

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 6 October 2020

Time: 2.00pm

Place: Virtual (via Zoom)

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

Also Present: Councillor Phil Bibby CC (observer).

Start / End Time: Start Time: 2.00pm
End Time: 4.24pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Lloyd Briscoe and for lateness from Councillor John Gardner.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 16 SEPTEMBER 2020

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 16 September 2020 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

3 COVID-19 UPDATE

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

As well as summarising some of the SBC Response and Recovery highlights, the key elements of the presentation included:

- Nationally, the confirmed number of coronavirus cases since the end of August 2020 had increased significantly to numbers above first wave peak levels, but hospitalisation and deaths had not seen a corresponding increase;
- The current cases per 100,000 people in Stevenage was 11.4 (the lowest in Hertfordshire, although this was updated at the meeting to 12.54), compared to the average for England of 28;
- The national Covid-19 alert level had been raised to Level 4, meaning transmission was “high or rising exponentially”. The new measures announced by the Government in response to this raised alert level were summarised;
- The NHC Covid-19 app had been rolled out, with features including risk alerts, QR check-in at venues, symptom checks and test booking;
- A new Jobs Support Scheme would be replacing the existing Furlough Scheme

in November 2020;

- Stevenage had seen a total of 77 cases during September 2020, with a weekly peak of 32 during the w/c 7 September 2020;
- Local response developments had included the establishment of a county-wide Events and Gatherings Co-ordination Group and a multi-agency Enforcement Steering Group. The Outbreak Tactical Co-ordinating Group was meeting daily to look at the number and nature of cases and to agree mitigation activity;
- Operation Shield/Sustain – a response plan and checklist had been produced to respond to a second peak or local lockdown;
- Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership had released a County Recovery Plan to prepare for the future (in the light of increased claiming for financial support; 28% of employed staff being on furlough; and the potential risk to 60,000 jobs due to the recession);
- Local Test and Trace – SBC was participating in a local contact tracing pilot scheme; and all Boroughs/Districts had been asked to identify suitable locations for Local Test Sites which could become operational in the event of a local surge in cases;
- SBC's Medium Term Financial Strategy had been modelled with a Covid-19 impact of loss of around £8.6M (Government funding received to date to offset this loss was £1.2M, with another £1.5M - £1.7M still to be claimed as part of the income guarantee scheme); work was underway to develop plans for future year's savings (£1M - £1.3M needed for 2021/22); the Revenues & Benefits Team were to administer £500 isolation payments from 12 October 2020; and
- The Stevenage Together Partnership was working on a joint recovery action plan for the town, covering areas from health, to jobs and skills, environment, regeneration and support to those who needed it most.

The following issues were raised by Members during the presentation:

- Officers were requested to improve communications with residents across the Borough and businesses in the Old Town area regarding the reasons behind the Covid-19 related restrictions introduced in the High Street, including the key messages behind the footway/highway width changes and the loss of some parking spaces, offset by the use of 120 spaces (free for 3 hours) in the Former Waitrose Car Park. On this latter point, the Leader asked that clear signage be provided in the High Street directing car users to the Former Waitrose Car Park;
- The Strategic Director (RP) was asked to contact the Hertfordshire Director of Public Health to ascertain the latest position with regard to the availability/supply of the flu vaccine and to inform Executive Members of the response;
- It was confirmed that it would be the responsibility of the Local resilience Forum to authorise any re-introduction of Operation Shield/Sustain activities in the case of a Local Outbreak or increased lockdown;
- It was clarified that, at present, the majority of contact tracing was carried out by NHS Test and Trace based on those testing positive for Covid-19 and providing contact lists, rather than via those individuals using the NHS Covid-19 app.;
- The Council was continuing to work with Stevenage Leisure Limited (SLL) on

service delivery, although it was acknowledged that the existing difficult financial position could be exacerbated should SLL's bid for Culture Recovery Fund monies be unsuccessful;

- As a contribution to Black History Month, Officers were requested to give consideration to the publication of material recording the contribution of black people to the life and growth of Stevenage, and that work should be done on this in time for Black History Month 2021;
- It was confirmed that the £500 isolation payments would be paid by the Revenues and Benefits Team to qualifying individuals (subject to the relevant Government Department confirming their eligibility);
- The Strategic Director (RP) informed the Executive that he would be producing a weekly Covid-19 update/bulletin to be sent to all Members.

