



Public Document Pack

James Ellis
Head of Legal and Democratic Services

MEETING : EXECUTIVE
VENUE : COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD
DATE : TUESDAY 26 MARCH 2024
TIME : 7.00 PM

MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE

Councillor Ben Crystall	- Leader of the Council
Councillor Mione H Goldspink	- Executive Member for Neighbourhoods
Councillor Carl Brittain	- Executive Member for Financial Sustainability
Councillor Alex Daar	- Executive Member for Communities
Councillor Joseph Dumont	- Executive Member for Corporate Services
Councillor Vicky Glover-Ward	- Executive Member for Planning and Growth
Councillor Sarah Hopewell	- Executive Member for Wellbeing
Councillor Tim Hoskin	- Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability
Councillor Chris Wilson	- Executive Member for Resident Engagement

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AGENDA

1. Apologies

To receive any apologies for absence.

2. Leader's Announcements

To receive any announcements from the Leader of the Council.

3. Minutes - 13 February 2024 (Pages 5 - 23)

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 13 February 2024.

4. Declarations of Interest

To receive any Member(s) declaration(s) of interest.

5. Financial Management 2023/24 - Q3 Forecast to year end (Pages 24 - 31)

6. Ward Freman Pool Update (Pages 32 - 36)

7. Urgent Business

To consider such other business as, in the opinion of the Chairman of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration and is not likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information.

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
EXECUTIVE HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
TUESDAY 13 FEBRUARY 2024, AT 7.00
PM

PRESENT: Councillor B Crystall (Leader)
Councillors C Brittain, A Daar, J Dumont,
V Glover-Ward, M Goldspink, S Hopewell
and T Hoskin.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors P Boylan, E Buckmaster, S Bull,
B Deering, Y Estop, D Jacobs, G McAndrew,
C Redfern, D Willcocks and G Williamson.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| Richard Cassidy | - Chief Executive |
| James Ellis | - Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer |
| Jonathan Geall | - Head of Housing and Health |
| Steven Linnett | - Head of Strategic Finance and Property |
| Riccardo Maraia | - Community Wellbeing Support Officer |
| Katie Mogan | - Democratic Services Manager |
| Kevin Steptoe | - East Herts Garden Town Lead Officer |
| Paul Thomas-Jones | - Service Manager – Environmental Health |

330 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Wilson.

331 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader welcomed everyone to the meeting and reminded them to use the microphones to be heard on the webcast.

332 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

333 MINUTES - 21 DECEMBER 2023

Councillor Goldspink proposed, and Councillor Dumont seconded a motion that the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 December 2023 be approved as a correct record and be signed by the Leader. On being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 December 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

334 BUDGET 2024/25 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented the Budget 2024/25 and the Medium Term Financial Plan and ran through the highlights of the report. He said that the budget picture had improved slightly since the report was presented to the Audit and Governance Committee on 30 January 2024 due to the receipt of additional government funding of £200,000 which had been added to the council's reserves.

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability said that £1.2 million of savings had to be found for 2024/25 due to the impact of inflation. The funding available to the council had increased with £1.5 million New Burdens Funding for the food waste collections and a 7.2% increase in the New Homes

Bonus. He said that this extra funding would be used to cover the debt servicing costs and allow the administration to set a balanced budget for 2024/25.

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability said that the 2025/26 budget would be very difficult, hence the need to increase reserves this year where possible. He said that there would be pressures of approximately £5million and there was uncertainty in the projections at this time. He said however, the council by then would be benefitting from the income of Hertford Theatre. Due to the ongoing pressures, it was recommended that Council Tax be increased by 2.99% for 2024/25.

Councillor Brittain proposed that the recommendations in the report be supported. Councillor Hoskin seconded the proposal.

Councillor McAndrew referred to planning enforcement and said that it played a vital role in the district with the large developments across East Herts. He felt this service should not be cut and needed enforcement to encourage people to operate within the rules. He also asked the Executive Member to clarify the position around Blue Badge parking.

Councillor Brittain said that the items Councillor McAndrew were referring to were savings proposals that had been rejected by the Executive. He said the council would not be pursuing these savings in the 2024/25 financial year.

Councillor McAndrew referred to civil parking enforcement and asked the Executive Member to expand on the £4 million deficit and the plans to recover costs.

Councillor Brittain said the deficit had built up over time for on street parking and said the plans were for the council to gain more revenue from parking and said they were entitled to do that.

Councillor McAndrew then referred to the plans for the Executive to introduce a new parking policy to prevent

congestion and penalise heavy pollutant vehicles.

Councillor Hoskin said in principle, heavy polluting vehicles should be penalised and said this would be part of the public consultation over the next 12 months.

Councillor Jacobs referred to page 60 of the report and the proposed list of asset disposals. He asked for an update on the progress of this following the discussions held at the Member Asset Reference Group.

