

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 16 September 2020

Time: 2.00pm

Place: Virtual (via Zoom)

Present: Councillors: Sharon Taylor OBE CC (Chair), Mrs Joan Lloyd (Vice-Chair), Lloyd Briscoe, 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: 5.05pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Rob Broom and Robin Parker, CC (observer).

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 12 AUGUST 2020

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

3 MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND SELECT COMMITTEES

In response to a question regarding publicity regarding the Co-operative Neighbourhood Teams, the Corporate Communications Manager advised that some videos had been produced, an item was to be included in the next edition of the Council's Chronicle, and negotiations were ongoing with the Comet newspaper about a double page information spread.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 19 August 2020 be noted.

4 LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (LDS)

The Executive considered a report seeking approval to a revised Local Development Scheme (LDS).

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration advised that the Council has a statutory duty to maintain an up to date LDS, which outlined the production of Development Plan Documents. Due to a delay to the timeframes involved with

production of the Area Action Plan for the Railway Station, the Council was now required to update the May 2019 version of the LDS. The opportunity had been taken to include details regarding a number of Supplementary Planning Documents which the Planning Policy Team would be preparing in the coming year or so.

The Executive supported the Leader's additional recommendation that the Planning and Development Committee should be consulted prior to publication of the final LDS.

As a consequence, the recommendation in the report concerning the publication date of the LDS would be amended accordingly.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the Local Development Scheme 2020 (attached as Appendix A to the report) be approved as the programme for the new Stevenage Local Development Documents, subject to any necessary minor editorial modifications agreed by the Assistant Director (Planning & Regulation), having consulted the Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration.
2. That prior to the publication of the Local Development Scheme 2020, the Planning and Development Committee be consulted on its content at its next meeting, with any views and comments being fed back to the Assistant Director (Planning & Regulation), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration.
3. That the Local Development Scheme 2020 be brought into effect on a suitable date following the consultation referred to in Resolution 2. above and published on the Council's planning web pages.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report; and 2. To allow the Planning and Development Committee to comment on the proposed LDS before its publication.
Other options considered: As contained in report.

5 PARKING PROVISION AND SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT: ADOPTION

The Executive considered a report seeking the adoption of the Parking Provision and Sustainable Transport Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration stated that a draft version of the new Parking SPD had been the subject of public consultation in February-March 2020. The SPD now before the Executive had been amended to take account of consultee comments. The main changes related to the recently amended Use Class Order, minor amendments to the Accessibility Zones where reduced levels of parking would be permitted, separate parking requirements for houses and flats, reduced visitor parking provision, and a stated preference for unallocated parking in communal areas. Upon its adoption, the SPD would be a material consideration in all future planning applications.

The following issues were raised during the debate:

- The Assistant Director (Planning and Regulation) explained that the reason for a reduced car parking requirement in the four accessibility zones was on sustainability grounds, due to the proximity of these zones to facilities and amenities, such as the Stevenage Railway Station;
- The Assistant Director (Planning and Regulation) undertook to respond to the Portfolio Holder for Resources regarding enforcement of disabled parking bays in the Borough;
- The Principal Planning Officer explained the formula used for the calculation of the number of disabled parking spaces required to be provided in new developments;
- Officers were requested to give further consideration to strengthening the document regarding the requirements of developers to contribute towards sustainable transport methods; including some specific reference in the document to the Old Town/High Street area; and referring to “Living” rather than “Liveable” streets throughout the text;
- The Leader made a specific request to officers to revise the wording of the “Park and Ride” section of the SPD, given the long held ambition of establishing a Park and Ride facility in the Borough aligned to the provision of an electric bus serving a circular route around the town.

