

# STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

## EXECUTIVE MINUTES

**Date: Wednesday, 9 February 2022**

**Time: 1.00pm**

**Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage**

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

**Also Present:** Councillor Maureen McKay (Chair of General Purposes Committee).

**Start / End**      Start Time:    1.00pm  
**Time:**            End Time:       4.25pm

### **1      APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Phil Bibby CC (observer) and Robin Parker CC (observer).

There were no declarations of interest.

### **2      MINUTES - 19 JANUARY 2022**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 19 January 2022 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 following Minutes of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees be noted:

Environment & Economy Select Committee – 10 January 2022

### **4      COVID-19 UPDATE**

The Executive considered an overarching verbal update report from the Strategic Director (RP), together with a short presentation from the Corporate Policy & Research Officer, providing information concerning the Omicron variant and the latest epidemiology statistics relating to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Strategic Director (RP) advised that the Prime Minister had announced that, subject to no significant increase in infection trends, the Government was considering the ending of all Covid restrictions (including self-isolation) on or around 24 February 2022, a month earlier than originally planned.

The Strategic Director (RP) commented that a temporary Covid vaccination centre (with a provisional venue of the United Reform Church on Cuttys Lane) would be provided in the Bedwell Ward on 5 and 12 March 2022 for first, second or booster jabs. Officers were working with the Hertfordshire Community Health Trust to promote these events, which would be supported by the SBC Covid Marshals.

The following issues were raised by Members:

- officers were asked to ensure that, as well as digital, non-digital forms of communication be used (such as posters displayed at the Bedwell and Monkswood Shopping Parades) to advertise the pop-up vaccination clinics to be held in the Bedwell Ward in early March;
- the Strategic Director (RP) agreed to request information from the Lister Hospital to confirm their position in relation to the backlog for elective surgery, along with any associated proposals for tackling the matter;
- if statistics became available at national level regarding the 39% of those hospitalised who had received a first, second and/or booster vaccination, then officers would report this information to Members; and
- the Chair stated that the Hertfordshire Director of Public Health had advised that there were no plans at present for second booster vaccinations, although it was likely that there would be a future need for at least an annual booster.

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

## **5 GAMBLING ACT 2005 - REVIEW OF STATEMENT OF LICENSING PRINCIPLES**

The Executive considered a report in respect of the proposed Stevenage Borough Council Gambling Act Statement of Principles 2022-2025, for onward recommendation to Council for adoption.

The Portfolio Holder for Communities, Community Safety & Equalities advised that Local authorities were required to publish a Statement of Principles in accordance with section 349 of the Gambling Act 2005. The Statement sets out the general approach that the Council would take when carrying out its regulatory role under the Act and promoting the licensing objectives. The Act specified that Local Authorities should “aim to permit” gambling, provided it was in accordance with the Code of Practice and guidance issued by the Gambling Commission, reasonably consistent with the licensing objectives and in accordance with the Statement of Principles. The effect of this duty was that Licensing Authorities must approach their functions in a way that sought to regulate gambling by using their powers to support the licensing objectives rather than by setting out to prevent it altogether.

The Portfolio Holder for Communities, Community Safety & Equalities stated that a number of additions and amendments to the current Statement of Principles were consulted upon, to reflect the update in the Guidance published by the Gambling Commission. There were no changes to the intent or direction of the Policy, which sets out how the Council would seek to regulate gambling activities under its control and provide a framework for consistent decision making.

The draft Statement of Principles was considered by the Council’s General Purposes

Committee at their meeting on 13 January 2022. The Executive was asked to agree the proposed Stevenage Borough Council Gambling Act Statement of Principles 2022-2025 and to recommend it to the Council for adoption.

The Executive supported an additional recommendation proposed by the Portfolio Holder for Communities, Community Safety & Equalities that the Council would, through the General Purposes Committee, engage with local partners and stakeholders, including Hertfordshire County Council Public Health and addiction support organisations, to further develop the Local Area Profile by establishing an evidence base that identified local harms from gambling activities and make representations to the Secretary of State to tackle harms from services such as online gambling. The Council would also seek the assistance of Hertfordshire's Public Health team to carry out a local health impact assessment.

The Senior Environmental Health & Licensing Manager added that the new Statement of Principles required adoption before July 2022. The Statement of Principles stood apart from the additional recommendation, which would be reflected in the Local Area Profile (an evolving document) currently being developed to address gambling harms in the Borough.