Councillor Brittain said he had fed the discussions back to the Head of Strategic Finance and Property and said it was his understanding that it was unlikely that the Tesco car park would now be sold. He said the rest were still ongoing and did not have a specific update.

Councillor Jacobs asked if that also applied to the Waitrose car park.

Councillor Brittain said that car park would be looked at in the context of the Old River Lane project.

The motion to support the recommendations having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – (A) To recommend to Council the approval of the budget and Medium Term Financial Plan at Appendix A, Capital Programme at Appendix B, savings programme at Appendix C and increase Council Tax by 2.99%, which will result in a Band D Council Tax increase of £5.65 to £195.52 per year;

(B) Note the proposed savings requirements, that will need to be delivered to balance the budget in the medium term, the delivery profile of which without any smoothing is as follows: 2025/26 £1.441 million 2026/27 £0 2027/28 £0.526 million;

(C) Note the amended Capital Programme which

pauses the Old River Lane Arts Centre, reducing revenue costs of Minimum Revenue Provision and interest by £1,514k per annum on current interest rates, a total saving of £7.442 million of over the MTFP period. Comment on the capital expenditure priorities:

- i. essential property maintenance to meet statutory requirements or to prevent loss or damage to neighbouring properties;
- ii. investment in ICT to continue but that the budget carry forward that has not been used for two years is deleted;
- iii. invest to save initiatives where the business case indicates that the cost of the investment will be recovered in under 10 years;
- iv. to allow pausing of construction of the Arts Centre at Old River Lane until such time as debt levels have fallen sufficiently to make the revenue impacts of new borrowing affordable while at the same time undertaking landscaping works on the arts centre site so that it is an attractive site rather than an undeveloped area blighting the retail and commercial units in the City Heart scheme;
- v. provide up to £170k for essential maintenance works for the URC Church Hall in Bishop's Stortford;
- vi. completion of Hertford Theatre, at as low a cost as possible, so that the entire venue is opened and run on a strictly commercial basis to maximise income; and
- vi. investment in depot works and waste containers for the new waste and recycling contract.

(D) Note the implication of the Autumn Statement that a further round of austerity is proposed by the Government and that the two major parties seem intent

on keeping to the announced expenditure totals which will severely reduce government funding and inevitably require service cuts.

335 CAPITAL STRATEGY, MINIMUM REVENUE PROVISION
POLICY AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY
2024/25

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability presented the report and said the capital strategy showed the financial position of the council and the costs of servicing existing debts. He said the position of the council meant that it could not afford any new major projects and the Old River Lane project would be paused until the costs of borrowing had been reduced.

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability said that capital assets were being reviewed to see if any could be sold to reduce debt and a cross party group had been set up to discuss the options. The group had agreed that assets would only be sold where interests of the community were protected and if there was a clear financial advantage to the council of doing so.

Councillor Brittain proposed that the recommendations in the report be supported. Councillor Glover-Ward seconded the proposal.

Councillor Estop referred to paragraph 2.4 about the pausing of the arts centre at Old River Lane. She asked the Executive to consider keeping their options open and talk about the site as development land instead of specifically an arts centre.

The motion to support the recommendation having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – To recommend to Council the approval of the Capital Strategy, Minimum Revenue Provision Policy and the Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25 including the Prudential Indicators contained within the

reports.

336 HARLOW AND GILSTON GARDEN TOWN:
INFRASTRUCTURE DELIVERY PLAN REVIEW

The Leader of the Council presented the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Infrastructure Delivery Plan Review report. He said that the purpose of the report was to lay out what infrastructure was required and where and when it was needed to achieve the targets set out in the District Plan such as the number of houses required, sustainable travel and employment. He said that the delivery plan also provided the scale of infrastructure needed, the phasing of it, the costs, the priorities, who was responsible, who paid and identified funding gaps and how developer contributions were shared.

The Leader of the Council said that the plan needed updating after five years due to new local plans, the approvals of planning applications, changes to developer contributions and changes in costs. He said that the role of the document was to provide an evidence base for masterplanning and to assist planning officers in their future discussions to get the delivery of infrastructure at the right time and place. He said that the plan would be updated every 2-3 years to keep up with changes to needs and costs and it was important to endorse now as infrastructure delivery was a key part of achieving the council's aims.

Councillor Crystall proposed that the recommendations in the report be supported. Councillor Glover-Ward seconded the proposal.

Councillor Dunlop said that there was no mention in the plan about burial grounds. He said that Gilston currently had capacity for 28 burials and 30,000 people would be moving into the area over the next 30 years. He said he wanted to flag that it was missing in the report.

The Garden Town Lead Officer said the plan would be reviewed in the future when the demand started to present itself. He said a greater evidence base was required to be

able to secure infrastructure for burial grounds and said this would start to come forward as the development starts. He said the issue of burial ground would be accommodated by future updates and reassessment of needs.

