

# STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

## EXECUTIVE MINUTES

**Date: Thursday, 12 October 2023**

**Time: 2.00pm**

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

**Present:** Councillors: Jeannette Thomas (Vice-Chair in the Chair), Sandra Barr, Lloyd Briscoe, Jackie Hollywell, Loraine Rossati and Simon Speller.

**Start / End** Start Time: 2.00pm  
**Time:** End Time: 3.00pm

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

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Richard Henry (Chair) and Mrs Joan Lloyd.

There were no declarations of interest.

### **2 MINUTES - 20 SEPTEMBER 2023**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 20 September 2023 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 following Minutes of meetings of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees be noted –

Environment & Economy Select Committee – 4 September 2023

### **4 CLIMATE CHANGE - ANNUAL UPDATE OCTOBER 2023**

The Executive considered a report in respect of the annual Climate Change update – October 2023.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Performance advised that it was exactly a year since the Climate Change Strategy had been revised. Over the last year the Council had not only sought to address the top-down issues, but also bottom-up issues that affected residents on a more regular basis.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Performance referred to the nine levels set out in the Strategy, and drew attention to levels 7 to 9, namely neighbourhoods; street level; and individuals and families. He felt that substantial gains had been made in these areas over the past year, including formalising user engagement with

walking, cycling and disability groups through the ATLEE Group.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Performance welcomed the support of the Overview & Scrutiny, Environment & Economy Select and Planning & Development Committees, which all had key roles in developing Climate Change policies in order to bring about positive action throughout the Borough.

The Assistant Director (Planning & Regulation) gave a brief slide presentation in respect of the Climate Change update. He referred to the nine levels previously mentioned by the Portfolio Holder and commented that the Council had been actively involved in lobbying activities at the national level. The Council had also worked with larger businesses to enable the sharing of best practice in climate change initiatives and measures. At regional level, the Council's Chief Executive had worked extensively across the East of England as Hertfordshire lead for Climate and Sustainability. This including working with all 11 Councils in Hertfordshire to work more effectively together to tackle climate change issues.

The Assistant Director (Planning & Regulation) stated that, in terms of SBC, the three work pathways concerned greening fuel and the vehicle fleet; assessing all buildings; and people and processes. He added that a number of Ward level projects had been identified through the "Dragon's Den" process, and the Portfolio Holder had previously referred to the ATLEE Group.

The Assistant Director (Planning & Regulation) concluded by presenting slides relating to the decarbonisation of Stevenage and the various local climate change schemes forming part of the Dragon's Den initiative.

The Executive was pleased to learn that the refurbished Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) building had achieved BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method) certification to ensure that construction had been carried out sustainably, and that the Council was working with them to share best practice and learning. Members were also pleased that 94 local businesses had signed up to the Wenta-run net zero programme, aimed at supporting small and medium sized enterprises in climate change initiatives. He also announced that the Council would be funding another 100 local business sign-ups to the Wenta-run scheme.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Performance stressed that it was important that the Council acted as an exemplar to other local organisations and businesses in the field of Climate Change.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the progress being made to deliver the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan be noted.
2. That the approaches to the three SBC Pathways, Fuel & Fleet; Buildings & Assets and People & Process, as outlined in Paragraphs 3.50 – 3.91 of the report, be agreed.

3. That officers be requested to prepare a business case for the Executive to consider relating to switching as much as possible of SBC's fuel to Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO), as detailed in Paragraphs 3.59 and 3.60 of the report.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in report.*

## 5 HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY

The Executive considered a report in respect of a proposed updated Housing Allocation Policy.

The Chair (Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Housing & Housing Development) advised that the Council continued to make significant investment in its social housing stock and was committed to the Future Town Future Council (FTFC) strategic priority of building 'More Social, Affordable and Good Quality Homes'. The proposed new Allocation Policy strengthened the focus on assisting those in most need of housing, thereby making best use of the Council's limited social housing stock. This item must be considered against a backdrop of unprecedented demand for housing locally, regionally and nationally due to the ongoing cost of living crisis, amongst other matters.

The Chair requested the Executive to approve the new policy, noting that it would be implemented on 1 July 2024, subject to completion of the associated system build requirements and engagement with those on the housing register. An easy-to-read reference guide would be created to accompany the policy. The report also recommended that the impact of the policy change was reviewed 12 months post its implementation.

