

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 21 November 2018

Time: 2.00pm

Place: Shimkent Room, Danesill House

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

Start / End Time: Start Time: 2.00pm
End Time: 4.45pm

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No apologies for absence were received.

The Chair (Councillor Sharon Taylor) declared an interest in Item 4 – Housing Revenue Account Medium Term Financial Strategy (2018/19 – 2022/23) and Business Plan Update, as her daughter worked in the SBC Housing Department. She considered that that this was not a prejudicial interest and that she would therefore be remaining in the meeting for the duration of that item.

2 **MINUTES - 3 OCTOBER 2018**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 3 October 2018 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

3 **MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND SELECT COMMITTEES**

In relation to the Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 8 October 2018, and in particular the item on Diversity in the SBC Workforce, the Leader was pleased to learn that the gender pay gap at the Council was improving, and looked forward to receiving the updated statistics. She further advised of the probability that the Government would be extending the monitoring of pay gap statistics to ethnic minority groups, and requested that when any such monitoring report was received it be circulated to all Members of the Council.

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

Community Select Committee – 2 October 2018

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 8 October 2018

Environment & Economy Select Committee – 18 October 2018

Community Select Committee – 23 October 2018

4 **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (2018/19 - 2022/23) AND BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE**

The Executive considered a report on the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Medium Term Financial Strategy (2018/19 – 2022/23) and Business Plan Update.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources stated that the modelling contained within the report had been completed before the announcement that the HRA debt cap of £217Million would be lifted with immediate effect following the Chancellor's budget speech. The report contained a number of scenarios to show the impact of the borrowing bid made to the Government, private sales, changes in Right to Buy (RTB) and the impact of funding the capital required.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources commented that the report updated Members on the 30 year HRA capital programme of £1.28Billion (which in the recommended Scenario 2b included the additional borrowing bid, 39 private sales and a small funding gap of £9.4Million over 30 years).

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health and Older People welcomed the action plan which contained an approach for reviewing new build/major works, management and maintenance, and then fitting a borrowing strategy around those proposals, subject to affordability. The report identified two growth items for approval, relating to viability options for high rise blocks (£190K) and the conversion of Asquith Court, in part for temporary accommodation (£100K).

The Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) gave a Powerpoint presentation on the key aspects of the report.

The Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) was requested to re-emphasise to the Government the importance to the Council of it being able to retain 50% of 1 for 1 Capital receipts. She was also requested to amend the MTFs principles to make it clear that the Council was committed to the delivery of an increased number of homes available for social rent.

Officers were further requested to monitor the impact on the HRA of Government welfare reforms, particularly Universal Credit.

The Leader thanked the Assistant Director (Finance and Estates), her Team and other officers who had contributed for a very thorough report. In turn, the Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) thanked the particular contribution of the Housing Policy, Performance and Improvement Manager.

RESOLVED:

1. That, for modelling purposes, fees and charges increases are in line with inflation.

2. That, for modelling purposes, the updated inflation assumptions used in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (Section 4.5 refers) be approved.
3. That the Capital Programme assumptions contained within the report be approved for the existing programme and new build properties and incorporated into the 2019/20 budget, (subject to subsequent approved changes from the action plan in Appendix A).
4. That the assumptions contained within Scenario 2b be approved, including the ability to build for private sale to provide additional income to the HRA (Paragraphs 4.11.8 - 4.11.12 refer), and subject to subsequent approved changes from the action plan in Appendix A.
5. That the Action Plan is approved, in order to consider options to increase the spending power within the HRA, as a result of the removal of the HRA debt cap (Appendix A).
6. That the two new additional funding requirements identified in Paragraph 14.13.8 of the report be approved.
7. That the current £4.9Million capital funding shortfall over the 30 year business plan (Paragraph 4.11.9 refers) be noted.
8. That the minimum level of balances for the HRA Business Plan, set as a minimum £2Million plus inflation (Paragraph 4.16.3 refers), be noted.
9. That if material changes to forecasts are required following further Government announcements or recommendations as a result of the Action Plan, the Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) be requested to revise the Medium Term Financial Strategy and re-present it to the Executive for approval.
10. That the HRA MTFS principles are reviewed and re-approved following the work contained within the Action Plan at Appendix A.
11. That public consultation is in line with the requirements of the Council's Consultation and Engagement Strategy.
12. 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.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

5 **2018/19 MID YEAR TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW**

The Executive considered a report which provided an update on Treasury Management activities in 2018/19 and which reviewed the effectiveness of the 2018/19 Treasury Management and Investment Strategy, including the 2018/19 prudential and treasury indicators.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources advised that the report identified that cash balances were estimated to be £55Million by 31 March 2019. The average borrowing rate on loans as at 30 September 2018 was 3.37% and the average investment rate at the same date was 0.77% (compared to 0.58% earned in 2017/18). The report also identified that officers were seeking approval to invest balances on behalf of Council wholly owned companies and/or Council Limited Liability Partnership (LLP).

The Executive noted that the figure for “Total Borrowing” in the second column of the table at Paragraph 4.5.4 of the report should be £227,595.

The Leader advised that Hertfordshire Living were developing projects across the county aimed at working with Housing Associations. She hoped that this would include working with Local Authorities like SBC that still retained their own housing stock in order to support management issues. There may also be the possibility for some investment of the Council’s 1 for 1 Capital receipts.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That Council be recommended to approve the 2018/19 Treasury Management Mid-Year review.
2. That Council be recommended to approve the latest list of approved Countries for investments, as set out in Appendix D to the report.
3. That Council be recommended to empower officers to undertake treasury management functions on behalf of Council wholly owned companies and/or Council Limited Liability Partnership (LLP), subject to authorisation from the Board of Directors (see Paragraph 4.5.12 of the report).

