

CABINET MEETING

Meeting: 30 January 2024

At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Mark Hunter (Leader of the Council) (Chair) in the chair; Councillor Mark Roberts (Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Climate Change & Environment) (Vice-Chair); Councillors Grace Baynham (Cabinet Member for Parks, Highways & Transport Services), Keith Holloway (Cabinet Member for Health & Adult Social Care), Jilly Julian (Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources), Colin MacAlister (Cabinet Member for Economy, Regeneration & Housing), Wendy Meikle (Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education) and Frankie Singleton (Cabinet Member for Communities, Culture & Sport).

Stockport Local Plan

The Chair addressed the meeting to provide an update in relation to the Stockport Local Plan. The Chair stated that when the decision was taken to pause the preparation of the plan in December 2022, that was as a result of the level of uncertainty regarding the direction of national planning policy.

It was commented that at that time, there was much discussion about whether or not central government was going to have a rethink on this, most specifically in relation to how local plans should address matters of housing and green belt, which was of great importance to Stockport. Upon the publication of the revised NPPF on 19 December, officers immediately mobilised to digest those changes and consider the implications for the progression of the Local Plan.

It was stated that in the days in the run-up to Christmas, and those immediately after the Council engaged with King's Counsel, as had been done throughout this process, and also met with representatives of the Department of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, as well as discussing matters at group leader level. In all of those discussions, a commitment was reaffirmed to move forward as quickly as possible to ensure that the Council had an up-to-date local plan in place.

The single biggest change was that the Council no longer had to consult on the basis of building on green belt sites which had been a matter of some controversy in Stockport going back to Greater Manchester Spatial Framework (GMSF) and indeed that was the reason that Stockport had opted out of GMSF because it was perceived as a threat to the green belt in Stockport.

It was further noted that the pause on the preparation of the Local Plan had saved an estimated £200,000 which was the forecast cost of a consultation which it was now known would have been redundant because of changes in the government's position.

The Council remained committed to progression of the Local Plan and intended to proceed to a consultation on a draft plan in early summer of this year. This would then be followed by a second consultation, as required by law in early 2025, before submission of the plan

to the government for examination in the spring of 2025. The Council would shortly publish its revised local development scheme, which would set out the timeline for progression of the Local Plan in more detail. Once that had been published, officers would continue to work on the plan, which would be shared with all Councillors via the cross-party Development Plan Working Party, the first meeting, of which was scheduled for 12 February 2024.

A commitment was made to provide further updates as progress was made towards finalisation of the draft plan.

1. MINUTES

The Minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 5 December 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors and officers were invited to declare any interests they had in any of the items on the agenda for the meeting.

No declarations of interest were made.

3. URGENT DECISIONS

No urgent decisions were reported.

4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Members of the public were invited to submit questions to the Cabinet on any matters within its powers and duties, subject to the exclusions set out in the Code of Practice.

Two public questions were submitted where the questioner was not in attendance at the meeting and in accordance with the Code of Practice, the Chief Executive was requested to respond to the questioners in writing.

5. FINAL SCRUTINY REVIEW REPORT - FINANCIAL IMPACT OF BUS FRANCHISING (NON-KEY)

Councillor Jeremy Meal attended the meeting to present the final report of the Scrutiny Review 'Financial Impact of Bus Franchising' (copies of which had been circulated) and to answer questions from the Cabinet.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- It was noted that the reduction in fares for bus services was currently underpinned by non-recurrent funding and that patronage had only recovered to around 85% of pre-covid levels.
- There would be a further review of the potential of 'over-bussing' of some services following the introduction of further tranches of bus franchising.

- It needed to be considered that diverting funding from the Bus Service Improvement Plan to fund fare reductions was not allowing those funds to be used to put money into new services.

RESOLVED - (1) That the Deputy Chief Executive be requested to prepare a response to the Financial Impact of Bus Franchising scrutiny review and the recommendations contained therein for consideration by the Cabinet at a future meeting.

(2) That the gratitude of the Cabinet be recorded for the excellent work undertaken by the Scrutiny Review Panel 'Financial Impact of Bus Franchising' and others involved in the Review.

6. SCHOOLS FUNDING SETTLEMENT AND LOCAL FUNDING FORMULA 2024/25 (CF&E5)

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education (Councillor Wendy Meikle) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update on the key announcements made by the Department for Education (DfE) on the education funding settlement for 2024/25.

RESOLVED - (1) That the details of the Education Funding Settlement for 2024/25 be noted.

(2) That approval be given to the construction of the early year's budget as per section 3.1 to 3.2 and the updated 2024/25 local funding formula for schools as outlined in sections 3.3. to 3.5 and detailed in the table(s) in section 6.2 which will form the basis of the calculation of school budgets and be notified to the DfE in accordance with statutory requirements.

7. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET AND RENT LEVELS FOR 2024/25 (ER&H6)

The Cabinet Member for Economy, Regeneration & Housing (Councillor Colin MacAlister) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) detailing a proposed HRA budget for 2024/25, including the level of rent and service charges.

