

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 10 February 2021

Time: 1.00pm

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: Councillors Phil Bibby CC, Robin Parker CC and Simon Speller (observers).

Start / End Time: Start Time: 1.00pm
End Time: 4.14pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Vice-Chair opened the meeting and immediately adjourned it.

At 1.30pm, the Chair re-opened the meeting.

There were no apologies for absence.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 20 JANUARY 2021

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 20 January 2021 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

3 MINUTES OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND SELECT COMMITTEES

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Environment & Economy Select Committee held on 13 January 2021 be noted.

4 COVID-19 UPDATE

The Executive considered a presentation providing an update on the Covid-19 pandemic from the Strategic Director (RP), assisted by other officers. The presentation covered national updates; a national vaccination update; Covid-19 Hertfordshire data; the latest from the Hertfordshire Local Resilience Forum; and Stevenage updates.

In reply to Members' questions, officers replied:

- It was understood that there were sufficient supplies of the various vaccines in the UK to allow for second doses to be administered to all;
- It was currently illegal for the use of unpaid volunteers to deliver election material on behalf of political parties ie. only paid delivery services could be used, although it was noted that lobbying was taking place to seek to change this position;
- Although electors would be encouraged to attend polling stations to vote using their own writing implements, pencils would be provided should they arrive without them; and
- Although electors would be asked to wear face masks within polling stations, there was no legal power for Presiding Officers to enforce the wearing of such masks.

Officers were requested to progress the following actions:

- To provide Members with more detailed information, when received, of the Government's indemnity to Election Returning Officers for running safe elections during the Covid-19 pandemic (it was also noted that a number of Returning Officers' questions regarding the holding of safe elections in May had yet to be answered by the Government);
- To advise Members of the results of data gathering in relation to the surge testing for the South African Covid-19 variant carried out in Broxbourne and other locations across the UK;
- To prepare a Surge Testing Plan should it be required for Stevenage; and
- To submit information to the next Coronavirus Emergency Committee meeting with regard to the types of Covid-related initiatives/projects supported financially by Members over the past year through the use of their Local Community Budgets.

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

5 **DRAFT COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGY 2021 - 2024**

The Executive considered a report in respect of the draft Community Safety Strategy 2021 – 2024.

The Portfolio Holder for Communities, Community Safety and Equalities advised that the report and Strategy outlined what had been achieved over the past 3 years, but also looked forward to the next 3 years. She referred to the 5 key priorities contained in the Strategy, as summarised in Paragraph 4.1.1 of the report. The aim was to tie in these priorities with SBC's Co-operative Neighbourhoods Programme, in order to encourage the reporting of "hidden" crimes, such as domestic abuse and hate crime, as well as anti-social behaviour.

The Portfolio Holder for Communities, Community Safety and Equalities stated that the Strategy also sought to tackle drug and alcohol misuse throughout the town, as such concerns were raised regularly by the public and at Police Priorities Meetings.

The Community Safety Manager explained that the Strategy had been supported by

the Responsible Authorities Group (RAG) and SBC Members via a Portfolio Holder Advisory Group meeting. The implementation of the Strategy would be achieved through co-operative working with communities and key partners, via the activities of the Joint Action Group, and overseen by the Responsible Authorities Group. It had also taken into account the involvement of the Stevenage (Survivors) Against Domestic Abuse Board.

The Community Safety Manager drew attention to the 5 key priorities contained in the Strategy, as follows:

1. To divert young people from becoming involved in crime and anti-social behaviour;
2. To provide safe reporting and support to domestic abuse survivors and victims of modern slavery;
3. To promote reporting of hate crime and equality in the community;
4. To tackle the harms caused by drugs and alcohol; and
5. To work with partners to encourage reporting of crime and address perceptions of crime.

