

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 12 August 2020

Time: 2.00pm

Place: Virtual (via Zoom) / Autun Room

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: Councillors Phil Bibby CC and Simon Speller (observers)

Start / End Start Time: 2.00pm
Time: End Time: 4.40pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no apologies for absence.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 8 JULY 2020

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 8 July 2020 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

3 MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND SELECT COMMITTEES

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 14 July 2020 be noted.

4 CO-OPERATIVE NEIGHBOURHOODS

The Executive considered an update report on the implementation of Co-operative Neighbourhoods, following approval of the programme in December 2019.

The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Working advised that an initial prototype for Co-operative Neighbourhoods had been developed for the St. Nicholas and Martins Wood Wards, but work on this was paused when the Covid-19 pandemic struck in late March 2020. Further development was not possible as officers focussed on reacting to the pandemic and supporting the most vulnerable in the community.

The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Working stated that the Council was now in a position to re-launch Co-operative Neighbourhoods in order that they could play a leading role in the recovery of the town. The plan was to now

set up Co-operative Neighbourhood Teams in all six areas of the Borough at the same time. The Housing & Investment, Stevenage Direct Services and Communities & Neighbourhoods Services would continue to be at the forefront of the project. Each Co-operative area would be supported by a Strategic Lead Officer drawn from SLT members, with Operational lead Officers for each area being drawn from the cohort of Fourth Tier Managers.

The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Working explained that work would begin with the development of community plans for each area, which would set out what the Council would be doing in neighbourhoods. Over time these would build into a set of actions and aspirations that would be owned by Members, Officers and the community.

In considering the report, Members commented as follows:

- The Communications Plan would require some amendments to make it more user friendly for the public;
- Briefing sessions for all Members of the Council would be set up to run through the “Guide for Councillors” document (Appendix C to the report) and to introduce them to their neighbourhood teams;
- In response to a request for the names (as opposed to designations) of the Operational Leads for each area, it was confirmed that a full list of officers comprising each area team would be provided to Members in due course;
- In reply to a question concerning the Community Action Plans, it was clarified that the intention was that these would replace the existing Ward logs system.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the revised strategy for resuming the development of Co-operative Neighbourhoods be endorsed.
2. That the Guide for Councillors (attached at Appendix C to the report), which will be sent to all Borough and County Councillors across Stevenage, be approved.
3. That future decisions on development of the strategy be delegated to the Strategic Director (RP), in consultation with the Co-operative Neighbourhoods Strategic Board.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

5 COVID-19 UPDATE

The Executive considered a verbal update/presentation on the Covid-19 pandemic, focusing on national and Hertfordshire positions; SBC transition arrangements; progress on recovery; and Local Outbreak planning.

In relation to the national position, the Strategic Director (TP) advised that the number of daily Covid-19 confirmed cases was starting to rise, however this may be due an increase in the number of tests being carried out and these tests being

targeted at areas where infection rates were high. ONS data based on a sample, suggested that the rise in cases may be levelling off. The R rate for England was currently estimated at 0.8 - 1. 56 cases had been reported in Hertfordshire in the latest week, a reduction of 14 compared with the previous week. There was 1 confirmed new case in Stevenage.

With regard to the Hertfordshire update, the Strategic Director (TP) commented that the key focus was currently on finalising Hertfordshire Local Outbreak Plan and arrangements, along with preparations for winter. A Local Outbreak Exercise to inform local arrangements was held in late July 2020, and event analysis was being undertaken and would be shared. The timescale for national care home testing had been delayed. The latest Government advice on the use of face masks and the 'Play your Part' campaign had been publicised. Operation Shield had now stopped, in line with the pausing of shield programme at national level. Changes were happening at national level for Test and Trace, to integrate with more local responses from Public Health teams.

In terms of the SBC transition arrangements, the Strategic Director (TP) stated that:

- Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre and Stevenage Swimming Centre re-opened on 25 July 2020. There had been a steady flow of leisure customers and swim school participants using an advanced booking system;
- Gordon Craig Theatre and the Healthy Hub were yet to resume due to current restrictions;
- Fairlands Valleys Sailing Centre remained closed. The Café toilets were now available for park users;
- Support remained available for those who needed it via the Stevenage Helps Hub and Herts Helps; and
- 170 households remained in Emergency/Temporary Accommodation. As of 31 July 2020, all those accommodated in the Holiday Inn Express had been moved to other settings.

In respect of recovery, Members were informed that a Recovery Summit had been held in July 2020, working towards a joint, ambitious action plan. There would be a further Summit meeting in September 2020. SBC Recovery reporting was to be embedded into the quarterly "Future Town Future Council" performance reports submitted to the Executive.

