

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 8 July 2020

Time: 2.00pm

Place: Virtual (via Zoom)

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.

Also Present: Councillor Robin Parker CC (observer).

Start / End Start Time: 2.00pm
Time: End Time: 5.37pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no apologies for absence.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 10 JUNE 2020

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 10 June 2020 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

3 MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND SELECT COMMITTEES

The Chair noted that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee had raised the issue of website performance, and was aware that follow up Member questions on this matter had been submitted for consideration at the Council meeting on 15 July 2020.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 17 June 2020 be noted.

4 CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) INCIDENT UPDATE REPORT AND RECOVERY PLAN

The Executive considered a report providing an update on the COVID-19 crisis and the Council's response, and seeking approval to a proposed Recovery Plan.

The Strategic Director (RP) advised that the report outlined the Government's five tests and alert levels which are being used to help inform the easing of lockdown measures in England. The Government's 3 step recovery plan was then outlined, as well as the announcements which the Government had made to lift lockdown restrictions as part of this Recovery Plan.

The Executive was informed that the District Council's Network (DCN) and the Local Government Association (LGA) had been lobbying the Government on a number of issues, particularly the financial impact of Covid-19 on Local Authority finances, and the work the DCN and the LGA had been doing was highlighted in the report.

The Strategic Director (TP) referred to Sections 3.9 to 3.14 of the report, which provided graphs and data, both nationally and locally, in respect of Covid-19 cases and deaths. The data reflected the fact that there were generally low rates for Stevenage compared to the Hertfordshire average and the number of confirmed coronavirus cases per week was reducing. The report also contained an extract from the recent Public Health England Report into Covid-19 Inequalities, and the recommendations made as a result were outlined

The report also highlighted and outlined:

- the assistance which had more recently been provided by the Government for households and businesses, and an update from the LEP which suggested there would be a major economic downturn due to the virus and the potential loss of many jobs in Hertfordshire this year;
- the changing role of the Hertfordshire Local Resilience Forum as it moved to manage response and recovery, and provided an update of the current situation in Hertfordshire care homes, schools, the East and North Hertfordshire Health Trust and Operation Shield and Operation Sustain, together with the measures being taken to exit from the direct provision of food during July and how Hertfordshire residents would be supported thereafter;
- the extensive work and achievements since the last report to the Executive undertaken by the Council's eight response cells which had been set up to deal with the crisis; and
- the new arrangements for Test and Trace and Local Outbreak plans, as the Council would have a key role to play in implementing these plans and in any response to a local outbreak of Covid-19 in Stevenage.

The Strategic Director (TP) then outlined the emerging recovery plans for the both the town and the Council, which were set out for approval by the Executive at Appendices 4 and 5 to the report. It was noted that recovery would be a complex and long running process that would involve many agencies and participants from across the Borough and would be costly in terms of resources.

The following comments/questions were raised by Members during the debate on the report:

- The Chair reported that the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) had been allocated £16.8Million from the Government's Building Back Better Fund. She was pleased to report that a number of Stevenage schemes were towards the top of the LEP's list, and so more detailed work would be progressed in support of those schemes [Note: The Chair (Councillor Taylor) declared an interest in the above matter as she was a member of the Hertfordshire LEP Board];
- The Chair advised that, despite the production of Local Outbreak Plans, only

the Government had powers to impose local lockdowns. The countywide Elected Member Engagement Board was seeking further advice from the Government regarding trigger points for the imposing and lifting of local lockdowns;

- The responsibility for enforcing Covid-19 safe business workplace environments rested with the Health & Safety Executive, who would engage local authority support if required;
- The Chair was pleased to report that the last COVID-19 patient in the Lister Hospital Intensive Care Unit had been discharged earlier in the week;
- The Chair confirmed that free parking for NHS workers would continue at Corey's Mill for the foreseeable future;
- Contrary to the Prime Minister's recent comments in this regard, the Chair wished to recognise the professionalism and commitment of staff employed in Care Homes, especially during the current pandemic;
- In relation to the COVID-19 death statistics by Ward set out in Paragraph 3.14.6 of the report, the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods & Co-operative Working asked if this information could be provided to all Members. Associated with this request, the Assistant Director (Communities & Neighbourhoods) was requested to prepare a report for submission to the next Coronavirus Emergency Committee providing details of the recovery activities taking place in each Ward;
- It was noted that the Council's Business Relationship Manager had prepared and sent out a questionnaire to businesses in Stevenage requesting feedback on the impact on them of the pandemic; and
- The Chair asked that the Public Health Dashboard of COVID-19 statistical information be submitted to the next meeting of the Coronavirus Emergency Committee.