The Executive supported the Leader’s additional recommendation that the Planning and Development Committee should be consulted prior to publication of the final SPD document.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the outcomes of the Draft Parking Provision and Sustainable Transport SPD consultation be noted.
2. That the views and comments of the Planning and Development Committee on the SPD be sought at the next meeting of that Committee.
3. That delegated powers be granted to the Assistant Director (Planning and Regulation), taking into account the views of the Planning and Development Committee, and following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration, to make minor amendments as necessary in the final preparation of the Parking Provision and Sustainable Transport SPD prior to its adoption.
4. That, subject to Resolutions 2. and 3. above, the Parking Provision SPD (adopted 2012) be revoked.
5. That, subject to Resolutions 2. and 3. above, the Parking Provision and Sustainable Transport SPD be approved for adoption as a material consideration for planning applications.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report; and 2. To allow the Planning and Development Committee to comment on the proposed SPD prior to its publication.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

6 STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY ADOPTION AND ENGAGEMENT CONSULTATION UPDATE

The Executive considered a report providing an update on climate change work, achievements and engagement, and seeking adoption of a proposed Climate Change Strategy.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration advised that, since the climate change declaration, officers had been working internally and externally with all Council departments and relevant local interest groups and academics. There had also been a number of Portfolio Holder Briefing Group sessions, several Climate Change and Sustainability Member Working Group meetings and discussions with the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration commented that the report before the Executive presented the Climate Change engagement work carried out so far, as well as seeking approval to a proposed Climate Change Strategy (CCS), which was the starting point for the Council to reach its carbon neutral targets.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment explained that the CCS began by outlining the known data on greenhouse gas emissions in Stevenage. This included emissions across the town, as well as for the Council's own activities, providing an important baseline. The CCS also presented what must change to support the aspiration of achieving carbon neutrality by 2030. The CCS outlined the areas the Council needed to focus on in order to reduce its own carbon footprint and to engage residents and businesses in an active cross-town commitment to reduce Stevenage's contribution to climate change.

The following points were raised during the debate upon the Strategy:

- It was confirmed that the Citizens' Panel would not target groups covered by existing engagement processes, but would consist of a cross-section of residents not involved with those groups;
- Officers were requested to arrange specific presentations of the Strategy to the Stevenage Youth Council and Stevenage Youth Parliament in order to gather the views of young people; and
- Once published, comments on the Strategy should be sought on-line and on social media.

The Executive supported the following three additional recommendations (Nos. 4, 5 and 6) proposed by the Leader:

4. That it be noted that the process to recruit to the Citizens' Panel is now underway, and that feedback from this Panel will be provided in October 2020 to inform the final Strategy.
5. That an Action Plan be developed, to be approved by the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration, and that the intention of asking the

Environment and Economy Select Committee to review the delivery of the Strategy be noted.

6. That a progress report on the delivery of the Strategy and associated Action Plan be submitted to the Executive in 12 months' time.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration commented that it would be his intention to establish an Implementation Group to help drive and monitor progress made against the Climate Change Action Plan, comprising himself and the Portfolio Holders for Housing, Health & Older People and Economy, Enterprise & Transport. The Chair of the Environment and Economy Select Committee would be invited to all meetings of the Group, together with other Members as and when required.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the updates to the Climate Change work and achievements thus far be noted.
2. That the content of the draft Climate Change Strategy (set out in Appendix C to the report) and accompanying documents be approved for adoption.
3. That delegated powers be granted to the Assistant Director (Planning and Regulation), following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration, to make amendments as are necessary in the final preparation of the draft documents prior to adoption.
4. That it be noted that the process to recruit to the Citizens' Panel is now underway, and that feedback from this Panel will be provided in October 2020 to inform the final Strategy.
5. That an Action Plan be developed, to be approved by the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration, and that the intention of asking the Environment and Economy Select Committee to review the delivery of the Strategy be noted.
6. That a progress report on the delivery of the Strategy and associated Action Plan be submitted to the Executive in 12 months' time.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report; and 4., 5. & 6. To ensure feedback from the Citizens' Panel is taken into account and to put in place suitable monitoring mechanisms for the Strategy.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

7 COVID-19 UPDATE

The Executive considered a verbal update/presentation from the Strategic Director (TP) on the Covid-19 pandemic.