In relation to local outbreak planning, the Strategic Director (TP) reported that the SBC Covid-19 Outbreak Management Cell was co-ordinating the Borough's local plans and response. SBC's response included: a register of high risk settings (other than schools and care homes) and identification of measures to prevent and manage outbreaks in the settings for which the Council had lead responsibility; prevention and enforcement in local workplaces; contact tracing in complex situations, as determined by Public Health England and Public Health; community support response in the event of an outbreak e.g. Stevenage Helps. A Local Outbreak resource plan was in preparation, as was work on the clarification of respective roles with HCC and PHE, and the development of Mutual Aid plans.

The Senior Environmental Health and Licensing Manager provided some further

details in respect of the Hertfordshire Local Outbreak Plan. He confirmed that HCC had produced a Local Outbreak Plan by the deadline of 30 June 2020. This was a collaborative, strategic document and focussed on 5 key strands:

- Governance and Programme co-ordination;
- Engaging communities;
- Surveillance, Intelligence and data;
- Testing and Contact Tracing; and
- Preventing outbreaks and responding proactively.

The Senior Environmental Health and Licensing Manager advised that a Health Protection Board had been established (an officer Board to oversee a tactical response to any local outbreak), as had an elected Member Engagement Board (comprising all 10 District/Borough Leaders and the Leader of HCC).

In respect of SBC's approach, the Senior Environmental Health and Licensing Manager reported that work would continue in collaboration with HCC's Director of Public Health to prevent community transmission; address complex cases and settings that could not be resolved by regional Public Health England health protection teams; respond to outbreaks that needed on the ground action; and augmented contact tracing.

In terms of resourcing SBC's response, the Senior Environmental Health and Licensing Manager commented that proactive and reactive work would be covered, in association with service priorities. Corporate and mutual aid support was in place, including external help from other agencies. An out-of-hours response would also be maintained.

A Member questioned the quality and timeliness of Covid-19 data being disseminated from the Government to local authorities, and whether a statement regarding this matter should be released to the local press. The Leader undertook to raise this matter at her forthcoming meeting with the other Hertfordshire Leaders and HCC's Director of Public Health.

In response to a Member's request, Officers undertook seek to provide an update at the September 2020 Executive meeting regarding the number of people in Stevenage on furlough and other key employment statistics.

The Senior Environmental Health and Licensing Manager was requested to write to all Members of the Executive to give a flavour of the enforcement activities carried out by his Team during and after lockdown.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Covid-19 update be noted.

6 CO-OPERATIVE COMMERCIAL AND INSOURCING STRATEGY 2020-2023

The Executive considered a report seeking approval of a proposed Co-operative Commercial and Insourcing Strategy.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources advised that the financial challenges faced by the

Council due to Covid-19 had been a catalyst for production of the Strategy. There need to be a prudent and efficient commercial approach in order to manage costs and generate funding to protect and invest in vital services.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources referred to the 4 main objectives set out in the Strategy as follows:

- Business process improvement – the financial performance of individual service areas would be reviewed to identify the level of subsidy or surplus generated in order to formulate the appropriate policy approach. If required, processes, levels of fees/charges, cost of service delivery and potential for new ways of working would be reviewed;
- Income generation – this would be reviewed across the whole organisation, together with the potential to sell commercial services externally;
- Insourcing – the Council would continue with its commitment to use in-house services to deliver Council operations. This would be the Council's default position, other than where there was evidence to prove that this was not an option. Conversely, the services supplied by all contracted out external providers would be reviewed to ascertain the potential for them to be brought in-house (subject to business cases); and
- Commercial culture – equipping staff with the correct skills to deliver the Council's commercial objectives, which would include a skills and culture audit, targeted training to increase commercial awareness, and a commercial resource centre (containing tools, guidance and case studies). Business units would be required to establish specific commercial objectives and would report on key commercial indicators.

The Commercial Manager gave a slide presentation on the proposed Strategy. The presentation comprised information regarding the context for the Strategy, summary financial tables, strategic aims, the key themes and decision making. She presented slides on various commercialisation case studies.

In response to a question in respect of implementation of the Strategy, it was confirmed that the skills audit would commence during September 2020, with the intention that targeted training would take place in the Autumn/Winter.