In considering information regarding the proposed reopening of Stevenage Old Town, the Executive agreed extra recommendations in respect of: potential locations for additional outdoor space and pavement seating; the provision of suitable barriers between the highway and those outdoor space/pavement seating areas; ensuring that appropriate wheelchair/pushchair access be maintained; ensuring that disabled parking facilities be protected; and the provision of 3 hours free parking in the former Waitrose Car Park for the next six months.

The Executive supported the Chair's proposed further additional recommendation that the Council's formal thanks be conveyed to the North & East Hertfordshire Hospital Trust for all that the Trust's staff had done to support Stevenage residents throughout the pandemic.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the current position and the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic since the last report to the May 2020 Executive meeting be noted.
2. That the recovery phase approach, as set out in Section 4.13 of the report, and the Town and Council recovery plans attached at Appendices 4 and 5 to the report respectively, be approved.

3. That delegated authority be granted to the Strategic Director (TP), after consultation with the Leader, to make revisions to the Recovery Plan as required during the recovery phase.
4. That, in relation to the proposed reopening of Stevenage Old Town:
 - (i) Working co-operatively with Stevenage Old Town Business Partnership, the following locations be considered for additional outdoor space and pavement seating:
 - Space outside Lavish / Angelic
 - Around Costa Coffee / Ice Cream area;
 - Middle Row (car park North of Middle Row);
 - Northern part of the High Street.
 - (ii) Suitable barriers be provided between the highway and those additional outdoor space and pavement seating areas referred to in (i) above;
 - (iii) Appropriate wheelchair/pushchair access be maintained;
 - (iv) Disabled parking facilities be protected; and
 - (v) In order to replace lost parking capacity in the Old Town area, 3 hours free car parking be offered in the former Waitrose Car Park for the next six months, and reviewed thereafter.
5. That the Council's formal thanks be conveyed to the North & East Hertfordshire Hospital Trust for all that the Trust's staff had done to support Stevenage residents throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report; and 4. To support the proposed reopening of Stevenage Old Town; and 5. To place on record the Council's thanks to the Trust.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

5 HOUSING FIRST APPROACH AT STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL IN RESPONSE TO THE ROUGH SLEEPING CRISIS

The Executive considered a report on the Housing First approach at SBC in response to the rough sleeping crisis.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People, assisted by the Assistant Director (Housing Development), advised that the report articulated how the Council was looking to provide sustainable long term solutions for those that have been rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping since 23 March 2020. The current arrangements at the Holiday Inn Express ended at the end of July 2020, and the Housing Team was working hard to ensure the provision of an alternative solution for those in hotel accommodation.

The Executive acknowledged that SBC's response to the current pandemic necessitated a change to the order of delivery to ensure that the Council was able to provide a legacy solution in the form of a Housing First type model of support - that brought good quality accommodation and wrap around support to assist vulnerable homeless people to start leading fulfilling lives. The ability to deliver this would depend on the input of partner agencies and how the detail around the potential Government funding support crystallised.

The Council's priorities, as set out in the report, were summarised into three categories:

1. Immediately: house the homeless. Completed - there were currently 182 households in Temporary and Emergency accommodation, as well as in interim Hotel placements.
2. In the medium term: to develop Support plans and build pathways into housing and support for the rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping. Roughly 48 in number were being supported by No More Service and the Rough Sleeper Co-ordinators.
3. Long term: To develop long-term partnerships and a possible hostel, subject to funding and need along the lines of a Housing First model.

Members were informed that a pathway system was being developed for each client that would see them into a form of interim accommodation before hopefully securing accommodation into the private sector. Ideally this would be done prior to the end of July 2020 for the majority of the homeless clients.

The Executive was advised that, during July and August 2020, officers would work with key partners to develop a business case for a Housing First Model, including the feasibility and viability of a new hostel. It was envisaged that a further report will be presented to the Executive in September or October 2020 outlining the business case.

