

MINUTES OF THE CABINET HELD ON

13 February 2025

7.00 - 9.50 pm

PRESENT

Committee Members

Councillor Dan Swords, Leader of the Council and Chair of Personnel Committee

Councillor David Carter, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing

Councillor Danielle Brown, Portfolio Holder for Community and Wellbeing

Councillor Joel Charles, Portfolio Holder for Public Protection

Councillor Hannah Ellis, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services and Transformation

Councillor Michael Hardware, Portfolio Holder for Economic Development

Councillor Alastair Gunn, Portfolio Holder for Garden Town and Planning

Councillor James Leppard, Portfolio Holder for Finance

Councillor Nicky Purse, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability

Other Councillors

Councillor Linda Clark

Councillor Tony Edwards

Councillor James Griggs

Councillor Kay Morrison

Councillor Stefan Mullard- Toal

Councillor Matthew Saggars

Councillor Jake Shepherd

Officers

James Gardner, Managing Director

Niel Churchill, Communications Manager

Rebecca Farrant, Assistant Director - Corporate Services and Improvement

Julie Galvin, Legal Services Manager and Monitoring Officer

Amanda Lucas, Graphic Designer

Adam Rees, Senior Governance Support Officer

Cara Stevens, Assistant Director, Housing Operations (People)

Jacqui Van Mellaerts, Assistant Director - Finance

Alan Townshend, Executive Director

Tanusha Waters, Assistant Director - Planning and Garden Town

103. WEBCAST INTRODUCTION

The Leader said the meeting was being webcast live and would be available for repeated viewing after the meeting has ended. By continuing to attend the meeting, you were consenting to being filmed and to appearing in the webcast.

104. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

None.

105. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Michael Hardware declared a pecuniary interest in Item 17 as the Deputy Cabinet member for Economic Development at Essex County Council. He would leave the meeting whilst the item was considered.

106. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2024 are agreed as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

107. **MATTERS ARISING**

None.

108. **WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

None.

109. **WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS**

None.

110. **COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE LEADER**

The Leader noted that this was the last meeting Julie Galvin, Legal Services Manager, would be attending as she was taking a role elsewhere. All Councillors thanked her for her significant contribution to the council.

111. **PETITIONS**

None.

112. **RECENT RELEVANT DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE LEADER, DEPUTY OR PORTFOLIO HOLDER(S)**

RESOLVED that the following decisions be noted.

- a) Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing - 19 December 2024
- b) Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing - 19 December 2024

113. **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN AND GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2025/26**

Cabinet received a report on the Medium Term Financial Plan and General Fund Budget 2025/26.

The Leader said an additional recommendation was to be added to this item, and the two subsequent items, granting delegated authority to the Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Leader, to make minor and inconsequential amendments to the budget papers prior to their publication in the Full Council agenda.

Proposed by Councillor Dan Swords (seconded by Councillor James Leppard) it was:

A Recommended to Full Council that it:

- i) Notes the balanced 2025-26 General Fund budget and balanced 2025-28 MTFP which will fully fund all corporate missions and pressures whilst ensuring greater efficiency and value for money for Harlow taxpayers and improved service provision and do so whilst freezing Harlow council tax and fees and charges across the lifetime of the MTFP.
- ii) Approves the Medium Term Financial Plan 2025 - 2028, and the General Fund Budget for 2025/26 as set out in Appendix A to the report.
- iii) Approves that the council's band D council tax for 2025/26 is set at £288.90 representing a 0% increase as set out Appendix A to the report.
- iv) Approves the General Fund estimates for 2025/26, as set out in Appendix A to the report.
- v) Approves the proposed transfers between the General Fund and service specific earmarked reserves, referred to within the report and as set out in Appendix A to the report.
- vi) Approves proposed Fees and Charges, as set out in Appendix B to the report.
- vii) Approves proposed Pay Policy Statement, as set out in Appendix C to the report.

B Granted delegated authority to the Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to make minor

and inconsequential amendments prior to the publication of the Full Council agenda.

114. **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET 2025/26 AND BUSINESS PLAN**

Cabinet received a report on the Housing Revenue Account Budget 2025/26 and Business Plan 2024-2054.