The key highlights of the presentation included:

- The number of daily cases was rising, although the number of hospital admissions remained lower than at the peak;
- The Stevenage figure for cases per 100,000 of people was 27, compared to an average for England of 18;
- The Director of Public Health had produced a plan of key areas where focus was needed;
- There were significant pressures on national testing capacity;
- The NHS was preparing for a potential autumn and winter second spike;
- SBC and HCC's Public Health team were working on an action plan to help prevent further escalation;
- Watford/Three Rivers Councils had begun a pilot of local contact tracing, which would be rolled out to all Hertfordshire Councils in October 2020;
- The direction to mobilise local contact tracers would be via the HCC Director of Public Health or Public Health England;
- The County-wide Local Outbreak Plan was about to be approved, and an SBC District outbreak Plan had been developed;
- Communications work, in relation to staff, residents and businesses, had continued; and
- The Stevenage Together Partnership was continuing in its work to develop a joint recovery action plan for the town.

The Leader commented that the quality of the information provided to Borough/District Councils needed to improve in order that resources could be targeted appropriately; the testing regime needed a rapid improvement; and HCC should be proactively informing District/Borough Councils of school closures, rather than this information being picked up by chance through social media. She felt that the Government should undertake proper consultation with local authorities regarding the Covid Marshals initiative, rather than the less than 24 hour period they had just given councils to respond on the matter.

The Leader requested officers to ensure that the Covid-19 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) were kept regularly up to date.

The Leader requested the Strategic Director (TP) to arrange for his presentation to be made available in the Covid-19 area on the Council's website, and that a link to this be circulated via social media.

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

8 ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW OF 2019/20 AND PRUDENTIAL CODE

The Executive considered a report in respect of the annual review of the 2019/20 Treasury Management Strategy.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources stated that during the year the average cash balance was £63.642M, earning interest of £625,000 and achieving an average interest rate of 0.98%. The comparable rate was 0.58% (average 7-day LIBID rate).

This compared favourably with an original budget assumption of £566,000 based on average investment rate of 0.7%.

The Executive noted that cash balances (£54.072M as at 31 March 2020) enabled the Council to use internal borrowing in line with its Capital Strategy and Treasury Management Strategy. This position was kept under review taking into account future cash balances and forecast borrowing rates.

It was further noted that, in 2019/20, the Council spent £43.527M on capital projects (General Fund and HRA). The capital programme was funded from a combination of existing capital resources and an increase in borrowing (General Fund £1.820M, HRA £7.056M). External loans of £4.010M were taken out for the HRA during 2019/20. As at 31 March 2020, the Council had total external borrowing of £209.229M.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources confirmed that there had been no breaches of the treasury operational boundary and authorised limit during 2019/20.

It was **RESOLVED** that the 2019/20 Annual Treasury Management Review be recommended to Council for approval.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

9 GENERAL FUND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE (2020/21 - 2024/25)

The Executive considered a report providing an update to the General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2020/21 – 2024/25.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources stated that, since the June 2020 Covid MTFS recovery report, the Council had received £130,000 of new burdens money for managing the retail and hospitality grant scheme. The June report did not look at losses beyond 2020/21, and the updated report assumed that there were likely to be losses of income of circa £1Million in 2021/22 (probably car parking, commercial income and so on).

The Portfolio Holder for Resources commented that the level of losses estimated across the life of the MTFS for the General Fund is circa £8.6Million, based on approximately £1.5Million losses beyond 2020/21. This has meant that the MTFS assumed that all the on-hold spend agreed in the June Covid report would remain on hold due to the current financial situation and uncertainty.

The Executive was informed that the MTFS assumed no additional New Homes Bonus (NHB), as the Government may abandon the scheme. This presented challenges for the Co-operative Neighbourhood Management (CNM) FTFC programme in future years beyond 2021/22, which still needed to be addressed for capital and would require a growth bid for 2021/22.

Members were further informed that the MTFS modelled a 1.99% Council Tax

increase - there was no news on the level of Council Tax rise for 2021/22, as this would be part of the Government finance settlement. Regrettably, the Council would need to look at prioritisation of services because the savings from commercial and transformation (and currently planned savings) were not likely to be forthcoming in 2021/22 for budget setting.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources explained that, to support the resilience of the General Fund, the Strategic Director (CF) had assumed a £350,000 RCCO reduction per year as a result of sale of the Locality Review sites. The MTFS assumed that the Council needed a higher level of balances as a result of Covid (£3.4Million General Fund balances), in case the impact of Covid had a 'long tail'.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources advised that the savings target had been increased for 2022/23 and 2023/24. The new savings target for 2022/23 was £550,000 and for 2023/24 was £600,000. Total savings required for 2021/22-2023/24 was £2.45Million for the General Fund.