The Chair of the General Purposes Committee reported that the debate of that Committee had focussed on the Local Area Profile and gambling harms, a national issue. The issue of gambling harms had been considered by a HCC Topic Group and the HCC Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel, where it had been noted that 0.6% of the population experienced gambling problems, especially in deprived areas. She commented that a major problem was in the way interested parties (such as the Police) collected data, and that there needed to be a major improvement in information and evidence gathering at a local level. The Hertfordshire Director of Public Health was due to report back on this issue in the coming weeks.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the proposed Stevenage Borough Council Gambling Act Statement of Principles 2022-2025, as attached at Appendix A to the report, be agreed.
2. That the Stevenage Borough Council Gambling Act Statement of Principles 2022-2025 be recommended to Council for adoption.
3. That the Council will, through the General Purposes Committee, engage with local partners and stakeholders, including Hertfordshire County Council Public Health and addiction support organisations, to further develop the Local Area Profile by establishing an evidence base that identifies local harms from gambling activities and make representations to the Secretary of State to tackle harms from services such as online gambling. It will also seek the assistance of Hertfordshire's Public Health team to carry out a local health impact assessment.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in report; and 3. To identify and endeavour to address local harms caused by gambling activities.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in report.*

The Executive considered a report in respect of the final General Fund Budget and Council Tax Setting for 2022/23, for onward recommendation to Council.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources advised that, since the January 2022 draft General Fund report, further pressures of £33,000 had been identified in addition to the £122,000 highlighted in that earlier report. It was still too early to know whether parking income was going to be more adversely impacted than currently predicted, but this would remain under review.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources stated that the pressures on the net budget were £213,000 on-going, which was why the Making Your Money Count (MYMC) target had been increased for future years and was £810,000 for 2023/24. The MYMC options remained at £781,000, as per the draft report, and they were modelled on 3 redundancies, subject to consultation.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources explained that the NNDR 1 had been completed and the gains had been projected to increase to £619,000. This sum had been transferred into a reserve until realised due to the risks outlined in the report, which meant that there would be an uncommitted sum of £1.162Million in the business rates reserve. An update would be provided at the June 2022 Executive concerning possible uses of the 2021/22 gains if they appeared at year end.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources explained that there were risks to projected balances shown in Paragraphs 4.11.2 - 4.11.3 and Section 4.16 of the report. The previous (January) report recommended finding £250,000 savings during the new financial year. It was now recommended that this target be increased to £500,000, which would help in the event that the Council had to respond to bigger fluctuations in spend than estimated due to Covid and inflation. The balances are £358,000 above the minimum balances.

In response to a Member's question, the Strategic Director (CF) stated that the issue of a potential gap in the Government's methodology regarding the application of the £150 energy costs relief for Houses in Multiple Occupation had been raised with the Government, although the Regulations for administering this relief were still awaited. There would be further challenges in applying this relief to those that did not pay their Council Tax by direct debit.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following proposals be recommended to Council:

1. That the 2021/22 revised net expenditure on the General Fund of £11,688,050 be approved.
2. That the inclusion of the 2022/23 Fees and Charges of £341,780 (Appendix B to the report) in the draft 2022/23 budget be noted.
3. That the draft General Fund Budget for 2022/23 of £11,206,660, with a contribution from balances of £1,112,817 and a Band D Council Tax of £225.57 (assuming a 2.26% increase) be approved.

