

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 9 June 2021

Time: 1.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: Sharon Taylor OBE CC (Chair), Mrs Joan Lloyd (Vice-Chair), Lloyd Briscoe, Rob Broom, Richard Henry, Jackie Hollywell and Jeannette Thomas.

Also Present: Councillors Phil Bibby CC and Simon Speller (observers)

Start / End Start Time: 1.00pm
Time: End Time: 4.00pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors John Gardner and Robin Parker, CC (observer).

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 10 MARCH 2021

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 10 March 2021 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

3 MINUTES OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND SELECT COMMITTEES

The Executive considered the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 17 March 2021.

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

4 COVID-19 UPDATE

The Executive considered a presentation providing an update on the Covid-19 pandemic from the Strategic Director (RP), assisted by other officers. The presentation covered Local and National epidemiology statistics; Step 4 – Easing of Lockdown – 21 June 2021; Delta (“Indian”) variant; outbreak management; compliance and enforcement; Covid Action Plan; Community and Housing; Business Support and Grants; Business Continuity and workforce; and Communications update.

The following issues were raised during the presentation:

- It was confirmed that the epidemiology statistics were Ward-related and did not indicate the socio-economic or employment status of individuals;
- The Strategic Director (RP) undertook to arrange for some clear and easy to read messaging/communications to be provided for those with vaccine hesitancy, targeting in particular: those on lower incomes/day rates who were concerned about feeling unwell following the vaccine and the financial consequence of needing time off work and pregnant women;
- The Assistant Director (Communities & Neighbourhoods) agreed to provide Members with a Briefing Note with details of relevant phone numbers of organisations offering help to those with suicidal tendencies;
- Consideration would be given to the provision of Mental Health First Aid Training, as part of the Member Development Programme, for those Members interested in receiving such training;
- The Strategic Director (RP) would ask the Business Relationship Manager to, if possible, provide Members with details of the 800 individuals who were no longer on furlough, in terms of the numbers of those who had returned to their original jobs and the numbers of those who were no longer employed;
- It was agreed that the next Covid-19 update should include details of the support mechanisms provided for staff during the pandemic and to be provided during the post-Covid new ways of working initiative (with particular reference to home working).

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

5 CO-OPERATIVE TENANT AND RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY

The Executive considered a report in respect of proposed new arrangements for ensuring that SBC tenants and residents has a range of opportunities to participate in the management of their homes and neighbourhoods, building on the development of the Co-operative Neighbourhood operating model.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People advised that officers would be considering how the Strategy connected with the Council's Co-operative Neighbourhoods Programme and responded to the Social Housing White Paper 'a charter for social housing residents'. Consideration would also be given to the recommendations made as a result of the Tenants Participation Advisory Service report that explored tenant scrutiny arrangements at SBC, concluded in 2020.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People explained that, following a Business Unit review in 2019, with a focus on enabling co-operative working, tenant and resident participation functions had merged into a new community development service. It was then identified that whilst there were a number of structures and mechanisms for resident participation, the number and diversity of individual residents actually engaged was limited. The report sought to introduce measures to rectify this imbalance.

The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods & Co-operative Council added his support for the proposed new Strategy.

The following points were made during the debate:

- The Assistant Director (Communities & Neighbourhoods) confirmed that the Housing Management Advisory Board would be consulted on the new proposals by way of a workshop session;
- The consultation exercise should focus on gleaning the views of residents first, rather than presenting them with a series of narrow options;
- In terms of consultation generally, the Leader considered that improved co-ordination of SBC consultation may be necessary, to ensure that the Council was not constantly consulting the same people at the same time on various issues;
- Community plans – it was important that these should be devised by the community for the community, using a bottom-up approach.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That a revised participation and engagement approach, as outlined in the report, for Stevenage tenants and residents living in homes rented and leased from the Council, be approved.
2. That the development of Co-operative Neighbourhoods as the mechanism for delivering meaningful, local engagement opportunities and better relationships with residents that will also meet the specific service and legal requirements relating to the Council's housing portfolio, be noted.
3. That an ongoing approach to tenant and resident participation based on 'engaging, listening and acting', reaching as many tenants and residents as possible to understand what is important to them in their neighbourhood, be approved.
4. That the new co-operative customer scrutiny model for housing functions, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be approved.
5. That the development of a new housing forum to create the opportunity for tenants, residents and councillors to engage in the strategic development of housing services, be approved.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

6 LEISURE CONTRACT WORK PROGRAMME

The Executive considered a report with regard to a proposed work programme to enable the Council to determine the strategic delivery of its leisure and cultural offer post-March 2023.