The Executive supported two proposed additional recommendations (Nos. 21 and 22) as follows:

21. That the additional pay inflation from the 2020/21 pay award of 2.75%, as outlined in Paragraph 4.4.5 of the report, totalling £90,460, be approved; and
22. That the budgets totalling £865,860 as outlined in the June COVID MTFS recovery report be removed from the budgets. This includes £75,000 of 2020/21 CNM spend, £152,000 of vacant posts held, £50,000 of overtime budgets, £125,000 of capital related spend, and £463,860 of other underspends identified in 2020/21.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the change to the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) principles, as outlined in Paragraph 4.1.6 of the report, be approved.
2. That, for modelling purposes, Council Tax increases be set at the threshold of 1.99%, subject to any change in Government rules to achieve a balanced budget (as referred to in Section 4.8.12 of the report).
3. That the update inflation assumptions used in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (as referred to in section 4.4 of the report) be approved.
4. That the approach to Financial Security, as set out in Section 4.7 of the report, be approved.
5. That an amount of £200,000 for 2020/21 and 2021/22 be approved for inclusion in the budget setting process as a Transformation Fund to help deliver the Financial Security Target (as referred to in Paragraph 4.6.3(v) of the report).
6. That a General Fund Financial Security Target of £2.45Million be approved for

the period 2021/22 – 2023/24, including increases in fees and charges (as referred to in Paragraph 4.7.17 of the report).

7. That an amount of £100,000 for 2020/21 be included in the budget to cover associated costs of the Devolution and Recovery White Paper (as referred to in Paragraph 4.6.3(ii) of the report).
8. That the 2020/21 1st Quarter changes to the General Fund, as outlined Paragraph 4.6.1 of the report, be approved.
9. That the financial impact of Covid-19 in 2020/21 and future years, including the estimation of income guarantee scheme, as set out in section 4.5 of the report, be noted.
10. That the budgets held as part of the June 2020 Covid-19 MTFS report be not released and be removed from the budget, as set out in Paragraph 4.7.17 of the report and based on the level of projected General Fund balances.
11. That the assumptions set out in Paragraph 4.7.17 of the report that underpins the level of Financial Security savings required in the MTFS and which supported the General Fund balances be noted.
12. That the unavoidable growth pressures, as outlined in Paragraph 4.6.2 of the report, be noted and included in the budget setting process.
13. That General Fund growth be only approved for the Council's FTFC priorities and the growth allowance in the 2020/21 budget is £75,000, with growth above that level needing to be funded by further savings in addition to the £2.45Million target identified (as referred to in Paragraph 4.7.17 of the report).
14. That the Leader's Financial Security Group oversees the development of the 2021/22 – 2023/24 savings package.
15. That the New Homes Bonus balances available be noted, and that growth funding of Co-operative Neighbourhood Management be included as part of the budget setting process.
16. That the revenue contribution to capital be reduced by £350,000 per year from 2020/21 as a result of the locality review sales in order to increase the resilience of General Fund balances.
17. That a minimum level of balances for the General Fund of £3.41Million be approved for 2020/21 (as referred to in section 4.11 of the report).
18. That the MTFS be regularly updated for any material financial pressures so forecasts are updated and be re-presented to the Executive for approval.
19. That, if required, public consultation be commissioned in line with the requirements of the Council's Consultation and Engagement Strategy.

