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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERONON ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY, SG6 3JF
ON TUESDAY, 19TH SEPTEMBER, 2023 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

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

In Attendance: *Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), Ian Fullstone (Service Director - Regulatory), Jeanette Thompson (Service Director - Legal and Community), Anthony Roche (Managing Director), Susan Le Dain (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Deborah Coates (Principal Strategic Planning Officer), Andrew Figgis (Economic Development Officer) and Callum Reeve (Democratic Services Apprentice)*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting approximately 12 members of the public, including registered speakers.*

204 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2:26

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Amy Allen.

205 MINUTES - 27 JUNE 2023

Audio Recording – 2:39

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 27 June 2023 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

206 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 3:24

There was no other business notified.

207 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 3:29

- (1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council policy this meeting was being audio recorded as well as filmed. The audio recording would be available on the NHDC website and the film recording via the NHDC YouTube channel.

- (2) The Chair reminded Members that the Council had declared a Climate Emergency. This was a serious decision and means 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. More details were included on the agenda front sheet.
- (3) The Chair reminded Members to make declarations of interest before an item, the detailed reminder about this and speaking rights was set out under Chair's Announcements on the agenda.
- (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 and Agenda Item 11 would be taken ahead of Agenda Item 7.

208 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 4:58

The Chair advised that Dr Hilary Napier was present to provide a presentation for Members on the Chesfield Conservation Area which would be provided ahead of the relevant item on the Agenda.

209 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Audio recording – 5:09

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

210 DLUHC'S SINGLE HOMELESSNESS ACCOMMODATION PROGRAMME

Audio recording – 32:25

Councillor Sean Prendergast, as Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health, presented the report entitled 'DLUHC's Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme' and advised that:

- This programme would provide a much needed service for vulnerable people with complex needs.
- It was an opportunity to meet the funding with an experienced provider in OneYMCA.
- This administration had a strong track record on this, and this gave the chance to continue this work.
- An update had been received regarding 1.3 of the report and a strong option had been identified and, with finer details to be agreed, progress was looking positive.

In response to a question from Councillor Elizabeth Dennis, Councillor Prendergast advised that the Council would always look to fund this scheme and would continue to work with OneYMCA. The finer details of future funding would need to be provided at a later stage.

During the debate, Councillor Ian Albert noted that it was critical that the Service Director – Resources and the Executive Member for Finance and IT to be involved in the process, as well as the currently listed Service Director and Executive Member. This was proposed as an amendment by Councillor Albert and seconded by Councillor Prendergast.

Having been proposed by Councillor Sean Prendergast and seconded by Councillor Alistair Willoughby, the amended motion was put to a vote, and it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Cabinet noted the content of the report and subject to a site being identified approved the submission of a bid under the SHAP programme.
- (2) That Cabinet delegated to the Service Director of Housing & Environmental Health and the Service Director Resources the preparation and submission of the bid in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing & Environmental Health and the Executive Member for Finance & IT.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: There is an urgent need for high quality, accommodation-based support services for single homeless people in the district. Adopting the recommendations at 2.1 and 2.2 would allow the Council to pursue a funding opportunity which if successful, would enable the delivery of a valuable additional resource for the district, benefiting vulnerable young people at risk of rough sleeping.

211 REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT AND HOME OFFICE FUNDING UPDATE

Audio recording – 37:07

Councillor Sean Prendergast, as Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health, presented the report entitled 'Refugee Resettlement and Home Office Funding Update' and advised that:

- The Council had a strong record on support provided to refugees.
- It was anticipated that demand would increase following changes to government policy, and it was important to be proactive in response.
- He would continue to keep Cabinet updated on progress or changes.

Councillor Ian Albert requested that the Service Director – Resources and the Executive Member for Finance and IT were to be involved in the process, as well as the currently listed Service Director and Executive Member. This was proposed as an amendment by Councillor Albert and seconded by Councillor Prendergast.

A further request to include the Executive Member for Community and Partnerships to be included in the process was rejected. In response to this, the Chair advised that meetings took place between Cabinet colleagues outside of this meeting and it was important all Cabinet members were consulted on projects, but not all needed to be involved.

In response to a question from Councillor Ruth Brown, Councillor Prendergast advised that the recommendations were trying to deal with likely pressure, so that the Council can be more focussed on meeting those demands as and when the issues occur.

