

NOTICE OF DECISIONS

Meeting:	Executive	
Date:	Wednesday, 7 December 2022	
Place:	Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage	
Members Present:	Councillors:	Baroness Taylor of Stevenage, OBE (Chair), Richard Henry (Vice-Chair), Sandra Barr, Lloyd Briscoe, Jackie Hollywell, Mrs Joan Lloyd, Simon Speller and Jeannette Thomas.

**THE DEADLINE FOR CALL-IN OF ANY OF THE DECISIONS BELOW IS FRIDAY, 16 DECEMBER 2022.
SUBJECT TO THERE BEING NO CALL-IN THE ATTACHED DECISIONS MAY BE IMPLEMENTED WITH EFFECT FROM MONDAY, 19 DECEMBER 2022.**

1	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST	
	<p>There were no apologies for absence.</p> <p>There were no declarations of interest.</p>	
2	MINUTES - 16 NOVEMBER 2022	
	<p>It was RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 16 November 2022 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.</p>	
3	MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND SELECT COMMITTEES	
	<p>It was RESOLVED that the following Minutes of meetings of the Select Committees be noted –</p> <p>Environment & Economy Select Committee – 20 October 2022 Community Select Committee – 2 November 2022 Environment & Economy Select Committee – 17 November 2022</p>	

4	COST OF LIVING CRISIS RESPONSE	B. Threadgold
<p>The Executive considered an update report on the progress that the Council had made in implementing the action plan agreed in October 2022 in response to the national cost of living crisis.</p> <p>The following comments were made by Members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in respect of the statement in Section 7 of the report regarding the potential duplication of work of the Cost of Living Member Group and Environment & Economy Select Committee on the cost of living crisis, there should be a diluting and softening of the demarcation between Executive and scrutiny functions with regard to this issue; • residents struggling with inflationary increases on bills were urged to apply for support under the Council Tax Support Scheme to see if they fulfilled the eligibility criteria; • officers were requested to investigate and confirm whether or not Cold Weather payments were still available for certain residents for when temperatures dropped below a certain level; and • attention was drawn to the Stevenage Community Trust who offered help to residents through an application for a heating grant (application forms were available from the Council, Citizens Advice Bureau, schools and Family Centres). <p>It was RESOLVED:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the updates to the Cost of Living Action Plan, attached at Appendix A to the report, be noted. 2. That the Council continues to work with key local partners, including through the Stevenage Together Partnership, to develop a co-ordinated response across agencies to support residents, businesses and community groups. 3. That further cost of living updates be reported as part of the quarterly Corporate Performance and Budget Monitoring reports, the next of which for Quarter 2 of 2022/23 will be in March 2023. 4. That it be noted that the potential for reduced income from fee-based services and people struggling to pay council tax 		

and/or rent, coupled with increased demand for services and higher costs, could significantly impact on the Council's short and medium-term finances, and that this will continue to be closely monitored and reported to Executive as part of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and budget setting process.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

5

CORPORATE PERFORMANCE QUARTER 2 2022/23

R. Protheroe

The Executive considered a report in respect of Corporate Performance for Quarter 2 of 2022/23.

The following comments were made by Members:

- in respect of voids performance, it was felt that there should be an improved pre-void inspection regime when mutual exchanges or transfers are proposed, to ensure that properties are left in a good condition prior to exchange/transfer; and
- officers would look again at Adverts/Job Specifications for Customer Service Centre posts in respect of promoting part-time/job share, as well as full-time, employment opportunities.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the delivery of priorities which form the Future Town Future Council Programme (Appendix A to the report) and service performance across the key themes for Quarter 2 2022/23 (Appendix B to the report) be noted.
2. That the strategic risk updates outlined in the report be noted.
3. That the performance challenges in relation to housing voids, customer services and human resources be noted, and the planned measures to improve performance be endorsed.