Councillor Dunlop said he appreciated that the land was there but asked who would pay for it to be turned into burial ground in the future.

The Garden Town Lead Officer said that there would be costs but it was not possible to introduce further requirements into the Gilston Area s.106 agreement (which had established the infrastructure requirements for the Gilston Area) at this stage as the Development Management Committee endorsed the Heads of Terms last year. He said the funding requirements would likely, in part, be covered in the normal way through the management and operation of sites, including fees from burials. He also added that through the stewardship arrangements of the s.106 agreement, there was a requirement for considerable areas of land to be handed over to a stewardship organisation, in good order and suitable for its future intended use. Once emerging, the stewardship organisation may decide to safeguard some of the land for burial purposes.

Councillor Buckmaster said that many residents and members were concerned about the project moving at a slow pace. He asked if the risks had been assessed about late delivery of stages. He also mentioned the phasing of education provision and the need to make sure provision was made on the occupation of the homes and not rely on other schools in the area being available for places.

The Garden Town Lead Officer said that the risks continued to be assessed as the scheme progressed and the detail of the s.106 agreement continued to be worked through. He said that officers continued to work with HCC to ensure that the HIG grant funding (of £172m) remained available to the project given its complex nature. In that respect, officers also worked proactively with Homes England to assess the risks and mitigate them where possible.

Councillor Deering said he was also concerned about the perceived slow progress of the project. He asked what steps were being taken to ensure the project was moving forward as quickly as possible and said that Councillor Dunlop had made a good point about burial ground provision.

Councillor Crystall said that the joint committee had been agreed and would be assessing the risk moving forward.

The Garden Town Lead Officer added that there were a range of risks of both delivering the project quickly and delivering it slowly. He said the plan ensured the process was thorough and secured the right level of infrastructure.

Councillor Estop said she welcomed the delivery plan and said it was important that the Executive committed to it. She referred to land value capture and viability assessments on affordable housing.

The Garden Town Lead Officer said the project had to work within the advice and guidance provided by the government. He said that the officers view was that the project had captured the best compromise between government funding, viability and the delivery of the site.

Councillor Dunlop said he expressed disappointment in the viability assessments and felt that it was an opportunity missed.

Councillor Hoskins said that it was important that the infrastructure was provided for sustainable transport before the homes were occupied to help form and shape behaviours early.

The motion to support the recommendation having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – To recommend to Council the approval of the HGGT IDP 2023 to form part of the evidence base

for the consideration of master plans, pre-application consideration, planning application consideration and in relation to all other relevant development management processes in relation to the Garden Town

337 HARLOW AND GILSTON GARDEN TOWN: STRATEGIC ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK

The Leader of the Council presented the Strategic Economic Framework for the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town which was the roadmap for economic growth over the next 20 years and would sit alongside various economic development strategies in partner authorities. He said that the framework would help get the right mix of jobs and housing.

The Leader of the Council said that the Framework set a target and timeline for the trajectory of employment creation to hit 23,000 jobs created by 2045. He said that the targets in the framework would be reviewed annually and a major review would be undertaken every five years. The framework had been presented to the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Board and was now with the member authorities for approval.

Councillor Crystall proposed that the recommendations in the report be supported. Councillor Glover-Ward seconded the proposal.

Councillor Dunlop said that the data set used for the framework was pre-pandemic and there was now a large increase in home working and therefore fewer transport requirements. He said it would be good to think in the framework about how to encourage more home working and there was an opportunity for it to be updated once post-pandemic data was available.

The Garden Town Lead Officer said that the framework would continue to be reviewed on a regular basis and understood the beneficial impact of home working. He said that the framework was about the initial creation of jobs, some of which would allow people to work from home.

Councillor Brittain said it was a great report but referred to section 6 on page 251 of the report which raised concerns about the current state of the commercial market. He said it was good to set targets but questioned whether there was a Plan B if there was no land available to create employment space.

The Garden Town Lead Officer said that under the District Plan, an economic analysis of wider areas was undertaken which identified land requirements and challenges. He said there were a range of 'easy wins' like the commitment to the delivery of the new hospital in Harlow but the framework set out a range of options and would assess risks and take actions as appropriate.

Councillor Buckmaster said that following the pandemic, there was more home working but also there had been an increase in commercial vehicles as more people shop online so that type of employment needed to be factored in. He said that it went back to the phasing of infrastructure and ensuring it was right to enable economic growth.

Councillor Estop asked if key worker housing would be provided as this went hand in hand with the stated objectives.

The Garden Town Lead Officer said it was not the focus as the framework was about the delivery of growth, but that housing delivery requirements had been assessed in the preparation of the Councils District Plan.

