

# STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

## EXECUTIVE MINUTES

**Date: Wednesday, 20 November 2019**

**Time: 2.00pm**

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

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

**Start / End**      Start Time:    2.00pm  
**Time:**            End Time:       3.38pm

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

There were no apologies for absence.

There were no declarations of interest.

On behalf of the Council, the Chair conveyed congratulations to Lewis Hamilton for winning the Formula 1 Championship for the sixth time.

### **2       MINUTES - 9 OCTOBER 2019**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 9 October 2019 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

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

In respect of the Future Town, Future Transport Strategy, and with particular reference to cycling in the Town Centre, the meeting was informed that there was already in place a by-law prohibiting this activity. Members felt that any enforcement or extending of this by-law should be publicised. Officers were asked to ensure that the Town Centre Neighbourhood Warden was made aware of the by-law, and Members felt that increased signage was necessary in the Town Centre (possibly funded through Members' Local Community Budgets). Officers were further requested to investigate the possibility of the introduction of a cycling education programme, in association with the Hertfordshire Constabulary.

Members were supportive of the concept of a property MoT as part of the new Domestic Gas Contract.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 15 October 2019 be noted.

## **4 HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPER STRATEGY**

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health and Older People introduced a report regarding the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy, which set out the proposed approach for tackling homelessness and rough sleeping across the Borough, with the 4 key priorities being:

- Prevention and Relief of Homelessness;
- Provision of Temporary Accommodation;
- Housing Development; and
- Support for Homeless Households.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health and Older People commented that the Strategy had been developed in conjunction with stakeholders, partners and, most importantly, those who had used the service, past and present. The SBC vision was to “work co-operatively to prevent and reduce homelessness and end the need for anyone to sleep rough in Stevenage”. The Strategy would be monitored quarterly and on an annual basis.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health and Older People referred to Paragraph 5.16 of the report, and stated that the word “made” had been omitted in error from the end of that paragraph.

The Chair referred to the increase in homelessness and rough sleeping both nationally and locally over recent years, and drew attention to a number of statistics which highlighted this issue, including 399 individuals in the SBC area presenting for homelessness in 2018/19 (compared to 231 in 2017/18); a 63% increase in rough sleeping locally since 2010; and forecast expenditure on bed and bed accommodation in 2019/20 of £220,000.

The Chair commented that the increasing figures could in part be mitigated by the provision of additional social/affordable housing. She was pleased that further work would be carried out into the feasibility of the Housing First initiative, which had been successfully introduced in Finland and was also being considered by Manchester City Council.

The Executive acknowledged that rough sleeping often affected vulnerable individuals, who for various reasons had struggled to sustain tenancies. Members felt that a wider cross-agency partnership approach would be required to provide greater support to such individuals.

In response to issues raised by the Chair, officers agreed to investigate the way in which Section 184 decision letters were worded by the Housing Options Service, however, the legal definitions such as “intentionally homeless” cannot be changed as this was a legal requirement. Officers also clarified that Section 184 of Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) related to a legal decision on each Homelessness application, and was a duty of the Council to meet its obligations under the Act. Officers were requested to tidy up the wording of the Prevention Duty definition included on Page 15 of the Strategy.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-2024, attached as Appendix A to the report, be adopted.
2. That delegated authority be given to the Strategic Director (RP) to make minor revisions to the draft Strategy, having consulted the Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in report.*

## **5 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2020/21**

The Portfolio Holder for Resources presented a report in respect of a proposed Council Tax Support Scheme for 2020/21.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources advised that the impact of Universal Credit (UC) on Council Tax Support had been considered. There was insufficient information available to determine the impact of UC on claimants, many of whom were currently in receipt of Housing Benefit. It was therefore proposed that there be no change to current (2019/20) Council Tax Support Scheme for 2020/21, namely that the Scheme for all working age claimants would be based on 91.5% of their Council Tax liability (so those on maximum benefit would only pay 8.5% of their Council Tax bill).

It was **RESOLVED** that Council be recommended to approve the 2020/21 Council Tax Support Scheme, as proposed within the report.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in report.*

## **6 2019/20 MID YEAR TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW**

The Portfolio Holder for Resources presented a report on the Mid Year position on Treasury Management. She advised that the report had also been presented to and supported by the Audit Committee at its meeting held on 12 November 2019.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources stated that the report showed that cash balances were projected to be £63.7Million by 31 March 2020. However, she stressed that all of these sums had been committed to be spent, were planned to be used/drawn down or were being held on behalf of others. In addition, the capital strategy required external borrowing and currently £401,000 of General Fund capital schemes were on hold pending the identification of matching capital receipts.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources explained that officers had completed the review of the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy, taking into consideration the freehold/leasehold classification of each asset, investment decisions relating to each asset and any resulting changes to the assets' useful lives. Members were requested to approve the updated MRP Policy shown at Appendix E to the report. Should this be approved, the additional income would be available to support

regeneration schemes in the future and resulting savings would be included in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

The Executive noted that, as at 30 September 2019, total borrowing was £205.351Million. The average investment rate was 0.98% compared to 0.86% earned in 2018/19. There had been no breaches of the Treasury Management Strategy during 2019/20.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That Council be recommended to approve the 2019/20 Treasury Management Mid Year Review.
2. That Council be recommended to approve the latest approved Countries for investments list (Appendix D to the report).
3. That the updated authorised and operational borrowing limits be approved (Paragraph 4.4.7 of the report).
4. That the updated MRP Policy be approved (Paragraph 4.4.10 and Appendix E to the report).

*Reason for Decision: As contained in report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in report.*

## **7 SECOND QUARTER REVENUE MONITORING REPORT 2019/20 - GENERAL FUND AND HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT**

The Portfolio Holder for Resources introduced a report on the 2019/20 Second Quarter revenue position on the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

The Portfolio Holder for Resources advised that the General Fund net increase to the working budget was £25,000. The most significant variances included decreases in income from under achievement of the Investment Property target and the dividend from the CCTV Company not being achieved. Increased costs had arisen from the Homeless service related Bed and Breakfast and the fuel cost saving being lower than anticipated in the 2019/20 savings option "Use of the Transfer station for bulk haulage". These pressures had been mitigated predominantly from the release of £159,000 from the Regeneration Asset Reserve and the Insurance provision of £131,000. The General Fund balance at the year-end was projected to be £3.7Million.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources explained that the 2019/20 HRA net deficit had reduced by £89,000. The most significant variances were from rents, which were mitigated by employee savings and release of some of the insurance provision. The HRA balance at the year-end was projected to be £11.7Million.

In relation to Paragraph 4.2.2 of the report, Officers were requested to amend the title of the "Gresley Way" development to "Blackwell Close" development, in order to

avoid confusion with the nearby scheme in East Hertfordshire District Council known as the “Gresley Park” development.

Members expressed strong concerns about the Government’s continued reduction in the Supporting People Grant, particularly as it most affected the Borough’s older and more vulnerable residents.

It was **RESOLVED**:

#### **General Fund**

1. That the 2019/20 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter projected net increase in General Fund expenditure of £25,010 be approved.
2. That it be noted that the cumulative changes made to the General Fund net budget remains within the £400,000 increase variation limit delegated to the Executive.
3. That it be noted that the 2020/21 ongoing net pressure of £5,180 will be incorporated into the Budget setting process.

#### **Housing Revenue Account**

1. That the 2019/20 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter projected net decrease in HRA net deficit of £88,760 be approved.
2. That it be noted that the cumulative increases made to the HRA net budget remains within the £250,000 increase variation limit delegated to the Executive.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in report.*

### **8 SECOND QUARTER CAPITAL MONITORING REPORT 2019/20 - GENERAL FUND AND HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT**

The Portfolio Holder for Resources introduced a report on the 2019/20 Second Quarter capital position on the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

The Portfolio Holder for Resources stated that the 2019/20 General Fund programme was projected to be £1.5M lower than the working budget of £33.0M, which related to the re-profiling of scheme delivery between 2019/20 and 2022/23. The HRA capital programme was projected to be £130,000 higher than the working budget of £33.7M.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources commented that the report provided an update on two schemes, the commercial property portfolio and wholly owned housing company. Business plans for both schemes were being reviewed in light of the recent increase in the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) lending rates. Capital resources to support the General Fund and HRA capital programme were also included in the report. The third tranche of Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)

funding (GD3), identified for the Bus Interchange, had still to be released.

The Executive was informed that the report forecasted that there was a need to return 1-4-1 receipts in Quarters 3 and 4 (£936,000 plus interest) if partnership schemes with registered providers could not be identified. 22 right to buy sales had been completed in the Second Quarter, with the forecast total for the year remaining at 35 sales.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the 2019/20 General Fund Capital Programme net decrease in expenditure of £1.5M be approved, as summarised in Table One, Paragraph 4.1.1 of the report.
2. That the General Fund net increase of capital expenditure of £2.1M in 2020/21, also as summarised in Table One, Paragraph 4.1.1 of the report, be approved.
3. That the net increase of £130,000 in the capital expenditure for the 2019/20 Housing Revenue Account, as summarised in Table Three, Paragraph 4.3.4 of the report, be approved.
4. That the net increase of £262,000 in the capital expenditure for the 2020/21 Housing Revenue Account, also as summarised in Table Three, Paragraph 4.3.4 of the report, be approved.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in report.*

## **9 URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

### **Town Deals Fund**

The Strategic Director (TP) updated the Executive on progress with the Council benefitting from the Town Deals Fund, with regard to the development of a Town Deals Board and Investment Plan.

The Strategic Director (TP) advised that, in the summer of 2019, Stevenage had been identified as one of 100 towns that could benefit from the Towns Fund. The Government had published a prospectus on the Fund in November 2019 and senior officers had met with Government officials to gain a greater understanding of the Fund.

The Strategic Director (TP) explained that towns were being asked to develop a Towns Fund Board and a deal for the town. Stevenage was to receive Government grant funding of £173,000 in November/early December to assist with the governance of the Board and the gathering of evidence bases to support the preparation of an Investment Plan.

The Strategic Director (TP) commented that SBC was required to submit a readiness assessment to the Government by 19 December 2019. The Board would

be led by SBC, but was expected to comprise representatives from Hertfordshire County Council, the Local Enterprise Partnership, key businesses and investors, developers, the local MP and any other relevant institutions.

The Strategic Director (TP) stated that Boards were expected to be in place by the end of January 2020, and Investment Plans by the summer of 2020. He added that he was intending to submit a report regarding the Towns Fund to the December 2019 meeting of the Executive.

## **10 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.

## **11 FINANCIAL SECURITY OPTIONS 2020/21 - 2022/23**

The Executive considered a Part II report that provided a range of Financial Security Options for 2020/21 – 2022/23.

It was **RESOLVED** that the recommendations contained in the report, including an amendment to Recommendation 2.1, be approved.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in report.*

## **12 URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

## **CHAIR**