	<p>4. That the Executive Action Tracker, as set out at Appendix D to the report, be noted.</p> <p><i>Reason for Decision: As contained in report.</i></p> <p><i>Other Options considered: As contained in report.</i></p>	
6	COUNCIL TAX BASE 2023/24	C. Fletcher B. Moldon
	<p>The Executive considered a report in respect of the proposed Council Tax Base for 2023/24.</p> <p>It was RESOLVED:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That, in accordance with the Local Authorities (calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by Stevenage Borough Council for the year 2023/24 will be 28,654.5 equivalent “Band D” properties, reduced to 28,153.1 “Band D” properties after making allowance for a 98.25% collection rate. 2. That the 2023/24 Council Tax Base be approved, subject to any changes made to the Council Tax Support (CTS) Scheme for 2023/24, the Executive having approved the CTS Scheme at its meeting held on 12 October 2022 for recommendation to Council. <p><i>Reason for Decision: As contained in report.</i></p> <p><i>Other Options considered: As contained in report.</i></p>	
7	DRAFT HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET SETTING AND RENT REPORT 2023/34	C. Fletcher B. Moldon
	<p>The Executive considered a report in respect of the draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget and Rent Setting for 2023/24.</p> <p>It was RESOLVED:</p>	

1. That the HRA rent on dwellings be increased, week commencing 3 April 2023, by 7% which is an average increase of £7.24 for social rents, £11.82 for affordable rents and £8.42 for Low Start Shared Ownership homes per week (based on a 52-week year). This has been calculated in line with the Government's change to rent policy announced in the Autumn Statement, as set out in Paragraph 3.3 of the report.
2. That Council be recommended to approve the 2023/24 HRA budget, as set out in Appendix A to the report.
3. That the 2023/24 growth options, as set out in Section 4.7 of the report, be approved.
4. That Council be recommended to approve the 2023/24 Fees and Charges, as set out in Appendix B to the report.
5. That Council be recommended to approve the 2023/24 service charges.
6. That Council be recommended to approve the minimum level of reserves for 2023/24, as shown in Appendix C to the report.
7. That the Rent Increases Equalities Impact Assessments, appended to the report in Appendix D, be noted.
8. That Council be recommended to approve the increase to the 2022/23 Working Budget by £884,400, to fund pressures detailed at Paragraph 4.3.1 of the report.
9. That the increase in tenant service charges to recover increased utility costs for the last 12 weeks of 2022/23, as set out in Paragraph 4.3.5 of the report, be approved.
10. That it be approved that, due to the current volatility of the market, utilities charges be kept under close review throughout 2023/24.
11. That the contingency sum of £250,000, within which the Executive can approve supplementary estimates, be approved for 2023/24 (unchanged from 2022/23).

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

8	URGENT PART I BUSINESS	
<p data-bbox="271 389 1075 421"><u>Use of Ibis Hotel as accommodation for Asylum Seekers</u></p> <p data-bbox="271 464 2074 608">The Leader advised that, on 3 December 2022, the Council was notified that the Home Office wanted to work with Hertfordshire County Council and Stevenage Borough Council to determine which cohort would best fit the Ibis Hotel site up until 16 December 2022, noting it had a maximum bedspace of 178. This was in addition to the 183 asylum seekers already placed by the Home Office in the Novotel Hotel adjacent to Junction 7 of the A1(M).</p> <p data-bbox="271 651 2074 719">The Leader stated that neither she nor officers believed that the use of the Ibis Hotel was acceptable, and felt that it would bring significant challenges for public sector providers, for local communities, and for those accommodated.</p> <p data-bbox="271 762 2074 938">The Leader commented that there was already stretched educational and health provision in the Borough and nationwide, which would be stretched further by the use of hotels by the Home Office for the above purpose. She recognised the Council's shared obligation to provide a safe environment for those seeking asylum, but considered that it was unacceptable that disruptive, challenging and inappropriate proposals for the use of large scale hotels within Stevenage were still being brought forward by the Home Office.</p> <p data-bbox="271 981 2074 1086">The Leader was surprised that the Home Office was prepared to use the Ibis Hotel for the accommodation of asylum seekers, which they had discounted some months ago. The Home Office had completely disregarded the work of the Regional Strategic Migration Partnership.</p> <p data-bbox="271 1129 2074 1310">The Leader stated that she had no confidence in the Home Office's pledge that the Ibis Hotel would only be used for the purpose until 16 December 2022. She had also learned that the Home Office had signed a booking contract with the hotel owners in Mid November 2022, but had failed to notify the Council, the Local MP, or partner authorities of its pending use until 3 December 2022. As a result, the Council and its partners had been unable to put any support provision in place for the asylum seekers.</p> <p data-bbox="271 1353 2074 1422">The Leader explained that the hotel would contain single male asylum seekers, a decision which had been taken with no regard to the community safety concerns already raised by the Council and its partner organisations since the Novotel had been</p>		

identified as a similar contingency hotel.