4. That the updated position on the General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), as summarised in Section 4.3 of the report, be noted.
5. That the minimum level of General Fund reserves of £3,471,038 in line with the 2022/23 risk assessment of balances, as shown at Appendix C to the report, be approved.
6. That the contingency sum of £400,000 within which the Executive can approve supplementary estimates be approved for 2022/23 (reflecting the level of balances available above the minimum amount).
7. That the Making Your Money Count (MYMC) options, as set out in Section 4.2 and Appendix A of the report, totalling £780,945 and £39,370 for the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) respectively for 2022/23 be approved.
8. That the Growth options included in Section 4.3 of the report be approved for inclusion in the 2022/23 General Fund (£3120,078) and HRA (£63,360) budgets.
9. That the General Fund pressures, as set out in Section 4.3 of the report, be approved.
10. That a further £300,000 be approved to pump prime Transformation, to be included in the Council's 2022/23 budget setting processes in order to significantly contribute to the savings targets set out in Section 4.11 of the report.
11. That the identification of a further £500,000 of MYMC options for the June 2022 MTFS report, as set out in Paragraph 4.11.4 of the report, be approved.
12. That the use of business rate gains only once realised be ring fenced for firstly the financial resilience of the Council and, if required, transferred to the Income Equalisation Reserve, and thereafter are used for Regeneration or Co-operative Neighbourhood one-off spend.
13. That the 2022/23 Council Tax Support Scheme, as set out in Section 4.6 of the report, be approved.
14. That the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as set out in Section 4.19 of the report, be noted.
15. That the Equalities Impact Assessments, as set out in Appendices D and E of the report, be noted.
16. That the work of the Leader's Financial Security Group (LFSG) in reviewing the efficiency, commercial and fees and charges, as outlined in Section 4.17 of the report, be noted.
17. That key partners and other stakeholders be consulted and their views

considered as part of the 2022/23 budget setting process.

18. 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 2023 (as referred to in Paragraphs 4.18.5 – 4.18.7 of the report).

*Reason for Decision: As contained in report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in report.*

## **7 RAILWAY STATION MULTI-STOREY CAR PARK - BUSINESS CASE**

The Executive considered a report in respect of a proposed Business Case for the Railway Station Multi-Storey Car Park.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration advised that approval of the designs, funding model and elements of funding for the project had been agreed at the December 2021 Executive meeting. The report requested approval of the remaining element of funding, as well as agreement of the mitigation actions during the construction period. The report provided information on borrowing cost implications and mitigation actions, including the Communications Plan principles, which would aim to reduce the loss of income from the temporary loss of customers during the construction of the new multi-storey car park (MSCP). The financial section presented the impact on the General Fund in different projected scenarios, but demonstrated that the borrowing and temporary income loss were manageable.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration commented that the timescales for the project were critical due to volatile material prices therefore it is recommended that a construction contract be signed by the end of February 2022, should the project receive the Executive's approval.

The Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise & Transport stated that planning approval was secured on 11 January 2022, subject to conditions which the project team was now working to discharge. Meanwhile, technical drawings were being developed in order meet the programme which reflected the current build price provided by the contractor.

In reply to a Member's question, the Assistant Director (Regeneration) stated that the discussions with Network Rail regarding the project had not thus far included the possibility of passengers using nearby stations for their rail journeys whilst the MSCP construction work was taking place. Although the existing parking capacity at nearby stations was limited, he agreed to raise this matter with Network Rail.

The Chair asked that officers arrange for a leafletting campaign to take place at the Railway Station in the run up to the start of the MSCP construction contract to advise passengers of the reduced car parking at the station for the duration of the contract and their options for parking in the other town centre car parks or travelling to the station by other means.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That it be noted that the discussions with Huber (proposed Contractor), as well as with Officers in the Council's Finance and Parking Departments, have continued since the December 2021 Executive meeting to progress the project.
2. That the successful outcome of the planning application process, with the new MSCP and cycle hub being approved on 11 January 2022, be noted.
3. That borrowing of up to £2.05M be approved to fund the costs of the MSCP not funded through Towns Fund and identified capital receipts.
4. That authority be delegated to the Strategic Director (TP) to enter into a construction contract with Huber up to £9.5M, and to agree any value increases to the existing Pre-Construction Services Agreement in order to protect the overall contract price.
5. That the following mitigation strategy principles be agreed:
  - Customers to be encouraged, using an improved communications strategy, to use St George's Multi-Storey Car Park as the preferred option for long term parking when using the station and other car parks within the town centre;
  - Customers have a further choice to use Primett Road car park and walk to the station - a "park and stride" option;
  - Utilisation of the Income Equalisation Reserve in the event that car parking income losses during construction of the MSCP are higher than included in the 2022/23 budget.
6. That authority be delegated to the Assistant Director (Planning & Regulation) to procure an operator(s) and operational plan for the new MSCP electric vehicle charging points and cycle hub, following consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Resources, Environment and Regeneration, and Economy and Transport.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in report.*

## **8 STEVENAGE CONNECTION AREA ACTION PLAN: ISSUES AND OPTIONS REPORT PUBLIC CONSULTATION FEEDBACK**

The Executive considered a report seeking approval to the drafting of the Stevenage Connection Area Action Plan: Preferred Options report.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration reminded Members that 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 & Regeneration advised that the "Issues & Options" stage was only the first element of development of the Area Action Plan. This would be followed by a "Preferred Options" consultation which would have been informed by the Issues & Options consultation response.