The Chair noted that central government needed to support local councils and to appreciate the pressures and burdens they were under.

Councillor Sean Prendergast proposed the motion, as amended, and Councillor Alistair Willoughby seconded and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Cabinet noted the local position regarding the resettlement of refugees and it supports more focused resettlement efforts for this client group as part of the Council's wider housing role;

- (2) That Cabinet 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 the Executive Member for Finance & IT, the authority to decide the allocation of Home Office funding to support the resettlement of refugees (for matters that are not reserved for Cabinet).

REASON FOR DECISIONS: There is likely to be increased demand for housing services from refugees in the foreseeable future and the recommendations in this report seek to manage this efficiently, whilst ensuring appropriate support services are in place.

212 PROPOSED OFF-STREET CAR PARKING TARIFFS FOR 2023/24

Audio recording – 44:54

Councillor Ruth Brown, as Executive Member for Planning and Transport, presented the report entitled 'Proposed Off-Street Car Parking Tariffs for 2023/24' and advised that:

- The Medium Term Financial Strategy required the Council to raise car parking charges by 2% and the discussion is around how to do this.
- Last year a 10p increase was introduced on the 1-hour rate, in order to close the gap between the 1 and 2-hour rates and encourage people to stay in towns longer.
- Over the past year there had been an increase in usage and income and phone data showed that people were staying longer.
- It was proposed that this be continued this year and further close the gap between 1 and 2-hour parking rates. This would be another 10p increase in the 1-hour rate.
- All permits and season tickets would remain the same.
- Long Stay Car Parks would stay the same, with the exception of the 5p charges. The most complaints received were about issues with 5p payments.
- Whilst over the next two years these will move to cashless machines, there were still 5p charges now and it seemed sensible to rationalise these at this stage. Most would be increased by 5p, but some car parks would be reduced by 5p.
- More EV charging points would be installed which currently did not require payment and it was felt this encouraged people to park for longer to charge their car. To reduce this impact it was proposed that a charge would be introduced for these bays as well.
- Subsidised or incentivised schemes, such as free 30 minute parking in Knebworth, would continue to be supported on a request basis, and it would be expected to break even.
- There was no requirement to consult on these proposals but these had been presented to all Area Forums, town BIDS, Royston Town Council and Knebworth Parish Council.
- There had been a mixed response from business to the proposals.
- Royston Town Council had made an overall objection, but this related to owners and workers who would not be impacted as permit rates were not being increased.

The Service Director – Resources confirmed for Members that the car parking charges were not increased to balance the budget.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Steve Jarvis

In response to questions, Councillor Brown advised that:

- She agreed the need for a larger review of evening and Sunday parking charges, as there had been changes in the way people parked following the pandemic.

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- To enable the review in the next two years, it was proposed to amend the TRO to cover evening and weekends now but this would be set to zero and would not currently be enforced, but this change would make it easier at a later stage.
- Permits would be reviewed in full in the future, however at the moment the focus was on alternative payments, pay on exit and EV charging projects.
- Royston Town Council had objected 2 years in a row to any parking charge increases and had not offered to subsidise this.
- Royston BID subsidised the 'Free after 3pm' scheme in Royston and this would continue for the next year. However, this was under review as the amount was based on a figure from 2010 and had not been increased.
- There was still a desire to incentivise EV and different schemes would be explored, and no introduction of EV parking charges was to take place this year.

The Service Director – Regulatory advised that if Members agreed in principle to the EV parking charges, then the final plans could be agreed with the relevant Executive Member to ensure EV was still incentivised.

Councillor Ruth Brown proposed and Councillor Keith Hoskins seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Cabinet agreed to adopt the proposed off-street car park tariffs for 2023/24 as set out in Tables 1 to 5 at Appendix A
- (2) That Cabinet agreed not to increase the charges for Season Tickets for each of its long stay car parks or business permits for its car park at St. Martins Road in Knebworth for 2023/24.
- (3) That Cabinet agreed not to increase the charges for resident permits, visitor permits, business permits or visitor tickets for resident permit zones for 2023/24.
- (4) That Cabinet agreed that the proposed tariff changes, as recommended and approved in paragraphs 2.1 above, are implemented as soon as practicable, and that officers in consultation with the Executive Member and Deputy for Planning and Transport proceed with the implementation as required.
- (5) That Cabinet agreed to the policy of customers paying for parking sessions whilst parked within electric vehicle charging bays.
- (6) That Officers proceeded with the necessary amendments to the Off-Street Parking Traffic Regulation Orders as required to implement changes recommended and approved above, and that officers in consultation with the Executive Member and Deputy for Planning and Transport proceed with the implementation as required.
- (7) That Cabinet agreed for officers in consultation with the Executive Member and Deputy for Planning and Transport to implement subsidy and incentive parking schemes on a break even approach on request.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To implement an increase in car parking tariffs in order to effectively manage their use and in accordance with the Council's fees and charges policy as set out in its Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). To set car parking tariffs that support the achievement of modal shift away from private car use and to help support the vitality of town centres.