It was agreed that consideration be given to inclusion in the Strategy of the following issues:

- In view of the frequency of the matter being raised by the public and at Police Priorities meetings, a reference to the concerns about traffic speeding throughout the Borough; and
- The work on hate crime referred to in the Strategy should link in with the work of the SBC Equalities Commission.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the draft Community Safety Strategy (the Strategy) accompanying this report be approved noting its focus on the work of the SoSafe partnership.
2. That the decisions taken in Resolution 1 above be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration, in accordance with the Budget and Policy Framework Rules in the Council's Constitution.
3. That, once the Final Strategy has been recommended for adoption by the Executive and reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, it be referred to Council for consideration, in accordance with the Budget and Policy Framework Rules in the Council's Constitution.
4. That the Chief Executive, in his capacity as Chair of the SoSafe Partnership, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Communities, Community Safety & Equalities, be authorised to make changes to the Strategy post consideration by the Executive.
5. That it be noted that implementation of the Strategy (once approved in accordance with the Budget and Policy Framework Rules) will be achieved through co-operative working with communities and key partners through the

activities of the Joint Action Group and overseen by the Responsible Authorities Group.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

6 STEVENAGE CONNECTION AREA ACTION PLAN: ISSUES AND OPTIONS REPORT FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Executive considered a report with regard to the draft Stevenage Connection Area Action Plan: Issues and Options consultation.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration introduced the report and, by way of background context, stated that, after reviewing Stevenage's Local Plan during the Holding Direction, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) asked Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) to prepare an Area Action Plan (AAP) for Stevenage Station Gateway Area (identified in the Local Plan as Site TC4). An Area Action Plan (AAP) was an optional development plan document which provided specific planning policy and guidance for a particular location or area of significant change. The AAP could create new policy over and above the Local Plan.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration explained that the AAP document appended to the report had been developed in conjunction with consultancy David Lock Associates, and was a draft "Issues and Options" version. The AAP outlined the core issues that were present within the station area, as well as the background policy and wider context that would affect its development. It was an early stage of the preparation of an AAP, and initial high level scenarios and options that focussed on mobility were presented for feedback from targeted stakeholders.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration commented that it was important to note that the Issues and Options AAP contained key concepts at this early stage, but did not suggest specific proposals for the Railway Station and Lytton Way.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration advised that the Local Plan regulations stated that an Area Action Plan, as a Development Plan Document, must be consulted on publicly for no less than 6 weeks. Once the Issues & Options public consultation had been completed and feedback analysed, work would begin to prepare a Preferred Options for the Station Gateway AAP. A further minimum 6 week public consultation would be undertaken for the Preferred Options AAP, with representations considered and incorporated into the final version of the AAP. The final version would be submitted to the Secretary of State for Public Examination, ahead of formal adoption of the AAP by the Council.

The Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport added that he would be interested to hear the view of stakeholders regarding the options for Lytton Way set out in Chapter 6 of the AAP document. He advised that the Regeneration Team was in the process of finalising a brief for a new Multi-storey car park adjacent to the

Station, which would be integrated into the AAP document. Hertfordshire County Council was also carrying out highway modelling work regarding the options for Lytton Way, including their wider impact on surrounding highways. It was hoped that the work would run in parallel with the consultation on the Issues and Options AAP.

The Assistant Director (Planning & Regulation) advised that the overriding aspiration for the document was to provide a sustainable development which fitted in with the aims and objectives of the Council's Climate Change Strategy.

The Planning Policy Manager stated that he would ensure that the AAP was aligned with other key documents, including the Future Town Future Transport Strategy, and the work on Sustainable Travel Towns.

The Chair of the Planning and Development Committee confirmed that the Committee was supportive of the Issues and Options AAP consultation document.

Members requested Officers to give consideration to the following proposals as part of their further work on the Area Action Plan:

- The revised recommendation stipulating a minimum 8 week period for consultation on the draft Plan was supported, although two separate 6 week consultation periods was suggested above the minimum level;
- The consultation process should take advantage of innovative consultation methods, including online/digital formats, with appropriate publicity/advice on how to respond to the consultation exercise;
- There should be specific consultation with Borough Councillors and the County Councillor in whose Ward/Division the Station area was situated;
- A recognition should be given to the high-tech traditions of Stevenage by ensuring that high-powered digital access was available for those arriving in the town at the Railway Station;
- Clear signage should be provided in the Station area, in order that those arriving were shown exactly where they were in the town to allow them to swiftly orientate themselves;
- Access to the Station for all modes of transport, as well as pedestrians and the disabled, should be promoted; and
- The impact of the possible narrowing of Lytton Way on nearby traffic routes (such as St. George's Way) would need to be modelled.

