

Cabinet
25 JANUARY 2024

Present: Councillors: Martin Boffey (Leader), John Milne (Deputy Leader), Mark Baynham, Colette Blackburn, Ruth Fletcher, Jay Mercer, Jon Olson and Sam Raby

Also Present: Emma Beard, Tony Bevis, Philip Circus, Paul Clarke, Nigel Emery, Claudia Fisher, Nick Grant, Warwick Hellowell, Liz Kitchen, Joanne Knowles, Lynn Lambert, Richard Landeryou, Alan Manton, Roger Noel, David Skipp, John Trollope and Belinda Walters

EX/64 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 23 November and 11 December were approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

EX/65 **DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

EX/66 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no announcements.

EX/67 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

No questions had been received.

EX/68 **PLANNING SKILLS DELIVERY FUND – APPROVAL OF BUDGET**

Councillor John Milne, Cabinet Member for Planning and Infrastructure, introduced the report on the Planning Skills Delivery Fund. He explained that Cabinet was recommended to ask Council to increase the strategic planning and development management budgets so that Strategic Planning and Development Management could receive an allocated grant from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities(DLUHC).

Notification of the receipt of the grant was only advised in December 2023 and not known when the 2023/24 annual budget was set. The grant was for the sum of £308,333, £250,000 would be used to help deliver solutions to water neutrality and £58,333 to assist with reducing the backlog of planning applications.

Further information was awaited from DLUHC which would set out more detail as to how the grant can be spent. Discussions were also planned with the

Council's water neutrality partners in other affected Local Authority areas to consider the options for using the water neutrality funds in due course.

In response to comments raised regarding the rationale used to divide the funding, it was explained that the grant of £250k was a joint bid submitted on behalf of the Council and neighbouring water neutrality partners which enabled more funding to be applied for. The £58,333 grant was specifically allocated to Development Management.

In response to comments raised regarding lobbying the Government to assist Parish and Neighbourhood Council's Plans and controlling speculative development, the Cabinet Member advised that the Memorandum of Understanding was awaited from DLUHC. This would offer specific advice on where money could be spent. It was also stated that assistance was being provided by the Council for Neighbourhood Planning groups as part of the work of the Strategic Planning team.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

- i) To approve the receipt of a grant for the sum of £308,333 for Strategic Planning and Development Management (government grants received).
- ii) To approve an increase in the Strategic Planning 2023/24 revenue income and expenditure budgets of £250,000 to cater for the receipt and expenditure of the grant.
- iii) To approve an increase in the Development Management 2023/24 revenue income and expenditure budgets of £58,333 to cater for receipt and expenditure of the grant.

RESOLVED, subject to Council approval:

- i) that monies be spent in accordance with any conditions attached to the same; and Page 17 Agenda Item 6
- ii) that authority be delegated to the Head of Strategic Planning to spend the grant monies, in the sum of £250,000, to procure additional project support for the delivery of the Sussex North Offsetting Water Scheme.
- iii) that authority be delegated to the Head of Development Management and Building Control to spend the grant monies, in the sum of £58,333 to procure additional support to reduce the planning application backlog.

REASON

- i) By increasing the revenue income and expenditure budget in Strategic Planning and Development Management will allow the Council to receive and spend the grant offered by DLUHC.
- ii) Council must approve an increase to the budget and the Cabinet must approve expenditure in excess of £250,000.
- iii) To provide funds to help deliver the Sussex North Offsetting Water Scheme (SNOWS).
- iv) To provide additional resource to reduce the planning application backlog.

EX/69 **LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING FUND TOP UP**

Councillor Mark Baynham, Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources introduced the report on the Local Housing Fund Top Up. On the 5 January 2024, Government had invited local authorities to express their interest in increasing their delivery of the Local Authority Housing Fund in 2023/24. The first two rounds of funding were designed to meet the housing requirements of Ukrainian and Afghan families fleeing conflict, and to assist local authorities in meeting the needs of people facing homelessness in the area.

The Council had applied for an allocation of up to £0.76m from Government and will add £1.02m of its own funding to provide up to 2 large resettlement homes and up to 2 temporary accommodation homes by 29 March 2024. The Cabinet was recommending approval of the receipt of grant funding, as well as the capital expenditure, and acquisition of properties, to Council.

Councillor Sam Raby, Cabinet Member for Housing, Communities and Wellbeing was encouraged that the Council were applying for additional funding and felt this supported and reflected what the residents wanted in the district.