213 STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT - ADOPTION

Audio recording – 59:40

Councillor Ruth Brown, as Executive Member for Planning and Transport, presented the report entitled 'Statement of Community Involvement – Adoption' and advised that:

- Following the adoption of the Local Plan, this was about how communities were engaged with by the Council.
- The draft version was presented in March to go out for consultation. This had taken place and 13 responses had been received, with some minor amendments made following this.

Councillor Ruth Brown proposed and Councillor Alistair Willoughby seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the consultation responses were noted.
- (2) That subject to recommendation 2.1, the amendments to the draft SCI are approved and that the SCI, attached as Appendix A was adopted.
- (3) That any minor amendments to the SCI, such as typographical errors, additional statutory consultees, legislation changes, were delegated to the Service Director – Regulatory in consultation with the relevant Executive Members.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: The SCI sets out how the Council consults with the local community in preparing, masterplans for the strategic sites, strategic planning documents and in determining planning applications. It also sets out guidelines for those communities involved in neighbourhood planning.

214 CHESFIELD CONSERVATION AREA

Audio Recording – 5:26

N.B. This item was considered ahead of Agenda Item 7.

Councillor Ruth Brown, as Executive Member for Planning and Transport, presented the report entitled 'Chesfield Conservation Area' and advised that:

- The purpose of a conservation area was to manage and protect areas of special interest.
- The 2016 heritage assessment for North Stevenage 1 (NS1) recommended there should be a conservation area in Chesfield, as an extension to the existing conservation area.
- Following a public consultation consultants carried out further work and made minor amendments, included at Appendix B. However, they concluded that there was enough historic evidence to merit a conservation area in this area.
- A conservation area promotes sustainable development, which was important following the declaration of the Climate Emergency at the Council.

Councillor Ruth Brown proposed the recommendations in the report.

The Chair invited Dr Hilary Napier to speak. Dr Napier thanked the Chair for the opportunity and provided Cabinet with a verbal presentation, including that:

- As a resident of the area, she was unaware of the proposed Conservation Area until November 2022, despite the report beginning in September 2021.

- They were also only made aware of the consideration of the item at this meeting on 13 September 2023 and no other resident had been provided information.
- It was good practice to involve residents in policies that impact them.
- A public consultation took place in January 2023 and the residents were unanimous in objecting to the Conservation Area proposals.
- At this meeting, Councillor Brown indicated that the proposals would not proceed without resident support.
- The main reasons provided for objections were the managing of boundaries of farmland, the impact of the nearby woodland and housing estates, as well as dangerous trees that would need felling immediately.
- The effects of NS1 was not considered within this report, and this is important as work is underway and the spoil from the development is to be deposited on the proposed Conservation Area boundary.
- There were historically significant buildings in the area, but these were covered by existing listing, and the land was protected as greenbelt. The proposed Conservation Area, therefore, made little additional protection.
- Following the resident meeting in January 2023, several responses were provided as action points, including to consult further with the ARB team at the Council regarding woodlands, expand permitted development on farmland, consider the likely effect of new developments and confirm a landscape assessment had been completed for NS1. However, no action or information had been provided on these points.
- The section of the report which covered Chesfield Park area contained inaccuracies, which had been covered by previous submissions from residents, including photographic evidence, but only summarised versions appear on the website.
- Woodland around the area is extremely patchy and housing developments were clearly visible.
- The Assistant Director of Planning at Stevenage Borough Council had advised that the immediate area around Chesfield Park had already been eroded by the development of Great Ashby, as well as pylons.
- A site visit had been arranged in May 2023, but this would be more appropriate following the completion of current ongoing developments.

