

Meeting: COUNCIL

**Council Agenda
Item:**

11

Date: 20 JULY 2016

ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT 2015/2016

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1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To report on the work undertaken by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Select Committees during the 2015/16 Municipal Year.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the work undertaken by Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Select Committees during 2015/16 be noted.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000 Overview and Scrutiny's role is to operate as an independent function of the Councils decision making process, by having overview of the Council's decision making, holding the Executive to account, having the power to "call in" decisions for reconsideration and undertake internal and external scrutiny reviews.
- 3.2 The Council's Constitution requires that there be an annual report to Council on the scrutiny activity over the past Municipal Year (see Article 6.3 of the Constitution).
- 3.3 This report is a retrospective look at the scrutiny review work undertaken by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the two Select Committees during the 2015-16 Municipal Year.
- 3.4 In addition to the Scrutiny studies the Committees have worked with their relevant Executive Portfolio Holders developing policies and considering reports before their submission to the Executive. This report, however, focuses on the Committees' Scrutiny role.
- 3.5 In accordance with the Constitution the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was also charged with scrutinising the Executive's proposals on Budget & Policy Framework items that go before Council for decision. In addition the Committees considered updates on Scrutiny studies that had been undertaken previously, examining the progress of recommendations and where appropriate following up on matters raised.

4. SUMMARY OF SELECT COMMITTEE REVIEWS FOR 2015/2016

4.1 Each Select Committee review made formal recommendations to the relevant Executive Member, officers and external partners. The following is a summary of the outcomes of each scrutiny review.

4.2 Community Select Committee – Review of the Local Community Budget Scheme (LCB)

4.2.1 In conducting this review the Community Select Committee met on 5 occasions and received written and oral evidence from the following people:

- Strategic Director, Community, Matt Partridge
- Head of Service, Chief Executive Unit, Richard Protheroe
- Community Development Officer, Fiona Rolfe
- Community Development Officer, Mandy Williams
- Alderman David Kissane
- The Leader, Cllr Sharon Taylor
- Chief Executive, Scott Crudgington
- Executive Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods & Co-operative Council, Cllr Simon Speller
- Executive Portfolio Holder for Community, Health and Older People, Cllr Jeanette Thomas
- Executive Portfolio Holder for Resources, Cllr Mrs Joan Lloyd
- Shared Anti-Fraud Service, Nick Jennings

4.2.2 The review focused on the following issues:

- Establish the purpose and focus of LCBs
- Provide analysis of LCB allocations by project
- Value for Money – use of resources
- LCB spend alignment with corporate, local and town wide needs
- Training and sharing of best practice
- Changes to the administrative process - Pre-bid and during the bidding process
- Publicity
- General changes to the system
- Comparison with other local authority schemes
- Equalities & Diversity issues

4.2.3 The review made 21 separate recommendations on the above themes. The Executive Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods & Co-operative Council has provided the Community Select Committee with a response to the review recommendations, which the Committee considered on 28 June 2016.

4.2.4 In summary the review recommended improvements and changes to the current Local Community Budget Scheme around the following issues:

- Annual refresher training for Members on the rules of the scheme including an online tutorial
- Minimum level of bids set at £100
- Improved publicity and communications leaflet
- Improved pre bid communication between applicants and Members including more detailed questions about the bid
- Applicants to be requested to make detailed declarations of interest
- Better liaison between local ward Members to determine whether bids can be supported at a ward level
- Request for more officer support pre bid
- Process to deter overbidding and for undersubscribed bids
- Better monitoring of successful bid outcomes and keeping Members informed
- Amended wording for electronic response for recipients of partially funded applications
- Repeat and high bidders be targeted for post award audit
- Flexibility with LCB funds 'carried over' for accruals if an award had been committed to but the monies not spent in the same financial year

4.3 Community Select Committee sitting as the Council Statutory Crime & Disorder Committee

4.3.1 The Committee considered performance of the Responsible Authority Group, SoSafe Community Safety Partnership against the Community Safety Action Plan on 2 November 2015. The Committee then further considered the performance of Community Safety Action Plan and the emerging priorities for 2016-17 on 31 March 2016.

4.4 Environment & Economy Select Committee – Review of the Business & Technology Centre

4.4.1 In conducting this review the Environment & Economy Select Committee met on 11 occasions undertaking site visits to the BTC and to other business incubation and workspace sites in London and received written and oral evidence from the following people:

- Executive Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport, Cllr Ralph Raynor
- SBC Interim Assistant Director Regeneration, Paul Pinkney
- SBC Interim Regeneration Manager, Gail Rowe
- Wenta – Peter Cabon (Regions Enterprise Agency Wenta Management Committee at BTC) and Spencer Tagg (Wenta Management Committee at the BTC)
- BTC Clients – Paul Maguire (BTC Workspace) & Tom Carol (BTC Incubation)
- University of Hertfordshire Business Innovation, Peter Findlay
- North Herts College – Executive Director of Commercial Development at North Herts College, Lucy Hann

- Executive Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Council, Cllr Simon Speller
- Leader of the Council, Cllr Sharon Taylor
- Kennington Workspace, Workspace Executive, Claudia Palomino
- Impact Hub Brixton, Impact Hub Director, Annette Dhani

