

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 13 March 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 pm
End Time: 4.44 pm

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

There were no apologies for absence or declarations of interest received from Members.

2. **MINUTES - EXECUTIVE - 14 FEBRUARY 2018**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 14 February 2018 are approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

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

The Scrutiny Committees were commended for the work they had undertaken on developing the new policies and strategies that were coming forward.

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

- A. Community Select Committee – 7 February 2018
- B. Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 8 February 2018
- C. Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 19 February 2018

4. **HERTFORDSHIRE HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY (HHIA)**

The Executive considered a report on recommending that the Council join the Hertfordshire Home Improvement Agency (HHIA).

Individual Members raised a number of particular concerns regarding the proposals to join the HHIA. The key outcome sought was for Stevenage residents to receive an improved service and Members wanted to be certain that this was to be the case.

It was emphasised that there was a need to identify current performance in order that a comparison could be made in 12 months' time.

Members considered the option of deferring joining the HHIA for 12 months. In response, the Assistant Director (Planning and Regulatory) expanded on the business case outlined in the report and in addition, he explained that the HHIA would provide a more resilient service for customers having recruited to a number of key posts.

The Executive was of the view that it was important that the performance of the new agency was closely monitored and that a thorough review was reported back to the Executive in 12 months' time. It was considered that the review should include details of customer feedback. The Portfolio Holders for Housing, Health and Older People and Community and Equalities also undertook to meet on a quarterly basis to consider performance and monitoring of the service.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That Stevenage Borough Council joins the HHIA in April 2018.
2. That the Council's functions under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, and any other functions relating to the delivery of the services provided by the HHIA, be delegated to Hertfordshire County Council
3. That the Strategic Director (MP) is authorised to execute all documents required for the Council to join the HHIA.
4. That the Assistant Director (Planning and Regulation) be nominated, and in his absence his nominated deputy, as the Council's representative on the Board of the HHIA with authority to take appropriate decisions on behalf of the Council.
5. That the Council reviews the performance of the HHIA 12 months post joining to determine whether it should remain a member authority and consider the potential for the Repairs and Voids Team to bid for HHIA work.

Reasons for Decision: As set out in the report.

Other options considered: As set out in the report.

5. **STEVENAGE CULTURAL STRATEGY (A 10 YEAR STRATEGY FOR ARTS & HERITAGE)**

The Executive considered a report that recommended the approval of a Cultural Strategy for the Town. The report also summarised a number of cultural ambitions over the next 10 years in order for Stevenage to become a destination creative town.

The Chair referred to the three bullet points setting out the Vision for the Strategy. It was considered that the third bullet point should be broken down into two parts.

The Executive thanked the Assistant Director (Communities and Neighbourhoods) for his work on drafting this strategy and the Chair undertook to write to the Chair of the Community Select Committee to thank her and the Members of the Committee for the comprehensive input they have made to this Strategy.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the final draft of the cultural strategy, as detailed at Appendix A to this report, is approved subject to reworking the 'Vision' section of the Strategy into four bullet points from the three quoted.
2. That the proposed set of milestones for 2018/19, as shown in section 6 of the Strategy, are noted.

Reasons for Decision: As set out in the report.

Other options considered: As set out in the report.

6. **3RD QUARTER MONITORING REPORT GENERAL FUND AND HOUSING REVENUE**

The Executive considered a report that details the third quarter review of the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the 2017/18 3rd Quarter General Fund projected net decrease in expenditure of £367,280 is approved.
2. That it is noted that the cumulative changes made to the General Fund net budget remain within the £400,000 (increase) variation limit delegated to the Executive.
3. That the progress of the 2017/18 approved savings, growth bids and carry forwards in the General Fund are noted.
4. That the 2018/19 ongoing net savings of £56,800, that will contribute to the General Fund Financial Security target for future years, is approved.
5. That the transfer of £4,730 from the General Fund to the town centre allocated reserve is approved.
6. That the new carry forward requests for the General Fund (£405,000) are approved.
7. That the 2017/8 3rd Quarter increases in the net HRA surplus of £230,370 is approved.
8. That the progress of the 2017/18 approved savings, growth bids and carry forward requests in the HRA are noted.
9. That the new carry forward request of (£217,870) in the HRA, as listed in table six of the report, is approved.