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People, Leisure & Culture, on behalf of his fellow Ward councillors, raised the matter of the apparent preponderance of units (including Houses in Multiple Occupation) being used in the St. Nicholas Ward for accommodating the homeless/rough sleepers, and felt that there should be a more equitable distribution of such units across the Borough. The Chair replied that Members needed to be in possession of the full facts and evidence in respect of this issue, and asked officers to undertake some Ward mapping work and report back on the locations of such units throughout the town.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the support provided to homeless households during the Covid-19 lockdown and the challenges faced by the Council over the coming months ahead, as outlined in the report, be noted.
2. That the current service pressures developing in the Housing and No More

service within the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account, which will be monitored by the Council's Finance department and reported to the Executive as part of the quarterly budget monitoring cycle, be noted.

3. That officers be requested to develop a business case for a new Housing First Model, including the potential construction of a new hostel (as outlined in Paragraph 4.24 of the report), taking into account partner support and funding requirements.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

6 A CO-OPERATIVE INCLUSIVE ECONOMY CHARTER

The Executive considered a report on a proposed Co-operative Economy Charter for the Borough.

The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods & Co-operative Working advised that it was proposed to launch a Co-operative Inclusive Economy Charter in July 2020. The Charter represented one of four recommendations made in the Community Wealth Building report approved by the Executive on 11 March 2020. Since Covid-19, the profile of Community Wealth Building had increased, in particular the contribution it could make to building local economic resilience.

The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods & Co-operative Working commented that the Council already undertook a number of activities that supported a Co-operative Inclusive Economy, and for the Charter, was making four key pledges, as set out in the report. These included formally considering local supply chains in procurement exercises and working with local business support programmes to develop advice for co-operatives and social enterprises.

The Executive noted that the Charter would be overseen by a cross-party Community Wealth Building Board, chaired by the Leader of the Council. This would receive reports from a working group comprising Council Officers and other stakeholders, including partners from the voluntary sector and University of Hertfordshire. It was recommended to launch the Charter in July 2020 in order to build upon the momentum of partnership working and to make a contribution to restarting the economy.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the Co-operative Inclusive Economy Charter, as set out at Appendix A to the report, be approved, and that it be launched in July 2020, making an early contribution to the Council's plans for economic recovery.
2. That the proposed action plan, as set out in Paragraph 4.6 of the report, be approved.
3. That the content of the Council's pledge, as set out in Paragraph 4.8 of the report, be approved.

4. That the Charter be monitored by a single working group, reporting to a cross-party advisory Community Wealth Building Group, chaired by the Leader.
5. That the working group develop a series of metrics to help measure the impact of Community Wealth Building on the Stevenage economy.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

7 2019/20 ANNUAL REPORT AND PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW

The Executive considered a report on the Council's 2019/20 Annual Report (attached as Appendix A to the report).

The Leader of the Council advised that this report provided Members with an overview of the Council's performance during 2019/20 against the outcomes and aims within the FTFC Corporate Plan programme, as well as celebrating successes across the range of Council services. It also presented a draft customer-facing Annual Report that gave information to residents about SBC's achievements over the past year and our plans for 2020/21.

Members were informed that significant progress had been made in delivering the Council's Corporate Plan and this was reflected in the successes identified across the range of Future Town Future Council (FTFC) programmes. Moving forward into 2020/21, programme sponsors had developed the key areas of focus for the coming year, and the associated deliverables were summarised in the report.

It was acknowledged that the range of projects proposed for 2020/21 represented an ambitious programme of work, particularly given the challenges currently faced. There remained considerable uncertainty as a result of these challenges and it would therefore be necessary to keep the deliverability of the FTFC programme under review during the course of the year.

The Executive noted that the report also included the suite of performance measures and targets which would be used to monitor performance across all business units in the year ahead, as set out in Appendix B to the report. In view of the current circumstances, officers proposed that 'targets' for the majority of performance measures should be set in line with actual performance at the equivalent period last year. This would help to establish the level to which Covid-19 was impacting on performance and to inform where activity and resources needed to be directed.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the progress on the delivery of the Future Town Future Council (FTFC) programme and overall performance and achievements of the Council during 2019/20 be noted.
2. That the content and publication of the Council's draft Annual Report 2019/20, as set out at Appendix A to the report, be agreed.