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People, Leisure & Culture advised that the report provided the background to the Council's current leisure management contract which ended in March 2023. The contract was with Stevenage Leisure Limited, who currently managed four of the Council's leisure facilities, namely

Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre, Stevenage Swimming Centre, Fairlands Valley Sailing Centre and Stevenage Golf & Conference Centre.

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People, Leisure & Culture stated that the nature and type of leisure contracts had changed significantly in recent years, with a heightened emphasis on commercial delivery plus the vital role that quality public leisure provision played in supporting community wellbeing and the wider determinants of health.

The Executive was informed that, in order to progress the work programme effectively, it was proposed that an officer project team be established and a programme board created, chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People, Leisure and Culture. This would help to ensure that the leisure programme was delivered on time and within the principles set out in the report. The underlying principle to the process was to ensure that a co-operative approach to planning future leisure services was embedded throughout.

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People, Leisure & Culture explained that the project stages would include the following:

- Identification of a clear, needs led 'vision', priorities and local strategic outcomes for the Council's health, wellbeing, sports, leisure, arts, culture and community outreach services and the town's physical assets, to be undertaken through a broader community visioning exercise, involving existing stakeholders and those who did not currently use facilities;
- Consideration and definition of what elements of culture, arts leisure, community, sports and wellbeing should be included within a leisure management contract;
- Evaluation of the opportunity for a new leisure build and the impact this would have on the leisure management contract; and
- Undertaking a management options appraisal - comparing the relative advantages, and disadvantages of management options, including in-house, Local Authority Trading Company (and the relevant legal entities that this may form, i.e. CIC, CLG, CLS, Mutual) and open market procurement.

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People, Leisure & Culture outlined the reasons for the work programme, as summarised below:

- The end of the current contract in March 2023 gave the Council an opportunity to define future arrangements that could be more closely aligned with the Council's strategic priorities, whilst providing additional flexibility to meet the changing needs of the market and either reduce the costs to the Council or provide a revenue stream for the General Fund;
- The current leisure contract ending in 2023 meant that the Council would need to formulate a plan for the operation of the four existing facilities beyond that point;
- Officers considered that, given the background and current context, the Council should give wider consideration to the mix of facilities that formed part of its leisure offer, rather than purely re-tendering on a like for like contract. This may include other leisure assets such as pavilions, Ridlins Athletics Stadium, outdoor

- sports and open space leisure assets. Such an approach would support a coherent vision for leisure and could drive best value and further efficiencies;
- Despite the difficulties in the current market a contract extension with the current provider was not being recommended at present, as this may not represent best value given that other options had not yet been explored;
 - Given the wider strategic ambitions for health, wellbeing and culture and a vision for new leisure and cultural facilities as part of Town Centre regeneration, it was proposed to consider future delivery through a wider focus on place-shaping. A leisure work programme had therefore been devised to enable the Council to determine its future leisure and cultural offer; and
 - Such a programme would give the Council an opportunity to define the long-term future service delivery for residents, whilst being flexible enough to be able to adapt to future changing demands of the local market.

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People, Leisure & Culture concluded by stating that it was proposed that a detailed options appraisal be brought back to Executive in September 2021 to enable the consideration of preferred options ahead of any procurement process.

In response to a series of Member questions, the Assistant Director (Communities & Neighbourhoods) commented:

- Thought was being given as to how the Council could be able to wet and dry leisure provision on one site within the town. This was one of the key aims of one of the projects contained in the Town Fund Deal; and
- the opportunity would be taken to look at leisure and cultural provision across the Borough, and to co-operatively engage as many sports and arts groups as possible in the preliminary and design work on relevant projects, including any new Leisure Centre scheme.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the progression of the Leisure Work Programme, as outlined in the report, be approved.
2. That the undertaking of an options appraisal to determine future leisure management options when the current leisure contract expires, be approved.
3. That a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Executive outlining leisure management options, in order to determine a preferred management model.
4. That a Project Team and Programme Board be established to manage the options appraisal and subsequent procurement process.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

7 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE: QUARTER 4 2020/21

The Executive considered a report and received a presentation from the Chief

Executive highlighting the Council's performance across key priorities and themes for Quarter Four 2020/21.

