

# STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

## EXECUTIVE MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 23 January 2018

Time: 2.00 pm

Place: Shimkent Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

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

**Start / End Time:** Start Time: 2.00 p.m.  
End Time: 4.40 p.m.

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

There were no apologies for absence or 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**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the following meetings are noted –

- A. Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 29 November 2017
- B. Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 13 December 2017

### 4. **COUNCIL TAX BASE 2018/2019**

The Executive considered a report that sought approval of the Council Tax Base for 2018/2019 and an increase in the long term empty property premium.

In response to a Member's question the Head of Revenues & Benefits Shared Service stated that there were three types of 'empty' property categories, 'Empty – unfurnished', 'Empty – undergoing structural repair' and those properties that were in such a state of disrepair and unoccupied that they were referred to the Valuation Office to determine.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by Stevenage Borough Council for the year 2018/19 shall be 27,610.7 equivalent "Band D" properties reduced to

27058.5 equivalent “Band D” properties after making allowances for a 98% collection rate.

2. That the 2018/19 Council Tax Base is approved subject to any changes made to the Council Tax Support Scheme (CTS) for 2018/19 that is to be recommended to Council on 30 January 2018.

3. That the long term empty property premium be increased from 50% to 100% from 1 April 2018, or such later date as determined by regulation.

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

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

## 5. **COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2018/2019**

The Executive considered a report for recommendation to Council concerning the 2018/2019 Council Tax Support Scheme.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following recommendations be made to Council -

1. That the impact of welfare reforms on the CTS scheme (section 4.4 of the report refers) is noted.

2. That the options considered as part of changes in the scheme (section 4.6 of the report refers) are noted.

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 (paragraph 4.1.15 of the report refers) is noted.

5. That the 2018/19 CTS Scheme proposed within this report (based on a 8.5% liability) as set in section 4.5. of the report is approved.

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

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

## 6. **DRAFT STEVENAGE CULTURAL STRATEGY (A 10 YEAR STRATEGY FOR ARTS & HERITAGE)**

The Executive considered a report that outlined the development of a cultural strategy for the town and that summarised a number of cultural ambitions for the next 10 years in order for Stevenage to become a destination creative town.

With the permission of the Chair, supplementary information was circulated that outlined the comments of Community Select Committee Members and expanded on the Equalities and Diversity Implications section of the covering report.

Following his introduction, the Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and

Leisure thanked all the Members and officers who had assisted with the initiative, including the Assistant Director Communities and Neighbourhood and his team, particularly Jo Ward, the Museum Curator/Manager.

Members welcomed the development of the strategy noting linkages to key priorities including town centre regeneration, the Council's Co-operative principles and Community Neighbourhood Management programme.

Members were of the view that the draft document was an enabling strategy that would facilitate partnership work with a view to securing external funding to support delivery of the key objectives.

A member referred to the public art works around Stevenage and indicated that, when in discussions with housing developers, consideration should be given to including art installations in any scheme.

The Executive highlighted a number of matters to address within specific sections of the draft strategy prior to the commencement of further consultation.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the draft cultural strategy is approved and the final draft be developed through the Community Select Committee.
2. That this draft be subject to further cultural stakeholder consultation and the final draft be submitted to the Executive for approval in March 2018.
3. That, in recognition of the Council's financial constraints officers work cooperatively with local stakeholders, partner organisations and key external agencies to identify sources of funding which can support implementation of the strategy.

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

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

## **7. 2018/2019 HRA RENT SETTING AND BUDGET**

The Executive considered a report for recommendation to Council concerning the 2018/2019 Housing Revenue Account and Budget.

The Assistant Director (Finance & Estates) corrected a typographical error at paragraph 4.9.1 – the first line should read 'Housing Revenue Account Growth' and not 'General Fund Growth' as quoted.

It was noted that comments from the Council's Housing Management Advisory Board and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee have been included in the report.

With reference to paragraph 5.4.8 of the report, the Executive was informed that £50k had been included in the risk assessment of balances should the Council need to borrow to fund the works fire safety works for high rise blocks.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That Council be recommended to approve 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 Council be recommended to note 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 £0.95 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 Council be recommended to approve the Final 2018/19 HRA budget, as set out in Appendix A to the report and the revised 2017/18 budget of £2,802,250, (surplus).
4. That Council be recommended to approve the HRA Financial Savings options as outlined in Appendix B to the report.
5. That Council be recommended to approve the HRA Growth options as outlined in Appendix C to the report.
6. That Council be recommended to approve the HRA Fees and Charges as outlined in Appendix D to the report.
7. That Council be recommended to approve the 2018/19 service charges.
8. That Council be recommended to approve the minimum level of reserves for 2018/19 as shown in Appendix E to this report.
9. That the contingency sum of £250,000 within which the Executive can approve supplementary estimates, be approved for 2018/19 (unchanged from 2017/18).

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

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

## **8. DRAFT GENERAL FUND AND COUNCIL TAX SETTING 2018/2019**

The Executive considered a report concerning the Council's draft General Fund Budget for 2018/19 and projected 2017/18 General Fund Budget and draft proposals for the 2018/19 Council Tax.

The Executive requested that it be made clear that the reference to a Council Tax increase of 2.99% was for modelling purposes and the final decision would not be made until the Council meeting on 28 February 2018.