The motion to support the recommendations having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED - That (A) the findings of the HGGT Strategic Economic Framework, as set out in Appendix 1, be endorsed;

(B) subject to all authorities approving the HGGT Strategic Economic Framework, the Framework is supported and agreed and will form the basis of the

approach to economic development in the Garden Town area; and

(C) it delegates to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Executive Member for Planning and Growth, to make any necessary, non-consequential and minor amendments and refer those amendments back to the HGGT Chair and Director.

338 THRIVING TOGETHER 2023 - 2027 - A NEW HEALTH AND WELLBEING PLAN FOR EAST HERTS

The Executive Member for Wellbeing presented the Thriving Together health and wellbeing plan. She said that work had begun on the plan in the previous administration and a public survey had been carried out over the autumn in 2023 which received good feedback that has been incorporated into the plan. She said a focus group was held before Christmas to go through the updated version of the plan and the document was reviewed at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16 January 2024. She said that there should be joint ownership of the plan by residents and councillors.

Councillor Hopewell proposed that the recommendations in the report be supported. Councillor Dumont seconded the proposal.

Councillor Dumont said that wellbeing was about more than just exercise but wanted to highlight the importance of exercise and physical activity. He said that obesity costed the NHS £6.5 billion a year and the council should act as an enabler and facilitated exercise groups and a wider scope of wellbeing activities. He thanked the Executive Member for allowing him to engage with his process.

Councillor Daar said that she was pleased that the administration had decided to protect the funding given to organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and Community Alliance who play an important part in delivering the action plan.

Councillor Buckmaster said he was pleased to see the continuation of this work and said there were other elements to wellbeing such as not being isolated. He said everyone had a role to play in the improvement of health and wellbeing.

Councillor McAndrew said that Bishop's Stortford had a vibrant cycling community which encouraged learning how to ride and promoting women's cycle groups. He said one of the biggest challenges was trying to influence the manufacturers of food to change what they put in what we all consume.

Councillor Crystall said that the Executive Member for Planning and Growth was doing some great work on local markets to make local food and fresh produce more easily accessible.

The motion to support the recommendations having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED - That (A) the comments put forward by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be considered, listed in Appendix A, and endorse the resulting actions proposed by the Executive Member for Wellbeing as also detailed in Appendix A;

(B) the draft Thriving Together health and wellbeing plan for 2024 – 2027 be endorsed, as amended by Recommendation (a), and recommend it to Council for approval

(C) Delegate to the Executive Member for Wellbeing, acting in consultation with the Head of Housing and Health, the authority to (i) determine action plans to deliver the objectives in the Thriving Together health and wellbeing plan, pending its approval by Council, and (ii) authorise periodic progress reports

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods presented the revised East Herts Council Safeguarding Policy and Procedure. She thanked the officers involved for their hard work and Councillor Boylan for his previous work on the policy and his continuing assistance. She said the policy was last reviewed in 2020 and the amended version incorporated many changes which were listed at paragraph 2.11 of the report.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods said that the Independent Chair of the Hertfordshire Safeguarding Board had reviewed the policy and was very complimentary of it. She said that the new policy had an overview section at the beginning which provided clear guidelines to give everybody confidence in dealing with safeguarding matters.

Councillor Goldspink proposed that the recommendations in the report be supported. Councillor Daar seconded the proposal.

Councillor Dumont said that safeguarding happened behind the scenes due to the confidential nature of the work. He wanted to praise the team who dealt with safeguarding as they had always taken his concerns seriously and were always quick to respond.

The motion to support the recommendations having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – That (A) the Head of Housing and Health incorporates any amendments to the Safeguarding Policy suggested by the Executive, acting in consultation with the Lead Member for Neighbourhoods, prior to presentation to Council by the Executive Member for adoption; and

(B) the revised Safeguarding Policy be recommended to Council for adoption.

340 EAST HERTS AIR QUALITY ACTION PLAN

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability presented the final draft version of the Air Quality Action Plan and said it would be submitted to DEFRA for approval if the Executive agreed it. He said that the council were required under legislation to produce an action plan and the plan was designed to be an active and evolving document.

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability said that the Action Plan went out for public consultation from 31 October to 13 December 2023 and received 189 responses. He said the action plan was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January and their comments were provided at Appendix C.

Councillor Hoskin proposed that the recommendations in the report be supported. Councillor Glover-Ward seconded the proposal.

Councillor McAndrew said it was good to see an end result after a long process. He said a lot of time and effort had gone into it from both officers and members. He said the biggest challenge in tackling air pollution was behaviour change and getting individuals to make changes to their daily routines.

Councillor Hoskin said that the council had now installed real time monitors in all three AQMAs and were looking at how to publish that information to the public so they could make better decisions for sustainable travel.

Councillor Estop referred to the proposed actions and acknowledged the LCWIP which would make physical changes to the environment to make walking a more pleasant and safe environment.