RESOLVED - That the Council Meeting be recommended to give approval to:-

- (1) An increase of 7.7% for social and affordable rent.
- (2) An increase of 9.4% for rent of shared ownership properties.
- (3) Service charge increases as outlined the updated section 3 in this addendum, with authority delegated to the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economy, Regeneration & Housing, to agree a lower increase should this be necessary.
- (4) The Housing Revenue Account Budget for 2024/25 as set out in Appendix 1.

8. 2023/24 QUARTER 2+ BUDGET MONITORING UPDATE (NON-KEY)

The Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources (Councillor Jilly Julian) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) detailing the Quarter 2+ revenue forecast outturn including an update on the Dedicated Schools Grant, Housing Revenue Account, Collection Fund, updates to the Capital Programme and budget virements to be incorporated into the 2024/25 budget setting process.

It was noted that there had been a reduction in the in-year deficit and the work of officers to achieve this was welcomed.

RESOLVED - (1) That approval be given to the virements to the Revenue Budget as detailed in the report.

(2) That the cash limit and non-cash limit forecast outturn positions for 2023/24 as at Quarter 2+ be noted.

(3) That the DSG, HRA and Collection Fund forecast outturn positions for 2023/24 as at Quarter 2+ be noted.

(4) That the update on Reserves be noted.

(5) That the update on the council's medium term financial position be noted.

(6) That the forecast position for the 2023/24 Capital Programme be noted.

(7) That the changes to the Capital Programme and re-phasing of schemes during Quarter 2+ be noted.

(8) That the 2023/24 Capital Programme Prudential Indicators be noted.

9. DRAFT COUNCIL PLAN 2024-2027 (GENERAL EXCEPTION)

The Leader of the Council (Councillor Mark Hunter) submitted the Council Plan 2024-2027 (copies of which had been circulated) that accompanied the budget and set a high-level framework for decision making throughout the financial year.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- The current iteration of the Council Plan worked across a longer timescale to match of the horizon of the Medium Term Financial Plan.
- The Council continued to provide vital services to residents when they needed it most.
- Members expressed their thanks to officers for their hard work in producing the plan document.

RESOLVED - That the Council Meeting be recommended to give approval to the draft Council Plan 2024-2027.

10. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN UPDATE

(i) Part A: Cabinet Response: Responding to Medium Term Financial Plan (F&R21)

The Leader of the Council (Councillor Mark Hunter) and the Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources (Councillor Jilly Julian) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update on the strategic approach in responding to the review of the Medium Term Financial Plan and including the budget proposals being considered by the cabinet to address the financial challenges and balance the rising cost of delivering services to the people in Stockport's communities who needed it most.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- Local government continued to face sustained financial pressure, however the Council remained in a robust position.
- It was stated that the Council would continue to live within its means, but it did not remain immune to the challenges imposed by the cost-of-living crisis and the ongoing expectation that local authorities must continue to do more with less resources.
- There needed to be a fundamental reset of local government financing.
- There has been an increase in the response rate to the consultation on the budget proposals, albeit on a low base rate, but the commentary from these responses showed broad support and an understanding of the position the Council found itself in.

RESOLVED - (1) That the further development of proposals and the feedback received from the engagement and consultation to date be noted.

(2) That approval be given to the proposals for inclusion within the budget papers for Budget Council.

(i) Part B: Medium Term Financial Plan – Financial Landscape and Forecasts 2024/25 to 2026/27 (F&R22)

The Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources (Councillor Jilly Julian) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update on the Council's 2024/25 to 2027/28 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) forecasts and assumptions as part of setting a robust and resilient budget and financial plan to meet the unprecedented uncertainty, volatility, and risk within the financial landscape.

RESOLVED - (1) That the details of the 2024/25 Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement be noted.

(2) That the financial forecasts and assumptions for 2024/25 to 2027/28 be noted.

(3) That approval be given to the indicative budget adjustments since the MTFP Update presented to the Cabinet meeting on 19 September resulting in savings requirement of £5.655m in 2024/25.

(4) That approval be given to the allocation of £16.543m of the corporate contingency budgets to Cash Limit budgets as part of the budget setting process.

Cabinet Meeting - 30 January 2024

(5) That the Section 151 Officer's recommendation to hold the Council's General Fund Balance at its current level £15.183m in 2024/25 aligned to his risk assessment of the budget and the adequacy of reserves and balances to support the Council's 2024/25 Budget, be noted.

(6) That approval be given to take the necessary steps to propose a final balanced 2024/25 Budget including any proposed Council Tax increase to be recommended for approval at the Council meeting on 22 February 2024.

(i) Part C: 2024/25 Cabinet Revenue Budget (F&R27)

The Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources (Councillor Jilly Julian) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) presenting the 2024/25 Revenue Budget outlining the Council's strategic approach to responding to the significant medium-term financial pressures whilst ensuring a sustainable and stable financial position to deliver our overarching priorities and desired outcomes.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- There was no choice but to increase Council Tax to address the funding gap.
- The expectation from government was that local authorities would raise Council Tax by the maximum amount permitted.
- There remained the ability to make some positive decisions as part of the budget that had been focussed on making best use of one-off monies.