In response to the presentation from Dr Napier, Councillor Brown advised she had taken part in online meetings with consultants and residents, however no officers were present at these, and could not recollect saying that this would not go ahead. She would have advised that concerns would be taken away and consulted on with Officers, as she was not an expert in these areas. Councillor Brown apologised if documents were missing from the website, and this was a genuine mistake.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Steve Jarvis
- Councillor Alistair Willoughby

In response to question, Dr Napier advised:

- A letter from the Assistant Planning Officer at Stevenage Borough Council mentioned the spoil.
- Her view was that the point of the letter was that he did not see Chesfield Park as a worth place to be designated as a Conservation Area.
- The whole area, not just buildings, had been included in the proposed area, despite nearby developments being visible through woodland in the winter months.

In response to questions, the Principle Strategic Planning Officer advised:

- The letter from Stevenage Borough Council did advise that there were pylons and the presence of housing, however the overall message was in favour of the designation for Chesfield.
- The reports were all uploaded online and to the best of her knowledge all submissions had been uploaded and, other than personal details, nothing had been redacted.
- It was not standard practice to notify all consultation respondents to the decision making, it was done in the case of Dr Napier as correspondence had been taking place over summer.
- Discussions had taken place with the Development Management Manager at Stevenage which had led to this outcome. In these discussions it became apparent that they were overall supportive, with some reservations about some matters, but saw the benefit of extending the current area.
- She was not part of the Development Management Team and therefore could not advise on what was considered whether this applied to non-built environment, such as farmland, fences, etc.
- The map included in the letter from Stevenage Borough Council highlighted the area in green, which was within this proposed conservation area, but was within the civil boundary of Stevenage, known as Park Plantation.
- This area had not been included within the Stevenage conservation area as it was designated as greenspace. However, this had been queried with the consultant who advised that this should be included in these proposals.
- Applications within North Herts boundary would be weighted with the proposed conservation area. The North Stevenage site had been given weighting based on the existing Stevenage Borough Council conservation area in St Nicholas and Rectory Lane. There were no further proposed developments out towards North Herts boundary.

Councillor Albert noted that verbal agreements and discussions were not appropriate for this decision to be taken and a written response was needed to clarify the position of Stevenage Borough Council. This position was similarly expressed by Councillor Steve Jarvis, who further noted the need to understand what was affected by the proposed area.

In response to points raised, the Chair allowed Dr Napier a response, who further advised that:

- Residents wanted to know what obligations they will need to meet to secure their boundaries.
- A lot of this land was farmland, which was not a normal conservation area, and the area had been expanded to cover dense woodland, which in reality was not dense.
- It was understandable to try and protect significant buildings in an area, but this proposal goes beyond the protection of historic interests.
- Residents had not been fully informed of the proposals and a lot of uncertainty around the proposals remained.

The Chair summarised that clear themes were coming from Members that they were not at grips with the proposal and concerns regarding consultation and putting people first.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis, as Chair, proposed to defer the item awaiting further clarification on points raised at the meeting. This was seconded by Councillor Ian Albert and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Chesfield Conservation Area item be **DEFERRED** to clarify the proposed conservation area and to conduct further consultation with residents to ensure the People First priority of the Council was being met.

215 **HITCHIN, LETCHWORTH AND ROYSTON BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT (BID) RENEWALS**

Audio recording – 1:01:21

Councillor Keith Hoskins, as Executive Member for Enterprise and Arts, presented the report entitled 'Hitchin, Letchworth and Royston Business Improvement District (BID) Renewal' and advised that:

- There had been some amendments to business plans received, including that the ballot holder was the Service Director – Customers, not the Chief Executive and the contact was with BIDs directly, not the elections team.
- These proposals qualified for Council support on many counts, especially as they represented a great partnership working arrangement between Council and businesses.
- For modest investment by the Council there was huge financial investment in the town centres by the BIDs.
- There was no new money required, though there were some inflationary increases.
- Civica would run the ballot which had cost around £12k.
- The Council was being asked to vote 'Yes' on Council owned properties in the areas. The cost of the levies would be £20k, £100k over the 5-year BID period, but this would generate £3.85million into town centres and therefore represented a superb investment.