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

4 WORKFORCE STRATEGY 2020-2023

The Executive considered a report seeking approval of the Workforce Strategy 2020-2023.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources advised that the Workforce Strategy was a critical enabler for delivering the Council's strategic ambitions over the next three years. It was through its people that the Council would aim to deliver the nine corporate priorities identified in the Future Town, Future Council Programme.

As part of the development of the Strategy, the Portfolio Holder for Resources explained that consultation had taken place with Members, the Senior Leadership Team and Trade Unions. Additionally, feedback had been received from staff via surveys. As part of the research associated with drafting the Strategy, officers had also engaged with other external partner networks and reviewed other employment research into the changing ways of working.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources commented that there were five key themes to the Strategy, namely:

- New ways of working – the development and embedding of a model of work being a thing we do, rather than a place to go. Technology would be utilised to enable work to be delivered in the most appropriate location for the task - be that working from home, an office, or in the community to deliver the Council's neighbourhood management ambitions, whilst also recognising the value of bringing people together for that shared sense of purpose;
- Attracting and retaining the best people – The Council would continue to strive to attract the most capable people to build an exceptional, diverse and culturally safe workplace. The employee experience would be aligned to SBC's values, vision and future organisational needs, and aspirations to deliver services in-house wherever possible;
- Inclusion and Wellbeing – The Council would be known for nurturing a progressive, inclusive, safe and healthy working environment. Inclusion replaced previous references to equality and diversity, with inclusion being considered a broader concept of embracing and valuing the contributions of

- everyone regardless of their background;
- Communication and Engagement - Effective internal communication was central to developing trust, engagement and productivity across the workforce; and
- Organisational Development - Developing a culture of personal accountability, with an increased focus on productivity and pride in delivering innovative and excellent customer service to residents.

The Senior Human Resources Manager confirmed that the Strategy had been drafted to align with the Council's other main strategic documents

The following issues were raised during the debate:

- The Leader's recommended addition of the word "inclusive" between the words "Build an" and "empowered and engaged workforce..." in the "People vision" box on Page 5 of the Strategy was supported;
- At an appropriate time in the future, Officers were requested to provide Members with the longer term impacts/effects of homeworking amongst staff; and
- It was confirmed that if major changes occurred regarding Covid-19, such as an effective vaccine, officers would react immediately and would not wait until the annual review of actions and targets.

The Executive accepted two additional recommendations proposed by the Portfolio Holder for Resources, namely that a key action from the Workforce Strategy would be the development of a workforce Equality and Diversity Policy; and that the Workforce Strategy would be an enabler of workforce productivity and the methodology and measurement would be included in the action plan and would be done in consultation with the trade unions.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the Workforce Strategy for 2020-2023, as attached at Appendix A to the report, and as amended, be approved.
2. That it be noted that the implementation plan may be revised due to changing circumstances and workforce requirements, and that approval for such changes be delegated to the Senior Human Resources Manager, after consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources.
3. That a key action from the Workforce Strategy will be the development of a workforce Equality and Diversity Policy.
4. That the Workforce Strategy will be an enabler of workforce productivity and the methodology and measurement will be included in the action plan and will be done in consultation with the trade unions.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report; 3. and 4. To widen the scope of the Workforce Strategy and supporting documentation.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

5 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE - QUARTER ONE 2020/21

The Chief Executive introduced a report regarding the Council's Corporate Performance for Quarter One of 2019/20 (April to June 2020).

The Chief Executive reminded Members that, in the context of Covid-19, a review of the Future Town Future Council (FTFC) programme was completed in May 2020 for the financial year 2020/21, to help identify which planned projects could be delivered or, where necessary, adapted. The key deliverables for each FTFC programme were then reported to the Executive in July 2020.

The Chief Executive added that, at the same time, a suite of performance measures and targets was agreed for 2020/21. The approach taken was that targets for the majority of performance measures would be set in line with actual or target performance at the equivalent period in the previous year. This helped to establish the level to which Covid-19 was impacting on performance and to inform where activity and resources needed to be directed.

The Chief Executive advised that, of the 54 Performance Indicators monitored during Quarter One, 38 were at green status; 3 were at amber status; 12 were at red status; and one was not available (Percentage of calls to the Customer Service Centre [CSC] resolved by CSC Advisors).