In response to concerns regarding tight time frames, the Cabinet Member stated that further information from Government was due to be received on 2 February and that the Council could return unspent funding to the Government should it wish to or not be able to deliver the housing within these deadlines.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

- iii) To proceed with the application for, and receipt of, the grant allocation for the Council to provide or facilitate the provision of up to 2 large resettlement homes and up to 2 temporary accommodation homes.

- ii) To approve capital spend of up to £1.78m in the 2023/24 capital programme, provided that the actual required spend, which is dependent upon the value of the unknown grant allocation, is reported to full Council at its next ordinary meeting.
- iii) To approve the acquisition by Horsham District Council of up to 4 properties using the funds earmarked for this initiative, provided that any such acquisitions are undertaken in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources, and Cabinet Member for Housing, Communities & Wellbeing.

REASON

- iii) To apply for, receive and use the grant to help purchase / provide more affordable homes for the district.
- ii) The Full Council must approve the capital budget.
- iii) Subject to Council approval, to avoid the requirement to seek Cabinet's approval for the purchase by Horsham District Council of each individual property that would otherwise be required to give effect to this initiative.

EX/70 **ANNUAL PLAN 2024/25**

Councillor Martin Boffey, Leader of the Council, introduced the report which set out the Council's Annual Plan for 2024/25 which sits under the Council Plan for 2023-2027 and outlined the projects and workstreams that the Council aimed to achieve in the financial year.

The projects set out in the Plan contained four main themes: Supporting people and communities; Inspiring greener futures; Building a thriving Economy and Always listening, learning and improving.

Under each category subheadings were included which contained keys areas of work the Council would focus on from now until March 2025. Throughout the year the Annual Plan will be reviewed against set performance indicators to ensure they match the needs set out in the plan.

The Leader advised that since October 2023, within the four areas of commitments, over 40 items had been completed and more projects and action would be continuing to complete within the year or as multi-year projects. Over £500k had been committed to local initiatives and more projects were planned to support businesses and communities. There was an emphasis on providing good jobs, homes, health, accessible countryside and affordable fun.

Councillor Jon Olson, Cabinet Member for Leisure, Culture and Green Spaces stated that he was encouraged that over two thirds of the Plan had been completed this year and was pleased to see a mixture of actions and

deliverables. He was encouraged that there was scope to develop a Cultural Strategy and felt that the new approach to consider the Plan at Council on an annual basis promoted transparency.

Councillor Sam Raby, Cabinet Member of Housing, Communities and Wellbeing, had attended the Cost of Living Summit and identified the importance of supporting families with the cost of living crisis and connecting partner agencies to help provide a good quality of life. He felt the Plan would assist with this.

Further discussion included the proposed mandatory food waste collections and frequency of collections. Consultation work had taken place and Member briefings would take place on 22 February to consider the best way forward. It was also requested that a review of pesticides on Council land took place – if this was applicable, as part of the ‘Inspiring Greener Futures’ priority in the Annual Plan.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

- i) To approve the Annual Plan for 2024/25 financial year for adoption.

REASON

- i) The Annual Plan is an operational plan which identifies projects to be undertaken during a financial year and which gives effect to the themes contained in the Council Plan 2023-2027 which constitutes the Council’s Policy Framework.

EX/71 CLIMATE ACTION STRATEGY

Councillor Colette Blackburn, Cabinet Member for Climate Action & Nature Recovery introduced the report on the adoption of the District wide Climate Action Strategy.

Members were reminded that in June 2023, Council declared a climate and ecological emergency and this strategy would be a key factor in tackling this.

Consultation and community engagement had taken place throughout summer 2023 on the draft Strategy which had confirmed that it reflected the priorities of the local community, although some changes were identified.

Changes raised by both residents and businesses had been incorporated. The most significant amendment was raising the prominence of water related issues. A communications plan would also be developed during 2024 to support residents and businesses on making changes to tackle climate change and barriers that may be encountered.

Ongoing monitoring of the strategy will take place via an online platform 'One Planet' and progress updates would be provided to Cabinet annually and the Strategy will be reviewed biennially.

Councillor Jay Mercer, Cabinet Member for Environmental Health, Recycling & Waste spoke of his support for the Climate Action Strategy and importance of engaging with whole communities for longer term success.

Members were keen to acknowledge that it was important to all take ownership of the Strategy and future Member briefings would be beneficial. Work is currently progressing on the One Planet online platform and it was envisaged that Members would gain access to this as soon as possible. It was felt that yearly reviews of the Strategy could be beneficial however the Cabinet Member advised that regular reports would be provided to Councillors, this could be reviewed in the future but currently the full review would remain as biennially.

