

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 18 July 2023

Time: 2.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

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

Start / End Start Time: 2.00pm

Time: End Time: 4.51pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no apologies for absence.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 14 JUNE 2023

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 14 June 2023 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair

3 MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND SELECT COMMITTEES

It was **RESOLVED** that the following Minutes of meetings of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees be noted –

Environment & Economy Select Committee – 14 June 2023

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 20 June 2023

Community Select Committee – 27 June 2023

4 STATION GATEWAY AREA ACTION PLAN: PREFERRED OPTIONS REPORT - PUBLIC CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

The Executive considered a report in respect of public consultation feedback on the Station Gateway Area Action Plan (AAP) Preferred Options report.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment & Performance referred to the 4 high level options for the Station Gateway area (the area adjacent to Stevenage Railway Station, incorporating the section of Lytton Way, between Swingate and Danesgate) which were:

- Option 0 – Do nothing.

- Option 1 – All traffic modes: reduced the central area of Lytton Way between Swingate and Danesgate to a single carriageway suitable for all modes of traffic.
- Option 2 – Bus and Taxi only: reduced the central area of Lytton Way between Swingate and Danesgate to a single carriageway and restricted movement to buses and taxis only.
- Option 3 – Pedestrianised Plaza: removed regular vehicle movement from the front of the station and Lytton Way ceased to be a through-route. An access through-route would be retained for emergency vehicles needing to access and egress the station and immediate environs.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment & Performance drew attention to the relationship between the AAP and the Local Plan Review, as demonstrated by a diagram presented at the meeting.

The Assistant Director (Planning & Regulation) commented that Hertfordshire County Council Highways had expressed a preference for Option 2, for the reasons set out in the report. Members were therefore being asked to agree to consult on Option 2 as the Preferred Option within the Local Plan Review in 2024.

The Planning Policy Manager referred to the revised Local Development Scheme (LDS) timetable, attached as Appendix D to the report, and commented that it was intended that an updated LDS and Local Plan Review report would be submitted to the Executive in late 2023.

The Portfolio Holder for Economy & Transport commented that he understood the themes that had emerged from the consultation exercise set out in Paragraph 4.7 of the report. He supported the statement contained in Paragraph 4.24 of the report that the level of ambition in the Stevenage Sustainable Travel Town may make the level of mode shift achievable – however, without major behaviour change and modal shift, there were potential risks of causing significant congestion.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment & Performance advised that he had established a User Engagement Group on Active Travel. He felt that the range and depth of consultation on the AAP had been good, but that he would be striving towards undertaking local level public engagement/consultation that was beyond the Town & Country Planning Institute guidelines.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the content of the Stevenage Station Gateway Area Action Plan (AAP) Preferred Options Report Consultation Statement, as set out in Appendix A of the report, be noted.
2. That the content of Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) Highways comments on the Preferred Options Report, as set out in the report, be noted.
3. That the next steps for the AAP Preferred Options Report and Local Plan Review set out in the report, including agreeing to consult on Option 2 as the Preferred Option within the Local Plan Review in 2024, be approved.

4. That the revised Local Development Scheme set out at Appendix D to the report be approved, and the timescales for a Local Plan Review be noted.
5. That it be noted that the comments of the Planning & Development Committee will be sought and considered on both the Consultation Statement and the content of the report.
6. That it be noted that informal engagement with key stakeholders will continue, ahead of incorporating the AAP into the Local Plan Review.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

5 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION ACTION PLAN (2023 - 2024)

The Executive considered a report in respect of the proposed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety & Equalities advised that the Equality Act (2010) was the legal framework by which the rights of individuals and the advancement of equality of opportunity for all are protected. In March 2022, the Council set out its commitment to fulfilling these requirements in its Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy (2022-2026). This was accompanied by the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy (2022-2026), which committed the Council to going beyond legislative requirements, and recommended the implementation of an annual EDI Action Plan.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety & Equalities commented that the Action Plan presented in Appendix A to the report was in response to this commitment. It explained how the Council would continue to promote equality, diversity and inclusion across its services, communities, and workforce over the next year. It brought together all strands of equality, diversity and inclusion work across existing Council strategies, services, and programmes, ensuring that a clear link between the Council's six equality policy objectives and projects was established.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety & Equalities stated that the actions identified in the plan sought to respond to a number of key pieces of work, including:

- the initial findings of the Stevenage Equalities Commission, which focused on establishing the extent of racial disparity in Stevenage and identified a set of recommendations to tackle this issue;
- a period of self-assessment by the Council to identify existing and future projects which supported the equality, diversity and inclusion agenda, and any opportunities within these projects which it could build upon; and
- recognition of the diversity of Stevenage through analysis of the Equality & Diversity Annual Report, and making sure that the Council's actions within the plan sought to represent all protected characteristics groups.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety & Equalities had been very involved in the valuable work of the Stevenage Equalities Commission, which had been set up in April 2021 following a Motion agreed by the Council to address the nature, extent, and impact of racism in the town. She praised the Chair of the Commission Errol John, who was present at the meeting, for his tireless commitment to the Commission's ambitions. The Commission's findings indicated that there was further work to be undertaken with partners to identify future opportunities for joint working, which was why she was pleased to see an action for the establishment of a Stevenage Equalities Commission Legacy Group included in the Plan, so that this work could be taken forward.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety & Equalities also remarked on the significant number of projects already being delivered by the Council in this area, particularly the work of officers to make sure that the output was meaningful and demonstrated tangible progress for the groups which the Council was seeking to support. She was keen to see how these projects progressed, which was why the recommendation to bring an EDI Action Plan progress report back to the Executive in a years' time was so important.

In response to a Member's question about how the Action Plan would be rolled out regarding safeguarding responsibilities under the Children's Act, the Operations Director stated that it would be part of the work that would be progressed this year (as outlined in the Action Plan) regarding protected characteristic groups, including engagement with disability groups and children and young people. In acknowledging the Council's requirements under the Equalities Act around children and young people, having an Action Plan of this nature demonstrated that it recognised the needs and issues faced by this group, and was striving to address and tackle those issues in a positive way.

Errol John (Chair of the Stevenage Equalities Commission - SEC) addressed the Executive and provided some local background and history to the pioneering contributions of individuals from ethnic minority groups in the town. In terms of the SEC, he advised that it comprised 18 people from various backgrounds, some of whom had strategic links into other public service organisations. He was grateful for the work of his fellow commissioners, which had focussed on 5 priority areas (criminal justice system, education, employment/business, health and sports/arts/culture).

Errol John commented that the work of the SEC had confirmed that equality disparities were still apparent in various areas, as evidenced by the data/information gathered and the testimony of witnesses. He stated that strategies were being developed to endeavour to address those disparities and drew attention to the SEC's Legacy Group Action Plan, which was appended to the officer report.

The Chair thanked Errol for his address and the work of the Commission.

The Operations Director confirmed that officers had incorporated the recommendations of the SEC into the Council's EDI Action Plan. Progress would be monitored via the SBC Equality & Diversity Governance Group.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan, as set out at Appendix A to the report, be approved.
2. That an EDI progress report and updated EDI Action Plan be brought back to the Executive in Autumn 2024.
3. That the Stevenage Equalities Commission (SEC) Recommendations Report and SEC Legacy Group Action Plan, as set out in Appendices B1 and B2 to the report respectively, be noted.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

6 HOUSING UNDER-OCCUPATION POLICY REVIEW

The Executive considered a report in respect of a proposed revised Housing Under Occupation Policy.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing & Housing Development advised that the updated Under Occupation Policy included various amendments and incentives to encourage those living in homes that were too large for them (should they so wish) to downsize into more appropriate accommodation that may better serve their needs. The policy aimed to support under-occupying council tenants who wished to downsize by providing them with practical support and financial assistance

The Portfolio Holder for Housing & Housing Development commented that moving into more appropriate homes benefitted residents by providing a home that was more manageable, both physically and financially. As the cost of living crisis deepened, larger homes could lead to higher energy costs and some residents may meet the criteria for the under occupation tax on benefits. Therefore, helping tenants to downsize appropriately would ensure that the Council made best use of its housing stock by releasing larger properties for re-letting to overcrowded families and helping to reduce customer debt and Council rent arrears.

