



14 November 2024 at 7.00 pm

Council Chamber, Argyle Road, Sevenoaks

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Cabinet

Supplementary Agenda

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5. Housing - Scrutiny Working Group update	Replacement Page 5	Alison Simmons Tel: 01732 227272
6. Treasury Management Mid-Year Update	Replacement Page 23	Alan Mitchell Tel: 01732 227483
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If you wish to obtain further factual information on any of the agenda items listed above, please contact the named officer prior to the day of the meeting.

Should you need this agenda or any of the reports in a different format, or have any other queries concerning this agenda or the meeting please contact Democratic Services on 01732 227000 or democratic.services@sevenoaks.gov.uk.

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Item 4 – Matters referred by Council, Audit Committee, Scrutiny Committee, CIL Spending Board, or Cabinet Advisory Committees

The Housing Strategy Action Plan – 2 Years On was considered by the Housing & Health Advisory Committee on 5 November 2024, and a reference to Cabinet was resolved. The relevant Minute extract is below.

Housing & Health Advisory Committee (5 November 2024, Minute 30)

The Chief Officer for People & Places presented the report, which set out the annual review of the Housing Strategy 2022 – 2027, which was adopted at Full Council in July 2022. The report sets out the strategy's four themes, alongside some of the challenges facing the service, together with successes. The officer noted that the Council is in its last year of funding of MHCLG's Homelessness Prevention Grant, Rough Sleeper Initiative and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme. These funding streams have significantly contributed to staffing costs, temporary and supported accommodation, landlord incentives, homelessness prevention and community support. The officer explained that many of the staffing posts were fixed-term due to short-term Government funding settlements.

Members discussed the report. They queried whether the risk assessment within the strategy was sufficient, covering risk, mitigation, likelihood, severity, and priority. It was further suggested the Local Plan could be more fully integrated into the plan. Members expressed concern around the high turnover rate within the Housing service, and questioned whether stress from difficult customer interactions was managed sufficiently. Members requested further information on the number of Rural Housing Needs Surveys completed against delivery.

Members also queried the Community Wi-Fi project and options to deliver and fund, as Kent County Council were no longer able to do so. The Portfolio Holder for Housing & Health requested Cllr Streatfeild put his questions in writing to him and he would provide a written response to the points raised.

Action: for the Chief Officer for People and Places to provide members with information on Rural Housing Needs Surveys completed against delivery.

Action 2: for the Portfolio Holder for Housing & Health to provide a written response to the Committee on receipt of the questions raised by Cllr Streatfeild.

Members further discussed the national affordable housing, notably social housing shortage. The Chief Officer for People & Places explained that the viability of providing social housing in developments was financially challenging for Registered Providers. The officer referred members to the National Planning Policy Framework and Planning's affordable housing policy

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percentage on new developments, together with the work undertaken by Housing Policy and Enabling team to work with Registered Providers. Members discussed the mechanisms by which housing providers monitored their social housing stock. Members were advised that there was no legal mechanism to compel people to not under-occupy housing. The officer discussed the Changing Spaces project, which provides incentives to social housing tenants to voluntarily downsize to smaller properties.

Action 3: for the Chief Officer for People & Places to provide members with additional information regarding any under-occupancy reviews carried out by housing providers within the district.

Members discussed the possibility of creating a separate strategy and action plan specifically for social housing. They noted the importance of planning within this proposed strategy. It was proposed and duly seconded that it be recommended to Cabinet that a cross-party working group be created to develop a Social Housing Strategy and Action Plan. The motion was put to the vote and it was:

Resolved: That

- a) The report be noted; and
- b) That it be recommended to Cabinet that a cross-party working group to develop a Social Housing Strategy and Action Plan, be established.

Background Documents

Housing Strategy Action Plan – 2 Years On Report:

<https://cds.sevenoaks.gov.uk/documents/s59661/08%20HHAC%20Report%20-%20Housing%20Strategy%202%20Year%20on%20-%20September%202024.pdf?J=1>

Housing Strategy 2022 – 2027 Action Plan:

<https://cds.sevenoaks.gov.uk/documents/s59662/08%20Appendix%20A%20-%20Housing%20Strategy%20Action%20Plan%202022-2027%20Year%202.pdf?J=1>

Item 05 – Housing – Scrutiny Working Group Update

The attached report was considered by the Housing & Health Advisory Committee on 5 November 2024. The relevant Minute extract is below.

Housing & Health Advisory Committee (5 November 2024, Minute 31)

The Chief Officer for People & Places presented the report, which updated the committee on the response to the recommendations of the Homelessness Prevention Scrutiny Working Group. The recommendations were presented to Cabinet on 8 February 2024 and had been investigated. The report set out the proposed actions to be taken in response to the recommendations.