The Chief Executive began by presenting a slide showing a number of the Council's highlights during Quarter 4. The next slide showed that, of the 53 Corporate Performance Indicators, 31 were at Green status; 6 were at Amber; 12 were at Red; and 4 were not available.

The Chief Executive drew attention to the 4 Red Indicators and 1 Amber Indicator that had not been directly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Red Indicators related to Void Loss; Voids – sheltered; Voids – sheltered Major Works; and Website Satisfaction. The Amber Indicator was in respect of Garage Voids. He explained the reasons for these Indicators performing below target, and outlined the measures proposed for improvement.

In respect of the Website Satisfaction performance indicator, the Leader asked that consideration be given to the establishment of a "Customer Testing Panel" to gauge the public's views on the website.

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 four 2020/21, together with the latest achievements, be noted.
2. That the impacts of COVID-19 on the Council's ability to deliver against the following key performance areas and, where appropriate the improvement actions outlined against them, as identified in the paragraphs outlined below, be noted:
 - Number of households in emergency/temporary accommodation (Paragraphs 3.69 to 3.76);
 - Homelessness preventions (Paragraphs 3.77 to 3.81 of the report)
 - Job Creation through the Business Technology Centre (Paragraphs 3.102 to 3.104);
 - Food establishment compliance checks (Paragraphs 3.105 to 3.107);
 - Letting of Council garages (Paragraphs 3.109 to 3.115);
 - Collection of Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates (Paragraphs 3.122 to 3.123);
 - Ability to identify and remove HRA/GF savings (Paragraphs 3.124 to 3.128);
 - Ability to mobilise the Decent Homes programme (Paragraphs 3.95 to 3.93);
 - Amount of residual waste collected per household (Paragraph 3.108).

3. That the impacts of Universal Credit and COVID-19 on the rent collection rate be noted and continuing delivery of the income action plan be endorsed (Paragraphs 3.82 to 3.91 of the report).
4. That the level of void loss, and the way in which this is impacted by sheltered and major works void property re-let times, be noted, and the improvement activities be endorsed (Paragraphs 3.94 to 3.101 of the report).
5. That the proposals to further improve website satisfaction be endorsed (Paragraphs 3.116 to 3.121 of the report).

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

8 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

The Leader had accepted the following item of urgent Part I business.

Government Levelling Up Fund

The Leader advised that the Government had allocated £4.8Billion nationally in respect of the Levelling Up Fund, in order to provide investment in areas suffering from significant levels of deprivation. Local Authorities could bid for funding from this fund, and she stated SBC would be submitting a bid by the deadline date of 18 June 2021, and that officers were working to provide a compelling case, building on the work of the successful Town Investment Plan (Town Fund). Support for the submission of a bid had been confirmed by the Stevenage Development Board.

The Chief Executive added that the Levelling Up Fund bid would need to focus on projects that would provide a visible impact on people and their communities, in terms of improved transport, urban regeneration and/or leisure and cultural facilities. The deliverability of schemes was an important factor, with an emphasis on projects that could commence in 2021/22. He stated that this was the first phase of bidding and that, if unsuccessful, this did not prevent the Council submitting a bid in subsequent phases. He advised Members that he would be meeting with the local MP to discuss SBC's bid.

As an aside, the Leader explained that, as part of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations in 2022, the Queen would be creating a number of new cities. The Leader commented that she was intending that Stevenage would put in an application for city status, which she felt would be appropriate in terms of the life of Stevenage New Town broadly matching the duration of the Queen's reign.

9 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was **RESOLVED:**

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.

10 PART II MINUTES - EXECUTIVE - 10 MARCH 2021

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 10 March 2021 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

11 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

Danestrete Roundabout Site Disposal

The Chair advised that she had accepted this report as Urgent Part II business because a decision was required promptly to enable the commencement of the Matalan Site redevelopment scheme. In accordance with the provisions of the Council's Constitution, this course of action had received the agreement, in writing, of the Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

The Executive supported a revision to Recommendation 2.2 in the report, regarding the use of the funds generated by this capital receipt.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Recommendations 2.1 and 2.3 contained in the report, together with a revised Recommendation 2.2, be approved.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report; and 2. To enable further information to be provided regarding the use of the funds generated by this capital receipt.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

CHAIR