The Executive noted the results of the Downsizing pilot and that the necessary staffing requirements were to be built into the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan for a Downsizing Officer to be maintained.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing & Housing Development stated that the policy responded to the Future Town Future Council programme ambitions for Co-operative Neighbourhood Management and Excellent Council Homes by responding to tenants' needs and priorities and developing a better housing service.

In reply to a Member's question, it was confirmed that the policy would apply to specialist housing (such as properties for the disabled), as well as general needs housing, and appropriate adaptations could be made to certain properties to enable tenants to downsize.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the reviewed Housing Under Occupation Policy, as attached at Appendix A to the report, be approved and adopted.
2. That the results of the Downsizing pilot, as set out in the report, be noted.
3. That it be noted that the budget for the Downsizing Officer role has been factored into the 2023/24 budget, and that beyond that, a growth bid will be submitted for the 2024/25 HRA Business Plan to maintain this role.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

7 LOCAL LETTINGS POLICY FOR SPECIALIST ACCOMMODATION (OLDER PEOPLE)

The Executive considered a report in respect of a proposed Local Lettings Policy for Specialist Accommodation (Older People).

The Portfolio Holder for Housing & Housing Development advised that the Council recognised that there was an increasing older persons population. As part of the Older Person's Strategy commitments, the proposed policy ensured that the Council met their needs, whilst recognising that complex cases required specific property types and support. The removal of Specialist Accommodation from the Choice Based Lettings bidding system would improve the customer journey to identify the most suitable property for letting. This streamlined approach would also ensure that properties were let in the shortest possible timeframes, reducing void rent loss.

The Executive noted that the necessary staffing requirements were to be built into the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan for the Specialist Support Officer (Lettings) to be maintained to support the implementation of the Local Lettings Policy.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing & Housing Development stated that the policy responded to tenants' needs and priorities and contributed to developing a better housing service for older people, as outlined in the Future Town Future Council programme ambitions for Co-operative Neighbourhood Management, Connected to our Customers and Excellent Council Homes.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the Local Lettings Policy for Specialist Accommodation (Older People), as attached at Appendix A to the report, be approved and adopted.
2. That it be noted that the budget for the Specialist Support Officer (Lettings) role has been factored in until December 2023, and that beyond that, a growth bid will be submitted for the 2024/25 HRA Business Plan to maintain this role. This was in addition to the Accommodation and Complex Needs Officer post.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

8 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE QUARTER 4 2022/23, ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23 AND CORPORATE PERFORMANCE SUITE 2023/24

The Executive considered a report in respect of Corporate Performance for Quarter 4 of 2022/23, the proposed Annual Report for 2022/23, and the proposed Corporate Performance Suite for 2023/24.

The Chair introduced the item by stating that he was pleased with the Council's achievements during the 2022/23 Financial Year, in particular the significant progress made towards delivery of the ambitious Future Town Future Council programme. Whilst acknowledging that there would always be room for improvement on some elements, he felt that overall performance had been good and he thanked portfolio holders for their leadership in this regard.

The Chair stated that the proposed Corporate Performance Suite 2023/24 would form the basis of quarterly performance reports to Executive throughout 2023/24. He was reassured that the changes proposed would improve performance monitoring throughout the year and ensured that Members had a good understanding of where the Council needed to focus its attention to secure further improvements, whilst also delivering on what would be of great interest to residents and wider stakeholders.