The Executive noted that the Planning & Development Committee had been briefed on the Issues & Options AAP consultation response on 31 January 2022.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration stated that Public consultation on the Issues & Options AAP ran from 12 July to 5 September 2021. Wide engagement had taken place via a range of methods which were detailed in the report and the appended Consultation Statement. As well as the general public, the Issues and Options report was circulated to key stakeholders who operated within and around the area covered by the AAP.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the content of the draft Stevenage Connection Area Action Plan: Issues and Options Report Consultation Statement (the Consultation Statement) be noted.
2. That it be agreed to progress to the next stage of the Area Action Plan progress, namely the production of the “Stevenage Connection Area Action Plan: Preferred Options Report”, (the Preferred Options Report), this report being based on the outcomes of the “Issues and Options” consultation.
3. That delegated powers be granted to the Assistant Director: Planning and Regulation, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration, to prepare the Preferred Options Report.
4. That it be noted that the final draft of the Preferred Options Report will be presented to Executive for approval to go out to public consultation in Summer 2022 (formal consultation, if approved, will take place once approved).
5. That the comments of the Planning & Development Committee on the report and Consultation Statement be noted.
6. That it be noted that informal engagement with key stakeholders will continue, to test the Preferred Options ahead of preparation of the Area Action Plan Preferred Options Report.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in report.*

## **9 STEVENAGE DESIGN GUIDANCE SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT 2021: PUBLIC CONSULTATION FEEDBACK**

The Executive considered a report regarding feedback from consultation on the draft Design Guidance Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) 2021, and seeking approval to the amended SPD prior to a second round of public consultation.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration reminded the Executive that Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) built upon policies contained in the Local Plan and were material considerations in the determination of planning



applications.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration explained that public consultation on the draft Design Guidance SPD had run from 20 September to 29 November 2021. Over 150 responses were received by the Council and, after taking these responses into account, officers felt that the document required significant amendments and additions.

The Executive noted the consultation outcomes set out in the Consultation Statement. The SPD would be revised before being re-submitted to the Executive for approval (likely in Summer 2022) before going out to public consultation thereafter, provisionally pencilled in for September 2022.

The Chair encouraged Members to provide officers with any suggestions for the addition of appropriate buildings to the Stevenage Heritage Assets list.

The following points were made by officers regarding issues raised by Members:

- the Assistant Director (Planning & Regulation) was requested to provide details in the next report on the SPD in respect of the refining of the design guidance for non-residential development;
- officers were requested to consider what action could be taken to direct telecommunications companies away from siting their apparatus in green leisure/community spaces, and instead locating them in more appropriate areas;
- officers were asked to include Liquid Amber trees in the list of tree species that should be considered set out in the “Movement” section of the SPD; and
- officers agreed to engage further as part of the next consultation phase in respect of the most appropriate signage to be used in the Borough’s Conservation Areas.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the content of the Stevenage Design Guidance SPD 2021 Consultation Statement (Appendix B) 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 second draft SPD prior to its consultation.
3. That the second draft Design Guidance SPD be published for consultation in September 2022 for a minimum of six weeks (speculatively 5 September to 17 October 2022).
4. That the Local List of Heritage Assets be published on the Stevenage Borough Council Webpage.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in report.*

## 10 FILMING OPPORTUNITIES IN STEVENAGE

The Executive considered a report in respect of the development of a formalised filming offer for Stevenage, designed to attract film, television and documentary makers into the Borough, help promote the town and to create an additional sustainable revenue stream for the Council whilst also supporting the local economy.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources advised that the proposal supported the Council's Cultural Strategy, which aimed to build the profile of Stevenage as a destination creative town.

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People, Leisure & Culture added that, locally in Hertfordshire, £1.5Bn was being invested in film production over the next three years. It was therefore timely for the Council to position itself to provide a clear offer for filming opportunities, to showcase and raise the profile of the Borough and realise the ambitions outlined in the Cultural Strategy. Increased filming in the town would widen cultural opportunities for local residents, practitioners, and other organisations. He referred to Paragraph 4.6 of the report, which outlined a number of the unique and interesting potential locations for filming in the Borough.