The Chair pointed out that the contents page of the Policy (attached as Appendix A to the report) referred in Section 2 to a number of "Qualification Rules", but that the Policy itself had them headed as "Non-Qualification Rules". This needed to be amended so that both descriptions match. The Executive supported adoption of the Policy, subject to the above amendment.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the new Housing Allocation Policy, as attached at Appendix A to the report, as amended, be approved.
2. That the Policy be adopted on 1 July 2024, subject to confirmation of system build requirements and all applicants and relevant stakeholders having been updated.
3. That an easy read reference guide be created to accompany the Policy.
4. That the impact of the proposed changes be monitored, and the Policy be reviewed 12 months after implementation.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in report.*  
*Other Options considered: As contained in report.*

## **6 STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL CORPORATE PLAN - MAKING STEVENAGE EVEN BETTER**

The Executive considered a report in respect of the Council's draft Corporate Plan, which outlined the Council's vision and strategic priorities for the next five years, and the approach to engaging residents, local community groups and partners in its Co-production.

In the absence of the Leader of the Council, the Chair (Deputy Leader of the Council) advised that the Future Town Future Council (FTFC) Corporate Plan was approved in 2016 and had been extended beyond its 5-year life twice since 2021. Much had changed in that time, noting the financial impact of changes in welfare and social rent policy, ongoing cuts in local government funding, rising inflation, energy and food costs, and the significant social and financial cost of the Covid-19 pandemic. It was therefore not surprising that the Council's key drivers, vision and values had changed, and now was an opportune time to review the Council's strategic priorities.

The Chair explained that proposed areas of focus included in the draft Corporate Plan (attached as Appendix A to the report) outlined the priorities that residents had highlighted, specifically:

- tackling climate change;
- anti-social behaviour;
- provision and maintenance of new and council homes; and
- delivery of good local services.

The Chair stated that these priorities had been set out via a Plan on a Page to aid resident, business and stakeholder understanding of the Council's proposed focuses and approach. To provide a further opportunity for residents, local community groups, partners, businesses, Members and staff to give their views, the Council would be undertaking a 6-week formal consultation and co-production period between 23 October 2023 and 4 December 2023. This would be done via a survey promoted through a social media campaign, the Council's e-newsletter to residents, an article in the Chronicle and posters on Neighbourhood Notice Boards, as well as in-person events with local businesses and community groups.

The Chair commented that, as a Budget and Policy Framework item, the draft would also be formally submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 17 October 2023, with a subsequent summary of consultation findings and a final version of the Corporate Plan to be presented to the Executive in January 2024.

The Chair advised that providing opportunities for local people, groups and businesses to shape the Council's strategic priorities for the next 5 years was vital and was at the heart of the Co-operative Council commitment. The Council would use the responses received to shape its approach, thereby ensuring that the plan was meaningful to the people of the town.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the Council's draft Corporate Plan "Making Stevenage Even Better", as attached at Appendix A to the report, be agreed.
2. That the engagement approach with residents, local community groups and partner involvement be agreed, as set out in Paragraph 4.9 of the report.
3. That, following the engagement period, a final version of the Corporate Plan be brought to the Executive in January 2024.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in report.*

## **7 CO-OPERATIVE COMMERCIAL AND INSOURCING STRATEGY 2023 - 2026**

The Executive considered a report in respect of the proposed Co-operative Commercial and Insourcing Strategy 2023 - 2026, and the proposed General Fund Fees and Charges for 2024/25.

In the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Transformation, the Chair (Deputy Leader of the Council) advised that this second iteration of the Commercial Strategy was accompanied by the proposed Fees and Charges for 2024-25 for the General Fund (set out at Appendix B of the report).

The Chair stated that the Strategy summarised the commercial activity that has taken place over the last three years and outlined how the approach aligned with the overall Council objectives and corporate priorities around Balancing the Budget. Thinking commercially and ensuring that changes to fees and charges remained reasonable and appropriate were essential tools in helping to bridge future budget gaps and mitigating the associated pressures. There was also an ongoing need to generate sustainable new income streams, which were built into the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, to support the delivery of vital services.

The Chair referred to the Council's definition of commercialisation laid out in the Strategy and its four main pillars of:

- Improving business processes and efficiency;
- Generating income;
- Capitalising on insourcing opportunities; and
- Creating a commercial culture through reviewing areas such as contract management.

