

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE
MINUTES

Date: Tuesday 5 April 2016

Time: 14.00 hrs.

Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Stevenage SG1 1HN

Present: Councillors S Taylor OBE CC (Chair), J Gardner (Vice-Chair), S Batson MBE DL CC, R Henry CC, Mrs J Lloyd, R Raynor, S Speller, J Thomas and A Webb.

Also Present:

Start/End Time: Start Time: 14.00 hrs.
End Time: 15.05 hrs

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no apologies for absence or declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES – EXECUTIVE – 8 MARCH 2016

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2016 are approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. MINUTES – OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND SELECT COMMITTEES

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the following meetings are noted

Community Select Committee – 7 March 2016
Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 14 March 2016.

4. NEW HOMES BONUS

The Executive considered a report that set out the range of schemes recommended to be funded from the 2016/17 New Homes Bonus allocation.

The Strategic Director (Community) reported on the comments made by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee who had considered the report the previous evening. Concerning the 'No More' Project it was suggested that Hertfordshire County Council Public Health team be approached about the potential for them to also support this initiative. The

Committee also asked officers to circulate a brochure detailing the events planned for the Town's 70th Anniversary celebrations.

Additionally, in reply to a further request from the Overview & Scrutiny Committee the Head of Leisure, Community & Children's Services had undertaken to circulate a copy of the Economic Impact Assessment that was carried out following the Town's hosting of the finish of a stage of the Women's Cycle Tour of Britain in 2015. In response to comments concerning the funding to be made available for the refurbishment of play areas the Head of Environmental Services would provide Members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee with details and costings of play equipment in advance of the Committee's meeting on 6 April.

At the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, in response to a question about prioritising shrub bed works and neighbourhood project investment at Ward level it was noted that a means for effectively achieving this ambition is currently under consideration. Ultimately though the aim is to ensure that all Wards receive investment over time.

The Strategic Director (Community) informed the Executive of the following formal resolutions of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee –

- The Committee welcomed the proposals put forward under the New Homes Bonus Scheme.
- Organisers of events sponsored by LCB monies for the Town's 70th Anniversary celebrations should be encouraged to advertise the event as being supported by the Council.
- Sponsorship of the Pearl Izumi Cycle Event should be linked with other health initiatives in the Town if possible.
- Further mitigation of the impact of the Pearl Izumi Cycle Event should be considered as the event was scheduled for a school day during the exam period and the Committee would not wish for the event to have a detrimental effect on those students sitting exams on that day.
- That the Neighbourhood Wardens be issued with a uniform to ensure they are recognisable to the public.

The Executive welcomed the comments of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Members were of the view that there was a need to monitor the progress of the initiative, whether this was by bringing the relevant Portfolio Holders and officers together, in a similar same way as the Archer Road project was being monitored and/or by quarterly monitoring by the Executive as a whole.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That funding of £534,540 from the 2016/17 New Homes Bonus allocation is approved for the implementation and delivery of the following schemes :

(Initiative 1) Stevenage New Town 70th Birthday celebrations and events-£40,000;

(Initiative 2) 'No More Project - £49,520;

(Initiative 3) Pearl Izumi Tour - £70,000;

(Initiative 4) Play Area Old Town - £8,000;

(Initiative 5) Neighbourhood Wardens (three) - £181,070;

(Initiative 6) Town wide shrub rejuvenation (2nd tranche) - £150,000

(Initiative 7) Homelessness initiatives - £35,950

2. That funding of £111,000 is approved from New Homes Bonus allocation to support the apprenticeship programme for 2016/17 (Initiative 8).

3. That the ring fencing of £433,000 from the New Homes Bonus funding for 2016/17 is noted and going forward, an equivalent annual amount to support delivery of the Neighbourhood Initiatives programme is approved (Initiative 9).

4. That progress on these initiatives be reported to the Executive on a quarterly basis, with relevant Members and officers liaising on their individual and cross cutting schemes on a regular basis.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report and 4. To ensure that the initiatives are progressed.

Other Options Considered: As contained in the report.

5. TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION PROCUREMENT AND PLACEMENTS POLICIES 2016-17

The Executive considered a report that sought approval of the draft Temporary Accommodation Procurement and Placement Policy 2016.

Members were of the view that the extent of the increase in the number of households in Temporary/Emergency Accommodation and the total number of Homelessness Acceptances was of great concern. It was commented that the Council staff involved in this area had been working really well to avoid use of bed and breakfast.

