

# STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

## EXECUTIVE MINUTES

**Date: Wednesday, 9 October 2019**

**Time: 2.00pm**

**Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete**

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

**Start / End Time:** Start Time: 2.00pm  
End Time: 3.44pm

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Lloyd Briscoe.

There were no declarations of interest.

### **2 MINUTES - 11 SEPTEMBER 2019**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 11 September 2019 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

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

In respect of the Minutes of the meeting of the Environment & Economy Select Committee held on 3 September 2019, the Leader welcomed the recent announcement of the imminent opening of a new Post Office at Bedwell Shops and looked forward to hearing about a venue for a replacement Post Office in Stevenage High Street.

In relation to the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 16 September 2019, the Assistant Director (Planning & Regulatory) advised that the Independent Examiner's report into the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) was expected at the end of October 2019, and it was intended to be reported to the Executive in December 2019 and Council in January 2020. The Portfolio Holder for Resources commented that the FirstCare Sickness Management Service for SBC employees had commenced on 7 October 2019.

With regard to the Minutes of the meeting of the Community Select Committee held on 17 September 2019, the Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Leisure thanked Members of the Select Committee for their helpful views and comments on the Sports and Leisure review and encouraged them to continue their involvement going forward.

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

Environment & Economy Select Committee – 3 September 2019

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 16 September 2019

Community Select Committee – 17 September 2019

Overview & Scrutiny Committee (sitting as a Select Committee) – 23 September 2019

#### **4 FUTURE TOWN, FUTURE TRANSPORT: ADOPTION OF A TRANSPORT STRATEGY FOR STEVENAGE**

In the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise & Transport, the Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration presented a report on the Future Town, Future Transport Strategy.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration advised that, following Executive approval in October 2018, a draft Transport Strategy for the borough, called Future Town, Future Transport (FTFT), underwent public consultation between January and July 2019. The final Strategy, incorporating minor amendments to take account of respondents' comments, was now being presented to the Executive for approval. The strategy received a strong level of support, including for concepts such as the liveable streets project and promotion of cycling initiatives. The strategy and accompanying report clarified where SBC could develop and deliver projects, but also noted where third parties were responsible for projects (such as the Railway Station fifth platform) and where the Council could use a lobbying and preparatory approach to make the case for longer-term investment.

The Executive was informed that the draft strategy established the key local transport issues and opportunities that existed in Stevenage, and included a vision and objectives for what would be delivered in the future, focussing around the four key themes of Connectivity; Liveable streets; Active and healthy travel; and Green travel.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration stated that, as a strategic document, FTFT served to establish the Council's position on transport matters when working and negotiating with infrastructure providers, developers, and other delivery partners to promote the use of sustainable forms of transport across the Borough. The report noted that not all the strategy was funded and in a number of cases bids would need to be developed to secure external funding - having a clear and well-articulated strategy aided this position.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration explained that the Council had submitted an initial bid to be designated as a Sustainable Travel Town and would continue to seek entry onto the programme. If successful, a range of programmes to be delivered would be selected through discussions between Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) and the Council, utilising evidential studies including the HCC North Central Growth and Transport Plan, the SBC Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, the SBC Cycle Strategy and this Transport Strategy.

The Assistant Director (Planning & Regulatory) referred to the replacement report pages tabled at the meeting, which included the correct information for the locations of streets within wards in the town.

Members made the following comments and suggested amendments to the Strategy:

- The Council's carbon neutral target should be amended from "2050" to "2030", in line with the recent Climate Change Emergency resolution;
- Officers were requested to ensure that the next iteration of the Strategy included some form of consolidation with other inter-related Council strategies/policies;
- It should be made clear in the Strategy that the Council's established approach was to support a widening of the A1(M) rather than a SMART motorway;
- For clarity, either of the terms "living streets" or "liveable streets" should be used throughout the document, not both;
- The Strategy needed to flag up that there were no evening bus services in some parts of the town, and that the Council wished these to be re-instated, along with a circulatory route which served the Lister Hospital;
- The Strategy should include an objective to prevent the idling of bus engines once the proposed new Bus Station comes into operation;
- The Assistant Director (Planning & Regulatory) undertook to provide Executive Members with details of the membership and frequency of meetings of the Disability Panel;
- In terms of disability issues, consideration be given to a limitation on the speed of mobility scooters and electric wheelchairs in the Town Centre to 4mph;
- Clarification be provided on precisely which vehicles were permitted to use the Stevenage cycleway system;
- Going forward, consideration be given to the use of some of the Council's garage blocks as charging points for electric vehicles; and
- Officers were requested to review the 2023 targets contained in the document relating to "Park and Ride" and "Electric Bike" schemes.

The Leader asked the Assistant Director (Planning & Regulatory) to meet with a Member who had raised issues with regard to roads crossing cycleways, and whether the Strategy could include an objective striving for reduced bus fares, in order to encourage residents toward a modal shift away from car use.

Members supported an additional recommendation proposed by the Leader that the Strategy be reviewed by the Executive in 12 months' time, particularly in the light of potential developments during that time with the Climate Change Strategy, including the proposed Citizens' Panel and People's Assembly.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the responses to the consultation on the draft "Future Town, Future Transport" Strategy be noted.
2. That the proposed amendments to the draft "Future Town, Future Transport" Strategy made following public consultation be approved.

3. That the revised “Future Town, Future Transport” Strategy, attached at Appendix B to the report, be adopted as the transport strategy for Stevenage, sitting under the Future Town Future Council Corporate Plan as one of the “Place of Choice” strategies.
4. That the Strategy be reviewed by the Executive in 12 months’ time, particularly in the light of potential developments during that time with the Climate Change Strategy, including the proposed Citizens’ Panel and People’s Assembly.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in the report; and 4. To ensure a robust monitoring and review of the Strategy.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in the report.*

## **5 DOMESTIC AND COMMUNAL GAS CONTRACTS**

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People introduced a report regarding the Domestic and Communal Gas Contracts.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People advised that the report sought approval to commence the procurement for new Domestic and Communal Gas Servicing and Repair Contract(s), with options to include other related services for the period 2020 to 2024, with an optional extension of two years to 2026 and a further two year option to extend to 2028.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People commented that the current contract had been extended to Summer 2020 to ensure that the Council did not mobilise the new contract during the winter months when the contractors were at their busiest. Robust mobilisation processes had been included, as well as de-mobilisation processes to ensure a smooth start and also a smooth handover at the end of the contract, keeping the customer experience at the forefront. The contract would also include Legionella testing and would make good use of technology through web portals to ensure that the Council had robust and accurate reporting. In a change to previous contracts, the contractors would be asked to let the Council know if they came across any tenancy issues which may require support from officers, as it was known that the gas contractors had a 100% success rate in gaining access.

It was clarified that it would be the responsibility of the Housing Tenancy Team to liaise with tenants over any issues identified by the Gas Contractors.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the procurement approach outlined in the report be agreed.
2. That the procurement process be commenced.
3. That a third-party procurement consultant be procured and appointed to support the procurement process.

4. That the current contracts are extended to July 2020 to allow the incoming contractors to mobilise effectively, paid for from within the existing HRA budget.
5. That the services are procured as two lots within the same open OJEU procurement, with bidders being permitted to bid for either or both, with the lots to be evaluated separately.
6. That the Strategic Director (RP) be given delegated authority to award and finalise the terms of the contract(s) with the winning bidders after an officer panel has concluded an evaluation of tenders received and having consulted the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health and Older People.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in report.*

## **6 INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT) JOINT STRATEGY**

The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods & Co-operative Working presented a report which sought approval for a new Information, Communications and Technology (ICT) Joint Strategy 2019-22; and to delegate authority to finalise an updated ICT Shared Service Agreement with East Herts District Council (EHDC).

The Executive noted that the report acknowledged the work that had been undertaken since the ICT Improvement Plan was agreed by the Executive in November 2017, including the decommissioning of outdated and unsupported hardware and software, the recruitment of an ICT Strategic Partnership Manager who had the right technical expertise, the establishment of a new Security and Networking Team, improved power resilience and securing the Public Sector Network Accreditation which enabled data to be stored and exchanged securely.

The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods & Co-operative Working drew attention to the Background section of the report, which highlighted the ICT challenges both SBC and EHDC continue to face. The Strategy identified the need to take a more strategic approach to ICT to ensure both councils harnessed the potential of ICT to help maintain priority services and enable changes to service delivery all within the context of reducing resources.

The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods & Co-operative Working explained that a series of independent reviews and support from a number of external partners, including Socitm and Microsoft, had helped to inform the development of the strategy. The strategy introduced a framework for technological change and adoption and was underpinned by four Strategic Ambitions, namely Empowered Customers; Consolidation, simplification and standardisation of the ICT and digital estate; Working Smarter; and Improved ICT Governance and Security.

The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods & Co-operative Working stated that an implementation plan was appended to the report and its delivery would be monitored through a new ICT Members Group and the ICT Partnership Board. The Executive and the Audit Committee would receive regular quarterly progress updates.

The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods & Co-operative Working stated that Members had been made aware of the future (known) revenue pressures and capital requirements associated with the ICT Strategy through the Quarter 1 Revenue and Capital Monitoring Reports and the General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy, all of which were all considered by the Executive in September 2019.

The Interim Strategic Director commented that the draft Strategy would be submitted to East Herts District Council for approval in December 2019.

In response to questions raised by Members on the proposed Strategy:

- The Assistant Director (Finance & Estates) confirmed that ICT costs were generally shared 50/50 between SBC and East Hertfordshire District Council, although for some specific services that related to volume of demand, SBC contributed a slightly higher proportion due to its larger workforce;
- The Assistant Director (Finance & Estates) advised that the Revenue costs had been built into the Medium Term Financial Strategy; and that the Capital costs would need to be re-profiled as part of the Capital Strategy;
- The Chief Executive confirmed that he supported the direction of travel and the level of investment set out in the ICT Strategy, as a root and branch review of ICT provision had been carried out to identify the improvements required;
- The Strategic Director confirmed that the permanent recruitment process for an Assistant Director post responsible for Transformation and Digital would commence in the coming months;
- Assurances were given that the new ICT equipment would be fully tested before the existing equipment was de-commissioned;
- Monitoring of the Strategy would be carried out by the ICT Partnership Board and the Audit Committee, including the monitoring of efficiencies and savings achieved; and
- IT system providers would be encouraged to move towards cloud based information storage systems, in advance of the Council's planned move to the Civic Hub.

The Leader stated that improvements to the Council's IT system was a priority and that significant investment was required to enable the development of a sustainable and resilient IT network to properly serve the residents of Stevenage. In order to bring this about, Members were informed that the level of investment could result in other priorities being re-profiled or deferred.

The Leader thanked the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood & Co-operative Working, the Strategic ICT & Partnership Manager and the IT Team for their work in producing the Strategy.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the ICT Partnership's ICT Strategy 2019 – 2022, attached at Appendix A to the report, be approved.

2. That delegated authority be granted to the Strategic Director (RP), having consulted the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Working, to make any further amendments to the ICT Strategy.
3. That the ICT funding challenges be noted, and the currently known ICT capital investments be prioritised, as summarised in Table 2 at Paragraph 5.1.7 of the report, subject to available funds and the Council's agreement to their inclusion in the Capital Strategy 2020/21.
4. That Council be recommended to approve the re-profiling of the ICT Capital Programme over the next five years, as summarised in Table 2 at Paragraph 5.1.7 of the report, as part of the Capital Strategy for 2020/21.
5. That Council be recommended to prioritise the currently known revenue pressures relating to the ICT Strategy (subject to available funds) through the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account annual budget setting process for 2020/21.
6. That delegated authority be given to the Strategic Director (TP), having consulted the Portfolio Holders for Neighbourhoods & Co-operative Working and Resources, to negotiate and agree a new ICT Shared Service Agreement with East Hertfordshire District Council.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in report.*

## **7 URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

The Chair advised she had accepted urgent Part I business items in respect of the Public Works Loan Board and Brexit Update.

### **(1) Public Works Loan Board**

The Assistant Director (Finance & Estates) advised that the Government had, without any prior warning, announced an increase of 1% in the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) interest rates. This meant that the financial information contained in the emerging Housing Revenue Account Business Plan and the Wholly Owned Housing Company would need significant revision.

The Executive was extremely disappointed at this announcement, especially as there had been no consultation with the Local Government Association (LGA) or local authorities, and as the Government had encouraged councils to borrow at the previously lower interest rates.

The Leader would be raising the matter with the Chair of the LGA Resources Board, and asked the Assistant Director (Finance & Estates) to feed back the Executive's extreme disappointment to the Local Government Minister and the Treasury and the significant implications for the delivery of new homes.

## (2) Brexit Update

The Interim Strategic Director updated Members on the Council's "No Deal" Brexit preparations.

The Interim Strategic Director advised that it was anticipated that Parliament would be sitting on Saturday, 19 October 2019 to discuss Brexit, following on from the EU Summit on 17/18 October 2019.

The Interim Strategic Director stated that the Hertfordshire Resilience Forum Brexit Plan had been submitted to the Government, who would be testing it in the near future. The Plan focussed on regional and countywide key risk areas, including the impacts on transport links, food and water, fuel supplies, the local economy and health care/social care issues. It acknowledged the potential impact on community safety should policing resources be diverted towards support to key ports.

In respect of SBC, the Interim Strategic Director commented that the Brexit Working Group was meeting on a weekly basis. Activities included the following:

- An Action Plan had been prepared based on the UK exiting the EU on 31 October 2019;
- The SBC website had been updated with links to Government Guidance on community engagement;
- SBC was working with an Eastern European Group and the Citizens' Advice Bureau on an EU Nationals Plan re: pre-settled/settled status;
- Officers liaising with local food banks regarding potential increased demand on these services;
- Communication with all Community/Voluntary Sector partners to gather intelligence on the impact of Brexit on the community;
- Communication with local businesses raising awareness of Brexit preparedness, including signposting to Government advice/funding, and to gather intelligence regarding business concerns;
- Communication with the Chamber of Commerce and Trading Standards, with a view to holding an event for businesses.

In relation to new burdens, the Interim Strategic Director explained that there may be a need for increased food inspections, especially at any "inland" ports, although there was no clear direction from the Government as to the level of support expected from local authorities at this stage. SBC was assessing all its contracts in liaison with contractors to ensure that contingency plans were in place and it was confirmed that SBC had a level of fuel supply provision in the event of a possible "No Deal" Brexit.

The Interim Strategic Director was requested to:

- Circulate the key points of the Government's "No Deal Brexit Readiness" report to all Members, with a link for them to access the whole document;



- Keep a close monitor of the expenditure associated with the Council's Brexit preparations;
- Provide a weekly summary of developments to Executive Members;
- Provide regular monthly updates to all Members; and
- Provide a list of the officer leads for each of the Brexit preparation work areas to Executive Members.

## **8 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 the following items of business on the grounds that they involve 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.

## **9 PART II MINUTES - EXECUTIVE - 11 SEPTEMBER 2019**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 11 September 2019 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

## **10 URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

## **CHAIR**