

# STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

## EXECUTIVE MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 12 December 2017

Time: 2.00 pm

Place: Shimkent Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

**Present:** Councillors: S Taylor OBE CC (Chair), J Gardner (Vic-Chair), J Hollywell, Mrs J Lloyd, R Raynor, S Speller and J Thomas.

**Start / End Time:** Start Time: 2.00 p.m.  
End Time: 3.45 p.m.

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

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Richard Henry.

There were no declarations of interest.

### 2. **MINUTES - EXECUTIVE - 28 NOVEMBER 2017**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 28 November 2017 are approved for signature by the Chair.

### 3. **MINUTES OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND SELECT COMMITTEES**

With reference to the Minutes of the Environment & Economy Select Committee, the Executive welcomed the focus on bus services and that the Committee had heard from representatives of the bus companies as well as the Bus User Group. It was considered that a number of residents might have been interested in this subject matter and if similar topics were to be addressed efforts should be made to publicise the meetings.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the following meetings of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees be noted –

- A. Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 13 November 2017
- B. Environment & Economy Select Committee (draft) – 22 November 2017

### 4. **COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME**

The Executive considered a report that set out proposals for the 2018/2019 Council Tax Support Scheme.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the impact of welfare reforms on the Council Tax Support scheme is noted (section 4.4 of the report refers).
2. That the options considered as part of changes in the scheme are noted (section 4.6 of the report refers).
3. That the work of the Members of Overview and Scrutiny in reviewing the scheme is noted.
4. That the timescale recommended by the Members of Overview and Scrutiny in reviewing the scheme for 2019/20 is noted (paragraph 4.1.15 of the report refers).
5. That subject to any further comments by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Council be recommended to approve the 2018/2019 Council Tax Support scheme proposed within the report.

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

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

5. **CONFIRMATION OF ARTICLE 4 DIRECTIONS TO REQUIRE CHANGES OF USE FROM B1A (OFFICE) TO C3 (RESIDENTIAL) TO GAIN PLANNING PERMISSION**

The Executive considered a report that detailed the outcome of the public consultation on the making of Article 4 Directions removing permitted development rights for office to residential conversions.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the results of the public consultation as shown at Appendix 1 to the report are noted.
2. That the Article 4 Directions as shown at Appendix 2 to the report are confirmed.

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

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

6. **CONFIRMATION OF ARTICLE 4 DIRECTION TO REQUIRE CHANGES OF USE FROM B1C (LIGHT INDUSTRIAL) TO C3 (RESIDENTIAL) TO GAIN PLANNING PERMISSION**

The Executive considered a report that detailed the outcome of the public consultation on the making of an Article 4 Direction removing permitted development rights for the light industrial to residential conversions.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the results of the public consultation as shown at Appendix 1 to the report are noted.
2. That the Article 4 Direction as shown at Appendix 2 to the report is confirmed

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

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

## 7. **DRAFT HRA RENT SETTING AND BUDGET REPORT**

The Executive considered a report on the draft proposals on the HRA Budgets and rent setting for 2018/2019, to be considered by Council on 30 January 2018.

Members were of the view that tenants should be given a clear understanding of how work undertaken related to the service charges paid, particularly as they were to be increased.

It was considered that, for historical reasons, there was not a consistent approach to caretaking across the board and this needed to be addressed in conjunction with the Service Charge Review that was to be undertaken. It was anticipated that when the draft HRA proposals for 2018/2019 came forward there should be a clear explanation of what tenants could expect for the service charges paid. It was noted that the timeline for completion of the service charge review during 2018/2019 would be shared with Members.

Concerning the setting of rents levels, it was noted that the LGA supported the argument for local determination and continued to raise this with the Government.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That HRA dwelling rents not subject to the 1% rent reduction (currently Low Start Shared Ownership LSSOs) be increased, week commencing 2 April 2018 by 4% i.e. £4.37 per week which has been calculated using the existing rent formula, CPI +1% in line with the Rent and Service Charge Policy approved at the January 2017 Council.
2. That it is noted that HRA dwelling rents, (other than those outlined in 2.1) are subject to the 1% rent reduction from week commencing 2 April 2018 or £0.96 and £1.62 per week for social and affordable rents respectively, as outlined in the Government's Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016.
3. That the draft 2018/19 HRA budget is approved, as set out in Appendix A to the report. This may be subject to change as a result of consultation and the finalisation of recharges from the General Fund.
4. That the final HRA rent setting budget for 2018/19 be presented to the Executive on the 23 January 2018 and then Council on 30 January 2018.
5. That key partners and other stakeholders be consulted and views fed back into

the 2018/19 budget setting process.