Reasons for Decision: As set out in the report.

Other options considered: As set out in the report.

7. 3RD QUARTER MONITORING CAPITAL PROGRAMME - GENERAL FUND AND HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT

The Executive considered a report, which provided an update on the Council's 2017/18 and 2018/19 Capital Programme and sought approval for the revisions to the General Fund Capital Programme. The report also provided an update on capital resources available to fund the capital programmes.

At this juncture, the Chair referred to the coverage in the Stevenage Comet of the recent Budget and Council Tax setting. The article put in a positive light the Council's management of its budgets and this had been particularly the result of the work of the Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) and her team who always followed the very best practices.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the 2017/18 General Fund Capital Programme net decrease in expenditure of £269,030, as summarised in paragraph 4.1.1. to the report, is approved.
2. That a virement from the Deferred Works Budget of £20,000 to Town Centre Toilet refurbishment works is approved.
3. That it is noted that the 2017/18 Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme remains unchanged.
4. That the 2018/19 General Fund increase in capital expenditure of £57,500 (slippage from 2017/18), as summarised in Table 1 and Paragraph 4.5.1. to the report, is approved.

Reasons for Decision: As set out in the report.

Other options considered: As set out in the report.

8. DRAFT COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGY 2018-21

The Executive considered a report that set out proposals for a draft Community Safety Strategy, which outlined the emerging priorities of the SoSafe Partnership for the next three years.

The Portfolio Holder for Communities and Equalities introduced the report and paid tribute to the Council's Officers for the work they had undertaken on the Strategy and who led the way on partnership working with the relevant agencies, particularly the local police.

The Executive recognised the successful initiatives in the area of Community Safety that the Council, along with its partners, had implemented in recent times. Work on domestic abuse had attracted much praise and although this was not included as a specific objective of the Strategy, Members were reassured that the focus on this

area of work would be maintained.

It was noted that funding for the Police had increased but as the Council funded PCSOs there was concern that, as a result, Stevenage might not benefit from additional front line Police Officer support. It was considered important that the Police and Crime Commissioner prioritised the resourcing of officers after giving due regard to the relative county wide crime statistics.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the draft Community Safety Strategy appended to the report be approved noting its focus on the work of the SoSafe partnership.
2. That in accordance with the provisions in the Council's Constitution, the draft Community Safety Strategy accompanying this report be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee before the final recommendations to Council are considered.
3. That it is noted that implementation of the Strategy would be achieved through co-operative working with communities and key partners via the activities of the Joint Action Group and overseen by the Responsible Authorities Group.

Reasons for Decision: As set out in the report.

Other options considered: As set out in the report.

9. **HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY REVIEW 2018**

The Executive considered a report, which advised members of the outcomes and subsequent recommendations following consultation on the Allocations Policy Review.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following changes to the Housing Allocations Policy be approved:

1. That those at risk of homelessness, who presented themselves to SBC, who subsequently self-sourced alternative accommodation outside of the Borough, retain their local connection for up to two years.
2. That the five-year local connection rule is amended to five years out of the last seven years.
3. That those who were under-occupying were given a priority banding allowing them to bid for properties themselves via the Choice Based Letting system process. For households under-occupying by two bedrooms, a Band B to be applied and for those under-occupying by one bed for a Band C to be applied.

Reasons for Decision: As set out in the report.

Other options considered: As set out in the report.