Attention was drawn to the requirement for the Council (via the Executive) to approve the level of estimated 2018/19 business rates it would receive by 31 January each year. However the timing of the announcement of the Government settlement on the 19 December together with information on the business rates pilots had meant that there was not enough time to complete a report for the January Executive. It was therefore recommended that this was delegated to the Assistant

Director (Finance and Estates) following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources.

With reference to the New Homes Bonus (NHB), Members expressed the view that they would favour funding for Neighbourhood Wardens and the work addressing domestic violence to be included in the mainstream budget as the amount of NHB had been reduced by the Government and a threshold of a 40% increase in the number of homes had to be reached before any award was given. It was noted that this latter provision had not been included in the Government's consultation document on NHB.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the 2017/18 revised net expenditure on the General Fund of £10,571,020 be approved.
2. That a draft General Fund Budget for 2018/19 of £9,126,090 be proposed for consultation purposes, with a contribution from balances of £838,986 and a Band D Council Tax of £204.46 (assuming a 2.99% increase) be approved for modelling purposes.
3. That the updated position on the General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), as shown at Appendix A and the Risk Assessments of General Fund Balances, as shown at Appendix B to this report, be approved.
4. That a minimum level of General Fund reserves of £2,790,089, in line with the 2018/19 risk assessment of balances, as shown at Appendix B to this report, be approved.
5. That the contingency sum of £400,000 within which the Executive can approve supplementary estimates, be approved for 2018/19, (unchanged from 2017/18).
6. That the 2018/19 proposed Fees and Charges increase of £134,160 (Appendix C to this report) be included in the draft budget.
7. That the 2018/19 proposed concessions (Appendix D to this report) be approved.
8. That the 2018/19 proposed Financial Security Options of £342,399 (Appendix E to this report) be included in the draft budget for consideration by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
9. That the 2018/19 proposed Growth options of £430,371 (Appendix F to this report) be included in the draft budget for consideration.
10. That the approval of the level of business rates (NNDR1) for 2018/19 is delegated to the Assistant Director (Finance and Estates), following consultation with the Resources Portfolio Holder (paragraph 4.6.5 of the report refers).
11. That any 2018/19 business rate gains above the baseline assessment are ring fenced for town centre regeneration (SG1), paragraph 4.6.5 of the report refers.

12. That new capital receipts and unspent revenue balances (above the £350,000 transferred to the capital reserve) are earmarked for the Council's and residents' top priority, town centre regeneration.

13. That the decisions taken on recommendations 2.2 – 2.9 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.

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

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

## 9. **DRAFT CAPITAL STRATEGY 2017/18-2022/23**

The Executive considered a report that includes proposals for revisions to the 2017/18 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme and the draft Capital Programme for 2018/19 for consideration by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

The Executive was of the view that when developing the capital strategy there needed to be clear links with the Asset Management Strategy that was to be considered by the Executive in February, together with the Council's Future Town Future Council programme. Members requested that consultation should take place with all Portfolio Holders before the Asset management Strategy was put to Executive along with engagement with Ward Councillors and resident groups to ensure that capital spending was driven by the Community as far as possible.

There was concern that sometimes works were being undertaken in Wards unbeknown to Ward Councillors. It was felt that this was particularly the case for work undertaken by HCC.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the revised General Fund and HRA 2017/18 capital programme, as detailed in Appendix A and Appendix B to the report are approved.

2. That the draft 2018/19 General Fund Capital Programme as detailed in Appendix A to the report is approved for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

3. That the draft 2018/19 HRA Capital Programme as detailed in Appendix B to the report is approved for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

4. That the updated forecast of resources as summarised in Appendix A (General Fund) and Appendix B (HRA) to the report is approved.

5. That the Government's potential changes to prudential borrowing and MRP as outlined in paragraph 3.21-3.26 of the report are noted.

6. That the approach to resourcing the General Fund capital programme as outlined

in paragraph 4.3.6 and 4.3.11 of the report is approved.

7. That the growth bids identified for inclusion in the Capital Strategy (Appendix C to the report) are approved.

8. That the 2018/19 de-minimis expenditure limit (section 4.7 of the report) is approved for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

9. That the 2018/19 contingency allowance (section 4.8 of the report) is approved for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

10. That the work undertaken by LFSG on behalf of the Executive in reviewing and challenging the General Fund Capital Strategy is noted.

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

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

## 10. **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

At this juncture the Chair took the opportunity to record the Executive's thanks to all the Members and officers who had worked on the suite of finance reports that had come forward on this occasion.

## 11. **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.

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.

3. That notwithstanding the decision taken at 1. above, Tim Johnson of Cushman & Wakefield (Commercial & Property Advice) Consultants, who had assisted with the report at item 13, was in attendance for the discussion of that report to respond to any relevant questions raised.

## 12. **MAJOR REFURBISHMENT CONTRACT PROCUREMENT - CONTRACT AWARD**

The Executive considered a Part II report that seeks approval to award the Major Refurbishment Contract (otherwise known as the "Flat Block" contract).

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

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

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

13. **TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION - SELECTION OF A PREFERRED DEVELOPMENT PARTNER FOR SG1**

The Executive considered a Part II report on the outcome of the EU compliant procurement for the selection of the Council's preferred development partner for the Stevenage SG1 development and that seeks approval to appoint the successful preferred bidder and arrangements going forward.

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

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

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

14. **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

**CHAIR**