The Chair pointed out that the references in the recommendations in the report to the "Assistant Director: Environment and Regeneration" should be changed to the correct designation of "Assistant Director: Planning and Regulation".

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the content of the draft Stevenage Connection Area Action Plan: Issues and Options Report be noted.
2. That delegated powers be granted to the Assistant Director: Planning and Regulation, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration, to make minor amendments as are necessary in the final

preparation of the draft Stevenage Connection Area Action Plan: Issues and Options Report prior to publication for consultation.

3. That the Stevenage Connection Area Action Plan: Issues and Options Report, as attached at Appendix A, be approved for consultation for a minimum 8 week period following the Executive meeting, consultation dates to be determined by the Assistant Director: Planning and Regulation.
4. That the comments of the Planning & Development Committee be invited regarding the content of the report.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

7 FINAL GENERAL FUND AND COUNCIL TAX SETTING 2021/22

The Executive considered a report with regard to the final General Fund Budget and Council Tax Setting for 2021/22.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources advised that the Financial Security options remained unchanged from the draft report and the report now included commentary from the Leader's Financial Security Group (LFSG) and Overview & Scrutiny Members, as set out in Paragraphs 4.1.2 - 4.1.4 of the report. The LFSG voted unanimously for 44 out of 45 options, and a majority voted for a reduction in Local Community Budgets.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources stated that the report now estimated that there would be Income Guarantee scheme compensation for 2020/21 NDR losses of £195,390 (based on losses of £260,518). The losses were spread over a 3 year period, as directed by the Government, and the income scheme funding had mirrored this approach in the General Fund.

The Executive was informed that NDR losses were not as bad as contained in the draft January report which estimated losses of £500,000 (versus a total £300,000), however this still needed to be realised and would not be known until the NDR3 was completed. Due to the risk, the NDR pooling gains of £367,000 were recommended to be transferred to a reserve in 2020/21 and returned to the General Fund in 2022/23.

The Portfolio Holder for resources explained that the Government Finance settlement had not been received at the time of writing the report, however the non-Covid elements were announced on 4 February 2021 and remained unchanged for lower tier grant and New Homes Bonus.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources commented that there were 2021/22 NDR gains of £586,565, however due to the risk to collection in 2021/22 the majority (80%) or £474,440 had been transferred to a reserve and could be returned to the General Fund when the gains were realised after year end 2021/22.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources explained that the 2021/22 Net budget had

increased by £437,120 to £1,165,480, but that this contained the transfer of NDR gains to reserves until gains were realised for 2020/21 and 2021/22 (£864,310), which was offset by lower interest on borrowing (garages) and a higher return from the Section 31 grants reserve. If these were excluded from the calculations, the net budget for 2021/22 would be £10.37Million.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources advised that there was £2.8Million of allocated reserves by 31 March 2021, of which of £1.298Million related to NDR reserves. The General Fund was £544,000 above minimum balances of £3.65Million, but the Chief Finance Officer still recommended that an additional £500,000 of savings be identified in case the financial position worsened in 2021/22.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following proposals be recommended to Council on 24 February 2021:

1. That the 2020/21 revised net expenditure on the General Fund of £11,056,840 be approved.
2. That a draft General Fund Budget for 2021/22 of £1,165,480 (as adjusted for the transfer from S31 grant allocated reserve to the General Fund of £8,395,960 to allow for the repayment to the Collection Fund of that amount) be proposed for consultation purposes, with a contribution from balances of £326,067 and a Band D Council Tax of £220.57 (assuming a 2.32% increase).
3. That the Risk Assessment of General Fund balances of £3,650,000 be approved.
4. That the contingency sum of £400,000, within which the Executive can approve supplementary estimates, be approved for 2021/22 (reflecting the level of balances available above the minimum amount).
5. That the 2021/22 Fees and Charges increase of £131,700 be noted, as approved at the January 2021 Executive (Appendix I to the report).
6. That the 2021/22 proposed Financial Security Options of £1,703,728, of which £1,462,182 relates to the General Fund (Appendix C to the report), be approved.
7. That the Growth bids of £260,365, of which £166,966 relates to the General Fund share (Appendix E to this report), be approved in principle, as set out in the report, and the priority order of implementation be approved, as set out in Paragraph 4.3.2. of the report.
8. That the General Fund pressures of £656,540 be noted, (Appendix E to the report).
9. That the 2021/22 Council Tax Support scheme be approved, as set out in section 4.8 of the report.
10. That use of New Homes Bonus be noted (section 4.4 of the report refers).

11. That the Financial Security targets for the General Fund, as set out in section 4.11. of the report, be approved.
12. That the use of the additional COVID grants, as set out in sections 4.5 and 4.6 of the report, be approved.
13. That the Strategic Leadership Team be requested to identify further options totalling £500,000 which could be implemented if the impact of COVID and other recessionary pressures are worse than projected (Paragraph 4.1.5 of the report refers).
14. That the Strategic Leadership Team be requested to bring forward a Productivity Focused Transformation Programme by June 2021 to set out the plan for future savings (Paragraph 3.9 of the report refers).
15. That, in accordance with the Council's Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules, the Council continues with the current Co-operative Corporate Plan, subject to further review in Autumn 2022 (Paragraphs 4.16.4 - 4.16.5 of the report refer).
16. That the comments from Overview and Scrutiny, Leaders Financial Security Group and all Member group (as set out in Paragraphs 4.1.2-4.1.4 of the report) be noted.
17. That the Equalities Impact Assessments, as appended to the report in Appendices G and H, be noted.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

8 FINAL CAPITAL STRATEGY 2020/21 - 2024/25

The Executive considered a report in respect of the Final Capital Strategy 2020/21 – 2024/25.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources advised that, in the January 2021 draft Capital Strategy report, whilst recommending in principle that the bids of £553,000 be approved, the report identified funding gaps of £161,000 for 2021/22 and £472,000 for 2022/23. A further review of the Strategy had taken place, and bids now totalling £514,000 were recommended for approval. If approved, the Capital Programme was now fully funded for 2021/22.

In respect of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) revised draft Capital Strategy budget for 2020/21 – 2025/26, the Portfolio Holder for Resources stated that this totalled £211.86Million, of which £51Million was earmarked for spend in 2021/22. The programme had been reviewed, identifying slippage of £2.2Million from 2020/21 to 2021/22, and growth of £309,000 was requested.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources recommended that the £250,000 contingency level remained unchanged for 2021/22 in respect of unexpected capital expenditure arising in year for which no approved funding was available. A limit of £250,000 was

also set for schemes for each Fund that had new resources or match-funded resources identified in addition to those contained within the report. This limit applied individually to both the General Fund and the HRA. This contingency sum constituted an upper limit on both funds within which the Executive could approve supplementary estimates, rather than part of the Council's Budget requirement for the year.

In relation to 1 for 1 receipt-based schemes (such as grants to Registered Providers), the Portfolio Holder for Resources recommended that the contingency allowance of £500,000 for such schemes remained unchanged for 2021/22.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources recommended that the Executive be given delegation to approve increases to the Capital Programme for 100% grant funded projects, when external funding sources had been secured, as outlined within the report. A contingency allowance of £5,000,000 was proposed for this purpose.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following proposals be recommended to Council on 24 February 2021:

1. That the final General Fund Capital Growth Bids for 2021/22 only, as detailed in Appendix A (and incorporated into Appendix D) to the report, be approved.
2. That the final General Fund Capital Savings and Slippage for 2020/21 – 2024/25, as detailed in Appendix B (and incorporated into Appendix D) to the report, be approved.
3. That the final HRA Capital budget requests for 2020/21 – 2024/25, as detailed in Appendix C (and incorporated into Appendix E) to the report, be approved.
4. That the updated forecast of Capital resources 2020/21, as detailed in Appendix D (General Fund) and Appendix E (HRA) to the report, be approved.
5. That the final 2021/22 General Fund Capital Programme, as detailed in Appendix D to the report, be approved.
6. That the final 2021/22 HRA Capital Programme, as detailed in Appendix E to the report, be approved.
7. That the Council's investment strategy for non-treasury assets, as detailed in Appendix F to the report, be approved.
8. That the approach to resourcing the General Fund Capital programme, as outlined in the report, be approved.
9. That the progress on Locality Reviews, as outlined in the report, be noted.
10. That the actions taken to ensure the General Fund Capital programme is funded, as outlined in paragraphs 4.2.2 - 4.2.3 of the report, be noted.
11. That the 2021/22 de-minimis Capital expenditure limit (Section 4.10 of the report) be approved.

12. That the 2021/22 Capital contingency allowances, set out in Paragraphs 4.11.1 and 4.11.2 of the report respectively, be approved.
13. That the Executive delegation set out in Paragraph 4.11.3 of the report, allowing approval for increases to the Capital programme for grant funded projects, be approved.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: as contained in report.

9 ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY INCLUDING PRUDENTIAL CODE INDICATORS 2021/22

The Executive considered a report in respect of the Annual Treasury Management Strategy including Prudential Code Indicators 2021/22.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources advised that cash balances were projected to be £72.7Million by 31 March 2021. These balances had been allocated for future (not new) spend and for payments due to third parties (eg) the County Council's share of Council Tax.

It was noted that the General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy and Capital Strategy had a planned use of resources over a minimum of 5 years, and that the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan (HRA BP) had a planned use of resources over a 30 year period, which meant that, whilst not committed in the current year, they were required in future years.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources commented that returns achievable on the Council's investments were currently modest based on the low Bank of England base rate. The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) had not changed the Bank of England base rate since it was cut to 0.10% on 19 March 2020 in response to the Coronavirus pandemic. For the financial year 2020/21 to 31 December 2020, returns on SBC investments had averaged 0.71%, and total interest earned was £330,511, contributing to General Fund and Housing Revenue Account revenue income.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources stated that there had been no breaches of Treasury Management counter party limits during 2020/21 to date.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources concluded by referring to a proposed change recommended for counter party limits to remain flexible for volatile cash balances (held by the Council on a short term basis). It was recommended that investments of up to one year, including Money Market Funds, the limits be increased from £8Million to £10Million, while cash balances were higher than £30Million.

The Executive supported the amendments to the report proposed by the Audit Committee at its meeting held on 9 February 2021, set out by the Strategic Director (CF) as follows:

- Paragraph 4.5.3 – the actual operational boundary limits should be included in

- this paragraph;
- Paragraph 4.6.1 – the date in the bottom row of the table should read “31 December 2020”;
 - References to “Queensway Properties LLP” be changed to “Queensway Properties (Stevenage) LLP”; and
 - Paragraph 4.3.3 – the colours in the table on projected external investment balances contained in this paragraph to be changed to make the table easier to read.

In response to a Member’s question, the Strategic Director (CF) confirmed that the Council’s investments were all placed with established banking institutions.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following proposals be recommended to Council on 24 February 2021:

1. That the Treasury Management Strategy 2021/22, as set out at Appendix A to the report, be approved.
2. That the prudential indicators for 2021/22, as set out in Appendix C to the report, be approved.
3. That the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy, as set out at Appendix B to the report, be approved.
4. That an increase to counterparty limits for short term investments (invested for up to one year) from £8Million to £10Million, when cash balances are higher than £30Million, be approved.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: as contained in report.

10 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

11 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.

12 PART II MINUTES - EXECUTIVE - 20 JANUARY 2021

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the meeting of Executive held on 20 January 2021 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

13 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

CHAIR