RESOLVED

- i) That the Climate Action Strategy for the Horsham District as contained in the appendix attached to this report be adopted.
- ii) That authority be delegated to the Director of Communities in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery to update the Climate Action Strategy and make amendments provided that any such changes do not undermine the Climate Action Strategy's core values.
- iii) That the actions that have been undertaken be noted, and that the actions that will be required to be undertaken by the Council, as contained in, and in order to give effect to the Climate Action Strategy be approved.

REASON

- i) The Climate Action Strategy provides the framework for collective action across the district on climate change, demonstrating Council leadership on this important issue, as well as what actions partnerships and the wider community should be taking to reduce carbon emissions and to adapt to the changing climate.
- ii) This will allow minor amendments to be made to the Strategy as opportunities arise and for the actions in the Strategy to be implemented.

EX/72 **CAPITOL THEATRE REFURBISHMENT**

Councillor Jon Olson, Cabinet Member for Leisure, Culture and Green Spaces introduced the report on and summarised the reasons for refurbishment of the Capitol. The key reasons were to enable the multi-arts community venue to remain a modern, thriving cultural venue but also an energy efficient building which would contribute towards the Council's carbon reduction plans required to reach its net zero target.

The importance of the Capitol for the community was highlighted. The last refurbishment was in 2003 and many of the fixtures and fittings are reaching end of life expectancy. It is also the Council's highest emitter of Co2 and investment will look to reduce this considerably. The investment would also improve the front of house space, and increase seating capacity which would attract better theatre touring products on offer.

The investment would also look to improve front of house space, more effective use of existing foyers and improve commercial food and beverage offering.

Investment in the Capitol would reduce the annual subsidy for running the theatre but spending £10.7m from reserves will have a larger negative impact on the council's revenue from the reduction in investment income based on forecast interest rates.

Councillor Colette Blackburn, Cabinet Member for Climate Action & Nature Recovery was supportive of the plans and welcomed improvements to reduce the carbon emissions.

In response to concerns raised regarding the high cost of refurbishing the Capitol as a non-statutory expenditure, Councillor Martin Boffey, Leader of the Council stated that it was an excellent capital investment and refurbishment was necessary after the last refurbishment in 2003.

In response to comments regarding those residents living south of the district not benefiting from the theatre, the Cabinet Member advised that visitor numbers had been evaluated from around the district. A number of residents living in the south were also visiting and enjoying the Capitol. He concluded the majority of residents were in favour of the refurbishment and recognise the importance of the Capitol's cultural offer to the wider Horsham District.

RESOLVED

- i) That subject to the budget allocation, that the refurbishment of the Capitol be approved (option 4, as detailed in paragraph 3.16 of this report).
- ii) That the award of contracts (required to facilitate the recommended refurbishment) to the winning suppliers (i) named on existing framework

agreements, and/or (ii) following a procurement exercise, and/or following the grant of a procurement exemption; be approved; and

- iii) That authority be delegated to either the Director of Communities or Head of Legal and Democratic Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Culture and Green Spaces, to finalise the terms of and enter into the required contracts above-noted.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

- i) To approve a capital budget of £10.7m for the refurbishment works, profiled across the capital programmes budget for the following financial years: 2023/24, 2024/25, 2025/26 and 2026/27;

REASON

- i) To reduce carbon emissions at The Capitol, meeting the Council's aspiration for direct emissions to become net zero by 2030.
- ii) To ensure The Capitol remains up to date and able to provide and attract a mix of high-quality performances and entice new productions by replacing end-of-life fixtures and fittings, increasing and improving seating in the auditorium and cinemas and enhancing the overall customer experience and offer.
- iii) To reduce ongoing revenue costs of running The Capitol.
- iv) To maintain and improve the cultural and social benefits of continuing to provide a multi arts community venue.
- v) The Full Council must approve the capital budget. vi) To facilitate the refurbishment works being undertaken and to delegate authority to award associated contracts for this purpose.

EX/73 2024/25 BUDGET AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY TO 2027/28

Councillor Mark Baynham, Cabinet Member for Finance & Resource introduced the report on the Council's Budget 2024/25 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy to 2027/28.

He summarised the key points which were:

- that net expenditure has increased by £0.8m from 2023/24 which was primarily a result of inflation.
- £14.5m budget will be set.
- Basic Council Tax for most residents will rise by 2%.
- Council tax base band D will be £170.28 which is an increase of £3.34
- £10.5m Capital Programme to support infrastructure in the environment

He highlighted that there was significant uncertainty in the medium term, with the risk of a gap growing and likely deficit by the end of the decade which would be carefully managed. He felt the budget was prudent but realistic and designed to support the ambitious Annual Plan. He mentioned that part of the Annual Plan was to ensure the Council set a balanced budget.