Members were pleased with the Repairs and Voids Team's insourcing plans for their work, and were supportive of the potential for future expansion of the Council's commercial activity to perhaps provide such services to private homeowners.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources confirmed that the Membership of the proposed Commercial and Investment Executive Committee would comprise herself (as Chair), together with Councillors Sharon Taylor, Jeannette Thomas, John Gardner and Lloyd Briscoe.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the Co-operative Commercial and Insourcing Strategy for 2020-2023, as appended to the report, be approved and reviewed on an annual basis.

2. That the establishment of the Commercial and Investment Executive Committee be approved (with the Membership as detailed in the preamble above), and the Terms of Reference for this Committee, as shown at Paragraph 4.9 of the report, be agreed.
3. That the Assistant Director (Stevenage Direct Services) be given delegated authority to approve any final changes required to the Strategy, following consultation with the Executive Member for Resources.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

7 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

The Chair had accepted an urgent item of business in respect of new and proposed changes to the Town and Country Planning system.

Prior to the consideration of the item, the Chair referred to the sad and tragic sudden death of Dave Rusling (Development Manager) on 9 August 2020. She commented that Dave was a consummate professional, with wide skills in dealing with the complexities of the Planning System and would be sorely missed. She expressed thanks for his contribution to planning in Stevenage. She asked that the Council's condolence be conveyed to Dave's family and his colleagues in the Development Control Team.

The Assistant Director (Planning & Regulatory) outlined changes soon to come into force regarding Use Classes and Permitted Development (PD) Rights, together with a flavour of the Government's Planning White Paper which was currently out for consultation.

In relation to Use Classes, the Assistant Director (Planning & Regulatory) advised that there was to be a new Use Class E for 'commercial, business and service' uses which would allow commercial, retail and leisure uses to change within that group of uses. A new community and learning class would allow for the protection of community facilities and infrastructure. Certain uses, such as pubs and theatres, would remain protected, whilst others, such as hot food takeaways or betting shops, would require full planning consent. This would come into force on 1 September 2020.

In respect of Permitted Development (PD) Rights, Members were informed that the changes would allow a right to extend buildings upwards to create new homes and living space, up to 2 storeys extra on purpose built flats, and some commercial uses. Up to 2 additional storeys would be permitted on existing houses, detached or in a terrace, to create new self-contained homes or additional living space up to a height of 18 metres. Single storey homes would be able to add 1 additional storey. There were conditions and a number of prior approvals would be required on specific matters, including the external appearance of the proposed development and its impact on the amenity of neighbours. The Regulations would come into force on 31 August 2020.

In addition, vacant and redundant free-standing commercial and light industrial premises, and residential blocks of flats, would be able to be demolished and replaced with new residential units. At the same time the right would allow up to 2 storeys to be added to the height of the original building up to 18 metres. There were conditions. The Regulations would come into force on 31 August 2020.

In relation to the Government's Planning White Paper, the Assistant Director (Planning & Regulatory) summarised the main aspects as follows:

- New Local Plans would require whole town designation into 3 areas - "Growth", "Renewal" or "Protected";
- The planning process would be "driven by data";
- Planning authorities would be given new powers to drive up design and sustainability standards;
- A new 'single infrastructure levy' would replace the existing S106 / CIL regime;
- A "binding" housing requirement would be introduced that local planning authorities would "have to deliver through their local plans";
- Big building sites would be split between developers to accelerate delivery; and
- Community consultation at planning application stage was to be "streamlined".

The Chair of the Planning and Development Committee echoed the Chair's comments in respect of Dave Rusling. He asked that Members of his Committee be involved in the consultation response to the changes and White Paper, and in any subsequent changes to SBC Planning policies.

Members were generally dissatisfied with the proposals and content of the White Paper, and both the Leader and Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration would be submitting robust responses to the Government on the matter.

It was confirmed that training would be provided to all Members on the changes, with specific detailed training for Members of the Planning & Development Committee.

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 – 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 reports being in Part II were accepted, and that the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

9 CO-OPERATIVE COMMERCIAL AND INSOURCING STRATEGY 2020-2023

The Executive considered a Part II report relating to the High Level Action Plan and Insourcing Road Map (Repairs and Voids), both of which were supporting

documents to the Co-operative Commercial and Insourcing Strategy 2020-2023.

It was **RESOLVED** that the recommendations contained in the report be approved.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

10 EMERGENCY COVID-19 FUNDING SUPPORT FOR STEVENAGE LEISURE LIMITED

The Executive considered a Part II report in respect of a request from Stevenage Leisure Limited (SLL) for funding support as a result of the coronavirus crisis.

It was **RESOLVED** that the recommendations contained in the report be approved, including additional wording to Recommendation 2.1 and an extra recommendation.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

11 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

CHAIR