The Chair explained that this approach would support services in reducing the cost of delivery, whilst also striving to achieve break even operating positions where deemed appropriate. The Council would ensure that all commercial actions and decisions were ethical in nature and had a positive impact on the community, delivering additional social value and contributing to community wealth building where possible.

The Head of Commercial stated that the Council had been involved in commercial activities for some time, including partnership working with developers Mace and Reef, the establishment of a Wholly Owned Company (WOC) to provide social housing, and supporting the Business Technology Centre. The Strategy would apply to the Council's commercial arrangements with external suppliers and sets out objectives to achieve best value.

The Head of Commercial drew attention to Appendix B to the report (Fees and Charges for 2024/25), and advised that these had been reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the cross-party Council Financial Security Group (CSFG), and all bar one (due to being amended following the meeting of the CFSG) had been agreed by a majority vote. She stated that 28 out of 35 fees/charges had been agreed unanimously.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the Co-operative Commercial and Insourcing Strategy for 2023-2026, as appended to the report as Appendix A, be approved and reviewed on an annual basis (together with relevant Appendices shown in Part II of this agenda).
2. That the Fees and Charges 2024-25 for the General Fund, as shown at Appendix B to the report, be approved.
3. That the Strategic Director (CF) be given delegated authority to approve any final changes required to the Strategy, following consultation with the Executive Member for Resources and Transformation.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in report.*

## **8 TOWN FUNDS - PROGRAMME DELIVERY UPDATE**

The Executive considered a report which provided an update on projects within the Government's Towns Fund programme being delivered by the Council and the Stevenage Development Board.

In the absence of the Leader of the Council, the Chair (Deputy Leader of the Council) advised that the report provided an update on the projects within the Towns Fund programme which is being delivered by Stevenage Borough Council and Stevenage Development Board. As the Council acts as the Accountable Body for the delivery of Towns Fund, it was required to provide formal updates to the Executive on project progress.

The Chair stated that the report covered the progress of the New Towns Heritage Centre, Station Gateway and Skills, Enterprise and Life Sciences projects. The report also sought to utilise the power delegated from central government to the accountable body to move some funding from 2023/24 to 2024/25, and requested the Executive to delegate authority for the procurement of design services, via a

procurement framework, for the Station Gateway and Central Core West Major Opportunities Areas (MOA), noting the work undertaken thus far.

The Regeneration Manager commented that the recommendations contained in the report had received the endorsement of the Stevenage Development Board.

The Portfolio Holder for Economy and Transport felt that it was important that the Council gave due consideration to the findings of the Clare Adler Community Stakeholder consultation report for Stevenage Museum, in the light of the possibility of a number of other museums/archive facilities expressing an interest in being located in Stevenage due to its favourable location and excellent transport links.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the endorsement of the Stevenage Development Board on resolutions 2. to 5. below be noted.
2. That the progress of the 'Transforming the Town Centre' regeneration programme, specifically the DLUHC grant funded Towns Fund projects, be noted.
3. That the progress made and early-stage consultation regarding the New Towns Heritage Centre and Museum be noted.
4. That authority be delegated to the Strategic Director (TP) to the procurement of design services via a procurement framework for the Station Gateway and Central Core West Major Opportunities Areas (MOA), and that the work undertaken thus far be noted.
5. That the amendments to the 2023/24 spend profile, in line with official DLUHC guidelines, and as set out in Paragraphs 3.30 – 4.3 of the report, be noted.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in report.*

## **9 URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

None.

## **10 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.

**11 PART II MINUTES - EXECUTIVE - 20 SEPTEMBER 2023**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 20 September 2023 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

**12 CO-OPERATIVE COMMERCIAL AND INSOURCING STRATEGY 2023 - 2026: HIGH LEVEL ACTION PLAN, INSOURCING ROAD MAP AND CHANGES TO KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

The Executive considered a Part II report in respect of the High Level Action Plan, Insourcing Roadmap and changes to Key Performance Indicators associated with the Co-operative Commercial and Insourcing Strategy 2023 – 2026.

It was **RESOLVED** that the recommendations contained in the report be approved.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in report.*

**13 TOWNS FUND - SPORTS AND LEISURE HUB PROGRESSION**

The Executive considered a Part II report providing an update in respect of the progression of the Towns Fund project for a new Sports and Leisure Hub.

It was **RESOLVED** that the recommendations contained in the report be approved.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in report.*

**14 URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

**CHAIR**