20. That the Trade Unions and staff be consulted on the key messages contained within the Medium Term Financial Strategies and more specifically when drawing up any plans where there is a risk of redundancy.
21. That the additional pay inflation from the 2020/21 pay award of 2.75%, as outlined in Paragraph 4.4.5 of the report, totalling £90,460, be approved.
22. That the budgets totalling £865,860 as outlined in the June COVID MTFS recovery report be removed from the budgets. This includes £75,000 of 2020/21 CNM spend, £152,000 of vacant posts held, £50,000 of overtime budgets, £125,000 of capital related spend, and £463,860 of other underspends identified in 2020/21

Reason for Decision: As contained in report and 21. To reflect the agreed pay award; and 22. To reflect further savings required due to Covid-19.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

10 QUARTER 1 MONITORING REPORT 2020/21 (CAPITAL) - GENERAL FUND AND HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT

The Executive considered a report in respect of the First Quarter Capital Programme General Fund and Housing Revenue Account monitoring 2020/21.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources advised that, in respect of the General Fund, there was a 2020/21 net decrease of capital expenditure of £1.4M and a 2021/22 net increase of capital expenditure of £1.6M. The updated projected spend for the 2020/21 General Fund capital programme was £35.3M, a net decrease of £1.4 M, which was mainly due to slippage to 2021/22.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources stated that two bids were in development from the funding package received by Herts LEP for Growth Deal 3 (GD3). The first was for £2.11M to speed up acquisitions, asbestos removal, remediation etc. The second proposal, for £1.10M was in relation to a new Multi-Storey Car Park, to allow and enable the development of other land parcels.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources further stated that a bid had also been submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). Stevenage had been selected to submit proposals for a Town Deal from the Towns Fund. The Government was bringing forward funding to 2020/21 to support projects that would make an immediate impact in towns. Stevenage had been offered a grant of £1.0M to fund capital projects that could be delivered this financial year. The spending must be in line with the Towns Fund intervention framework and achieve good value for money. The Council had submitted proposals to utilise the funding for demolition works to key regeneration sites, expansion of the town square project realm works scope, and delivery of part of the north block co-work scheme which would deliver new jobs

In respect of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), the Portfolio Holder for Resources advised that there was a 2020/21 net decrease in capital expenditure of £750,000 and a 2021/22 net decrease in capital expenditure of £10.9M. The current

forecast was that there would be no need to return 1 for 1 receipts in 2020/21, but this was heavily reliant on the timing of capital spend and identifying suitable Registered Provider grants.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources reported that the Decent Homes Programme formed a large part of the ongoing investment programme of the HRA. The forecast for 2020/21 of the number of properties where works had been carried out to bring the property up to the decent homes standard was 2,392.

The Executive noted that Right to Buy (RTB) sales were now forecast to be 27 in 2020/21 based on current expressions of interest (the forecast was reduced from 35). 5 RTB sales had been completed to date (20 RTB sales in total had been completed up to the same time last year).

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the 2020/21 General Fund Capital Programme net decrease in expenditure of £1.4Million, as summarised in Table One, Paragraph 4.1.1 of the report, be approved.
2. That the General Fund net increase (arising from slippage) of capital expenditure of £1.6Million in 2021/22, also as summarised in Table One, Paragraph 4.1.1 of the report, be approved.
3. That the net decrease of £750,000 in the capital expenditure for the Housing Revenue Account, as summarised in Table Five, Paragraph 4.3.1 of the report, be noted.
4. That the net decrease (arising from slippage) of £10.9Million in the capital expenditure for the 2021/22 Housing Revenue Account, also as summarised in Table Five, Paragraph 4.3.1 of the report, be noted.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

11 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

The Chair had accepted an urgent item of business in respect of the Council's request for a Stevenage Car Cruising Injunction.

The Chief Executive reported that the Court had granted an Interim Injunction preventing car cruising throughout the whole of the Borough. The Injunction had been granted on an interim basis to allow unnamed persons to attend a final hearing on the matter in due course. Legal advice would be drawn up, in association with Hertfordshire Constabulary, regarding enforcement of the Injunction, and the decision would be communicated to the public.

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 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.

13 PART II MINUTES - EXECUTIVE - 12 AUGUST 2020

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

14 LOCALITY REVIEW LAND AND SITE DISPOSAL REPORT

The Executive considered a Part II report recommending a pipeline of site disposals identified as part of the Locality Ward asset and land reviews, in order to support the funding of the Capital Strategy and reduce the Revenue contribution to Capital from the General Fund.

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.

15 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

CHAIR