Councillor Ian Albert noted that he welcomed this renewal report and recognised the importance of the BIDs and the work they have done in town centres. In future, it may be possible to charge the BIDs themselves to cover the costs of the renewal ballot, but this would require an e-billing option before it could proceed. Whilst some costs could be recouped, there was still a desire to see BIDs succeed and therefore the Council would not look to charge all costs to them.

In response to a question from Councillor Ruth Brown, Councillor Hoskins advised that the Hitchin industrial area had not been included, the extended area was an additional section of the High Street. The industrial area had been explored but there was little appetite to be included in the BID.

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

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Cabinet considered the BID renewal proposals for Hitchin, Letchworth and Royston, appended in A, B and C and instructs the Returning Officer to hold the BID renewal Ballots;
- (2) That Cabinet delegated the Council's voting rights in the BID renewal process to the Service Director – Customers.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: The Council is under a legal duty to comply with the BID arrangements under section 44 of the Local Government Act 2003 ("the Act"). This includes compliance with the Act and The Business Improvement Districts (England) Regulations 2004 (as amended) ("the Regulations") in respect of receipt of any BID renewal.

216 **FIRST QUARTER INVESTMENT STRATEGY (CAPITAL AND TREASURY) REVIEW 2023/24**

Audio recording – 1:09:16

The Chair invited Councillor Sean Nolan, as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Nolan advised that a point had been raised regarding potential spend on access to grants, to ensure the Council was not spending money to chase money. The Service Director – Resources had confirmed that minor amounts were being spent for large potential gain.

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Finance and IT, presented the report entitled 'First Quarter Investment Strategy (Capital and Treasury) Review 2023/24' and advised that:

- Capital schemes were detailed in tables 2 and 3 of the report.
- The £385k Section 106 funding for social housing detailed in table 3 of the report had been allocated to the Foundation House site in Letchworth.
- Funding for the Leisure Centres solar/PV scheme had been held for now to act as match funding for government grant bids for decarbonisation scheme. This would go further than original proposals.
- The report confirmed that the Investment Strategy had been complied with.
- There had been an increase in investment income due to the general rise in interest rates, but this meant less money was available in the revenue areas of the Council.

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

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Cabinet noted the forecast expenditure of £10.438M in 2023/24 on the capital programme, paragraph 8.3 refers.
- (2) That Cabinet 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 overall estimated spend in 2024/25 and beyond by £1.271M.
- (3) That Cabinet 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) Cabinet noted the position of Treasury Management activity as at the end of June 2023.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

- (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.

217 FIRST QUARTER REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2023/24

Audio recording – 1:13:48

The Chair invited Councillor Sean Nolan, as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Nolan advised that:

- Questions were asked about the employee pay award which was still outstanding, and it was confirmed that the 4% rise was an average across the board but would depend on staff base pay amount.
- The money allocated for the Baldock Fire Recovery was only for base costs to the Council and did not cover Officer time.
- The Leisure Management Fee was getting back to pre-Covid levels, however it was difficult to forecast at this stage.

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Finance and IT, presented the report entitled 'First Quarter Revenue Budget Monitoring 2023/24' and advised that:

- The main movements were details in table 3 of the report, with the biggest being the investment income, though it was expected that interest would eventually return to normal levels.
- The larger changes were regarding the pay award, the release of the Covid-19 provision and the overestimation of inflation on the waste budget.

The Service Director – Resources advised that:

- The Council had previously been involved in Business Rate Pooling in 2022/23, however this was deemed too risky last year.
- For 2024/25 the Council had been invited by DLUHC to form a pool.
- Work had been commission with Herts County Council and other district councils to see what would be in the best interests. The pool would always include County with potential for 3 to 5 districts to join.
- The early indication was that a pool would be beneficial and North Herts could be part of this.
- Pooling would give the Council the chance to reduce Business Rate payments to the government and retain this in the local district and county.

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

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Cabinet noted this report.
- (2) That Cabinet approved the changes to the 2023/24 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.2, a £1.119million decrease in net expenditure.
- (3) That Cabinet noted the changes to the 2024/25 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.2, a total £270k increase in net expenditure. These will be incorporated in the draft revenue budget for 2024/25.
- (4) That Cabinet delegated to the Service Director: Resources (in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and IT) authority to enter into a Business Rate Pooling arrangement (if available) if it is estimated that it will be in the financial interests of the Council.

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.

218 Q1 23-24 UPDATE ON THE COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN

Audio recording – 1:18:50

The Chair advised that a referral on this item had been provided from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, however Councillor Val Bryant was unavailable to present this. Therefore, the Chair presented the referral and advised that:

- There was a relatively light agenda at this meeting and so Members were able to pay close attention to this report.
- There were a lot of comments and feedback on some date and milestone slippages on certain projects. The Controls, Risk and Performance Manager had provided some detail regarding these.
- Councillor Ralph Muncer had several questions on projects which were not put at the meeting. These were submitted in writing and a response had since been provided by Officers and these would be circulated to Executive Members.
- The Scrutiny Committee was a valuable space and it was important for those members to be able to ask questions and she had provided an apology to Councillor Muncer, as well as the Leader of the Opposition, for this not happening at the meeting.

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Finance and IT, presented the report entitled 'Q1 23-24 Update on the Council Delivery Plan' and advised that:

- This report helps all Councillors understand the projects the Council was undertaking and the progress made.
- Staff resources were impacting on the delivery of the Council Delivery Plan.
- A workshop on recruitment and retention was being held by the East of England Local Government Association in November and he would attend this to try and address some of these issues.
- It was important to identify the main priorities within the Council Delivery Plan.
- Needed to consider the presentation of the report to ensure the right information was being provided.

The Service Director – Resources continued that:

- The yellow highlighting within the report indicated that a change to a milestone had been made and was to be approved by Cabinet. Progress would then be set and monitored against this revised date, which can therefore lead to difficulties in identifying original dates without reviewing past reports.
- If there was a reduction in the projects included on the Delivery Plan, then a detailed review of the report could take place, but that was not possible with the current number of projects included.
- Currently all milestones are retained within the report, but as milestones are met and completed, these could be removed once they had been through a cycle of Committees to assist with conciseness of the report.
- Only the milestones from the current year, and previous years, were included, it did not cover all future milestones on projects.
- There was an issue with the system which meant if more in year milestones were added, then this would see a decrease in the percentage update provided.
- He was seeking feedback from Members on the display of the completion percentage and whether completed milestones should be removed.

The Chair noted that this was a document to be owned by Members and it needed to be agile and provide relevant data to ensure projects were on track and effective monitoring of these. She was supportive of removing completed actions, so long as these were recorded within the Pentana system.

Councillor Steve Jarvis advised that for projects with many completed milestone the deletion was fine, however noted that for some projects the milestones were useful indicators of progress made. The current system of counting milestones to produce a percentage was not always an accurate reflection of the project.

Councillor Sean Prendergast noted that some of the information provided was not particularly helpful to understanding the progress of a project and that this could be removed to make the report more concise.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Sean Prendergast seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Cabinet noted the progress against Council projects as set out in the Council Delivery Plan (Appendix A) including changes to milestones, performance indicators and risks.
- (2) That Cabinet commented on the presentation of the report for future meetings, especially in relation to milestones and project status.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: 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.

219 NEW FINANCIAL SYSTEM

Audio Recording – 1:33:50

Councillor Ian Albert presented the report entitled 'Financial System Budget' and advised:

- The allocation of £200k of capital was to enable the purchase of the new finance system which followed a tender exercise which identified the best value option.
- This new system would allow the delivery of efficiency improvements across the Council and to the way accounts are produced.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Alistair Willoughby
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Steve Jarvis

In response to the questions, the Service Director – Resources advised that:

- Over time this system would bring enough savings which would recover not only the revenue costs, but also the annual revenue impact of the capital costs, but that this would take time.
- The system would not have any impact on services at East Herts Council, or on joint services between this Council and East Herts because they have their own finance system.
- The software package was standard, but that it would have to be customised to enable it to work in a more efficient way to enable improvements across the Council.

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The Chair stressed the importance in this current climate for local government to look actively for areas where they can work together across all services to reduce costs and make savings.

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

RESOLVED: That Cabinet noted the expected benefits from the new finance software system.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That Council approve a capital budget allocation in 2023/24 of £200k for the initial work to develop and implement the new finance software system.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: A new finance system is expected to lead to more efficient processes and a better customer experience. A new finance system will incur up-front installation and development costs. These costs can be charged to capital but require a capital budget. Additions to the capital programme above £50k require approval by Full Council.

The meeting closed at 9.13 pm

Chair