The Leader advised that, in response to the Home Office notification, the Chief Executive had respectfully, but firmly, asked Home Office officials to remove the Ibis site for future consideration beyond 16 December 2022. The Council had also called for an urgent meeting with the Home Secretary and the Local MP to make the strength of local views known. This was in addition to a request that the Home Secretary (or her representative) visits the Novotel Hotel in Stevenage to see how unsuitable it was for the placing of asylum seekers.

The Leader expressed a further concern that moving existing hotel use into a dedicated form of hotel provision could breach planning regulations, noting that legal challenges had been launched elsewhere in the country. As a result, the Council was seeking legal advice on this matter.

The Leader also drew attention that no new burdens funding had been provided to the Council and its partners by the Home Office to support the asylum seekers, in particular local health screening services. She added that inspections would be undertaken by the SBC Environmental Health Service and Hertfordshire Fire & Rescue Service to ensure that the hotel premises was a safe place to accommodate the asylum seekers.

The Leader referred to the Labour Group's motion being submitted to the Council meeting on 14 December 2022 urging the Government to carry out an urgent review of the policy of using hotels for the accommodation of asylum seekers. The motion also calls on the Government to work with local authorities to develop more sustainable options for the accommodation of asylum seekers, including for example the use of Ministry of Defence modular buildings, alongside properly resourced support packages that met the needs of individual asylum seekers. Also for a review of the asylum seeker application process to speed up decision making, and to ensure that appropriate infrastructure is in place before decisions were made.

The following comments were made by Members:

- a further reason why the Ibis Hotel was an inappropriate location was its distance from any green/open space areas in the town;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it was confirmed that hotels used for the accommodation of asylum seekers were able to refuse approaches from the Home Office, but that it should be borne in mind that such use would be guaranteed income for the hotels, many of whom were struggling to recover losses incurred as a result of under-occupation throughout the Covid pandemic; • concerns regarding the potential lack of hotel accommodation for overnight business people as a result of two hotels in Stevenage being used to accommodate asylum seekers; and • concerns regarding the impact on Knebworth Park of the current use of the Novotel Hotel (in terms of the reduced number of visitors, some of whom may have stayed overnight at the hotel). Similarly, the impact of cancelled weddings and Christmas and other events at the hotel. 	
9	EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC	
	<p>It was RESOLVED:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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 NOVEMBER 2022	
	It was RESOLVED that the Part II Minutes of the executive held on 16 November 2022 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.	

11	LEISURE SERVICES AND ACTIVE COMMUNITIES MANAGEMENT CONTRACT	R. Gregory G. Caine
<p>The Executive considered a Part II report seeking approval to award the Council's Leisure Services and Active Communities Management Contract for the period 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2033, following the outcome of an extensive procurement process.</p> <p>It was RESOLVED that the recommendations set out in the report be approved.</p> <p><i>Reason for Decision: As contained in report.</i> <i>Other Options considered: As contained in report.</i></p>		
12	REGENERATION PROGRAMME UPDATE AND SG1 PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION	D. Wells
<p>The Executive considered a Part II report in respect of progress on the delivery of the Council's "Transforming the Town Centre" regeneration programme, including the delivery of projects supported through the Stevenage Town deal funding package; and proposals to re-negotiate parts of the SG1 project Development Agreement to enable delivery of this project.</p> <p>It was RESOLVED that the recommendations set out in the report be approved.</p> <p><i>Reason for Decision: As contained in report.</i> <i>Other Options considered: As contained in report.</i></p>		
13	MAKING YOUR MONEY COUNT OPTIONS 2023/24 (PART 2)	C. Fletcher B. Moldon
<p>The Executive considered a Part II report recommending approval of Making Your Money Count (MYMC) budget options for 2023/24, following on from the MYMC report submitted to the November 2022 Executive meeting.</p>		

	It was RESOLVED that the recommendations set out in the report be approved. <i>Reason for Decision: As contained in report.</i> <i>Other Options considered: As contained in report.</i>	
14	URGENT PART II BUSINESS	
	None.	