3. That delegated authority be given to the Strategic Director (RP), following consultation with the Leader, to approve any final changes to the Annual Report prior to its publication.
4. That the Future Town Future Council deliverables for 2020/21 be noted.
5. That the suite of 2020/21 performance measures and targets, as set out in Appendix B to the report, be noted.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

8 4TH QUARTER REVENUE MONITORING REPORT 2019/20 - GENERAL FUND AND HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT

The Executive considered a report with regard to Fourth Quarter Revenue Budget Monitoring 2019/20 (General Fund and Housing Revenue Account).

The Portfolio for Resources stated that the figures contained in the report were subject to external audit and may change. She advised that General Fund net expenditure was £2.6M underspent for the year, as explained in the report. The variances are shown in the graph at paragraph 4.2 of the report and carry forward requests were in the table at Paragraph 4.3.1. Following a contribution to balances of £2.1M, the General Fund balance at the year-end was £7Million. This contribution to balances would be used to go towards anticipated Covid-19 losses in 2020/21, which were likely to be significant.

Members noted that a review of the year end underspends compared to the 2019/20 budget had resulted in officers identifying an ongoing pressure of £15K for the 2020/21 General Fund budget.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources commented that the 2019/20 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) net deficit was £973,000 less than the budget. £390,000 was identified and requested for carry forward (as detailed in Paragraph 4.7.8 of the report). The HRA balance at the year-end was £19.8Million and total HRA balances were £53.6Million including capital reserves, of which £10Million were restricted use 1 for 1 receipts and £16.4 Million restricted to known risks, revenue overspends and repayment of debt.

The Executive was informed that the Council had investment balances of £54.8Million at the year end. Some of these balances related to provisions, creditors not yet paid, and collection fund balances held on behalf of other preceptors.

The Strategic Director (CF) undertook to draft a letter for submission to the Government's Housing Minister reinforcing SBC's continued request to him that local authorities be permitted to retain (rather than hand back to the Government) their 1 for 1 right to buy capital receipts for a longer period, to enable re-investment in the housing stock via the building of new homes.

It was **RESOLVED**:

General Fund

1. That the 2019/20 actual net expenditure on the General Fund of £6,965,145 be noted, subject to the 2019/20 audit of the Statement of Accounts.
2. That carry forward requests totalling £794,510 be approved for the General Fund (Paragraph 4.3.1 of the report).
3. That the ongoing pressure from 2020/21 of £14,970 on the General Fund be approved.
4. That part of the additional 2019/20 business rate gains (£788,106) be set aside in an allocated reserve to protect the General Fund against business rate losses in 2020/21 (Paragraph 4.2.14 of the report).

Housing Revenue Account

1. That the 2020/21 actual in-year deficit on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) of £1,482,648 be noted, subject to the audit of the Statement of Accounts.
2. That the new carry forward requests totalling £390,440 be approved for the HRA (Paragraph 4.7.8 of the report).

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

9 CAPITAL EXPENDITURE OUTTURN 2019/20

The Executive considered a report in respect of the Capital Programme Outturn position for 2019/20.

As with the Revenue Budget outturn report, the Portfolio Holder for Resources confirmed that the figures contained in the report are subject to external audit and may change. She advised that the General Fund capital expenditure for 2019/20 was £13.140Million, £4.198Million lower than that estimated in the 3rd Quarter monitoring report, largely due to underspends on Housing Development and Regeneration scheme. The breakdown of the variances and slippage was set out in the report.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources explained that the 2020/21 General Fund capital programme has been updated accordingly, and was now forecast to be £38.589Million. She added that capital resources available to the General Fund had increased in the short term due to the release of a previously ring-fenced regeneration receipt, to remove the need for revenue financing in 2019/20 and reduce it in 2020/21. This had been reflected in the revised Medium Term Financial Strategy agreed in June 2020, approved in order to mitigate the impact of Covid-19. However, there were potential resourcing pressures due to the continuing impact of Covid-19, and officers were working on revised estimates.

In terms of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), the Portfolio Holder for Resources advised that capital expenditure for 2019/20 was £30.387Million, £445,000 higher than that estimated in the 3rd Quarter monitoring report. This was primarily due to a higher level of spend on the refurbishment contracts than anticipated at Quarter 3, when £3.2Million of spend was slipped to 2020/21.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources stated that the 2020/21 HRA capital programme had been updated accordingly, and was now forecast to be £53.610Million, a reduction of £443,000. This reflected the decrease due to accelerated spend in 2019/20.