The Executive was informed of further statutory duties that may to be placed on the Council that put an emphasis on preventing homelessness. Transitional funding may be available in the short term. A Policy Officer from Shelter had been invited to meet with the Homelessness Team to discuss related policy development and service delivery.

It was noted that the Council had overspent on its Discretionary Housing Payments and that demand was likely to increase. The 2015/16 budget was £156,565 and £158,489 was spent with the allocations in relation to the individual cases as follows

- Under Occupation - £123,924
- Combination of rent restrictions/arrears/ hardship – £20,722
- Local Housing Allowance shortfalls - £10,086
- Benefit Cap - £3,757

The Chair stated that it was important that Members and officers explore alternative and innovative options, together with best practice with a view to effectively addressing the local challenge.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the content of the draft Temporary Accommodation Procurement and Placement Policy 2016 is approved and the Strategic Director (Communities) is given delegated authority to make any final changes that may be required following the meeting and consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing.
2. Delegated authority is given to the Strategic Director (Communities) to determine future targets for the procurement of temporary accommodation and changes to the type of temporary accommodation and/or methods of procurement, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing.
3. Delegated authority is given to the Strategic Director (Communities) with regard to future changes in the placement of households both inside and outside Stevenage following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing.
4. That a meeting be arranged for Members of the Executive to consider with officers best practice in other authorities to address the homelessness problem and to consider options and innovations that might be used in Stevenage.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report and 4. To ensure all options are considered

Other Options Considered: As contained in the report.

6. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE HOUSING MANAGEMENT BOARD (HMB)

The Executive considered a report that sought approval to the HMB annual report and the proposed approach to take the HMB forward.

Councillor C Latif, Chair of the Housing Management Board (HMB) was in attendance and was given the opportunity to comment on the report. She suggested that the Minutes of the HMB might be included on the agenda for the Executive.

A typographical error on the report was noted – the name of Len Saunders (tenant member) had been erroneously omitted from the details of members of the Board.

The Executive considered that when the Board reviewed its terms of reference it should consider increasing the tenant representation.

The Chair indicated that if any Members had any further comments to be considered in the review they should liaise with the Portfolio Holder for Housing or the Strategic Director (Community).

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the content of the draft HMB Annual Report is approved.
2. That the proposals for improvement are approved.
3. That the finalised HMB annual report be signed off by the Interim Assistant Director of Housing Services, Chair of HMB, the Leader and the Executive Member for Housing.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report

Other Options Considered: As contained in the report

7. FRAUD PROSECUTION POLICY

The Executive considered a report that sought approval of a new Fraud Sanctions and Prosecution policy

N Jennings from Shared Anti-Fraud Services (SAFS) was in attendance.

The Executive was informed that the Audit Committee had considered the draft policy and made no formal comment.

The Executive Portfolio Holder for Resources introduced the report and informed the Executive that between April and December 2015, SAFS received over 600 allegations of fraud across all of its Partners. There

were 62 frauds regarding SBC administered services that included 30 cases of Housing Fraud with six properties recovered. To the end of December 2015 SAFS had identified SBC fraud losses of £135k have been identified and further saving of £174k. SAFS were also working with the Council's Licensing Team on suspected fraud regarding taxi licensing.

N Jennings thanked SBC for the support it had given to the Shared Service.

Members were of the view that the Fraud Hotline Number (0300 123 4033) and website details (<http://www.hertsdirect.org/help/fraud/#howtoreportfraud>) should be widely publicised together with the fact that all contacts through this hotline were anonymous.

The Executive noted that there had been no Equalities Impact Assessment undertaken on this Policy and it was agreed that one would be completed.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the Fraud Sanction and Prosecution policy appended to this report is approved.
2. That as a result of amendments made by other Shared Anti-Fraud (SAFS) partners, as part of their individual council approval processes, the Assistant Director (Finance) is given delegated authority to make and approve changes to the policy that may be required following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options Considered: As contained in the report.

8. URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

None

9. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for item 9 below only, (Item 10 having been taken in Part I) on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1-7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by SI 2006 No. 88.
2. That having considered the reasons for item 10 being in

Part II it be determined that the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

10. WRITE OFF OF HOUSING BENEFIT OVERPAYMENTS AND DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT GREATER THAN £10,000

The Executive considered a Part II report that set out proposals for the write of Housing Benefit overpayment debts deemed irrecoverable and the recovery of a Disabled Facilities grant given as a result of exceptional circumstances.

It was **RESOLVED** that the recommendation in the report be approved.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report

Other Options Considered: As contained in the report

11. STEVENAGE EXTERNAL WORKS CONTRACT AWARD

Report withdrawn

12. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None

Chair