

NOTICE OF DECISIONS

Meeting:	Executive	
Date:	Wednesday, 15 September 2021	
Place:	Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage	
Members Present:	Councillors:	Sharon Taylor OBE CC (Chair), Mrs Joan Lloyd (Vice-Chair), Lloyd Briscoe, Rob Broom, Richard Henry, Jackie Hollywell and Jeannette Thomas.

**THE DEADLINE FOR CALL-IN OF ANY OF THE DECISIONS BELOW IS FRIDAY, 24 SEPTEMBER 2021.
SUBJECT TO THERE BEING NO CALL-IN THE ATTACHED DECISIONS MAY BE IMPLEMENTED WITH EFFECT FROM MONDAY, 27 SEPTEMBER 2021.**

1	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST	
	Apologies for absence were received from Councillors John Gardner, Phil Bibby CC (observer) and Robin Parker (observer). There were no declarations of interest.	
2	MINUTES - 11 AUGUST 2021	
	It was RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 11 August 2021 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair. The Chief Executive confirmed that a draft Executive Action Tracker had been prepared for consideration by Members ahead of the next Executive meeting.	
3	MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND SELECT COMMITTEES	
	The Strategic Director (CF) confirmed that it was intended that the further report on the Council's Transformation Programme would be presented by the end of the current financial year. In the meantime, Members would receive informal updates	

periodically.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 17 August 2021 be noted.

4

COVID-19 UPDATE

**R. Protheroe
X2938**

The Executive considered an overarching verbal progress report from the Strategic Director (RP), together with a short presentation from the Corporate Policy & Research Officer providing an update on the latest epidemiology statistics relating to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The following matters were raised during the verbal progress report/presentation:

- Officers undertook to seek statistics regarding Covid hospitalisations, with particular emphasis of the numbers of those unvaccinated, single-vaccinated and double-vaccinated;
- The Leader confirmed that she had circulated to Members the useful guidance produced by the Hertfordshire Public Health Officer regarding vaccination consent for 12-15 year olds;
- The Leader reported that 3 additional one year fixed term posts had been approved to help Independent Living Schemes re-open communal lounges and re-introduce social activities for residents; and
- It was acknowledged that some sectors were experiencing staff shortages (eg. HGV drivers and hospitality staff). It was pleasing to note that Stevenage Direct Services had not had to suspend any services during the pandemic, but Stevenage Leisure Limited were experiencing staffing issues, particularly with recruitment of hospitality employees.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Covid-19 update be noted.

5	TRANSFORMING OUR TOWN CENTRE PROGRAMME UPDATE AND TOWNS FUND DECISION MAKING	C. Barnes X2292
<p>The Executive considered a report in respect of progress with regard to town centre regeneration, together with proposals for decision-making with regard to the Town Investment Plan projects benefitting from the Towns Fund.</p> <p>The Executive supported the replacement wording of Recommendation 2.4 of the report proposed by the Assistant Director (Regeneration), as follows:</p> <p>“To note that all Business Cases will be prepared for submission to the Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) by 24 March 2022. A report will be prepared for a meeting of Full Council confirming the approval of Business Cases for submission to the MHCLG with delegated authority to the Executive.”</p> <p>In order to meet the challenging timescales relating to the submission of Business Cases, the Leader requested officers to identify some dates for additional Executive (and possibly one Council) meetings to consider the Business Cases.</p> <p>In response to Members’ questions, the Assistant Director (Regeneration) replied;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Regeneration Team had taken on additional resources to help progress the Business Cases, and external professional support had also been engaged. Other Council Teams (particularly Planning and Finance colleagues) would also be assisting in the process. He was confident that there was the necessary capacity to deliver the Business Case submissions; • Correspondence from the MHCLG indicated that successful Town Fund bidders should receive an up-front payment of 5% of the total Town Fund Award. For Stevenage this was estimated to be £1.875M, to assist with the development of Business Cases and the implementation of projects. This sum had yet to be received; • In approving the £37.5M Town Deal for Stevenage, the MHCLG had not as yet provided any supporting information 		

regarding its rationale for approving the bid;

- The Stevenage Development Board would be required to endorse Business Cases before they were considered by the Executive. A Chair's Panel, comprising of officers, external experts (including the Development Board Theme Lead for each project) and Members, would be established to vet the draft Business Cases before submission to the Development Board/Executive; and
- The timing of any further planning approvals for projects would vary dependent on the size and complexity of each scheme. Some projects (such as the Marshgate Science Innovation Centre) already benefitted from having planning permission in place.

