

# STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 15 October 2019

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete

**Present:** Councillors: Lin Martin-Haugh (Chair), Philip Bibby CC (Vice-Chair) , Jim Brown, Michael Downing, Michelle Gardner, Sarah Mead, Adam Mitchell CC, Robin Parker CC and Claire Parris.

**Start / End Time:** Start Time: 6.00pm  
End Time: 8.11pm

### 1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sandra Barr, Laurie Chester, Sarah-Jane McDonough, Andy McGuinness and John Mead.

Councillor Michael Downing declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 3 – Part I Decisions of the Executive - Future Town Future Transport: Adoption of a Transport Strategy for Stevenage, as he had submitted the response from the Bus Users' Group as part of the consultation on the Strategy document.

### 2 MINUTES - 16 SEPTEMBER 2019 AND 23 SEPTEMBER 2019

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meetings of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 16 September 2019 and 23 September 2019 be approved as correct records for signature by the Chair.

### 3 PART I DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

The Committee considered the decisions on the following matters arising from the Executive held on 9 October 2019.

#### **Minutes of the Executive – 11 September 2019**

Noted.

#### **Minutes of the Overview & Scrutiny and Select Committees**

The Interim Strategic Director undertook to provide Members of the Committee with an update on the latest position in respect of the re-provision of a Post Office in the High Street following the closure of Waitrose.

## **Future Town, Future Transport: Adoption of a Transport Strategy for Stevenage**

The Assistant Director (Planning & Regulatory) advised that the Executive had made a number of comments/suggested amendments to the Future Town, Future Transport Strategy, and had agreed to an additional resolution regarding a review of the Strategy 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.

In response to a query regarding consideration being given to a limitation on the speed of mobility scooters and electric wheelchairs in the Town Centre to 4mph, the Assistant Director (Planning & Regulatory) confirmed that this would be an aspirational objective achieved through signage and raised awareness of users, rather than through an enforcement regime.

It was further confirmed that the existing use of the Borough's cycleways was limited to cycles and mopeds up to 49cc. However, Hertfordshire County Council was investigating an expansion of use in the light of new National Rules on Electric bikes/scooters.

There was general support from the Committee to the imposition of a cycling ban in the Town Centre, although it was recognised that this may need to be achieved through the approval of a By-Law, and that consideration would need to be given to the resourcing of the enforcement of any ban.

The Assistant Director (Planning & Regulatory) stated that the Strategy would be a foundation document as part of any future bids for Stevenage to become a Sustainable Travel Town. He added that Section 106 monies could be used to contribute towards the transport aspirations set out in the Strategy, provided the each required contribution was relevant to individual planning applications.

A Member commented that, legally, the speed limit on cycleways which ran parallel to major roads was the same limit as that which applied on those roads. He questioned the safety for cyclists of mopeds and electronic bikes sharing cycleways with those speed limits in place.

A Member was not supportive of the Executive's comment that the Council's established approach was for a widening of the A1(M) rather than a SMART motorway, as he felt that this was contradictory to the whole thrust of the Transport Strategy.

A Member strongly endorsed the Executive's comments regarding a desire for evening bus services to be re-instated in all areas of the town, along with the re-instatement of the circulatory route which served the Lister Hospital.

In terms of the idling of bus engines, the Assistant Director (Planning & Regulatory) explained that the problems had been alleviated over recent months due to the presence in the Bus Station of an operative from the bus company dedicated to minimising the idling of engines.

It was recognised that charging points for electric vehicles would be a future priority, and that appropriate sites should be found outside of the Town Centre. As well as the possibility of these being installed in some garage blocks, a Member asked if consideration could be given to their installation as part of the new Kenilworth redevelopment scheme.

A member was concerned that there was no hierarchy of travel included in the Strategy. If the need to travel by car was reduced, then a modal shift could result. He felt that this could be achieved through cheaper public transport and greater encouragement for residents to use cycling or walking as alternatives to the car.

### **Domestic and Communal Gas Contracts**

The Housing & Investment Operations Manager (IHP) advised that the Executive had approved a procurement process for new Domestic and Communal Gas Contracts, and had agreed to extend the current contracts to July 2020 to allow the incoming contractors to mobilise effectively during the summer months.

In response to a series of Members' questions, the Housing & Investment Operations Manager (IHP) replied as follows:

- The appointed contractors would need to demonstrate that they had experience relating to dealing with the heating and water supply elements of gas-fired systems;
- Although the number of complaints had reduced and satisfaction levels had increased, lessons had been learnt over the lifetime of the current contract (3 years) and improvements had been built into the new contract specification;
- Performance of the new contractor(s) would be monitored through a series of Key Performance Indicators, with a residents' compensation scheme to tackle any poor performance in place and communicated to residents in advance of any gas-related work being carried out;
- It might be possible to embed in the new contract(s), as part of the "Home MOT" style service, the use of before and after photographs as an aid to ensuring that work had been carried out to appropriate standards.

### **Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Joint Strategy**

The Interim Strategic Director advised that the Executive had approved a Joint SBC/East Hertfordshire District Council (EHDC) ICT Strategy. EHDC would be considering the Strategy in December 2019. The report to the Executive also detailed the capital and revenue budgetary requirements relating to the Strategy.

In reply to a question regarding the surplus capital funding at the end of 2023/24, the Interim Strategic Director advised that during the lifetime of the Strategy there would most likely be a call on this surplus for expenditure on Enterprise Architecture and Digital Strategy items. He confirmed that, as the Council moved towards "cloud" technology, expenditure on the Strategy would move from capital to revenue budgets.

The Interim Strategic Director commented that the Strategy aimed to achieve financial savings and efficiencies, including the aspiration to reduce the number of SBC/EHDC software systems from 152 to under 100. A rationalised IT system procurement method should also lead to increased efficiencies.

The Interim Strategic Director explained that, although the intention was to move towards cloud technology, this would be a phased approach, as not all the business systems used by SBC/EHDC were currently compatible. It was important that the capability of the ICT Team remained robust, with sufficient staff to provide resilience in the IT Programme Management, IT Systems and IT Service Desk Teams.

A Member asked the Interim Strategic Director to look again at the approximate 50/50 split in IT costs between SBC and EHDC, in view of EHDC's higher Council Tax base.

It was acknowledged that all technology had a limited lifecycle, especially ICT hardware and software. In recent times, SBC had spent in the region of £450,000 per annum on IT, whereas Socitm and Microsoft had advised that the Council should be spending double this amount to keep up to date with latest IT developments. A root and branch review of IT had been carried out, which had highlighted the lack of investment over the years, with some equipment up to 13 years old, when it should be replaced every 5 years. The intention going forward would be to introduce a rolling replacement programme, in order to keep pace with ever-changing technology.

At the request of a Member, the Interim Strategic Director undertook to provide Committee Members with the latest position with regard to the new SBC website project, including an estimated date for the new website coming into operation.

### **Urgent Part I Business**

#### (1) Public Works Loan Board

The Committee supported the Executive's extreme disappointment in the Government's recent announcement of a 1% increase in the Public Works Loan Board's interest rates.

#### (2) Brexit Update

The Interim Strategic Director referred to a Brexit update e-mail he had circulated to Members earlier in the day. At the Committee's request, he undertook to circulate the weekly Brexit update bulletins to all other Members of the Council, in addition to the Executive Members.

## **4 URGENT PART I DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

None.

**5 URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

None.

**6 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 involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1 to 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by SI 2006 No. 88.

2. That having considered the reasons for the following item being in Part II, it be determined that maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

**7 PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE**

The Committee considered the Part II decisions on the following matter arising from the Executive held on 9 October 2019.

**Part II Minutes – Executive – 11 September 2019**

Noted.

**8 URGENT PART II DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

None.

**9 URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

**CHAIR**