RESOLVED – That the Council Meeting be recommended to:-

(1) Approve the Budget for 2024/25 described in the report and set out in Appendix 2 and 3.

(2) Approve the cabinet's use of any available one-off resources to support the positive investment detailed in Section 6 subject to the council's 2023/24 outturn position and the 2024/25 Final Settlement.

(3) Note the risk assessment of the 2024/25 Budget at Appendix 5 and the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer on the adequacy of proposed financial reserves and robustness of the estimates also included at Appendix 5.

(4) Approve the required Council General Fund Balance to reflect the Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer's assessment of risks.

(5) Note, comment upon, and approve the financial forecasts and assumptions for 2024/25 to 2027/28 at Appendix 6, and the key issues to be addressed in formulating a response to the future financial challenges facing the council.

(6) Pass the appropriate Council Tax resolutions which produce a Council Tax increase of 4.99% in 2024/25 (2.99% General increase, 2% Adult Social Care Precept increase) as illustrated in Appendix 7.

11. 2024/25 CAPITAL STRATEGY AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME (F&R29)

The Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources (Councillor Jilly Julian) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) detailing the draft 2024/25 Capital Strategy and Capital Programme, developed in accordance with the CIPFA Prudential Code, which provided a framework for the Council's capital investment plans.

RESOLVED – That the Council Meeting be recommended to give approval to:-

- (1) The Capital Strategy at Appendix one.
- (2) The 2024/25 to 2026/27 Capital Programme and the funding arrangements as described in the report and set out at Appendix two.
- (3) The prudential indicators set out in Appendix three.

12. 2024/25 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY, ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY AND MINIMUM REVENUE PROVISION POLICY (F&R28)

The Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources (Councillor Jilly Julian) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) detailing the 2024/25 Treasury Management Strategy and Annual Investment Strategy Mid-Year Review Policy.

RESOLVED – That the Council Meeting be recommended to approve:-

- (1) The Minimum Revenue Provision Policy for 2024/25.
- (2) The Capital Expenditure Forecasts and Capital Financing Requirement projections.
- (3) The Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25.
- (4) The Treasury and Prudential Indicators and Limits 2024/25-2026/27.
- (5) The Annual Investment Strategy (AIS) 2024/25.

General Items

13. STOCKPORT COUNTY FOOTBALL CLUB – MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (NON-KEY)

The Cabinet Member for Economy, Regeneration & Climate Change (Councillor Colin MacAlister) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) detailing a proposed Memorandum of Understanding between the council and Stockport County Football Club.

RESOLVED - (1) That approval be given to the terms of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Council and Stockport County Football Club to set out how we will work together to deliver our shared objectives; and

(2) That authority be delegated to the Director of Development and Regeneration (Place), in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources and Economy, Regeneration and Housing, to enter into the Memorandum of Understanding; and

(3) That authority be delegated to the Assistant Director (Legal & Democratic Governance), to take such steps and complete such agreements as are necessary to implement the resolutions recommended in this report and any decisions properly made under authority delegated by these resolutions.

14. ONE STOCKPORT SAFETY PARTNERSHIP SERIOUS VIOLENCE STRATEGIC NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND PLAN 2024 (NON-KEY)

The Cabinet Member for Communities, Culture and Sport (Councillor Frankie Singleton) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) detailing the draft One Stockport Safety Partnership Serious Violence Strategic Needs Assessment and Plan 2024.

RESOLVED - (1) That the proposed additional actions for 2024/25 outlined in the tables in 4.1 in the report be noted.

(2) That the One Stockport Safety Partnership's intention to use these proposed additional actions as the basis for its Serious Violence Plan for 2024/25 be noted.

(3) That the One Stockport Safety Partnership's proposed approach to serious violence assessment and planning beyond 2024/25, set out in 2.5 above be noted – that is, to incorporate work relating to serious violence as a specific strand within its overall assessment and planning arrangements.

15. USE OF SURVEILLANCE POWERS - REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT 2000 AND THE INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT 2016 (NON-KEY)

The Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources (Councillor Jilly Julian) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) setting out the Council's Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) Policy which must be considered by elected members annually to set the Policy and to ensure that if the Council is using its RIPA powers, it is doing so appropriately and complying with its own Code of Practice when carrying out covert surveillance.

RESOLVED - (1) That it be noted that the Council has not exercised its RIPA powers since the last report.

(2) That approval be given to the RIPA Policy/ Code of Practice for the forthcoming year.

16. GMCA DECISIONS

The Leader of the Council (Councillor Mark Hunter) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) setting out decisions taken by the GMCA at its meetings on 24 November and 15 December 2023.

RESOLVED – That the decisions be noted.

17. TO CONSIDER RECOMMENDATIONS OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

There were no recommendations to consider.

The meeting closed at 7.17 pm