The motion to support the recommendations having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that (A) the draft Air Quality Action Plan

found in Appendix A be considered and approved;

- (B) approve that the Executive Member for Sustainability may submit the draft Air Quality Action Plan to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) for their review and approval;
- (C) delegate to the Head of Housing and Health, acting in consultation with the Executive Member for Sustainability, authority to make minor changes to the Air Quality Action Plan if needed following submission to DEFRA for approval, with any changes with a financial implication for the council being brought to the Executive for consideration;
- (D) delegate to the Executive Member for Sustainability authority to adopt the final version of the Air Quality Action Plan on behalf of the council once it has been approved by DEFRA;
- (E) delegate to the Head of Housing and Health, acting in consultation with the Executive Member for Sustainability, authority to add, amend or delete actions from the Air Quality Action Plan over the lifetime of the action plan so as to ensure that it remains current, reflecting the financial viability of projects and evolving best practice

341 STANSTEAD ABBOTTS CAR PARK CHARGES

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability presented the report to reintroduce parking charges in Stanstead Abbots. He said that a commercial employer approached the council in 2014 and offered to pay £7,500 a year to cover the pay and display income but they had now withdrawn their funding leading the council to undertake a review. The council's car parks were operated on a chargeable basis and would ensure optimal use of spaces and encouraging model shift.

Councillor Hoskin proposed that the recommendations in the report be supported. Councillor Goldspink seconded the proposal.

Councillor McAndrew asked if the Executive Member was aware of the unintended consequences of charging for parking as cars would migrate to parking on the side streets.

Councillor Buckmaster said he was also concerned about parking in certain streets and as a county council member, did not want to install double yellow lines to discourage parking when it just moved the problem on. He said he understood why decision was being made but it would have consequences.

Councillor Boylan spoke on behalf of residents as the local ward member. He said Stanstead Abbots was the only village in East Herts that had a council owned car park and questioned if alternative sources of funding had been explored. He said that there were significant disparities in the charges compared with towns in the district and residents did not think they were being treated reasonably.

Councillor Hoskin said that a parking review across the whole district would be undertaken in the summer to look at anomalies across car parks and ensure fairness. He said the parity would be dependent on the public consultation and there was no alternative funding within the council to cover the costs.

Councillor Boylan said he was not suggesting that the funding should come from the council but was asking about alternative commercial funding. He said it seemed strange to start charging a village a higher rate than a town.

Councillor Hoskin reminded Members that the car park had always been charged for and it had been covered by commercial business. He said that parking was something that the Executive were trying to get right and had an opportunity to be able to bring about changes through attitudes.

Councillor Deering asked the Executive Member to confirm if he had explored alternative funding for the car park.

Councillor Hoskin said it had not been considered at this stage.

Councillor Buckmaster said that not all towns were alike and hoped the administration would prove that they were a listening council through the parking consultation.

Councillor Dumont said he was able to vote for this because he felt able to defend his position with his residents. He felt that this was the only viable option at the current time.

Councillor Hopewell said that she felt, as a someone who did not drive, that the car park prices were fairly reasonable and were cheaper than public transport. She said that there would be no incentive for people to walk if free parking was provided and said she felt that the council had a role to play in helping people become active.

Councillor Dumont thanked the company who had financed the car park as the community really appreciated it.

The motion to support the recommendations having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – That (A) the twenty seven Traffic Regulation Order objections for the reasons set out in Appendix A be overruled and reintroduce parking charges; and

(B) To authorise the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to publish a Notice of Making under the Road Traffic Regulation Act to give effect to the introduction of the tariff structure as shown in Appendix C.

342 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 9.00 pm

Chairman
Date

Agenda Item 5

East Herts Council Report

Leadership Team Meeting

Date of meeting: Tuesday 12 March 2024

Report by: Councillor Carl Brittain – Executive Member for Financial Sustainability

Report title: Financial Management 2023/24 - Q3 Forecast to year end

Ward(s) affected: (All Wards); All

Summary –

- The net revenue budget for 2023/24 is £12.113m as set out in table 1, this is funded by council tax. The forecast outturn as at 31st December 2023 is £220k
- The revised capital budget for 2023/24 is £28.335m, plus £2.954m is approved but not yet committed, as set out in Appendix C. The forecast outturn is £24.230m giving a variance of £4.105m

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXECUTIVE:

- a) The net revenue budget forecast overspend of £220k be noted;
- b) The capital programme forecast outturn variance of £4.105m be noted;
- c) The proposed capital budget carry forwards of £807k be noted.