In response to questions, the officer explained that the challenges faced by the service, as detailed within the report, had been considered by Cabinet as part of the Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy and were being addressed.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

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Item 7 – Treasury Management Mid-Year Update

The attached report was considered by Finance & Investment Advisory Committee on 24 October 2024. The relevant Minute extract is below.

Finance & Investment Advisory Committee (24 October 2024, Minute 29)

The Senior Principal Accountant presented the report which detailed treasury activity in the first half of the current financial year, recent developments in the financial markets and fulfilled reporting requirements of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Code of Practice on Treasury Management.

The report gave an economic update provided by Link, the treasury advisors in order to understand some of the influences that may impact on the investment markets. It also gave a review of the council's investment and borrowing portfolios and provided an update on the council's capital position as well as the funding of the capital programme together with an update on the public works loan board (PWLB) borrowing rates. She was pleased to advise that as of 30th September, the investment returns were £164,000 above budget as shown in paragraph 46 of the report. The multi-asset investment funds were performing well both in terms of income and the underlying capital value.

Members considered the report and discussed the possible ringfencing of income from the multi-asset funds.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that the report be noted.

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Item 7 – Financial Monitoring 2024/25: to the end of August 2024

The attached report was considered by Finance & Investment Advisory Committee on 24 October 2024. The relevant Minute extract is below.

Finance & Investment Advisory Committee (24 October 2024, Minute 30)

The Head of Finance presented the report which provided information on the revenue and capital position of the Council as at the 31 August 2024 together with the forecast financial position to the 31 March 2025.

The Officer confirmed that whilst the current forecast position was an unfavourable variance of £288,000, this represented an improvement of £29,000 from the July position. The Cost of Services under the Leisure contract was still expected to come in within the £1.8m budget over two years. Since publication of the report, the pay award for 2024/25 had now been agreed, and was £70,000 below the budget assumption.

The level of staff vacancies had given rise to an underspend of £1.2m. The largest variances were in Revenue and Benefits, Direct Services, Audit and Building Control. The savings forecasted were partly being used to offset agency costs and consultants. There was an unfavourable variance on Development Management due to planning fees being lower than anticipated. The Swanley Meeting point was also showing an adverse variance.

In terms of the more favourable variances, interest receipts from the Council's investment strategy continued to perform well and the Leisure Contract was forecasting a favourable variance of £124,000 due to the cost of borrowing to fund the White Oak Leisure Centre capital scheme being less than allowed for in the revised budget.

Members discussed the report and considered the way the financial figures were presented to Members, and how this information could be enhanced to assist with interpretation of the budget, including ringfenced monies, statutory service functions and further training. Members also expressed concern over the housing figures provided by West Kent Housing Association. Discussion took place on the projected overspend on refuse collections, and Members were reminded that this was being looked at by the Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee. In response to a question Members were advised that an email would be circulated with details of what was included within Miscellaneous finance.

Action: For the Head of Finance to circulate to the Committee the details of miscellaneous finance as set out in the budget monitoring.

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Following further discussion, the Portfolio Holder took the opportunity to remind Members that administration costs were regularly reviewed by management as well as productivity and reported through the performance indicators.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

Item 08 – Waste & Recycling Strategy

The attached report was considered by the Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee on 11 November 2024. The relevant Minute extract is below.

Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee (11 November 2024, Minute 28)

The Head of Direct Services presented the report, which set out the new domestic waste and recycling strategy for the District. The draft strategy set out the proposed approach to managing waste and recycling collections in a more sustainable way, with the aim of reducing the environmental impact of waste in the District.

The officer advised that following Cabinet's recommendations the internal review was being undertaken, and explored service opportunities, costs and increasing recycling rates for new waste collection options that included food and glass, as the current collection system did not meet national recycling targets, nor was it in line with forthcoming legislation. The new strategy would include a glass and food waste collection.

In response to questions, the officer explained that the monitoring of the carbon footprint of the strategy was included in the Climate Change Action Plan. Cost saving had not been included as an objective of the strategy as it was intended to be a top-level document indicating the direction of the service, though cost savings were implicit within the strategy. Fixed targets had not been included as improvement in recycling was linked to funding from the Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs and were set by government. The review of the service would work to the strategy objectives and establish costings, options, and further targets. All operational and logistical changes would be presented to Cabinet and the Advisory Committee for approval. Market research companies and a Member Working Group were being consulted to ensure the survey was appropriate. Work was ongoing regarding kerbside glass collection arrangements for converted flats.