The Chief Executive explained the reasons for the amber, red and not available items, and the improvement proposals for each item.

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

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 One 2020/21, together with the latest achievements, be noted.
2. That the impacts of the Government directive on housing rough sleepers during Covid-19 be noted, and that future Housing First plans be endorsed (Paragraphs 3.80 to 3.86 of the report).
3. That the impacts on the Council's Housing Options Service from the Government directive on evictions and the Covid-19 pandemic be noted, and that future Housing First Plans be endorsed (Paragraphs 3.74 to 3.79 of the report).
4. That the impacts of Universal Credit and Covid-19 on the rent collection rate be noted and action plans endorsed (Paragraphs 3.87 to 3.95 of the report).
5. That the impacts of Covid-19 on the following area be noted and plans endorsed:

- Community Safety issues (Paragraphs 3.99 to 3.105 of the report);
 - Job Creation through the Business Technology Centre (Paragraphs 3.107 to 3.111 of the report);
 - Ability to inspect food establishments (Paragraphs 3.112 to 3.113 of the report);
 - Issues with the letting of Council garages (Paragraphs 3.114 to 3.120 of the report);
 - Collection of Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates (Paragraphs 3.152 to 3.154 of the report);
 - Ability to identify and remove Housing Revenue Account/General Fund savings (Paragraphs 3.155 to 3.157 of the report).
6. That the level of void loss be noted and the improvements be endorsed (Paragraphs 3.95 to 3.98 of the report).
7. That the changes in the process to recruitment be endorsed (Paragraphs 3.144 to 3.145 of the report).

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

6 HERTFORDSHIRE HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY - 24 MONTH REVIEW

The Executive considered a report on the Council's second year of participation in the Hertfordshire Home Improvement Agency (HHIA), a joint agency of five Hertfordshire Borough/District Councils (including SBC) and Hertfordshire County Council.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health and Older People advised that, as well as providing a progress update, the report also outlined how the HHIA had responded to an audit of the service. She added that the report highlighted the improvements that had been made to the service over the past year and how performance would be assessed on an ongoing basis.

The Assistant Director (Planning & Regulation) referred to the HHIA Key Performance Indicator information on Disabled Facilities Grants for years 2017/18 (the final year of the service being run in-house), 2018/19 and 2019/20, which showed a significant improvement in performance during 2019/20.

The Executive requested the Communications and Marketing Team to draw up an easy to follow guide for residents on the processes to go through in applying for aids and adaptations/Disabled Facilities Grants for their properties, including an article in the Council's Chronicle magazine; an infographics sheet; an item on the SBC website; and social media coverage.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the performance of the Hertfordshire Home Improvement Agency (HHIA) over the last 12 months be noted.

2. That the Council's continued participation in the HHIA be endorsed.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

7 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2021/22

The Executive considered the proposed Council Tax Support Scheme for 2021/22, which would be approved as part of the Council's General Fund budget in February 2021.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources advised that the current scheme was based on working aged claimants paying 8.5% of their Council Tax bill if they were on maximum benefit. The report identified the challenges of Universal Credit on the scheme (Paragraphs 4.4.5 - 4.4.6) with the option to move to a banded discount scheme. However, this was not recommended for 2021/22, as it was proposed that the existing scheme remained in operation.

It was noted that Preceptors were required to be consulted annually on the scheme, and therefore that Hertfordshire County Council and the Hertfordshire Police & Crime Commissioner would be advised of the proposed 2021/22 scheme.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources commented that the report identified that the cost of changing to a banded scheme would be £25,000 in software costs, with consultation costs in addition. Hertfordshire County Council had previously declined to contribute to any costs associated with changing the scheme, despite being the biggest preceptor for Council Tax.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources referred to the Council Tax Support Scheme caseload, which saw an increase in cases up to the end of August 2020, although the numbers had started to reduce in September 2020. The cost of the current scheme in 2019/20 was £5.779Million for all preceptors, as set out in Paragraph 4.10.1. of the report.

It was **RESOLVED** that Council be recommended to approve the 2021/22 Council Tax Support Scheme proposed within the report.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

8 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

9 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That under Section 100A 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.

10 PART II MINUTES - EXECUTIVE - 16 SEPTEMBER 2020

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 16 September 2020 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

11 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

CHAIR