It was noted that capital resources available to the HRA, as at 1 April 2020, were £14.5Million, of which £10Million was restricted use 1 for 1 receipts.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the 2019/20 General Fund capital expenditure outturn of £13.1Million be noted, subject to the completion of the 2019/20 external audit of accounts.
2. That the 2019/20 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) capital expenditure outturn of £30.4Million be noted, subject to the completion of the 2019/20 external audit of accounts.
3. That the funding applied to the 2019/20 General Fund capital programme be approved, as summarised in Paragraph 4.2.1 of the report.
4. That the funding applied to the 2019/20 HRA capital programme be approved, as summarised in Paragraph 4.5.1 of the report.
5. That the 2020/21 General Fund capital programme net increase of £571,000, as detailed in Appendix A to the report, be approved, comprising of:
 - £3.9Million slippage from 2019/20 (as detailed in Paragraph 4.3.8 of the report);
 - £3.3Million re-profiled into 2021/22;
 - £125,000 reduction to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on revenue resources available to support the capital programme; and
 - an additional net reduction of £10,000 funding no longer required in 2020/21.
6. That the 2020/21 HRA capital programme net decrease of £0.4Million, due to slippage into 2019/20, be approved, as summarised in Paragraph 4.6.1 and as detailed in Appendix B to the report.
7. That the use of £15,000 from the Deferred Works Reserve for 3 CCTV cameras which need to be replaced, as set out in Paragraph 4.3.4 of the report, be approved.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

10 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

Chancellor of the Exchequer's Summer Economic Statement

The Strategic Director (CF) provided the Executive with summary details of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Summer Economic Statement, which aimed to assist various sectors in their recovery from the Covid-19 lockdown. This included:

- Job Retention Bonus – intending to reward and incentivise employers who retained their furloughed staff in employment (a one-off payment to employers of £1,000 per furloughed member of staff through to the end of January 2021) – estimated cost: £9.4Billion;
- Kickstart Scheme to stimulate the creation of six month work placements for 16 – 24 year olds – funding for each job to cover 100% of the minimum wage for 25 hours, plus associated N.I. contributions – estimated cost: £2.1Billion;
- Mixture of other measures, costing £1.6Billion, intended to boost work research skills and apprenticeships, including payments to employers who hire new apprentices from 1 August 2020 to 31 January 2021;
- Traineeships for 16 – 24 year olds – an additional £111M this year;
- Enhanced work support - £895M to double the number of work coaches in Job Centre Plus;
- Flexible Support Fund – funding increased by £150M;
- Reduction in VAT from 20% to 5% for the hospitality, accommodation and attraction sectors, to run from 15 July 2020 to 12 January 2021 – estimated cost: £4.1Billion;
- Eat out to Help Scheme – entitling diners to a 50% discount (up to £10 per head) on their meals bills at any participating restaurant/food service provider (valid Monday to Wednesday through August 2020) – estimated cost: £500,000;
- Public Sector decarbonisation – investment of £1Billion over the next year, offering grants to fund energy efficiency projects and low carbon heat upgrades;
- Social Housing decarbonisation – to help social landlords to improve the least energy efficient social-rented homes – estimated cost: £1.1Billion;
- Green Homes Grant - £2Billion, providing £2 for every £1 homeowners and landlords spend to make homes more energy efficient (up to £5,000 per household); and
- Temporary increase of the nil band on residential tax for purchase of properties (Stamp Duty) – no tax on properties sold up to £500,000, and with the tax tapered for properties in excess of £500,000.

The Leader commented that officers would need to look into the detail of the various proposals before the Council would be in a position to respond.

In respect of the situation with regard to the leisure industry, the Chair requested officers to draft a letter for submission by the Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People, Leisure & Culture to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media & Sport requesting that a fair proportion of the £1.5Billion recovery funding allocated by the

Government for theatres, galleries and museums be ring-fenced for regional theatres or, failing that, additional dedicated Government funding be allocated for this purpose.

11 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 the reasons for the following report being in Part II were accepted, and that the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

12 PART II MINUTES - EXECUTIVE - 10 JUNE 2020

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 10 June 2020 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

13 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

CHAIR