1.0 Proposal(s)

1.1 Not applicable

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The revenue budget and capital programme were approved by Council on 1st March 2023. The budgets were set amid an ongoing period of continued financial uncertainty arising from the pandemic, the lack of a multiple year Comprehensive Spending Review and risks for local government, particularly the impact of high inflation. The report provides details of the forecast outturn position against budgets set in March 2023.
- 2.2 The 2023/24 net revenue budget is £12.113m the table below shows the budget alongside the 2023/24 forecast outturn as at Quarter 3. A

breakdown of the revenue budget and forecast outturn can be found in **Appendix A:**

	2023/24 Budget	2023/24 Forecast outturn	Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000
Net Cost of Services	17,230	17,996	766
Total corporate budgets	1,173	1,025	(148)
Total reserves	(818)	(1,216)	(398)
Total Funding	(5,472)	(5,472)	-
Net revenue spend	12,113	12,333	220
Funded by Council Tax	(12,113)	(12,113)	-
Overspend/(underspend)	-	220	220

2.3 High inflation has impacted on the councils spending with contracts, utilities and salary increases at levels above budget. Increases to the Bank of England's base rate have resulted in interest rate rises which impact on the rate at which the Council can borrow and also the return that the Council can achieve on its investments. A summary of significant variances is provided in Appendix B, this gives details of the £220k forecast overspend.

2.4 The revised capital budget for 2023/24 is £28.335m plus £2.954m approved but not yet committed, as set out in **Appendix C**. The forecast outturn is £24.230 giving a variance of £4.105m. The main variances are in respect of pausing the Old River Lane & Arts centre project and rephasing of IT capital spend.

2.6 It is proposed to carry forwards budgets of £807k to 2024/25, these are in respect of projects that have been reprofiled to begin in 2024/25.

2.7 The outstanding debt as at Quarter 2 was £3.5m. Debt over 365 days old totals £1.6m, this is being reviewed by officers. The recent restructure of the strategic finance team has resulted in an appointment to the Team Leader (transactions) post and 2 new finance assistants will be joining the team mid March 2024. The strengthening of the team, alongside the decision for credit control to be managed centrally by the finance team will improve the aged debt position of the Council.

3.0 Reason(s)

3.1 Section 28 of the Local Government Act 2003 requires the Council to monitor the budget and monitor and assess the adequacy of reserves and balances during the year. East Herts Council's financial management framework requires

quarterly reports to Audit and Governance Committee and the Executive with expenditure forecasts to year end.

3.2 The Executive must consider the budget forecasts and ensure that action is taken in relation to any expenditure over spends or any underachievement of income so that the Council's financial resources are not exceeded.

4.0 Options

4.1 Not applicable

5.0 Risks

5.1 Higher inflation and rising interest rates will put pressure on the Councils revenue and capital budgets.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

6.1 The finance team have consulted with Heads of Service, service managers and budget managers in writing this report.

Community Safety

No

Data Protection

No

Equalities

No

Environmental Sustainability

No

Financial

All financial implications are included in the report

Health and Safety

No

Human Resources

No

Human Rights

No

Legal

Section 28 of the Local Government Act 2003 requires the Council to monitor the budget and monitor and assess the adequacy of reserves and balances during the year. East Herts Council's financial management framework requires quarterly reports to Audit and Governance Committee and the Executive with expenditure forecasts to year end.

Specific Wards

No

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

7.1

Appendices	
A	2023/24 Revenue budget & forecast outturn
B	Significant variances
C	2023/24 Capital programme & forecast outturn

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2023/24 Revenue budget - Qtr 3 Forecast outturn position

		2023/24 budget	Forecast outturn	Variance
		£'000	£'000	£'000
Net Cost of Services	Chief Executive & Directors	349	325	(24)
	Communications, Strategy & Policy	1,520	1,613	93
	HR & Organisational Development	570	584	14
	Strategic Finance & Property	2,061	2,480	419
	Corporate	530	618	88
	Housing & Health	2,193	2,133	(60)
	Democratic and Legal	1,506	1,532	26
	Planning & Building Control	2,209	2,663	454
	Operations	2,803	2,616	(187)
	Shared Revenues & Benefits Service	1,798	1,781	(17)
	Revenues & benefits retained costs	(467)	(451)	16
	Housing Benefit Subsidy	(371)	(405)	(34)
	Shared Business & Technology Services	2,291	2,269	(22)
	CERA	238	238	-
	Total Net Cost of Services	17,230	17,996	766
Corporate Budgets	Minimum Revenue Provision	557	557	-
	Interest Payments on loans	979	1,400	421
	Interest & Investment income	(1,000)	(1,569)	(569)
	Pension Fund Deficit contribution	637	637	-
	Corporate Budgets Total:	1,173	1,025	(148)
Use of Reserves	Contributions to Earmarked reserves	590	445	(145)
	Contributions from Earmarked reserves	(1,408)	(1,661)	(253)
	Use of General Reserve	-	-	-
	New Homes Bonus Priority Spend	-	-	-
	Net Use of Reserves:	(818)	(1,216)	(398)
Net Cost of Services Total:		17,585	17,805	220
Funding	Capital salaries	(150)	(150)	-
	NDR	(2,933)	(2,933)	-
	Section 31 grants	(1,169)	(1,169)	-
	(Surplus)/Deficit on collection fund	1,583	1,583	-
	Government grants	(1,361)	(1,361)	-
	Business Rates pool 22/23 pooling gain	(511)	(511)	-
	New Homes Bonus	(931)	(931)	-
Non Departmental Budgets Total:		(5,472)	(5,472)	-
Total:		12,113	12,333	220