Final settlement information was likely to be available from Government in February.

In response to concerns raised regarding budgetary provision to support Parishes with Youth Services, Councillor Sam Raby, Cabinet Member for Housing, Communities and Wellbeing advised that plans were in place to review Youth Services this year.

In response to the issue raised regarding a 9% increase in rural car parking charges affecting already struggling businesses in the district, the Cabinet Member stated that charges were still comparably lower than other authorities and that the increase would support scheduled car park improvements.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

- i) That the level of Council Tax for 2024/25 increases from £166.94 by £3.34 (2%) to £170.28 at Band D.
- ii) That the net revenue budget set out in Appendix A for 2024/25 of £14.538m is approved.
- iii) That £0.6m of the £3.55m Funding Guarantee grant received in 2024/25 is used in Revenue to balance the budget, £0.55m to be used to fund up to £195 for working age and pension age claimants on Council Tax Support, with the remainder earmarked against potential overspend in 2024/25 and as a reserve to help resolve future budget deficits in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.
- iv) That Special Expenses of £456,865 set out in Appendix C and a Band D charge of £37.21 are agreed in respect of the unparished area for 2024/25
- v) That the capital programme for 2024/25 set out in Appendix D be approved and that the indicative capital budgets in the programme for future years be noted.
- vi) That the projected future budgets on the revenue account in 2025/26 to 2029/30 are noted and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy continues to be reviewed and refined to ensure that decisions are taken in 2024 to set a balanced budget in 2025/26.

- vii) That the Minimum Revenue Provision Statement set out in Appendix E is approved.
- viii) That the Capital Strategy, Treasury Strategy, Investment Strategy and prudential indicators and limits for 2024/25 to 2027/28 set out in Appendix F are approved.
- ix) To note the statement on the robustness of the level of reserves in Appendix G.
- x) That the increases to fees and charges set out in Appendices H to H (iii) are approved.

REASON

To meet the Council's statutory requirement to approve the budget and the prudential indicators before the start of a new financial year.

EX/74 **COUNCIL TAX PREMIUMS**

Councillor Mark Baynham, Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources stated that following Government's Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act coming into force in October 2023, Councils can now charge higher Council Tax on properties that are defined as long-term empty homes and properties that are only occupied occasionally (second homes). It was proposed that the premiums would be introduced from 1 April 2024 for empty properties and 1 April 2025 for second homes.

This additional charge was intended to encourage owners to bring properties back into use and also support the supply of available homes to rent or buy in Horsham.

Councillor Sam Raby, Cabinet Member for Housing, Communities & Wellbeing spoke in support, as the initiative would help reduce the Council's housing waiting list.

Councillor Jon Olson, Cabinet Member for Leisure, Culture & Green Spaces stated that this was a positive recommendation as empty homes are often a contentious issue for residents. He was pleased however that some discretion remained for particular circumstances.

Following additional questions, the Cabinet Member advised that further information and guidance is awaited from Government.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

- i) From 1 April 2024, to approve that empty and substantially unfurnished properties be charged an additional 100% council tax premium (twice the current Council Tax amount) after one year.
- ii) From 1 April 2025, to approve that dwellings with no resident and which are substantially furnished are charged 100% council tax premium (twice the current Council Tax amount).

REASON

i) & ii) To reduce the number of empty homes within the District and to encourage the use of premises as main residences by local residents rather than second homes.

EX/75 **2024/25 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME AND HOUSING BENEFIT MODIFIED SCHEME**

Councillor Mark Baynham, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources stated that the Council Tax Reduction and Housing Benefit Modified Schemes provided by the Council would remain unchanged for 2024/25, other than those prescribed by Government amendments.

Following the publication of the Cabinet report, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) advised the Council that new legislation would come into effect from 9 February which had implications for the proposed Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

Amended regulations require pension age Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) schemes are updated in line with changes in the wider benefits system. The annual update also provided an opportunity to ensure that residency requirements for accessing both pension age and working age LCTS remain consistent with the UK's immigration policy.

The current Council Tax Reduction Scheme provided by Horsham District Council provides financial support for people on low incomes to help them afford their Council Tax payments. The Council also has a local modified scheme which disregards war disablement pension and war widow pension from the housing benefit calculation.

Both schemes are reviewed annually and review work showed that both schemes currently remain affordable for the Council and provide a good level of support to less well-off residents.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

- i) That there are no changes in the Council Tax Reduction scheme for 2024/25, other than the updates prescribed by Government as detailed in paragraph 1 of this paper and the Appendix to this supplementary paper.
- ii) The adoption of, with no changes to, the existing modified schemes under Housing Benefit subsidy for 2024/25 whereby the Council locally and voluntarily disregards war disablement pensions or war widow pensions in the housing benefit calculation.