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

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

## 8. **CORPORATE PERFORMANCE FOR QUARTER TWO 2017/18**

The Executive considered a report that highlighted the Council's performance across key priorities and themes for quarter two 2017/2018.

The Chief Executive introduced the report and stated that in quarter two 30 performance measures had met or exceeded their targets (green), 4 had amber status and 13 required urgent improvement/action (red).

The Chief Executive addressed particular indicators where performance improvement was needed. Concerning the two Future Town, Future Council (FTFC) indicators that were red, the 'New Build spend against budget for schemes in contract' related to retention of monies held back until snagging had been completed on a particular scheme. The 'Percentage of HRA savings identified to meet three year target' had achieved only 34% against a target in the region of 50%. However, the 'Housing All Under One Roof' transformation programme would deliver efficiency savings and other improvements that would address the shortfall.

The Chief Executive then addressed the Corporate Performance. The turnaround for voids in both sheltered properties and general needs had not achieved their targets. It was explained that some sheltered accommodation had proved to be hard to let, although performance had improved in recent times following some scheme remodelling and targeted promotional activities. The letting of some General Needs voids had been delayed due to over specification which had been subsequently addressed.

Members stated that some tenants had not been able to bid for sheltered units as they had been 'under-occupying' their current homes. It was noted that this was an anomaly of the existing housing allocation policy. Members requested that such cases be referred to the Panel until such time that the allocation policy was reviewed.

The view was also expressed that where outstanding repairs had been transferred between contractors, affected tenants should be updated on what was happening. The Assistant Director (Housing & Investment) undertook to advise households on how the transfer was progressing.

The Customer Service Centre (CSC) red indicators were in the main due to the shortage of trained/skilled staff. Improved resource planning was needed with recruitment beyond the establishment along with condensing the training programme for new staff. It was noted that during the severe weather the service had reduced its opening hours, but it was explained that wherever possible in times of great demand or where there were difficulties due to snow etc. staff located elsewhere within the Council who were CSC trained were redirected to work in the Centre.

With reference to paragraph 3.118 of the report concerning the percentage of complaints progressing to stages two and three members requested that the actual number of complaints be quoted.

In response to a Member's question regarding ICT performance, the Assistant Director (Corporate Projects, Customer Services & Technology) stated that recruitment to the new Manager post agreed at the last meeting of the Executive would take place as soon as possible after Christmas.

There had been a spike in sickness absence to 9 days. The Chief Executive stated that this matter had been raised at the recent series of staff road shows. He explained that this was of great concern and needed close monitoring and intervention as the organisation could not sustain that level of sickness absence.

There had been a slight increase in anti-social behaviour and criminal damage per 1,000 population. Members were concerned that the Police might not always consider these matters a priority given other challenges they faced and because they could sometimes be difficult and time consuming to resolve, however these continued to be a great concern to people in Stevenage.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the delivery of priorities which form the Future Town, Future Council Programme and performance of the Council across the key themes during quarter two 2017/18 together with latest achievements are noted.
2. That learning from phase one of the Repairs and Voids improvement programme be incorporated into the second phase of the programme to ensure the function operates successfully in the future (outlined in paragraphs 3.102 to 3.114 of the report).
3. That plans to increase the availability, skills and knowledge of Customer Service Advisers to improve performance in the Customer Service Centre are endorsed (outlined in paragraphs 3.116 to 3.123 of the report).

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

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

## 9. **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

### Severe Weather – Service Update

At the request of a Member the Strategic Director (Matt Partridge) provided an update on the impact to services of the severe weather.

Many staff had worked hard to ensure that services were delivered, particularly to the most vulnerable. The Executive recorded its thanks to all staff, particularly those in Direct Service, Supported Housing and the CSC.

The view was expressed that it needed to be made clear that road gritting was an HCC function and that only main routes were gritted. This was of particular concern as a number of schools in Stevenage were not on main routes making access in recent days difficult, if not impossible.

10. **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That, under Section 100(A) 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 involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1 to 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by SI 2006 No. 88; and
2. That having considered the reasons for the following item being in Part II, it be determined that maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

11. **PART II MINUTES - EXECUTIVE - 28 NOVEMBER 2017**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 28 November 2017 are approved for signature by the Chair.

12. **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

At this juncture the Leader took the opportunity to wish all colleagues and officers a Happy Christmas and she was sure that 2018 would be a very exciting year in Stevenage as the FTFC plans, particularly for the SG1 scheme would be starting.

**CHAIR**