The Chief Executive gave a presentation concerning the Quarter 4 2022/23 report, and summarised the Future Town Future Council (FTFC) performance highlights throughout the Quarter, under the headings of Transforming Our Town; More Social and Affordable Housing; Co-operative and Neighbourhoods; Making Your Money Count; and a Clean, Green, Safe and Thriving Town.

The Chief Executive reported that, as at Quarter 4, of the 63 Corporate Performance Indicators, 43 were at Green status; 3 were at Amber; 11 were at Red; and 6 were outstanding, the reasons for which he outlined in his presentation.

The Chief Executive then presented the proposed Priorities for 2023/24 under the above five FTFC headings, and also outlined the Corporate and Service priorities for the year. It was noted that the words "Good Quality" had been added to the title of the housing heading so that it now read "More Social, Affordable and Good Quality Homes".

The Portfolio Holder for Environment & Performance commended the simplified performance measures for 2023/24, as set out in Appendix B to the report.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the draft Annual Report 2022/23 (Appendix A to the report) and Summary Action Plan/Plan on a Page (Appendix B to the report) be agreed, with final sign off delegated to the Chief Executive, after consultation with the Leader of

the Council.

2. That the significant progress in the delivery of priorities which form the Future Town, Future Council Programme and strong performance of the Council across the key themes for Quarter Four 2022/23, together with the latest achievements, be noted (as set out in Appendices C and D to the report).
3. That the proposed Corporate Performance Suite 2023/24 (as set out in Appendix F to the report) be agreed.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

9 4TH QUARTER REVENUE MONITORING 2022/23 - GENERAL FUND AND HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT

The Executive considered a report in respect of 4th Quarter Revenue Budget Monitoring 2022/23 for the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account.

In respect of the General Fund, the Portfolio Holder for Resources & Transformation referred to Section 4.2 of the report, which provided an analysis of the significant 2022/23 underspends totalling £740,000. She added that the report also sought approval for the Chief Financial Officer, in consultation with her as Portfolio Holder, to appoint the Council's insurers, following completion of a tendering exercise. The report requested approval for carry forwards totalling £504,650, and the transfer to reserves of £696,000.

In relation to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), the Portfolio Holder for Resources & Transformation explained that this was reporting a 2022/23 deficit of £469,000, and a £518,000 improvement against the working budget of £987,000. Within these figures, £922,000 of carry forwards were requested, as set out in Section 4.13 of the report. A transfer to reserves of £17.244Million was also recommended for approval, to reflect upcoming debt repayments in the HRA. The working balance for the HRA would therefore be £10.476Million.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources & Transformation stated that inflation costs and staff pay award costs would need to be monitored and analysed. The updated General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy would be submitted to the Executive in the Autumn.

The Strategic Director (CF) commented that, for the General Fund, officers were vigilant at looking at savings opportunities due to reducing funding. The table contained in Paragraph 4.1.4 of the report would be key to understanding how the 2022/23 underspends had arisen.

It was **RESOLVED:**

General Fund

1. That the 2022/23 actual General Fund net expenditure of £10.423Million be

noted, subject to the 2022/23 audit of the Statement of Accounts.

2. That the 2022/23 actual core resources of £9.470Million be noted (as set out in Paragraph 4.4 of the report), subject to the 2022/23 audit of the Statement of Accounts.
3. That carry forward/spend requests totalling £504,650 be approved for the General Fund (as set out in Paragraph 4.3.1 of the report).
4. That the Transfer to reserves of £0.696Million be approved for the General Fund (as set out in Paragraph 4.7.2 of the report).
5. That the changes to the 2023/24 General Fund budget savings totalling £95,000 be approved for the General Fund (as set out Section 4.6 of the report).
6. That the changes to the 2023/24 General Fund budget to reflect the additional cost associated with the Shared Revenue and Benefits service of £89,000 and adjustment to NDR Levy of £51,000 be approved for the General Fund (as set out in Section 4.6 of the report).
7. That the inflationary pressures outlined in Paragraphs 4.6.4 and 4.6.5 of the report be noted.
8. That drawdown of £272,000 from reserves to fund Revenue Contribution to Capital within the amount included in the General Fund working budget be approved (as set out in Paragraph 4.6.2 of the report).
9. That delegated authority be given to the Strategic Director (CFO), following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Transformation, to appoint the Council's insurers, following the completion of the tendering exercise (as set out in Paragraph 4.8 of the report).

Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

10. That the 2022/23 actual in year HRA deficit of £469,241 be noted, subject to the audit of the Statement of Accounts.
11. That new carry forward requests totalling £922,000 and an ongoing budget saving of £6,300 be approved for the HRA (as set out in Paragraph 4.13.1 of the report).
12. That the Transfer to reserves of £17.244Million be approved for the HRA (as set out in Paragraph 4.15.2 of the report).

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

10 2022/23 CAPITAL EXPENDITURE OUTTURN

The Executive considered a report in respect of the 2022/23 Capital Expenditure Outturn.

In respect of the General Fund, the Portfolio Holder for Resources & Transformation advised that there had been spend of £17.8Million against a working budget of £23.9Million, with a request for carry forwards totalling £6.7Million. Of the £17.8Million spent, £4.9Million was funded from borrowing; £5 Million from capital receipts; and the remaining £7.9Million from a variety of reserves, grants and other contributions. If the recommendations in the report were approved, a revised General Fund Capital Programme of £33.7Million would be in place for 2023/24.

With regard to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), the Portfolio Holder for Resources & Transformation stated that this incurred expenditure of £44Million against a working budget of £42.4Million, which resulted in a negative carry forward of £1.6Million into 2023/24. Of the £44Million spent, £5.5Million was funded through borrowing; £24.5Million from the Major Repairs reserve; £12Million from capital receipts; and the remaining £2Million from a variety of reserves, grants and other contributions. The HRA resources were being reviewed through the refreshed HRA Business Plan. Approval was also sought for the appropriation of the Brent Court garage block from the General Fund to the HRA in 2023/24, as detailed in Paragraph 4.7.1 of the report.

The Strategic Director (CF) commented that funding the Capital Programme continued to be a challenge, with the majority of resources, particularly for the General Fund, allocated towards maintaining existing facilities rather than enhancements and growth (unless third party funding was available). She referred to some already known pressures that could impact on the deferred reserve used for in-year spend that could be required as a result of those pressures.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the 2022/23 General Fund Capital expenditure outturn (£17.814Million), as summarised in Paragraph 4.1.1 of the report, be noted (subject to the completion of the 2020/21 and 2021/22 and 2022/23 external audit of accounts).
2. That the 2022/23 HRA Capital expenditure outturn (£43.966Million), as summarised in Paragraph 4.4.1 of the report, be noted, (subject to the completion of the 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 external audit of accounts).
3. That the funding applied to the 2022/23 General Fund Capital programme, as summarised in Paragraph 4.2.1 of the report, be approved.
4. That the funding applied to the 2022/23 HRA Capital programme, as summarised in Paragraph 4.5.1 of the report, be approved.
5. That the 2023/24 General Fund Capital programme increase of £6.796Million, as set out in Paragraph 4.3.1 of the report, be approved.

6. That the 2023/24 HRA Capital programme decrease of £1.628Million, as set out in Paragraph 4.6.1 of the report, be noted.
7. That the appropriation of Brent Court garage block (red book valuation to be obtained) in 2023/24 from the General Fund to the HRA, as detailed in Paragraph 4.7.1 of the report, be approved.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

11 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

12 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.

13 PART II MINUTES - EXECUTIVE - 14 JUNE 2023

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 14 June 2023 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

14 REGENERATION PROGRAMME UPDATE AND SG1 PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION

The Executive considered a Part II report in respect of an update on the Regeneration Programme and implementation of the SG1 project.

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.

15 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

CHAIR