

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 18 January 2023

Time: 2.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: Richard Henry (Chair), Jeannette Thomas (Vice-Chair), Sandra Barr, Lloyd Briscoe, Mrs Joan Lloyd and Simon Speller.

Start / End Time: Start Time: 2.00pm
End Time: 3.02pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no apologies for absence.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 7 DECEMBER 2022

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 7 December 2022 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

3 MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND SELECT COMMITTEES

In respect of the Minutes of the meeting of the Environment & Economy Select Committee held on 15 December 2022, the Portfolio Holder for Environment & Climate Change stated that he was working proactively with the Chair of the Select Committee to ensure that the Select Committee was fully engaged with the Executive in tackling the Climate Change emergency.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following Minutes of meetings of the Select Committees be noted –

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 23 November 2022

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 13 December 2022

Environment & Economy Select Committee – 15 December 2022

4 TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION PLACEMENT AND PROCUREMENT POLICY

The Executive considered a report seeking approval of a revised Temporary Accommodation Placement and Procurement Policy, which had been updated to reflect changes in homelessness legislation and case law.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing & Housing Development advised that the Policy

was last updated in 2016 and the approach to predominantly use owned Council stock for temporary accommodation has remained unchanged. There would, however, be future pressures on interim and temporary accommodation demand, due to the growing cost of living crisis, which the Council would have to consider carefully.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing & Housing Development stated that Officers would continue to explore ways to secure temporary accommodation and would work closely with other housing providers and housing support organisations to be able to identify solutions. The Executive was asked to agree the recommendation in the report for service charges to be reviewed to maximise income recovery and reduce the operational burden.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing & Housing Development commented that appropriately sourced and well managed interim and temporary accommodation provision was effective for both co-operative neighbourhoods and the thriving town pillars of the Future Town Future Council (FTFC) programme. This also responded to the making your money count pillar, by driving financial efficiency in delivering the service. The Policy was in line with the aims of the Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-2024 to eradicate rough sleeping across Stevenage.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the revised Temporary Accommodation Procurement and Placement Policy, as attached at Appendix A to the report, that has been updated to reflect changes and case law, be approved.
2. That a review of service charges be undertaken to maximise income recovery and reduce operational burden.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

5 JOINT HOUSING FOR OLDER PEOPLE STRATEGY UPDATE

The Executive considered a report which provided an update on the Joint Housing for Older People Strategy (HOPS).

The Portfolio Holder for Housing & Housing Development advised that the Strategy contained commitments under each theme to ensure there was joined up working between Hertfordshire County Council and Stevenage Borough Council to aid decision making and focus on providing suitable long-term housing for older people in Stevenage.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing & Housing Development stated that the report outlined some of the progress made to date and some of the next steps. There was an action plan accompanying the report that provided details of projects that had completed, those in progress and those that had not yet started. The Executive was asked to note progress made on the 10-year Housing for Older People Strategy and that future actions, including their financial implications, were approved.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the progress of the Housing for Older People Strategy following its adoption in 2020 be noted.
2. That the future plans, as identified in the Action Plan, including their financial implications, be approved.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

6 STEVENAGE DESIGN GUIDANCE SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT - ADOPTION

The Executive considered a report seeking the adoption of the Stevenage Design Guidance Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

The Portfolio Holder for Environment & Climate Change advised that the Design Guidance SPD was intended to ensure that the Council's planning policies and approach captured the key components for good design, such as the appearance of buildings, the form and creation of new streets and spaces, practicality and visual quality.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment & Climate Change stated that Local and National policy has changed significantly over recent years (and since the examination and subsequent adoption of the Stevenage Borough Local Plan (2019), with the latest iteration of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021) and introduction of the National Design Guide (2021)). Policy now strongly supported sustainable development in all its forms and the protection and enhancement of a sense of place across the Borough.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment & Climate Change reminded Members that the first consultation on the Stevenage Design Guidance SPD was held from September to October 2021 and the consultation outcomes reported to Executive in February 2022. A second round of consultation had taken place to ensure local views and perspectives were included in the Design Guide. Public consultation on the draft Design Guidance SPD ran from 19 September to 31 October 2022.