Summary of significant variances – Qtr 3 2023/24

Budget area	2023/24 budget £000	Forecast outturn £000	Variance £000	Reason for variance
Salary budgets	15,754	15,951	197	When the 2023/24 budget was set a 4% increase on salaries was budgeted for. Following negotiations, the National Joint Council for Local Government Services has agreed a flat rate of £1,925 for all spinal points to 43 and 3.88% for all spinal points above. This has resulted in a pressure on the budget of £197k.
Planning service – staffing costs & reduced planning income	2,209	2,663	454	<p>Planning is currently forecasting to be £4541k overspent at year end. At present this is due to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decrease in planning applications as a result of rising construction costs and overall cost of living crisis. - Ongoing recruitment difficulties which has meant that the service continues to use consultants to assist with the workload and planning application backlog. <p>In terms of mitigation, planning fees are due to be increased by 35% for major applications and 25% for all other applications. Draft regulations to introduce these fee increases were laid on 20 July and need to receive parliamentary approval before coming into effect.</p> <p>A recruitment and retention strategy is in place and there is a rolling programme of recruitment. A number of posts have already been filled and it is anticipated that more will be filled in the Autumn/Winter.</p>
Use of planning reserves	0	(74)	(74)	Proposal to utilise £74k of planning grant held in reserves to offset overspends in planning service.
Restructuring costs	0	179	179	Service restructuring under the Transformation programme has resulted in costs of £179k.
Use of MTFP Transition funding reserve	0	(179)	(179)	Proposal to utilise £179k of reserve to fund one off restructuring costs incurred as a result of the Transformation programme.

Budget area	2023/24 budget £000	Forecast outturn £000	Variance £000	Reason for variance
Charringtons House	0	327	327	Charringtons House was closed to tenants on 31 March 2023, the Council remains liable for costs in relation to Business rates and utilities. The metropolitan police have enquired about using the building to run police dog training.
Leisure contract	(150)	(258)	(108)	Income received in respect of the contract with SLM has exceeded budget by £108k as a result of a reprofiling of the income.
Interest payments	979	1,400	421	Due to increased bank of England base rate interest on the Councils borrowing is higher than budgeted. Officers are working hard to secure rates in advance of need that are on average 1% below the rates on deals of the day.
Investment income	(1,000)	(1,569)	(569)	Interest that the Council receives on its investments is also above budget due to the high interest rates.
Total	17,792	18,440	648	
Other minor balances	(5,679)	(6,107)	(428)	
Overall total	12,113	12,333	220	

Capital Forecast Outturn Quarter 3 \ December 2023

	Carry Forward from 2022/23	Revised Budget 2023/24	Forecast Outturn 2023/24	Variance 2023/24	Carry Forward to 2024/25
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Land and Buildings					
Investment in operational assets	204	454	454	0	0
Grange Paddocks Leisure Centre	97	97	97	0	0
Hartham Leisure Centre	4,300	4,246	4,246	0	0
Hertford Theatre	5,716	15,550	15,550	0	0
Car Park Resurfacing & extension	305	305	0	(305)	305
Old River Lane and Arts Centre	552	2,552	500	(2,052)	0
Northgate End	55	55	340	285	0
Hostels	187	187	0	(187)	187
Pinehurst Community Hall	180	180	0	(180)	180
Vehicles and Equipment					
Rolling programme to be utilised on ICT	913	1,363	100	(1,263)	0
LED Lighting Upgrades	107	135	0	(135)	135
Community Assets					
Replacement play equipment across the district (in response to the Condition Audit to be reviewed in 2018/19)	20	70	27	(43)	0
Castle Park - HLF	200	2,700	2,700	0	0
Phisiobury Park - HLF	35	35	35	0	0
Buryfields	0	38	38	0	0
Revenue Expenditure Funded as Capital Under Statute (REFCUS)					
Home Improvement Loans	0	120	0	(120)	0
Improve & renew structures along rivers and watercourses	39	87	87	0	0
Land Management Asset Register & Associated Works	6	56	56	0	0
Green Deal Loans	0	20	0	(20)	0
Historic Building Loans	0	20	0	(20)	0
Community Capital Grants	0	65	0	(65)	0
Current Capital Programme Budget Total	12,916	28,335	24,230	(4,105)	807

Approved But Not Yet Committed
Buntingford Depot site works
St Andrews Street CP Resurfacing
Transformation Programme
Capital Contingency - Major Projects
Current Capital Programme Budget Total

384	repair to vehicle washer & drainage
70	
1,000	ICON & Advance
1,500	
2,954	

Agenda Item 6

East Herts Council Report

Executive

Date of meeting: Tuesday 12 March 2024

Report by: Councillor Sarah Hopewell – Executive Member for Wellbeing

Report title: Ward Freman Pool Update

Ward(s) affected: Buntingford;

Summary – To provide an update on Ward Freman Pool following its closure in December 2023 for health and safety reasons.