The Leader requested the Portfolio Holder for Resources and her Street naming Sub-Group to compile a list of potential names for the new streets arising from the Town Centre Regeneration Programme.

The Leader asked the Chief Executive to invite the Chairman of the Stevenage Development Board to future Executive meetings where Town Deal Business Cases were being considered.

The Leader requested that consideration be given to the introduction of some form of interactive Town Centre Regeneration question and answer forum be developed for inclusion on the Council and Stevenage Even Better websites.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the progress of the regeneration programme, including the Queensway North regeneration scheme, Town Square co-working & heritage project, and the construction of the new bus interchange, be noted.
2. That the progress of Town's Fund programme to date, including the obligations of the Council as the Accountable Body for the Town's Fund, be noted.
3. That the creation of an Officer Panel (as set out in Paragraph 4.12 of the report) be approved, to support the discharge the Council's obligations as Accountable Body and to review and approve business cases for full approval.

	<p>4. That it be noted that all Business Cases will be prepared for submission to the Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) by 24 March 2022. A report will be prepared for a meeting of Full Council confirming the approval of Business Cases for submission to the MHCLG with delegated authority to the Executive.</p> <p>5. That it be noted that there will be future decision points for a number of Council-sponsored projects, in accordance with the Council's Constitution, following approval of the Towns Fund Business Cases and release of funding by MHCLG.</p> <p>6. That the inclusion of the £37.5 million within the Council's Capital Strategy be noted, and that it be further noted that this is aligned with the Heads of Terms agreement with MHCLG for the Towns Fund, and the funding profile attached to the Towns Fund grant confirmation letter. Authorisation for Council match funding will be reserved until the relevant Business Case is approved.</p> <p><i>Reason for Decision: As contained in report.</i> <i>Other Options considered: As contained in report.</i></p>	
6	CORPORATE PERFORMANCE QUARTER ONE 2021/22	M. Partridge x2456
	<p>The Executive received a presentation from the Chief Executive concerning the Quarter One Corporate Performance report 2021/22.</p> <p>Discussion points raised included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whilst recognising the 45% reported increase in calls to the Customer Service Centre (CSC) post the last lockdown, Members were very concerned about CSC response times. An informal Executive meeting on 30 September would consider the matter further, including further opportunities to improve the performance of the CSC; • Notwithstanding the appointment system operated by the CSC during the pandemic, it was confirmed that customers with high priority needs continue to be seen in-person, with or without an appointment; 	

- It was important that back-office services worked in collaboration with the CSC with regard to efficient responding to customers;
- The response times on re-letting void properties were often skewed by the limited demand for sheltered units. The Leader highlighted that the Council had converted a number of bedsit units into one-bedroom homes and was continuing to do so;
- In relation to the Co-operative Neighbourhood FTFC priority, the Leader asked that the issues identified during Ward walkabouts be entitled “Actions List” rather than “Community Plan”; officers were requested to ensure that there was an element of consistency with regard to action taken by the 6 Co-operative Neighbourhood Teams, in respect of matters such as following up/resolving issues identified during walkabouts and guidance on the method of payment for issue resolution (ie. central budgets or Member Local Community budgets); officers were also asked to ensure that County Councillors were invited to participate in future walkabouts;
- The Leader asked the Assistant Director (Stevenage Direct Services) to provide Members with an assessment of the success of the establishment of the new meadowland areas in the town;
- It was confirmed that the first Climate Change Citizens’ Panel group had met and that a fresh Panel would be set up for 2021/22. An annual report regarding progress on the Council’s Climate Change Strategy was scheduled to be submitted to the October Executive meeting.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the delivery of priorities which form the Future Town, Future Council Programme and performance of the Council across the key themes for quarter one 2021/22, together with the latest achievements, be noted.
2. That the continued impacts of COVID-19 on the homelessness preventions service and actions to recover be noted (as set out in Paragraphs 3.60 to 3.74 of the report).
3. That the issues with sheltered voids and void loss be noted and plans to improve performance be endorsed (as set out in Paragraphs 3.75 to 3.86 of the report).
4. That issues with asbestos and the letting of Council garages and the planned measures to improve performance be noted

(as set out in Paragraphs 3.91 to 3.98 of the report).