REASON

i) & ii) The Council Tax Reduction and locally modified schemes are annual schemes requiring an annual review and approval, even when no changes to the scheme are being proposed. Review work on the scheme showed the schemes remains affordable for Horsham District Council and provides a good level of support to our less well-off residents.

EX/76 2024/25 BUSINESS RATES DISCRETIONARY CHARITABLE RELIEF

Councillor Mark Baynham, Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources introduced the report which recommended no change to the existing scheme.

The Council provides Business rates discretionary rate relief to charities and not for profit organisations under s47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, and the current scheme grants charitable relief up to 100% for eligible residents.

The scheme is reviewed annually, and it was proposed that the current scheme would remain unchanged for 2024/25.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

- i) To refer the Discretionary rate relief scheme for 2024/25 (“the Scheme”) as detailed in the appendix to full Council for approval and adoption; and
- ii) To delegate the award of discretionary relief, in accordance with the Scheme, to the Director of Resources in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources.

REASON

- i) Discretionary rate relief is an annual scheme and therefore require an annual review and approval.

EX/77 **ELECTORAL PRINT TENDER**

Councillor Mark Baynham, Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources stated that following a robust tendering process, authority was sought to award a contract for the design, supply, print and postage of all relevant material in relations to elections and electoral registration.

The Council received four bids and the winning supplier provided the most competitive price and quality. The contract would commence on 1 April 2024, for a 6-year term. It was noted that the cost of elections conducted on behalf of other authorities will be reimbursed.

RESOLVED

- i) That the award approve of the contract for electoral print to the highest scoring bidder, on the terms recommended, as detailed in Appendix 1 (exempt); be approved.
- ii) That authority be delegated to the Chief Executive/Electoral Registration Officer/Returning Officer, in consultation with the Head of Legal & Democratic Services to finalise terms and conditions of and enter into a contract with the highest scoring bidder for the electoral print contract

REASON

- i) The Council must competitively tender if the value of the goods or services exceeds the current threshold of £213,477 (inclusive of VAT). The current annual spend on electoral print exceeds this threshold.
- ii) To obtain authority to award the subject contract to the winning bidder pursuant to a legally compliant procurement process.

EX/78 **WEST CHILTINGTON LANES CONSERVATION AREA**

Councillor John Milne, Cabinet Member for Planning and Infrastructure introduced the report on West Chiltington Lanes Conservation Area (previously known as Wells Cottages). He explained that there was a legislative duty on local planning authorities to review whether any parts or further parts of their area should be designated as conservation areas.

In September 2022 Cabinet agreed to undertake public consultation regarding a new proposed designated conservation area in West Chiltington which encompassed a number of buildings collectively know as Wells Cottages.

The public consultation exercise was held in January 2023 and the report to Cabinet set out key issues raised by respondents.

The Cabinet were recommended to designate the Wells Cottage area of West Chiltington as a designated conservation area to be called the West Chiltington Lanes Conservation Area to provide a wider sense of place and adopt a final version of the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan.

Councillor Ruth Fletcher, Cabinet Member for Local Economy & Place was pleased to support the proposal and acknowledged the area has a very special character which needed to be preserved.

Other Members supported the proposal, thanked Cabinet and Officers for the hard work undertaken and supported the change in the name of the area.

The Cabinet Member advised that discussions and communication was on-going with the Parish Council and residents.

RESOLVED

- i) That the designation of the West Chiltington Lanes be approved, (as shown on the Conservation Area designation map (Map 1) included in this report) as a conservation area.
- ii) That the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan for the West Chiltington Lanes be approved and adopted as set out in Appendix 2.
- iii) That authority be delegated to the Cabinet Member for Planning & Infrastructure to approve minor changes prior to final publication of the Conservation Area designation map and Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan.

REASON

- i) To formally designate the new conservation area boundary.
- ii) To provide updated conservation area guidance for residents, occupiers, developers and Members in determining applications.
- iii) To give the Cabinet Member for Planning and Infrastructure delegated authority to approve minor changes to the Conservation Area designation map and Conservation Appraisal and Management Plan, without the need for it to be referred back to Cabinet.

EX/79 **OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

There were no matters currently outstanding for consideration.

EX/80 **FORWARD PLAN**

The Forward Plan was noted.

EX/81 **TO CONSIDER MATTERS OF SPECIAL URGENCY**

There were no matters of special urgency to be considered.

The meeting closed at 7.17 pm having commenced at 5.30 pm

CHAIRMAN