10. **RETROFITTING FIRE SUPPRESSANT SPRINKLER SYSTEMS TO RESIDENTIAL TOWER BLOCKS - PROGRAMME PROPOSAL (SEE ALSO PART II REPORT)**

The Executive considered a report that sought approval to proposals to commence a programme of retrofitting Fire Suppressant Sprinkler Systems (FSSS) to all of the Council's seven high rise flat blocks, including two sheltered schemes. The financial details were set out in an accompanying Part II report on the agenda.

It was **RESOLVED** –

1. That the following proposals and the related financial provisions set out in the accompanying part 2 report, be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee before the final recommendations Council are considered.
2. That a FSSS, as specified by the Feasibility Study carried out by John Rowan and Partners (JRP), be retrofitted to all properties as stated in Paragraph 1.1. to the report (These works are fully endorsed by Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue).
3. That the retrofit programme, led by the Investment Team, be delivered by a single appointed contractor.
4. That the contract be offered to market via advertised tender using the "Restricted Procedure" for a term of one year.
5. That it is noted that these works are deemed improvements and as such will not be rechargeable to leaseholders.
6. That approval is given for officers to procure a Retrofitting FSSS Contract, in order to provide additional fire safety within each of the Council's residential high rise flat blocks.
7. That all means of information and communication with residents, pertaining to the installation, ongoing maintenance and operation of the FSSS be utilised.
8. That it is noted that SBC was undertaking this programme prior to the anticipated changes in regulations regarding Fire Safety and Building Control, following the publication of the Building a Safer Future, Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety (Dec 2017) (Hackitt Report). (It was very likely that further Fire Safety related works might come to force in the near future and that note be given to the outcomes).

Reasons for Decision: As set out in the report.

Other options considered: As set out in the report.

11. **CORPORATE PERFORMANCE FOR QUARTER THREE 2017/18**

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

With reference to the FTFC performance, the Chief Executive explained that there were two areas that were not achieving their targets and these were in relation to General Fund and HRA identified savings. He stated that the Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) would be working closely with the Leader's Financial Security Group to ensure these targets were met.

Before moving on to Corporate Performance, the Chief Executive highlighted a number of positive outcomes and areas of good performance achieved by the Council in Quarter 3. These included the selection of Mace to help develop the SG1 Town Centre Regeneration Programme, the reduction in the use of agency staff and the Play Service being shortlisted for a Local Government Chronicle (LGC) national award.

Sickness Absence remained a concern and it was explained that, amongst other action being taken to improve performance, the Assistant Director (Corporate Services and Transformation) was looking to trial a third party provider for sickness reporting as there was a need for improvement.

It was noted that for the Customer Services Centre, the percentage of calls abandoned was not on target. Members asked that officers take steps to improve the current interactive voice response (IVR) service offer.

Homelessness Preventions also remained a concern and Members were aware that two staff would shortly leave the Council's Service. The Assistant Director (Housing and Investment) explained that the Section was undergoing a review ahead of implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act and that the interim plans were in place to appoint staff pending the outcome of the review process.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the delivery of priorities, which formed the Future Town, Future Council Programme and performance of the Council across the key themes during quarter three 2017/18, together with latest achievements are noted.
2. That the improvement plans for the Customer Service Centre and associated timeframe for delivery are endorsed (as outlined in Paragraphs 3.122 to 3.126 to the report).
3. That steps outlined to improve management of sickness absence across the Council are endorsed (as outlined in Paragraphs 3.135 to 3.138 to the report).

Reasons for Decision: As set out in the report.

Other options considered: As set out in the report.

12. **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None

13. **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.

14. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS - RETROFITTING FIRE SUPPRESSANT SPRINKLER SYSTEMS TO RESIDENTIAL TOWER BLOCKS - PROGRAMME PROPOSAL PART 2**

The Executive considered a Part II report that outlined the financial implications for the retrofitting of Fire Suppressant Sprinkler Systems to residential tower blocks, which were set out in item 10 of this agenda.

It was **RESOLVED** that the recommendations within the report are agreed.

Reasons for Decision: As set out in the report.

Other options considered: As set out in the report.

15. **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None

CHAIR