Recommendation/s for Executive:

- (a) To agree a 6-month postponement in bringing an options report to Executive on the future of the pool**

1.0 Proposal(s)

- 1.1 To allow the community Group to present a business case to Hertfordshire County Council, Executive agree that the options report be deferred to September 2024.
- 1.2 That officers instruct the commissioning of a condition survey.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 In December 2023 due to health and safety concerns raised and demonstrated by the council's contracted operators of the site a decision was taken to close the pool whilst further evaluation of options took place on the future of the pool.
- 2.2 Officers proposed that an options appraisal would be undertaken and presented back to Executive in spring 2024.

- 2.3 Since the announcement of the closure in December 2023, East Herts officers have been in dialogue with officers from Hertfordshire County Council regarding the options for the pool. HCC are the freeholders of the pool and as such agreement has to be reached with them on a future option.
- 2.4 Buntingford residents and the wider community have expressed a strong desire to form a community group to run the pool going forward.
- 2.5 HCC have agreed to consider a community led business plan, Should HCC consider the plan viable, they will enter discussions to look at the viability, risks and liability in more depth.
- 2.6 HCC have asked the Community group to submit a business plan to them by the end of February 2024.
- 2.7 The community group have not yet submitted a business plan, but work continues to progress this work, HCC are aware of the delay.
- 2.8 For EHC to examine and make recommendations, the council needs to be in possession of all facts. This means waiting on HCCs decision on whether it will enter discussions with the Community group with regard to securing a lease arrangement.
- 2.9 In addition, EHC officers have been instructed to commission a condition survey of the pool now that it is drained and more easily accessed. This survey will, in turn, inform the viability of the pool's future.

3.0 Reason(s)

- 3.1 Until this is clear, EHC is unable to present options and it is therefore proposed that a full report is deferred for 6 months to enable HCC and the Community group to conclude a direction of travel.

4.0 Options

- 4.1 Defer full options appraisal reporting on the future of Ward Freman pool until no later than September 2024 -RECOMMENDED
- 4.2 Continue with the production of a report now, making assumptions on options – NOT RECOMMENDED

4.3 Do nothing – although the pool is currently ‘mothballed’ it continues to be a liability for both EHC and HCC with an annual liability of £96k – NOT RECOMMENDED

5.0 Risks

5.1 The more time that elapses before a decision is taken, the greater the risk of the pool falling into further disrepair.

5.2 There is an ongoing financial liability for both EHC and HCC

5.3 The longer the uncertainty remains around the future of the pool, the greater the effort and cost needed to reinstate pool use, should that be the outcome of the options appraisal.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

6.1 HCC have been kept informed of and been involved in discussion regarding the future of the pool as freeholder of the site.

Community Safety

No

Data Protection

No

Equalities

No

Environmental Sustainability

No

Financial

The budget for Ward Freman pool is net expenditure of £140k per year. By mothballing the pool there is a saving of £44k. The pool will remain in care and maintenance until such time as Hertfordshire County Council determine the community bid to operate the pool. If the County Council opts to allow the community to operate the pool then East Herts £140k expenditure will no longer be required to subsidise the pool on an ongoing basis. Members have indicated they may wish to use the budget to

provide pump priming finance to the community group should they be successful in becoming the operator of the pool. Should the community not be successful then East Herts will need to reach a mutually agreed position with Hertfordshire County Council to bring the joint use agreement to an end. The agreement can only be mutually ended otherwise it will run until 2031. The council will be jointly liable with Hertfordshire County Council for remedial works to return the pool to the agreed condition (although Hertfordshire County Council is unlikely to claim dilapidations as they are liable for 40% of the costs and if the pool is not transferred to the community then the County Council is likely to opt to close the facility.

Health and Safety

Yes, but heavily mitigated through the pools closure and mothballing, including the drainage of the pool.

Human Resources

No

Human Rights

No

Legal

Yes – East Herts Council is party, along with HCC, to a joint use agreement for the pool, meaning that East Herts Council must ensure it meets its obligations under the agreement for as long as it persists.

Hertfordshire County Council is the legal owner of the freehold of the pool.

Specific Wards

Yes

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

7.1

Contact Member

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