The Chair requested the Strategic Director (TP) to liaise with Hertfordshire County Council colleagues to ascertain details of the process and cost for the fast-tracking of road closures in association with filming productions.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the need to formalise the arrangements for filming within the Borough, in order that the Council will be in a better position to generate interest as a destination creative town and ensure that income is appropriately generated from the use of Council assets, be noted.
2. That the plan outlined in Section 4 of the report be approved as the Council's "filming offer".
3. That the implementation of the Council's scale of charges for filming, as set out in Appendix B to the report, be approved.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in the report.*

## 11 CAPITAL STRATEGY 2021/22 - 2025/26

The Executive considered a report seeking revisions to the 2021/22 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme, and approval of the final Capital Programme for 2022/23 for onward recommendation to Council.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources advised that the initial review of the existing Capital programme proposed growth bids for 2022/23 of £1.950Million, which resulted in a balance remaining at the end of 2022/23 of £842,000. This was considered to be too low by the Chief Financial Officer. Following the draft Capital

Strategy, a review of the bids was undertaken by Leader's Financial Security Group (LFSG).

The Portfolio Holder for Resources stated that as a result of the LSFG review, the following was proposed:

- £1.342Million agreed for 2022/23:
- three bids totalling £73,000 were not supported, however the service concerned could bid from the Deferred Works Reserve if the works became essential, and
- 7 bids were deferred totalling £535,000. Accordingly the Deferred Works Reserve had been increased by the sum of £535,000, so that the schemes could go ahead if a health and safety need arose or the bid was subsequently supported. It was recommended that the Executive be given delegated authority to approve all of the "On Hold" schemes, so that they could go ahead, subject to the outcome of the work identified. This would be in addition to the usual contingency allowance delegation of £250,000 to the Executive.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources commented that, due to a number of potentially larger pieces of work for which there was currently insufficient information available, it was recommended that the Deferred Works Reserve for 2022/23 be increased by a further £300,000, resulting in a total Deferred Works Reserve of £1.035Million.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources advised that the Capital Programme was fully funded for 2021/22 – 2025/26. The Chief Financial Officer would be submitting a report forward during the 2022/23 financial year setting out the Council's key capital town centre transformation, community asset ambitions and key land and asset disposals not currently in the Capital Strategy, in order to determine a funding strategy to meet the Corporate priorities.

In respect of the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme, the Portfolio Holder for Resources stated that there had been no changes since the draft Capital Strategy was agreed at January 2022 Executive meeting. The budget for 2021/22 - 2025/26 remained a total of £188.942Million.

The Executive noted that a specific delegation recommended to the Executive or Portfolio Lead/Leader of the Council to approve increases to the capital programme for grant funded projects when external funding sources had been secured. It was proposed that this contingency allowance remained at £5,000,000 where a scheme was fully funded from third party contribution/grant.

In reply to a question from the Chair in respect of progress on the Locality Reviews, the Strategic Director (CF) stated that the Strategic Leadership Team was in the process of considering community assets, following which there would be consultation with Executive Portfolio Holders.

In response to a further question from the Chair regarding the use of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)/Section 106 monies, the Strategic Director (CF) confirmed that these were essentially limited to the provision of capital funding for specific projects, but officers would investigate the extent of which the ongoing maintenance and revenue costs associated with such projects could be paid for from CIL/Section

106.

A Member requested that consideration should be given in the future to the use of funding for a more regular upgrading and maintenance programme for the Borough's Shopping Parades.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following proposals be recommended to Council:

1. That the final General Fund Capital Growth Bids for 2022/23, as detailed in Appendix A (and incorporated into Appendix C) to the report, be approved.
2. That the revisions to the 2021/22 General Fund budget, as incorporated into Appendix C to the report, be approved.
3. That the final 2022/23 General Fund Capital Programme, as detailed in Appendix C to the report, together with the recommended resourcing, be approved.
4. That the Chief Financial Officer brings a report forward during the 2022/23 financial year setting out the Council's key capital regeneration and community asset ambitions and key land and asset disposals not currently in the capital strategy, to determine a funding strategy to meet these Corporate priorities.
5. That the final Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget requests for 2022/23, as detailed in Appendix B (and incorporated into Appendix D) to the report, and as approved at the 26 January 2022 Council meeting, be noted.
6. That the final HRA Capital Programme, as detailed in Appendix D to the report, be approved.
7. That the updated forecast of resources 2022/23, as detailed in Appendix C (General Fund) and Appendix D (HRA) to the report, be approved.
8. That the Council's investment strategy for non-treasury assets, as detailed in Appendix E to the report, be approved for consideration by the Executive.
9. That the funding increase requested for the Bus Interchange scheme, as set out in Paragraph 4.1.2 of the report, be approved.
10. That the Executive be given delegated authority to approved all of the on-hold schemes, so that they can go ahead depending on the outcome of the work identified in Paragraph 4.3.1 of the report.
11. That the 2022/23 de-minimis expenditure limit, as set out in Section 4.11 of the report, be approved.
12. That the 2022/23 contingency allowances for the General Fund and HRA, set out in Paragraphs 4.12.1 and 4.12.2 of the report respectively, be approved.
13. That the Executive delegation set out in Paragraph 4.12.3 of the report,

allowing the Executive to approve 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.*

## **12 ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY INCLUDING PRUDENTIAL CODE INDICATORS 2022/23**

The Executive considered a report seeking the approval of the Treasury Management Strategy 2022/23, including its Annual Investment Strategy, Prudential Indicators and Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy, for onward recommendation to Council.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources advised that cash balances were projected to be £71.4Million by 31 March 2022. The projection excluded £10.5Million of used balances in lieu of external borrowing due to low interest rates leading to a poor return on investments.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources explained that the returns achievable on the Council's investments were currently modest based on the low Bank of England base rate. The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) raised the Bank of England base rate (Bank Rate) on 16 December 2021 to 0.25%, the first increase since it was cut to 0.10% on 19 March 2020 in response to the Coronavirus pandemic. For the financial year 2021/22 to 31 December 2021 returns on investments had averaged 0.34% and total interest earned was £201,159 which had contributed 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 2021/22 to date. There were no changes recommended for counter party limits, as the existing limits had allowed the Council to remain flexible with respect to volatile cash balances (held on a short-term basis).

The Portfolio Holder for Resources commented that revised Treasury Management and Prudential Codes were issued by CIPFA on 20 December 2021. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC, formerly MHCLG) was proposing to tighten up regulations around local authorities financing capital expenditure on investments in commercial projects for yield. The DLUHC was also currently conducting a consultation on amending Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) rules for England. Officers had been reviewing the potential impact that the proposed changes may make to the MRP charged to revenue and were taking this into account when making borrowing decisions.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following proposals be recommended to Council:

1. That the Treasury Management Strategy, as set out at Appendix A to the report, be approved.
2. That the Prudential Indicators for 2022/23, as set out at Appendix C to the

report, be approved.

3. That the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy, as set out at Appendix B to the report, be approved.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in report.*

## **13 URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

### **Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund**

The Chair was pleased to announce that the Council had been awarded £1,836,546 for the project to improve the energy efficiency of 400 Council homes. This funding would be provided through the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF), which was administered by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). The SHDF funding would be supported by a 33% contribution from the Council's Housing Revenue Account, making the total project value £2.75M.

The Chair advised that the funding would see social homes with an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of D or lower receive upgrades to improve their energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions. This included, where required, fitting wall and loft insulation, double glazing, and solar panels. The scheme would help us to make these homes warmer and cheaper to run and was also expected to create a great number of jobs in the green energy sector, some of which it was hoped would be local within Stevenage.

The Chair commented that, given the well-publicised increase in energy costs and the other factors which were believed to be fuelling a broader cost of living crisis, this funding was greatly welcomed and the Council would work to ensure that its tenants benefitted as soon as possible, with planned works expected to take place between April 2022 and March 2023. The work being delivered formed part of the Council's commitment to making Council housing more energy efficient and would also contribute towards the achievement of its wider ambition to be net carbon zero by 2030.

The Chair recorded her thanks to the Council's Housing & Investment Team and Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health and Older People for the significant efforts made to submit the bid, which had secured this important and timely funding award.

## **14 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Not required.

## **15 URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

## **CHAIR**