillor Ian Albert, the Managing Director advised that it was only the Parish and Community Projects that would need to be considered by the Panel.

Councillor Keith Hoskins proposed and Councillor Alistair Willoughby seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Considered and approved the proposed outline distribution of funding allocated (£510,000) to the Council by the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities for 2024/5 under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
- (2) Delegated approvals of individual grants and payments under the Fund to the relevant Executive Members and Service Directors, as identified with reference to Directorates in table 8.1, and confirmed that the Parishes and Community Projects Fund decisions would be taken following consideration and recommendation by the Panel.
- (3) Approved the updated Cabinet Capital and Revenue Grants Panel's Terms of Reference, Appendix C.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: The approval of up to £518,000 capital investment for the Solar for Business Programme, in addition to the £51,285 capital funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) The Council will be provided with funding in April 2024 to allocate to schemes which were originally outlined in the Council's UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UK SPF) Investment Plan that was submitted in July 2021. This plan was approved by Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) in January 2022.
- (2) The Funds regulations allow considerable flexibility in how the Council allocates funding and under which approved UK SPF Activities. Officers presented a report to the Leadership Team on 5th February 2024, which outlined how we are proposing to spend the remainder of the Fund in line with the UK SPF criteria set. The Leadership Team agreed with the proposal in principle, and therefore it has been brought to Cabinet for further consideration.
- (3) Once final approval has been obtained, the individual projects will be managed by the relevant North Herts Council (NHC) service areas. We are seeking approval to delegate approval of spend decisions, payments or grants made under the scheme to the relevant Executive Members and Service Directors, as identified under table 8.1 of this report.

10 STRATEGIC PLANNING MATTERS

Audio recording – 43 minutes 37 seconds

Councillor Ruth Brown, Executive Member for Planning and Transport, presented the report entitled 'Strategic Planning Matters' and advised that:

- Officers had worked hard to obtain the best mitigation possible should the expansion of Luton Airport be successful, as detailed in paragraph 8.10 of the report.
- There were three Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) mentioned within the report. One had been adopted, one was currently delayed and the biodiversity SPD was being abandoned due to changes at national levels.
- The two Neighbourhood Plan Referendums held on 14 March in Wallington and Ickleford had been approved. These plans would now have weighting towards any planning applications in those areas.
- The Solar Farm at Great Wymondley which had been called in by the Secretary of State in May 2023 had now been approved and was detailed in paragraph 8.46 of the report. The same decision had been reached as that made by the planning committee with a delay of 18 months for implementation and a cost of about £100,000 in legal and consultant fees for the Council.

Councillor Ruth Brown proposed, and Councillor Amy Allen seconded and, following a vote, it was

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

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

11 COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN: Q3 UPDATE AND PROJECTS FOR 2024/25

Audio recording – 49 minutes 59 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Val Bryant, Vice Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Bryant advised that the Controls Risk & Performance Manager had attended the last meeting of the Committee and answered many questions by Members. The main points discussed by the Committee were:

- From the moderation process the number of projects on the Council Delivery Plan had been reduced from 27 to 11 with a maximum of 14 and there was concern about how to keep an overview of those projects not included.
- Training needed to be made available to Members on Ideagen/Pentana to enable Members to gain knowledge in these areas.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis reminded Members that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could request Service Directors to report at Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings on any project they wished to review.

Councillor Ian Albert, Executive Member for Finance and IT, presented the report entitled 'Council Delivery Plan Q3 Update and Projects for 2024/25' and advised that:

- The prioritisation of projects in the Council Delivery Plan had been implemented following a request from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Training on Ideagen/Pentana had been offered in the past to Members of both the Overview and Scrutiny and Finance, Audit and Risk Committees.
- It was the right way forward to request Service Directors to report on their workplans to get an in-depth analysis.
- The current position on the projects in the Council Delivery Plan was set out in Appendix A.
- Round three of Local Authority Housing Fund has been announced and although the Council had not received an allocation at this time, it could still bid for an allocation of any funds that are not taken up.
- Two additional recommendations were required committing the Council to explore round three of the Local Authority Housing Fund if it could and to delegate authority to relevant Service Directors to make final decision on the submission.
- The plans for developing performance indicators that would be used next year on the Council Delivery Plan were highlighted in paragraph 8.10 of the report.