Members discussed the report. They noted the importance of the public consultation to inform the delivery of the strategy. They further noted that the council's national standing in relation to recycling rates would improve once glass collection commenced. They raised the inclusion of value for money as an objective within the strategy, as waste collection was a significant expenditure for the council, but expressed that it should not undermine service provision. They were further concerned that some of the objectives, such as regulatory compliance, aimed too low, and expressed desire for the strategy to go beyond compliance. The officer advised members that the service was not currently compliant with occupational safety and manual handling legislation.

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Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That

- a) Members comments on the proposed Waste and Recycling Strategy be noted and submitted to Cabinet for consideration;
- b) it be recommended to Cabinet that a public consultation on the delivery of the Waste and Recycling Strategy be approved, delegating responsibility to the Portfolio Holder for Cleaner & Greener to agree the survey approach and questions; and
- c) It be noted that a further report to Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee will be presented in March 2025 setting out options to deliver the Strategy, following the public consultation.

Item 09 – Trade Waste Update

The attached report was considered by the Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee on 11 November 2024. The relevant Minute extract is below.

Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee (11 November 2024, Minute 27)

The Head of Direct Services presented the report which set out the business review of the commercial trade waste service. He advised that the commercial waste collection service had been run providing local business with a fairly priced transparent and flexible service. During recent years, a number of challenges had impacted the service and it was now being subsidised from other direct services budgets, and thus was not generating the required surplus. Following the business review undertaken there were three options available to Members regarding the service. Members considered the options which included, continuing the service as is, ceasing the service or reviewing the service to reinvent the service as a more compact commercial entity.

In response to questions, the officer explained that the service was currently too intermingled with the statutory service, and that the reinvention of the service would allow the service to be separated from and support domestic waste collection. Should the service be reinvented, but prove unviable within 12 to 18 months, the service would likely be recommended for termination. The number of customers for the service had grown beyond pre-Covid levels and it was anticipated that it would be viable. The reinvention of the service would not involve the creation of a separate company; there would be no change in ownerships or liabilities for the service. High disposal costs prevented the service from collecting glass, plastic, and metal recycling, but it was anticipated that operating as a more compact commercial entity may allow the Council to better negotiate this issue. The Council would investigate having the service support the statutory domestic waste collection service where possible, such as through bulk bin collection.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that Option 3 - Reinventing the service as a more compact commercial entity to deliver an income surplus – be approved.

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Item 10 – Annual Review of Parking Fees and Charges

The attached report was considered by the Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee on 11 November 2024. The relevant Minute extract is below.

Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee (11 November 2024, Minute 26)

The Head of Direct Services presented the report, which set out the annual review of parking management for 2025/26. The service budgeted for an inflationary increase of 2.5%, and the requirement to offset the assumed 25% reduction in parking in 2021/22, improving by 5% per year. This totalled an assumed parking increase of £306,000. Of this, £206,000 was adjusted for exceeding budget performance, efficiencies, and increased usage and enforcement. It was proposed that the remaining £100,000 be offset through a 3% increase on all parking fees and charges.

In response to questions, the officer explained that, should the inflationary increase be agreed, the service would undertake work to create an average 3% uplift across all parking fees and charges, to ensure the increases are sensible and easily payable. Cash payments for car parking were in decline, and accounted for roughly 20% of the service's income. The increases would be distributed across all fees, including season tickets.

Members discussed the proposed increases, and emphasised that the increases should be sensible and to round numbers. They further discussed the comparisons between the prices of the district's car parks and those in other districts. They expressed concern that the premium car park in Blighs was more expensive than premium car parks in other, larger, towns, noting that it may have a negative effect on local businesses. They further expressed concern that increases in parking fees may negatively impact people that travel into town centres for work. The officer explained that demand had increased by 8% since the last annual review, and that on-street parking was free in many areas close to the town centre. Permits were also available for people that required daily parking in towns.

Members further discussed the possibility of a park-and-ride scheme for the major towns within the district. They were advised that one such scheme had previously been operated in Sevenoaks during the redevelopment of Blighs, but that it was largely unviable, as travel into the town centre did not come from one direction on the whole.

Members expressed a desire for a holistic parking management strategy, considering economic development and residents' needs as well as revenue generation. The officer advised that this was already in development, and that it would be presented to the Advisory Committee in March 2025. It was

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moved and duly seconded that it be recommended to Cabinet that a comprehensive Car Parking Strategy be created. The motion was put to the vote and it was

Resolved: that

- a) It be recommended to Cabinet that Option 1 – an average of 3% increase in parking fees and charges, be approved.
- b) That it be recommended to Cabinet that a Car Parking Strategy be created.