5. That work with the Business Technology Centre (BTC) to recover from the impacts of COVID-19 be monitored (as set out in Paragraphs 3.89 to 3.90 of the report).
6. That work to investigate issues with late complaint closures continues and actions be implemented to ensure complaints are dealt with in a timely manner (as set out in Paragraphs 3.99 to 3.106 of the report).
7. That issues with satisfaction of the Council website be monitored and issues be addressed utilising the new customer feedback panel (as set out in Paragraphs 3.123 to 3.125 of the report).
8. That challenges within the Customer Service Centre be noted and improvement plans endorsed (as set out Paragraphs 3.107 to 3.122 of the report).

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

7

GENERAL FUND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE (2020/22 - 2025/26)

**C. Fletcher
x2933**

The Executive considered a report providing a General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) update for the period 2020/22 to 2025/26.

The Strategic Director (CF) undertook to provide the Leader with a breakdown of the “Other COVID spend (funded from grant)” figure of £500,210 set out in the Table at Paragraph 4.1.2 of the report.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That change to the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) principles, as outlined in Paragraph 4.1.6 of the report and amended in Paragraph 4.10.9, be approved.

2. That, for modelling purposes, Council tax increases be set at the threshold of 1.99%, subject to any change in Government rules to achieve a balanced budget, as set out in Paragraph 4.6.9 of the report.
3. That the updated inflation assumptions used in the Medium Term Financial Strategy, as set out in Section 4 of the report, be approved.
4. That the approach to Making Your Money Count (MYMC) budget options, as set out in Section 4.8 of the report, be approved.
5. That an amount of £300,000 for 2022/23 be approved for inclusion in the budget setting process to support the Transformation Fund, to help deliver the MYMC Target, as set out in Paragraph 4.8.4 of the report.
6. That a Making Your Money Count Target of £2.14million (of which £1.91Million is not identified), be approved for the period 2022/23- 2024/25, as set out in Section 4.9 of the report.
7. That the potential expansion of the Revenues and Benefits Service be approved, subject to a full business case, as set out in Paragraph 4.8.11 of the report.
8. That the 1st quarter changes to the General Fund, as outlined in Section 4.3 and also in Appendix B of the report, of £377,840 net underspend, be approved.
9. That the changes to business rates and section 31 grants, as set out in Paragraph 4.5.5 of the report, be noted.
10. That the financial impact of COVID in 2021/22 and future years, as set out in Section 4.1 of the report, be approved.
11. That the use of £265,930 of COVID finance settlement funding for homeless pressures, as set out in Paragraph 4.3.10 of the report, be approved.
12. That General Fund growth be only approved for the Council's FTFC priorities and the growth allowance in the 2022/23 budget is £75,000. Growth above that level will need to be funded by further savings in addition to the £2.14Million target identified.

	<p>13. That a minimum level of balances for the General Fund of £3.46million be approved for 2021/22, as set out in Paragraph 4.10.8 of the report.</p> <p>14. That the MTFS be regularly updated for any material financial pressures so forecasts are updated and then be re-presented to the Executive for approval.</p> <p>15. That the Trade Unions and staff be consulted on the key messages contained within the Medium Term Financial Strategies and more specifically when drawing up any proposals where there is a risk of redundancy.</p> <p><i>Reason for Decision: As contained in report.</i> <i>Other Options considered: As contained in report.</i></p>	
<p>8</p>	<p>ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY REVIEW OF 2020/21 INCLUDING PRUDENTIAL CODE</p>	<p>C. Fletcher x2933</p>
	<p>The Executive considered a report in respect of the annual review of the 2020/21 Treasury Management Strategy.</p> <p>It was RESOLVED:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the 2020/21 Annual Treasury Management Review be recommended to Council for approval. 2. That Council be recommended to approve that the wording in Appendix C, Table 1 of the report (Specified Investments Criteria) be amended as set out in Paragraph 4.2.6.5 of the report, in order to allow the use of Enhanced Cash Funds included in Table 3 (Treasury Limits). <p><i>Reason for Decision: As contained in report.</i> <i>Other Options considered: As contained in report.</i></p>	

9	URGENT PART I BUSINESS	
	None.	
10	EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC	
	<p>It was RESOLVED:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraphs 1 – 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as amended by Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006. 2. That the reasons for the following report being in Part II were accepted, and that the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure. 	
11	PART II MINUTES - EXECUTIVE - 11 AUGUST 2021	
	It was RESOLVED that the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 11 August 2021 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.	
12	URGENT PART II BUSINESS	
	None.	