Proposed by Councillor Dan Swords (seconded by Councillor David Carter) it was:

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

A Recommended to Full Council that it:

- i) Notes the balanced HRA budget proposals for 2025/26 which include a sustainable 30-year HRA Business Plan, increased investment to meet fully the requirements of the regulatory landscape and improve service provision, and significant investment to deliver the council's corporate mission to Transform Harlow's Housing.
- ii) Approves the HRA estimates as set out in Appendix A to the report.
- iii) Approves that tenant rents are increased by 2.7 percent with effect from 1 April 2025. This equates to an average weekly rent of £115.23 an increase of £3.03 as set out in paragraph 13 to 16 of the report.
- iv) Approves that the rents and personal charges for temporary accommodation are increased with effect from 1 April 2025 as set out in paragraph 17 to 19 of the report.
- v) Approves that garage rents within the 'Retain and Invest' category and related charges are increased by 5 percent with effect from 1 April 2025 as set out in paragraph 20 to 23 of the report. This equates to an average weekly rent of £13.62, an increase of £0.65.
- vi) Approves that tenant service charges are increased to recover full cost with effect from 1 April 2025 as set out in paragraphs 24 to 28 of the report and Appendix C to the report.
- vii) Approves that the leasehold service charges are increased with effect from 1 April 2025 to ensure that all leaseholder costs are recovered as set out in paragraphs 29 to 33 of the report and Appendix C of the report.

- viii) Approves that all other tenant charges are increased with effect from 1 April 2025 in order to recover cost as set out in Appendix C of the report.
 - ix) Approves the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2024-54, as set out in Appendix B to the report.
- B** Granted delegated authority to the Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to make minor and inconsequential amendments prior to the publication of the Full Council agenda.

115. **CAPITAL BUDGET AND TREASURY REPORT 2025/26**

Cabinet received a report on the Capital and Treasury Budget Report 2025-26 to 2027-28.

Proposed by Councillor Dan Swords (seconded by Councillor James Leppard) it was:

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

A Recommended to Full Council that it:

- i) Notes both capital programmes which fully fund all six corporate missions and represent the largest capital programmes the council has ever undertaken.
- ii) Approves the 2025/26 Housing Capital Programme (HCP) totalling £39.672 million as set out in Appendix A to the report.
- iii) Approves the 2025/26 Non-Housing Capital Programme totalling £75.236 million as set out in Appendix A to the report.
- iv) Approves the following Capital and Treasury Reports:
 - The Capital Strategy Report 2025/26 as set out in Appendix B to the report;
 - The Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2025/26 as set out in Appendix C to the report;
 - The Investment Strategy Report 2025/26 as set out in Appendix D to the report;
 - The Minimum Revenue Provision Statement 2025/26 as set out in Appendix E to the report; and

- The Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy as set out in Appendix F to the report.

B Granted delegated authority to the Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to make minor and inconsequential amendments prior to the publication of the Full Council agenda.

116. **PERFORMANCE, FINANCE AND RISK - NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER**

Cabinet received a Performance, Finance and Risk report for November and December 2024.

Proposed by Councillor Hannah Ellis (seconded by Councillor James Leppard) it was:

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- A** Noted the performance of key performance indicators for November and December which demonstrate strong performance on all indicators.
- B** Noted the financial performance and position as of December (period 9) of 2024/25 financial year which demonstrate strong financial performance across the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and Capital Programmes.
- C** Approved the Period 9 reprofiling into 2025/26 within the Housing and Non-Housing Capital Programmes included within Appendices D and E to the report.
- D** Noted the current strategic risks for the council's operations in Appendix F to the report.

117. **TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2024/25 - MID-YEAR REVIEW**

Cabinet received a report on the Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25 – Mid-Year Review.

Proposed by Councillor James Leppard (seconded by Councillor Dan Swords) it was:

RESOLVED that the Mid-Year Review of the Treasury Management Strategy, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be noted and referred to Council for consideration.

118. **CHURCHGATE STREET CONSERVATION AREA MANAGEMENT AND ARTICLE 4 DIRECTION**

Cabinet received a report on the Churchgate Street Conservation Area Management and Article 4 Direction.

Proposed by Councillor Alastair Gunn (seconded by Councillor Michael Hardware) it was:

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- A** Noted the comments received during the September 2024 consultation on the CMP, and the Council's responses, set out at Appendix A to this report.
- B** Noted the finalised Churchgate Street Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Proposals document (CMP), set out at Appendix B to this report.
- C** Adopted the revised Churchgate Street Conservation Area boundary, set out at Appendix C to this report.
- D** Approved the making (drafting) of the Churchgate Street Article 4 Direction set out at Appendix D to this report, and approves commencement of associated notification period.
- E** Approved a consultation on the draft Management Plan and Guidance document (MPG) for a six-week period.

Councillor Hardware left the meeting.

119. **UPDATE ON THE USE OF COMPULSORY PURCHASE POWERS AND HARLOW COUNCIL LAND TO ADVANCE THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HARLOW & GILSTON GARDEN TOWN**

Cabinet received a report on the use of CPO powers to advance the development of HGGT.