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

6 **STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT (SCI)**

The Executive considered a report which provided consultation feedback and which sought approval for the adoption of the final Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration advised that there had been six responses to the consultation on the SCI, a similar amount to the consultation response on the 2012 SCI.

The Executive supported the proposal of the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration that the SCI be adopted, subject to some minor wording amendments to Paragraphs 52 and 53 of the document to emphasise the right of appeal to the Local Government Ombudsman for those objecting to planning applications and drawing attention to the “Planning Aid” website for those wishing to consider Judicial Review proceedings, and which explained the process as well as the costs of this

course of action.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the key outcomes of the public consultation on the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), as set out in Appendix A to the report, be noted.
2. That the revised SCI, as set out in Appendix B to the report, be adopted, subject to minor wording amendments being made to Paragraphs 52 and 53, as discussed.
3. That the SCI 2012 (BD1) be revoked.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

7 **COMMUNITY CENTRES REVIEW - DIRECTION OF TRAVEL REPORT**

The Executive considered a report on the Stage One review of community centres in Stevenage and which sought approval to undertake further community consultation and the establishment of co-operative agreements with existing community associations to develop a sustainable future model of community centre delivery.

The Portfolio Holder for Communities, Community Safety and Equalities advised that it was intended to carry out a broad consultation exercise on a wide range of options. Future operating models would be explored including the development of co-operative compacts. She thanked the Community Select Committee and officers for their support to the review through the Portfolio Holder Advisory Group.

The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Working was supportive of the report, and hoped it would include work on identifying best practice in other parts of the UK.

The following Members' comments were noted by officers:

- The emphasis going forward with the review should be on working co-operatively with community associations to arrive at agreed solutions, rather than about the closure of community centres;
- The sterling work of volunteer staff at community centres should be recognised, all of which added to the vibrancy of the town;
- Even though SBC revenue support to community centres was diminishing, it should be made clear to community associations that the Council still bore considerable capital costs in their upkeep;
- Leases – the issue of trustees being reticent to sign leases was an ongoing problem. A resolution of this issue was needed as soon as possible;
- As it was felt that councillors had an important role in putting the minds of community association representatives at rest, it was agreed that an All-Member Briefing session be held prior to the wider community consultation process on the review.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the outcome of the stage one review of community centres and the scope of options for potential future operational models be noted.
2. That wider community consultation be undertaken to vision the future community centre offer for Stevenage to meet residents' needs.
3. That the implementation of a co-operative agreement with existing community associations, in order to award delivery grants for 2019/20, be approved.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

8 **SMART CHOICES, BETTER PLACES: A TRANSPORT STRATEGY FOR STEVENAGE**

The Executive considered a report which provided an update on progress made in preparing a Transport Strategy for Stevenage and which sought approval to carry out public consultation on the draft Strategy over the next three months.

The Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport advised that the report explained the need for a sustainable Strategy. The Strategy was in line with the aspirations of the emerging SBC Local Plan and supported projects included in the SBC Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

The Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport commented that the consultation would include previous consultees, but would also benefit from the closer involvement of local communities and local businesses. The Strategy also included action plans, which would specify the partners, schedules and resources required for specific outcomes.

The Executive supported the Leader's request that she and the Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport be delegated authority to agree a change in the title of the strategy.

The Leader referred to a document containing some comments on the draft Strategy submitted by Councillor Jim Brown. This would be added to the consultation responses on the Strategy, subject to officers seeking clarification on a number of the issues raised.

Officers were requested to consider the preparation of a plan of the footpaths running across the Borough in line with the objectives of the Transport Strategy.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That, subject to the Leader and Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport being delegated authority to agree a change in the title of the document, the content of the draft "Smart Choices, Better Places: A Transport Strategy for Stevenage" (as attached at Appendix A to the report) be agreed for

public consultation.

2. That authority be delegated to the Assistant Director (Planning and Regulation), following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport, to make minor amendments as are necessary in the final preparation of the draft Strategy prior to its consultation.
3. That public consultation on the draft Transport Strategy be approved for a period of 3 months, commencing on 5 December 2018.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

9 **URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

Stevenage Local Plan

The Chief Executive advised that through previous correspondence, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) had stated that a decision would be taken in respect of the holding direction on the Stevenage Local Plan by 13 November 2018. However, as at 21 November 2018, no written response had been provided by the MCHLG and the holding direction remained in effect. Stevenage Borough Council officers had maintained regular contact with the MCHLG over recent weeks, but no decision had been on this matter by the Secretary of State.

Accordingly, a letter had been despatched to the MHCLG demanding an urgent face to face meeting with the Secretary of State to seek to positively resolve this matter. The Council had requested a response by no later than 30 November 2018 to avoid the need for more formal legal routes to be considered.

The Leader commented that, in accordance with the Communications Strategy, the Council would be publicising the latest position on the Plan.

10 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

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 the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraphs 1 to 7 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by SI 2006 No. 88.
2. That having considered the reasons for the following items being in Part II, it be determined that maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

11 **PART II MINUTES - EXECUTIVE - 3 OCTOBER 2018**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 3 October 2018 be approved for signature by the Chair.

12 **BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY CENTRE MANAGEMENT CONTRACT 2019-24**

The Executive considered a Part II report which sought approval to commence the procurement process for the Business Technology Centre for the period 2019-24, with an optional extension contract of a further two years.

It was **RESOLVED** that the recommendations in the report, including some additions to Recommendation 2.1, be approved.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

13 **FINANCIAL SECURITY OPTIONS 2019/20 - 2021/22**

The Executive considered a Part II report that provided a range of Financial Security Options for 2019/20 – 2021/22.

It was **RESOLVED** that the recommendations 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