The Planning Policy Manager stated that the public consultation had elicited 43 comments from 16 respondents, including the public and key stakeholders. Key points from this second round of consultation included:

- Embed "Active Design" – to promote a more physically active and mentally stimulating environment in all aspects of design;
- New guidance from Building Research Establishment (BRE) on daylight and sunlight best practice had been incorporated; and
- Reference had been included to new and updated guidance from Sport England.

The Executive noted that, subject to any minor final amendments, the SPD would

then be prepared for adoption on 30 January 2023. This would include the preparation of an adoption statement to confirm that the 2009 version had been superseded by this latest version.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the content of the final Stevenage Design Guidance SPD, and public consultation held between 19 September to 31 October 2022, be noted.
2. That the Stevenage Design Guidance SPD be adopted, with effect from 30 January 2023.
3. That delegated powers be granted to the Assistant Director: Planning and Regulation, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change, to make minor amendments as necessary in the final preparation of the SPD document prior to adoption.
4. That the comments of the Planning & Development Committee, held on the 10 January 2023, regarding the content of the report, be noted.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

7 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) - FINAL BUDGET AND RENT SETTING 2023/24

The Executive considered a report in respect of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) – Final Budget and Rent Setting 2023/24, for onward recommendation to Council.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing & Housing Development advised that the standard approach had been that rents would normally be calculated on the current agreed formula of September CPI plus 1 %. However, as the September 2022 CPI was at 10.1%, which would have resulted in a 11.1% rent increase, the Government announced a rent cap of 7% as part of its Autumn 2022 Statement.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing & Housing Development stated that, for 2023/24, Social rents would be an average £110.78 per week, LSSO £128.75 and Affordable rents £180.65. This would generate £3.3Million of rental income for the HRA. With service charge increases, there would be 637 properties with an increase per week of over £20, with 74 over £40.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing & Housing Development referred to a comparison between HRA property rents per week and private sector rents per week, which showed that a three-bedroom private sector rental property would cost an additional 114% (2022/23,131%) more per week than an SBC council home and 28% more than affordable let properties (2022/23, 30%).

The Portfolio Holder for Resources, Transformation & ICT referred to the £1.7Million of growth pressures included in the draft HRA budget. Additional growth of

£709,000 had been added into the HRA between draft and final budget reports. Most of this increase related to inflationary pressures on support service costs that were calculated after the draft budget was completed.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources, Transformation & ICT advised that the draft HRA budget had been reviewed by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee at its meeting held on 23 December 2022. The report was noted by the Committee.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources, Transformation & ICT commented that the HRA balances were projected to be £0.4Million by the end of 2023/24. However this was £6.4Million lower than in the 2019 HRA Business Plan and, by 2026/27, balances were projected to be £11Million lower than the full 30 year Business Plan at £16.2Million.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources, Transformation & ICT stated that the 2023/24 HRA Capital budget had increased by £5.1Million. The 2023/24 Capital programme was now £62.42Million

The Assistant Director (Finance) advised of a change to Paragraph 4.8.5 of the report in respect of Service Charge Income. The increase in charges for the last 12 weeks of 2022/23 of £84,210 would not be realised, as this required appropriate notice to be given to tenants. Accordingly, the charges would only be payable for the last 6 weeks of 2022/23. The revised figure of £42,110 would be reflected in the version of the report that would be submitted to Council on 25 February 2023 for final approval.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That HRA rent on dwellings be increased, week commencing 3 April 2023 by 7% which is an average increase of £7.24 for social rents, £11.82 for affordable rents and £8.42 for Low Start Shared Ownership homes per week (based on a 52-week year). This has been calculated in line with the Government's change to rent policy announced in the Autumn Statement as set out in Paragraph 3.3 of the report.
2. That Council be recommended to approve the 2023/24 HRA budget set out in Appendix A to the report.
3. That Council be recommended to approve the 2023/24 growth options, as set out in Section 4.7 of the report.
4. That Council be recommended to approve the 2023/24 Fees and Charges, as set out in Appendix B to the report.
5. That Council be recommended to approve the 2023/24 service charges.
6. That Council be recommended to approve the minimum level of reserves for 2023/24, as shown in Appendix C to the report.
7. That the Rent Increase Equalities Impact Assessments, appended to the report

in Appendix D, be noted.

8. That Council be recommended to approve the increase to the 2022/23 Working Budget of £1,394,400, to fund the pressures detailed at Paragraph 4.3 of the report.
9. That the increase in tenant service charges to recover increased utility costs for the last 12 weeks of 2022/23, as set out in Paragraph 4.3.5 of the report, be approved.
10. That it be noted that, due to the current volatility of the market, utilities charges will be kept under close review throughout 2023/24.
11. That the contingency sum of £400,000, within which the Executive can approve supplementary estimates, be approved for 2023/24 (increased from £250,000 for 2022/23), as detailed in Paragraph 4.16.5 of the report.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

8 DRAFT GENERAL FUND AND COUNCIL TAX SETTING 2023/24

The Executive considered a report in respect of the Council's draft General Fund, Council tax Support Scheme and draft proposals for the 2023/24 Council Tax.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources, Transformation & ICT advised that the report incorporated the Making Your Money Count savings (totalling £1.6Million) highlighted at the December 2022 Executive meeting. In addition, the report noted growth and identified pressures. The report also summarised the council tax bands for SBC based on an increase of 2.99%. As an illustration, for a Band D property this represented an increase of £6.74 per week, if approved at the February 2023 Council meeting.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources, Transformation & ICT stated that the Making Your Money Count savings included some service reductions which were only recommended due to the size of the £2Million budget gap, and the level of subsidy per child for the play service.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources, Transformation & ICT commented that there would be a draw on balances of £664,000 in 2023/24. There was projected to be a total draw on balances to 2025/26 of £3.37Million. Given this projected draw on General Fund reserves, it was expected that there would be a requirement for £1.53Million of further savings up to 2025/26.

In reply to a Member's question, the Strategic Director (CF) confirmed that the Covid-19 pandemic had contributed to a net loss to the Council of approximately £4Million, primarily though reduced income along with some increased costs.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the 2022/23 revised net expenditure on the General Fund of £11,938,420 be approved, as set out in Paragraph 4.10.1 of the report.
2. That the inclusion of the 2023/24 Fees and Charges of £325,840, including the 5% increase in market rents approved for inclusion at the December 2022 Executive meeting (Appendix B to the report), in the draft 2023/24 budget, be noted.
3. That the draft General Fund Budget for 2023/24 of £10,723,320 be proposed for consultation purposes, with a contribution from balances of £664,462 and a Band D Council Tax of £232.31 (assuming a 2.99% increase).
4. That the updated position on the General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), as summarised in Section 4.12 of the report, be noted.
5. That the minimum level of General Fund reserves of £3,419,753, in line with the 2023/24 risk assessment of balances, as shown at Appendix C to the report, be approved.
6. That the contingency sum of £400,000 within which the Executive can approve supplementary estimates, be approved for 2023/24 (reflecting the level of balances available above the minimum amount).
7. That the 2023/24 Making Your Money Count (MYMC) options, as set out in Section 4.2 and Appendix A to the report, totalling £1,373,999 and £32,502 (cost) for the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) respectively, be included into the Council's budget setting processes for consideration by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, subject to resolution 8. below.
8. That, for 2023/24, £32,000 be transferred from the Business Rates Gains allocated reserve to fund next year's firework display and town twinning event, together with the reviews set out in Paragraphs 4.7.12 and 4.7.13 of the report.
9. That the Growth options included in Section 4.8 of the report be approved for inclusion in the 2023/24 General Fund (£73,150) and HRA (£56,892) budgets.
10. That the pressures identified in Sections 4.2 and 4.9 of the report be noted.
11. That, for 2023/24, £300,000 budget to pump prime Transformation and included in the General Fund budget setting processes, be noted, to enable to significantly contribute to the savings targets, as set out in Section 4.12 of the report.
12. That the use of the business rate gains only once realised, and ring fenced for use for the financial resilience of the Council, be approved.
13. That the decisions taken on Resolutions 3 – 12 above be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration, in accordance with the Budget and Policy Framework Rules in the Council's Constitution.

14. That the Equalities Impact Assessments appended to the report in Appendices D and E be noted.
15. That key partners and other stakeholders be consulted and their views considered as part of the 2023/24 budget setting process.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

9 DRAFT CAPITAL STRATEGY 2022/23 - 2026/27

The Executive considered a report in respect of the draft Capital Strategy for 2022/23 – 2026/27.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources, Transformation & ICT advised that the Leader's Financial Security Group had endorsed capital bids totalling £3.35Million for 2023/24. This was revised to £3.25Million following a subsequent review by the Council's Senior Leadership Team. The related changes were set out in Paragraph 4.2.2 of the report.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources, Transformation & ICT explained that, if all the bids were approved, the current funding gap would be £177,000. There was a deferred works budget available for overruns, deferred or urgent works of £1.259Million, which may not be sufficient in the current period of high inflation. Therefore, it was recommended that the bids totalling £3.6Million were noted. The Capital Strategy report to the February Executive meeting would update Members on the level of spend that could be approved, recommended bids and the funding strategy.

The Strategic Director (CF) confirmed that the Assistant Director (Finance) and his Team would be aiming to submit a balanced Capital Budget to the February 2023 meeting of the Executive.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the Draft General Fund Capital Budget for 2023/24 of £34Million, as set out in Appendix C to the report, be proposed for consultation purposes subject to funding (Paragraph 4.2.3).
2. That the Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Budget for 2023/24 of £62.4Million, as set out in Appendix D to the report, be proposed for consultation purposes.
3. That the updated forecast of resources 2023/24, as detailed in Appendix C (General Fund) and Appendix D (HRA) to the report, be approved, subject to the consultation process.
4. That the General Fund and HRA capital budget re-profiling of £15.2Million from 2022/23 to future years be approved.

5. That the General Fund capital budget adjustments (Paragraph 4.1.3 of the report) be approved.
6. That the approach to resourcing the General Fund capital programme, as outlined in the report (Paragraph 4.5), be approved.
7. That the General Fund growth bids identified for inclusion in the Capital Strategy (Paragraph 4.2.1, table five and Appendix A to the report) be approved in principle, subject to further review work on Capital Priorities being undertaken.
8. That £28,000 for the installation of solar panels to 8 existing fleet vehicles to be funded from the business rates reserve (Paragraph 4.2.5 of the report).
9. That the HRA budget increases identified for inclusion in the Capital Strategy (Paragraph 4.8.4, table ten and Appendix B to the report) be approved.
10. That the 2023/24 de-minimis expenditure limit (Section 4.10 of the report) be increased from £5,000 to £7,500.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

10 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

11 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 reports being in Part II were accepted, and that the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

12 PART II MINUTES - EXECUTIVE - 7 DECEMBER 2022

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the Executive held on 7 December 2022 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

13 SUNDRY DEBT AND HOUSING BENEFIT OVERPAYMENTS WRITE OFFS GREATER THAN £10,000

The Executive considered a Part II report seeking approval to sundry debt and

Housing Benefit overpayments write offs greater than £10,000.

It was **RESOLVED** that the recommendations set out in the report be approved.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

14 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

CHAIR