Proposed by Councillor Alastair Gunn (seconded by Councillor James Leppard) it was:

RESOLVED that:

- A** Cabinet recommended to Full Council that Full Council approves (subject to satisfactory negotiations with PfP) the disposal of Harlow Council's freehold interest in the subject land required to deliver the Stort River Crossing Schemes, those schemes being:
 - i) The Central Stort Crossing proposal which comprises, in broad terms, alterations to the existing Fifth Avenue

road/rail bridge, and creation of new bridges to support the widened highway to the west of the existing structure to create the Central Stort Crossings, including embankment works, pedestrian and cycle facilities, a pedestrian and cycle bridge over Eastwick Road, lighting and landscaping works and other associated works (East Herts Council planning reference: 3/19/1046/FUL & Harlow Council planning reference: HW/CRB/19/00220); and

- ii) The Eastern Stort Crossing which comprises, in broad terms, erection of a new road, pedestrian and cycle bridge; replacement of an existing rail bridge at River Way; alterations to the existing local highway network; lighting and landscaping works; listed building works to Fiddlers Brook Bridge; and other associated works (East Herts Council planning reference: 3/19/1051/FUL and Harlow Council planning reference: HW/CRB/19/00221).

Such land disposal to be via private treaty to PfP and to include all necessary land currently within the ownership of Harlow Council; and any land acquired by Harlow Council as part of the land assembly for the Stort River Crossing Schemes.

For the avoidance of doubt, the Recommendation above involves the resolutions made by Full Council on 29 October 2020 detailed in Council Minute 36. remaining extant, except for the Resolution recorded in Minute 36. a) ii) that *“Full Council, in principle, where Harlow District Council is landowner, or through the process of acquisition (including under CPO) would become landowner, the Council agreed to retain ownership but grant licence for infrastructure works on that land...”*. However, that resolution recorded in Minute 36. a) ii) shall remain extant if Officers are unable to negotiate satisfactory terms with PfP for the freehold transfer of the subject land.

- B** Cabinet delegated to the Managing Director in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance the authority to negotiate and finalise the terms of the freehold land disposals and (subject to being satisfied that it would be for the best consideration reasonably obtainable and on terms that comply with the Council’s statutory and common law duties) thereafter procure the legal completion of the sale documentation.

Councillor Hardware returned to the meeting.

120. **COMMUNICATIONS FROM COMMITTEES/WORKING GROUPS/PARTIES AND PANELS**

None.

121. **MINUTES OF PANELS/WORKING GROUPS**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the following meetings are noted.

- a) Minutes of meeting Tuesday, 1 October 2024 of Harlow Local Highways Panel
- b) Minutes of meeting Tuesday, 22 October 2024 of Safety Committee
- c) Minutes of meeting Monday, 25 November 2024 of Housing Standards Board
- d) Minutes of meeting Wednesday, 27 November 2024 of Shareholder Sub Committee
- e) Minutes of meeting Tuesday, 7 January 2025 of Harlow Local Highways Panel

122. **MATTERS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

123. **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

RESOLVED that the following item be taken in private session on the grounds that it is likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information as specified under Paragraph 3 of Part One of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, if and so long as in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

Paragraph 3 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

124. **HTS TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME**

Cabinet received a report on the HTS Transformation Programme.

Proposed by Councillor Dan Swords (seconded by Councillor Nicky Purse) it was:

RESOLVED that:

- A** Cabinet noted and endorsed the programme of work being undertaken to transform HTS, improve service performance and deliver better value for money from HTS services.

- B** Cabinet approved the next steps in that transformation as set out in paragraphs 14 to 21 of the report and approves the formal decisions required to implement those next steps.
- C** Delegation be given to the Executive Director, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to implement those next steps.

125. **TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY**

Cabinet received a report on the Town Centre Strategy.

Proposed by Councillor Dan Swords (seconded by Councillor James Leppard) it was:

RESOLVED that Cabinet recommended to Full Council that:

- A** Delegated authority be given to the Leader of the Council, Managing Director and Section 151 Officer to finalise the purchase of the development sites as detailed in the report.
- B** Delegated authority be given to the Leader of the Council and Managing Director to take all necessary steps to commence the redevelopment of the sites, including demolition, as detailed within the budget profile set-out within this report and in accordance with council's procurement framework.
- C** A maximum budget is allocated for the negotiated purchase price and associated costs per the agreed terms of this report and approve that associated Capital Strategy and Treasury documents are amended to reflect the capital acquisition as detailed in the report.
- D** Delegated authority be given to the Leader of the Council and Section 151 officer to finalise any required capital financing for the acquisitions as detailed in the report.
- E** Delegated authority be given to the Leader of the Council, Section 151 officer and Managing Director to negotiate and complete the acquisition as detailed in the report.

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL