



Minutes of the Cabinet

**Wednesday 13th December, 2023 at 6.00pm
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House,
Priory Road, Dudley**

Present:

Cabinet Members

Councillor P Harley (Leader - Chair)
Councillor P Bradley (Deputy Leader – Vice-Chair)
Councillors P Atkins, I Bevan, R Buttery, D Corfield, S Clark, Dr R Clinton, M Rogers and L Taylor-Childs.

Opposition Group Members Nominated to attend the Cabinet

Councillors S Ali, A Aston, C Bayton, K Casey, J Cowell, J Foster, S Mughal, S Ridney and P Sahota.

Officers

B Heran (Deputy Chief Executive), K Jones (Director of Housing and Communities), I Newman (Director of Finance and Legal), M Abu Affan (Director of Public Health and Wellbeing); P Mountford (Head of Economic Growth and Skills) and H Mills (Senior Democratic Services Officer).

40 **Apology for Absence**

An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor P Lowe.



41 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor J Cowell declared a non-pecuniary interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, as a Council tenant.

42 **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 25th October, 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed.

43 **Review of Housing Finance**

The Cabinet considered a joint report of the Director of Housing and Communities and the Director of Finance and Legal on the latest financial forecast outturn for 2023/24 and provisional Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to 2026/27 (revenue and capital) for the Housing Revenue Account.

Following the presentation of the report, Members of the opposition group expressed concerns regarding the proposed full rent increase of 7.7% and the full cost recovery for service charges equating to £12.46 per week (on average), for tenants in homes with communal areas, particularly during a period of rising costs of Council Tax and other amenities. Members also requested clarification as to whether it was the intention for grounds maintenance to be outsourced and if so, the impact this would have on wider Council Services; assurance that residents would benefit from an improvement in the level of service/maintenance provided as a result of the increase and whether there was a commitment for discretionary payments to assist those tenants' experiencing difficulties.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Communities responded to questions accordingly and in doing so commented that a prudent analysis had been undertaken with regard to the rent increase and service charge model, which would conform to Universal Credit to alleviate inconsistencies. It was further commented that there was no intention to outsource grounds maintenance and that there was an array of support available for residents that were experiencing difficulties to meet their payments. Housing representatives would be available at Cost of Living Hubs and additional capacity would be considered.

In referring to the transfer of the Telecare Service to the Adult Social Care Directorate, it was stated that whilst this had provided a saving within the HRA, it was recognised that it had created a pressure on Adult Social Care. The Telecare Service was considered an exceptional service, and Members were assured that there would be no impact to existing Council tenants that were users of the service and who continued to be eligible. The service would continue to be needs tested in the same way as all social care services.

Resolved

- (1) That the latest Housing Revenue Account (HRA) outturn forecast for 2023/24, as outlined in paragraphs 7 to 11 (inclusive) and Appendix 1 to the report submitted, be noted.
- (2) That the proposed budget for 2024/25, the provisional Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to 2026/27, and the revised Public Sector Housing capital programme for 2023/24 to 2028/29 as outlined in paragraphs 12 to 21 (inclusive) and Appendices 2 and 3 to the report submitted, be noted.

44 **Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Review Feedback**

A report of the Chief Executive was submitted to provide a summary of the feedback from the Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC), organised by the Local Government Association (LGA) from 19th to 22nd September, 2023.

Resolved

That the contents and recommendations contained within the feedback report be acknowledged and endorsed and that the Council's approach with regard to implementation be supported.

45 **Independent Improvement and Assurance Board (IAB)**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Chief Executive which provided an overview of the newly established Improvement and Assurance Board to address the recommendations from the Local Government Association Peer Review feedback, Annual Auditor's report and the financial challenges the Council faced.

Resolved

That the report be noted and that the establishment of the Council's Improvement and Assurance Board be supported.

46 **Long Term Plan for Towns – The Town of Dudley**

A report of the Director of Regeneration and Enterprise was submitted on the Long Term Plan for Towns Initiative, the implementation process, funding, timescales and the proposed next steps.

Following the presentation of the report, Members of the opposition group commented positively on £20 million endowment investment that Dudley was set to benefit from, however, emphasised the need for the membership of the Town Board to reflect the area and community and suggested that one Councillor from each of the Central Dudley Wards be appointed as members, together with a young person representative. The need for due consideration to be given with regard to converting vacant retail into living space, to ensure it was appropriate and fit for purpose, and the need for the investment to be made now and not spread over a ten-year period was emphasised.

Resolved

- (1) That the details of the initiative and the proposed next steps be noted.

- (2) That the Director of Regeneration and Enterprise, following consultation with the Deputy Leader (Cabinet Member for Communities and Economic Delivery), be authorised to progress the implementation of the initiative, as set out in the 'next steps' that do not require additional funding in advance of the receipt of capacity funding and that the 'finance' sections in the report and the impact on the programme of the need to pause elements until the capacity funding is received, be noted.
-

47 **Stalled and Derelict Sites Programme**

The Cabinet considered a report on stalled and derelict sites programme, in particular to seek approval for work to commence on the preparatory stages required to use compulsory purchase order powers and to improve the supply of land and property to deliver new homes on brownfield land, protect green belt and support the availability of affordable and mixed tenure homes.

Arising from the presentation of the report, Members suggested that an updated list or map identifying stalled and derelict properties, with a narrative of why some properties were not listed, would be useful, however due to commercial sensitivity it was recognised that this may need to be provided in the form of a private report to a future meeting.

Resolved

- (1) That the Council confirm that it is minded in principle to seek approval from the Secretary of State to use its Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) powers on sites within the borough that are detailed within the Stalled and Derelict Sites programme.
 - (2) That the Director of Regeneration and Enterprise be authorised to undertake and commission the necessary detailed work to establish the case for a CPO, meeting the statutory tests and funding requirements for individual sites within the Stalled and Derelict Sites programme, and that this will be subject to any internal spending control processes that are in place.
-

48 **Infrastructure Funding Statement 2022/23**

A report of the Director of Regeneration and Enterprise was submitted to seek approval for the Infrastructure Funding Statement 2022/23 and to provide an update on available Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) monies.

Arising from questions raised by Members of the opposition group in relation to Section 106 monies; the process in which these monies were allocated; details of how much Section 106 monies and CIL neighbourhood funding allocations were available for each ward; and confirmation of what the affordable housing allocation was and why it had not been spent, would be provided by Officers following the meeting.

Resolved

- (1) That the Infrastructure Funding Statement 2022/23 be approved.
- (2) That the available Community Infrastructure Levy monies and the approach to funds being carried forward be approved.

49 **Portersfield**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Regeneration and Enterprise in relation to the progress with the Portersfield project, which outlined the proposed next steps and timescales moving forward.

Members of the opposition group commented on the need to broaden the vision for the site and to provide an element of mixed-use development, rather than being predominately residential. Consideration for the inclusion of health facilities and GP Practices was advocated.

Resolved

- (1) That the progress made to date and the updates presented in the report be noted.
- (2) That the headline activity and timescales proposed over the next six months, with further detail to be provided in due course on specific elements, be noted.

- (3) That the revenue budget and how that is proposed to be used, prior to seeking further financial approvals, be noted.
-

50 **Issues arising from Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees**

No issues were raised under this agenda item.

51 **Questions from Members to the Leader (Cabinet Procedure Rule 2.5)**

No questions were raised under this agenda item.

The meeting ended at 7.30pm

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL