

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 11 March 2020

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, Jackie Hollywell and Jeannette Thomas.

Start / End Start Time: 2.00pm

Time: End Time: 3.57pm

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

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Richard Henry.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES - 12 FEBRUARY 2020**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 12 February 2020 be approved as correct record for signature by the Chair.

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

In respect of the Minutes of the Environment & Economy Select Committee meeting held on 11 February 2020, the Leader advised that she would be discussing the matter of the maintenance of various amenity areas around the Borough with the Chair of the Select Committee and Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods & Co-operative Working, with a view to incorporating the environmental improvement of these areas into the Community Neighbourhood Management Programme.

In relation to the Select Committee's on-going review of Neighbourhood Centres, the Leader requested officers to ensure that Ward Councillors were consulted on any site specific recommendations arising from the review.

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

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 28 January 2020

Environment & Economy Select Committee – 11 February 2020

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 17 February 2020

4 **DAMP AND CONDENSATION POLICY**

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People introduced a report seeking approval of a new Damp and Condensation Policy. She advised that the Policy aimed to clarify the different types of damp and condensation within a home and how, working with tenants, the Council could seek to resolve the issues.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People stated that the Policy supported the Damp and Condensation Strategy which was approved in 2016, and on which Members were further updated through the Executive in October 2018.

The Executive was informed that the Policy described rising damp, penetrating damp and condensation damp and detailed clearly the Council's responsibility to support its tenants to combat the issues that arose as a result of damp and condensation. The Policy also detailed how the Council supported those living in private rented accommodation, be it that they had sought this for themselves or been placed in private rented accommodation as part of the Council's approach to deal with homelessness.

The Leader thanked officers for the inclusion of a section clarifying the position with regard to private rented homes.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the Damp and Condensation Policy document, as attached at Appendix A to the report, be approved.
2. That delegated authority be given to the Assistant Director (Housing and Investment), having consulted the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health and Older People, to approve any minor future revisions to the Policy.
3. That delegated authority be given to the Assistant Director (Housing and Investment), having consulted the Portfolio Holder of Housing, Health and Older People, to approve appropriate processes and procedures in order to implement the Policy, and to approve any future revisions to them.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

5 **AIDS AND ADAPTATIONS SERVICE POLICY**

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People presented a report seeking approval of an Aids and Adaptations Policy. She explained that the Aids and Adaptations Policy aimed to provide a focus on supporting people to consider how their future housing needs could be met and how they could live more independently, improving their day to day quality of life in and around the home.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People commented that the Policy sought to make best use of the Council's stock and ensure that the reasonable needs of the Council's disabled residents were prioritised and appropriate aids and

adaptions were implemented. The Policy also focussed on working closely with partnering organisations, for example Hertfordshire County Council's Adult Care Services and NHS Children's Services.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People stated that, recognising that there was allocated funding for aids and adaptations, the Policy sought to ensure that the Council maximised all available funding sources and ensured that the available budgets were used effectively and efficiently to maximise best use of the Council housing stock so that the needs of the residents were appropriately prioritised.

In respect of questions raised by Members, the Assistant Director (Housing & Investment) commented:

- the potential transfer of homes following the death of a tenant who had benefitted from aids and adaptations was dealt with on a case by case basis. If others were left in the household, it often took some time to provide them with suitable alternative accommodation. Conversely, it could also take time to find a suitable tenant to benefit from aids and adaptations already carried out to a property ready to be re-let;
- the referral system would aim to ensure that regular tenancy checks were undertaken by officers to identify potential vulnerable tenants who could benefit from aids and adaptation works.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People was asked to respond to the recent Government consultation on Aids and Adaptations, requesting that a more flexible approach be introduced regarding the national Disabled Facility Grant limit of £30,000, including the possible increase of this limit, to reflect the higher construction costs in more affluent areas of the UK.

The Executive supported the Leader's suggestion that the policy should include a statement referring to the fact that the Council was continuing to monitor the delivery of aids and adaptations through the Hertfordshire Home Improvement Agency (HHIA).

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the Aids and Adaptation Policy document, as attached at Appendix A to the report, and as amended, be approved.
2. That delegated authority be given to the Assistant Director (Housing and Investment), having consulted the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health and Older People, to approve any minor future revisions to the Policy.
3. That delegated authority be given to the Assistant Director (Housing and Investment), having consulted the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health and Older People, to approve appropriate processes and procedures in order to implement the Policy, and to approve any future revisions to them.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

6 VARIATIONS OF TENANCY AGREEMENT AND CONDITIONS OF TENANCY

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People presented a report seeking approval of a revised Tenancy Agreement. She advised that the revisions to the Tenancy Agreement were proposed to ensure that the document was current and incorporated up to date legislative changes. The previous review of the Agreement had been in 2013 and the revised document incorporated legislative requirements imposed since that date.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People stated that customers had been consulted on the proposed changes and the report covered the outcome of the consultation process.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People explained that the main changes to the Tenancy Agreement related to: access to properties, anti-social behaviour, fire safety, health and safety, independent living, maintaining a pleasant neighbourhood, payment and charges, repairs and improvements, tenancy fraud and Termination of tenancies.

The Executive was informed that the Agreement had been considered by a Portfolio Holder Advisory Group and the Housing Management Advisory Board. In addition, an All-Member Briefing had been held on 18 February 2020, which had updated Members on the details of the proposed changes.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People that the Housing & Investment Business Unit Review should allow sufficient resources to be devoted to the enforcement of the Agreement. This would be carried out by 8 Tenancy Advisors, who would link into the Community Neighbourhood Management process. The structure of the Service would be reviewed after six months.

The Executive accepted an additional recommendation proposed by the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People authorising the Strategic Director (RP) to make minor changes to the Tenancy Agreement, following consultation with her. In particular, Members asked that the element of Paragraph 4.22 of the Agreement that referred to pets and other animals be adapted to allow tenants to keep certain types of pets without needing to obtain permission (subject to conditions).

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the changes within the proposed tenancy conditions be agreed.
2. That the revised Tenancy Agreement and conditions, as attached at Appendix A to the report, be approved.
3. That delegated authority be given to the Strategic Director (RP), following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People, to approve any future minor revisions to the Agreement.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report; and 3. To expedite minor changes to the Agreement before publication.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

7 COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING

The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Working introduced a report following on from a motion on Community Wealth Building (CWB) approved by the Council in January 2020, setting out a pathway to establishing an Inclusive Growth Charter in June 2020. The report recognised the work undertaken in shaping this agenda so far and the support provided by the University of Hertfordshire in measuring the impact of the Council's work.

The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Working advised that the proposed Stevenage CWB model was built on 4 foundations, namely Procurement; Employment and Skills; Social Value; and Climate Change.

The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Working stated that the Council had been asked to play a role in shaping the Hertfordshire Growth Board approach to CWB. This could unlock some further resource to drive this important agenda forward.

The Executive was informed that a helpful Portfolio Holder Advisory Group meeting was held on 27 February 2020 to consider how CWB could be embedded within Council processes, with much support for the concept of an annual Community Balance Sheet.

Members noted that, as well as the Community Balance Sheet, associated proposals included the development of an Inclusive Economy Charter, the introduction of a set of metrics to measure the impact of on day-to-day business, and the establishment of a Working Group to review progress.

The Leader commended the idea of the Community Balance Sheet, the set of metrics to be used to measure the impact of Community Wealth Building (CWB) and the concept of a Working Group to drive CWB forward. There was a need to increase the level of local procurement, and she hoped that this would be reflected in the Council's emerging Procurement Strategy, which itself should link into the work on CWB.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources was requested to raise at the next Local Government Pensions meeting the possibility of the Hertfordshire Pension Fund contributing towards CWB, seeing it as an avenue towards the generation of local investment.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That an Inclusive Economy Charter be developed and launched by the end of June 2020, underpinned by an action plan, this Charter to include a space for communities and stakeholders to pledge their support.

2. That the Council pilots a Community Balance Sheet in partnership with its Co-operative Neighbourhoods Programme, and that this Balance Sheet be published alongside its annual statement of accounts.
3. That the Council agrees a set of metrics to measure the impact of Community Wealth Building (CWB) on day-to-day business, and that this process be supported by a cross-departmental working group.
4. That the Council facilitates a CWB Group to review progress and to validate findings of impact work, and to support the Council to share best practice at a regional and national level.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

8 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE 2019/20 - QUARTER 3

The Chief Executive presented a report on Corporate Performance in Quarter Three of 2019/20 (October – December 2019) and advised that, of the 55 Performance Indicators monitored, 47 were at green status; 1 was at amber status; 6 were at red status; and one was not available (Health and Safety compliance).

The Chief Executive explained the reasons for the amber, red and not available items, and the improvement proposals for each item. For a number of the red status items, it was anticipated that these would be back on target by the Year End.

The Chief Executive summarised a number of Future Town, Future Council (FTFC) Programme performance highlights during Quarter Three.

In respect of the impact of Universal Credit on rent collection levels, the Leader asked officers to lobby the Government to allow rents to be paid directly to Councils, to avoid the potential for Universal Credit payments (to cover rent) not being subsequently paid by the tenants to Councils. In addition, Members felt that, where appropriate, SBC tenants should be encouraged to apply to have such Universal Credit payments paid directly to the Council.

In respect of sickness absence, officers undertook to ensure that cases of absence due to coronavirus were recorded separately from the generic sickness figures.

The Leader was pleased to report that many of the performance highlights during Quarter 3 of 2019/20 referred to by the Chief Executive were to be mentioned in the forthcoming edition of the Council's Chronicle magazine.

The Executive agreed that the Community Neighbourhood Management Programme should be added to the list of strategies and plans set out in Paragraph 3.4 of the report, which would be included within the "Place of Choice" strand of the Future Town, Future Council (FTFC) Programme.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the delivery of priorities which form the Future Town, Future Council Programme and performance of the Council across the key themes for Quarter Three 2019/20, together with the latest achievements, be noted.
2. That the suite of strategies included in the scope of the new Place of Choice programme, as set out in Paragraph 3.4 of the report, be agreed, and that the progress being made in identifying associated actions to be tracked for 2020/21 be noted.
3. That actions to commence implementation of the Corporate Landlord Review, and to ensure the prompt certification of health and safety compliance of non-domestic/non-commercial Council buildings in accordance with the compliance contract, be noted and endorsed (Paragraphs 3.124 and 3.125 of the report).
4. That further improvement plans for the Customer Service Centre be noted and endorsed (Paragraphs 3.119 to 3.123 of the report).
5. That ongoing implementation of improved practices to support sickness absence management be endorsed (Paragraphs 3.110 to 3.112 of the report).
6. That issues with the delay in inspections to Council garages be recognised and plans to improve garages lettings be noted (Paragraphs 3.93 to 3.95 of the report).
7. That improvement plans for the collection of rent be endorsed (Paragraphs 3.72 to 3.73 of the report).

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

9 3RD QUARTER REVENUE MONITORING REPORT - GENERAL FUND AND HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT 2019/20

The Portfolio Holder for Resources introduced a report regarding the 3rd Quarter Revenue Monitoring Report 2019/20 for the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA). She reported that the General Fund net spend was projected to be £108,000 lower than the working budget. The cumulative increase made to the General Fund net budget remained within the £400,000 variation to the original budget delegated to the Executive.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources advised that the largest variances included transfers to reserves, a revenue contribution to capital and a net increase of income, all as set out in the report. There were no changes to the 2020/21 budget arising from Quarter 3 of 2019/20. It was requested that £101,000 be carried into 2020/21, all staff related matters. The net change to the General Fund is a £7,000 saving (£108,000 less the £101,000 carry forwards).

The Executive noted that the General Fund balance was projected to decrease to £3.98Million by 31 March 2020. Allocated revenue reserves were also expected to decrease to £2.5Million.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources stated that the Housing Revenue Account net deficit for 2019/20 was now projected to decrease by £16,000. The variances were savings on staff costs and other expenditure, transfers to provisions with pressures from premises and income, all as detailed in the report.

Members noted that there were no changes to the 2020/21 HRA budget arising from Quarter 3 of 2019/20. The HRA balance at the year-end was projected to be £18.9Million.

The Accountancy Services Manager confirmed that the SBC's share of the overall outstanding Council Tax arrears of £2.8Million at 31 March 2020 was £300,000.

The Accountancy Services Manager announced that the Government's Budget had included a cut in interest rates, the full effect of which would not become apparent until 2020/21. A prudent figure of 0.90% for investments had been included in the Treasury Management Strategy 2020/21. However, the Council had recently made some long-term investments with a locked-in interest rate of 1.15%, and so the revised forecast for 2020/21 was now a slightly improved average of 1%.

It was **RESOLVED**:

General Fund

1. That the 2019/20 3rd Quarter General Fund projected net decrease in expenditure of £108,000 be approved, and that the cumulative changes made to the General Fund remain within the £400,000 (increase) variation delegated to Executive.
2. That the progress of the 2019/20 approved savings, growth bids and carry forwards be noted.
3. That the new carry forward requests of £100,800 be approved.

Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

4. That the 2019/20 3rd Quarter decrease in the net HRA deficit of £16,440 be approved.
5. That the progress of the 2019/20 approved savings, growth bids and carry forward requests be noted.
6. That new carry forward requests of £47,000 be approved.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

3RD QUARTER CAPITAL MONITORING REPORT - GENERAL FUND AND HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT 2019/20

The Portfolio Holder for Resources introduced a report regarding the 3rd Quarter Capital Monitoring Report 2019/20 for the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

The Portfolio Holder for Resources advised that the 2019/20 General Fund programme was projected to be £15.5M lower than the working budget of £32.9M, most of which related to the re-profiling of scheme delivery between 2019/20 and 2022/23. The report provided details of the General Fund schemes that would be slipped from 2019/20 to 2020/21. The total re-profiling of General Fund capital schemes was £15.8M.

It was noted that the HRA 2019/20 Capital Programme was projected to be £3.6M lower than the working budget of £33.6M. This was mostly related to re-profiling of schemes. The report provided details of the HRA schemes that would be slipped from 2019/20 to 2020/21. The total re-profiling of HRA capital schemes was £3.9M.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources commented that the report also included details of requests to vary the budgets allocated to individual projects in 2019/20. On the General Fund programme these totalled a net increase of £273,000. On the HRA capital programme these totalled a net increase of £330,000.

The Executive was informed that the Business Plan for the wholly owned housing company continued to be reviewed in light of the increase in the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) lending rates. The Capital resources to support the General Fund and HRA capital programmes 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, despite work continuing to demonstrate that the requirements to release the funding had been met.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources stated that the report forecasted that there was a need to return 1-4-1 receipts in Quarter 4 2019/20 of £372,000 (plus interest) and in Quarter 1 2020/21 of £317,000 (plus interest) if additional expenditure, such as registered provider grants, could not be identified. The Housing Development Team had requested an increase to the budget for Open Market Acquisitions to mitigate this risk.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources advised that 28 Right to Buy (RTB) sales had been completed by the end of the Third Quarter and the forecast for the year was unchanged at 35 sales. However, as at 11 March 2020, a total of 36 RTBs had been completed.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the 2019/20 General Fund Capital Programme net decrease in expenditure of £15.5Million 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 £15.8Million in 2020/21, also as summarised in Table One, Paragraph 4.1.1 of the report, be approved.
3. That the net decrease of £3.6Million in the capital expenditure for the 2019/20 Housing Revenue Account, as summarised in Table Three, Paragraph 4.3.1. of the report, be approved.
4. That the net increase of £4.0Million in the capital expenditure for 2020/21 Housing Revenue Account, also as summarised in Table Three, Paragraph 4.3.1. of the report, be approved.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

11 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

The Chair accepted items of urgent Part I business in respect of an update on the Coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak, and on the financial implications for the Council of the outbreak.

1. Coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak

The Strategic Director (RP) gave an update on the Coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak.

The Strategic Director (RP) advised that, as at 10 March 2020, there had been a total of 300+ cases of Coronavirus in the UK, including 18 in Hertfordshire. There had been a total of 8 deaths nationally, with one in Hertfordshire. All of those who had died had underlying medical conditions.

The Strategic Director (RP) stated that the Government's Emergency Committee had met on 9 March 2020, assisted by the Chief Medical Officer and Public Health England. Of the four stages (containment; delay; mitigation; and research), the virus was currently at the containment stage in the UK. It was anticipated that the UK would be in the delay phase in the days ahead.

The Strategic Director (RP) commented that NHS advice was for people experiencing symptoms to stay at home. The Government was looking to implement legislation to cover the employment rights in their substantive jobs of volunteers (eg St. John's Ambulance). In Stevenage, the advice as at the time of the Executive meeting for symptom carriers was to self-isolate for a period including up to 7 days after the virus had disappeared. Therefore, there could be a significant impact on the services provided by the Council.

The Strategic Director (RP) explained that the delay stage would involve further self-distancing and the likelihood of more large scale events being cancelled or postponed. Advice was still expected from the Cabinet Office on the management of public meetings and forthcoming Elections, but in the interim it was business as usual. The Government had indicated that Employers should be prepared for up to 20% of staff being affected by the virus over a 16 week period.

The Strategic Director (RP) advised that there were currently 2 or 3 Hertfordshire Strategic Co-ordinating Group meetings taking place each week. At present Hertfordshire County Council and Hertfordshire Police were operating as normal, although Police resources would need to be prioritised should the impact of the virus escalate. Public Health Teams in Hertfordshire were also liaising with Faith organisations across the county.

In relation to SBC, the Strategic Director (RP) stated that the focus was on critical services, with all Assistant Directors being tasked to review their respective Business Continuity Plans. Other issues for consideration included possible public building closures for periods of time, staff shortages, and homeworking.

The Strategic Director (RP) commented that the Strategic Leadership Team was meeting to ensure business continuity plans were in effect, and would prepare a briefing for Executive Members and provide regular reports to Members on plans and contingency arrangements.

The Strategic Director (RP) explained that there would be regular communication to staff and Members regarding the virus. A Communications Plan would be developed for the Council's website, with appropriate links to Public Health England advice pages.

Members agreed that officers be instructed to request the Hertfordshire County Council Public Health Team to send out a communication to all residents expressing concerns that some ethnic groups had been targeted by certain individuals as carrying/being responsible for the spread of coronavirus, and categorically stating that there was no link between the virus and ethnicity.

Members further agreed that officers be asked to write to the Chief Executive of the East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust, stating that the Council was understanding of the increased pressure placed upon him and his colleagues due to Covid-19, and offering the Council's help to do all it could to support the Trust, as well conveying the Council's best wishes for the coming weeks.

2. Financial Implications for the Council of the Coronavirus outbreak

The Accountancy Services Manager gave a verbal report on the financial implications for the Council of the Coronavirus outbreak.

In terms of the financial impact of the Coronavirus outbreak on SBC, the Accountancy Services Manager advised that the Council's income streams were mainly demand led, such as car parking. If there was a 20% reduction in car park income for 3 months, the loss of income would be in the region of £230,000. This could be mitigated as the budget contained a risk allowance for such circumstances.

The Accountancy Service Manager added that the Estates Team was looking at the level of potential arrears in rent payments from commercial properties; the services provided by Stevenage Leisure Limited could well be affected; and the Business Technology Centre could also be impacted (as could the Council's share of the

profits). The Council Tax Team was looking at a hardship scheme to allow for changes in the payment terms offered to certain vulnerable residents.

The Accountancy Services Manager referred to the Chancellor of the Exchequer's specific Budget announcement reducing the level of business rates to be paid by small businesses to zero (as a consequence of potential loss of income due to Coronavirus).

The Executive requested officers to provide an assessment of the loss of income to the Council as a result of the measures introduced by the Government due to Covid-19 outbreak, and that a letter be written to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government asking what proposals were in place to mitigate against this further loss of income to Councils.

The Chief Executive summarised a briefing note prepared by the Strategic Director (CF) in respect of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget. He agreed to circulate this briefing note to all Members.

12 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 – 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as amended by Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.
2. That Members consider the reasons for the following reports being in Part II and determine whether or not maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

13 PART II MINUTES - EXECUTIVE - 12 FEBRUARY 2020

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 12 February 2020 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

14 PART II MINUTES - OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 12 FEBRUARY 2020

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 12 February 2020 be noted.

15 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

CHAIR