Councillor Keith Hoskins provided an update to Members on the Churchgate shopping centre in Hitchin, and advised that:

- There were two strands to Churchgate, the ongoing maintenance and the regeneration project.
- Phase 1 of the regeneration has been completed and focused on due diligence.
- David Leonard, a master planner, had now been appointed and working towards attending the UK's Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum (UKREiIF) in May.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Alistair Willoughby seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Noted the progress against Council projects as set out in the Council Delivery Plan (Appendix A) and approves the changes to milestones.
- (2) Agreed the scope of the 24-25 Council Delivery Plan as detailed in paragraphs 8.8-8.10.
- (3) Noted the update on the Local Authority Housing Fund and wished to support round three of the scheme if it could.

- (4) Delegated to the Service Director Housing and Environmental Health and the Service Director Resources, in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health and Executive Member for Finance and IT, the final decision on submission of the validation form.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) The Council Delivery Plan (CDP) monitoring reports provide Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet with an opportunity to monitor progress against the key Council projects, and understand any new issues, risks or opportunities.
- (2) Making a recommendation on the 24-25 CDP means that the Q1 report will provide the information that the Committee wants. It also helps set the priorities for the Council, as those projects that form part of the CDP will be prioritised.

12 THIRD QUARTER INVESTMENT STRATEGY (CAPITAL AND TREASURY) REVIEW 2023/24

Audio recording – 1 hour 5 minutes 47 seconds

In the absence of the Chair and Vice Chair of Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, Councillor Ian Albert, Executive Member for Finance and IT, presented the referral and the report entitled 'Third Quarter Investment Strategy (Capital and Treasury) Review 2023/24' and advised that:

- Items that had slipped into 2024/25 were highlighted in Table 2.
- The change to the Howard Park Kiosk scheme was approved at Council on 29 February 2024 and was outlined in Table 3.
- Funding for the capital programme was set out in Table 4.
- The split of investments was highlighted in paragraph 8.1.1 of the report with the list of individual investments set out in 8.1.2 of the report. These were all low risk.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Keith Hoskins seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Noted the forecast expenditure of £6.521M in 2023/24 on the capital programme, paragraph 8.3 refers.
- (2) Approved the adjustments to the capital programme for 2023/24 onwards, as a result of the revised timetable of schemes detailed in table 2 and 3, increasing the estimated spend in 2024/25 by £0.960M.
- (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) Noted the position of Treasury Management activity as at the end of December 2023.

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.

13 **THIRD QUARTER REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2023/24**

Audio recording – 1 hour 8 minutes and 56 seconds

In the absence of the Chair and Vice Chair of Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, Councillor Ian Albert, Executive Member for Finance and IT, presented the referral and the report entitled 'Third Quarter Revenue Budget Monitoring 2023/24' and advised that:

- The Revenue Budget movement to the end of 2023 was highlighted in Table 3 of the report.
- There had been various staff underspends where roles could not be filled.
- There had been an increase in fly tipping which was putting pressure on the budget.
- The red and green progress indicators detailed in Table 4 would not change before the end of the year.

In response to a question from Councillor Ian Albert, the Contracts Manager – Waste advised that:

- The National Highways Agency had produced fly tipping posters which focused on showing animals being shocked by the amount of waste on the roads. Small animals were being killed as they were attracted to the litter.
- Work was being carried out with the Community Safety Team to share information on hotspots for fly tipping.
- It was planned to reduce the number of litter bins in specific laybys to reduce waste.
- Work was being carried out with the Communications Team to produce signage for the laybys and for on the litter bins.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Amy Allen seconded and, following a vote, it was:

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 £415k decrease in net expenditure.
- (3) Approved the changes to the 2024/25 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.2, a total £411k increase in net expenditure.

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.

The meeting closed at 8.47 pm

Chair