4.4.2 The review considered the following issues:

- The current running of the BTC through the management contact with Wenta
- The historical background to the BTC
- What other models there are for business incubation
- Whether the current arrangements are adequate

4.4.3 The review made 7 separate recommendations on the following themes:

- That market testing should be undertaken regarding targeted workspace in the town centre
- That the operator of the BTC should look to increase the number of young people starting businesses which the BTC support and better collection of Equalities and Diversity data amongst its client base
- That external funding sources to support any new ventures such as further business workspace/incubation in the town centre be sought by officers
- That officers investigate the feasibility of establishing a social enterprise workspace in Stevenage
- Those involved in supporting economic development, both inside the Council and its external partners in government and education, encourage more collaborative working and stimulation of entrepreneurial ventures for young people
- That a breakdown of data on how long companies have been based at the BTC since Wenta took on the contract to manage the Centre and the Chells Industrial Workshops, be provided to Members
- That the Executive Portfolio Holder be challenged to increase the amount of incubation space made available and being actively used at the BTC.

4.4.4 The Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment & Economy has provided the Environment & Economy Select Committee with a response to the review recommendations, which the Committee considered on 4 July 2016.

4.5 **Overview & Scrutiny Committee sitting as a Select Committee – The Council's Communications**

4.5.1 The review undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee into the Council's Communications was started in 2015-16 but was put on hold owing to an external peer review which was due to be undertaken by the Local Government Association. Given that the external review would be covering some of the same ground in the scrutiny review it was considered prudent to

wait until the LGA peer review is complete to see where the scrutiny review could add any further value.

4.6 Monitoring outcomes from previous reviews

4.6.1 As well as undertaking their own specific reviews the Select Committees revisited previous Scrutiny reviews that fell into their area of interest and held briefings on other matters of interest. These included:

- Executive Member response to the review into housing conditions in the private rented sector, Community Select Committee, 29 June 2015
- Update on Landlord Incentivisation Scheme following the review into the Private Rented Sector, Community Select Committee, 6 October 2015
- Update on review of Stevenage's Night Time Economy, Community Select Committee, 2 November 2015
- Executive Member response to review into the maintenance of Trees, Hedges and Shrub Beds, Environment & Economy Select Committee
- Update on SBC Green Travel Plan, Environment & Economy Select Committee
- Briefing on Fly Tipping, Littering & Environmental Law, Environment & Economy Select Committee
- Discussion Item, Members future use of Social Media, Community Select Committee, Community Select Committee, 6 October 2015

5. OTHER ISSUES

5.1 Training

5.1.1 Two training sessions were undertaken by the South East Employers Association in 2016 on the subject of (i) preparing for a meeting and questioning skills and (ii) evaluating research and evidence. A training session introducing new Members to Scrutiny was held in July 2015 and this was repeated with the intake of one new Member in June 2016.

5.1.2 A training programme for Scrutiny Members has not yet been arranged for the 2016-17 Municipal Year, but the Scrutiny Officer will liaise with the Learning and Development Manager and will provide Scrutiny Members with details of the training that will be provided.

5.2 2015/2016 Scrutiny Work Programmes

5.2.1 The two Select Committees have agreed their outline Scrutiny work programmes for the 2016/17 Municipal Year:

- Community Select Committee: Review of Damp and Mould in Council Homes, SoSafe RAG Community Safety Priorities/Action Plan & Local Public Health Meeting

- Environment and Economy Select Committee – Review of Allotments & Neighbourhood Maintenance & briefings on Open Spaces & Public Toilets

5.2.2 In addition to undertaking all scrutiny of Budget & Policy Framework items and decisions of the Executive, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has the capacity to undertake a “Select Committee” style meeting during the year if it so wishes. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has agreed to continue the review of SBC Media and Communications when the external peer review findings are published and to review the success of shared services as Select Committee review items.

5.2.3 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will review the Council’s Forward Plan of Key Decisions and also consider all ‘Call-in’ requests in accordance with the Council’s Constitution as well as considering any Councillors Call for Action in relation to matters relating to Resources and any Petition appeals, in accordance with the Councils Petition Scheme, regarding matters relating to Resources or of a Corporate or Council wide nature.

5.2.4 A schedule of meetings for the two Select Committees has been arranged for the 2016-17 Municipal Year. These meetings will incorporate the scoping of the review where Members will identify the areas they wish to cover during the review, who to interview, what evidence/background information is required and which Members will lead the questioning on a specific area, as well as undertaking site visits, where appropriate. Meetings will also be arranged to revisit previous reviews to monitor actions.

5.2.5 Policy Development work will be undertaken as and when requested by Executive Portfolio Holders in consultation with Strategic Directors and Heads of Service.

5.3 **Monitoring of Previous Scrutiny Reviews**

5.3.1 In line with comments made by some Scrutiny Members asking for clearer arrangements for monitoring review recommendations and associated actions from previous reviews, officers have included a review timeline section in the scoping document for all new Scrutiny reviews. Scoping documents now incorporate a deadline for the final report, as well as a two month Executive response deadline date and lastly a year review final revisit date to sign off the review. In addition to this change, officers are looking to provide an area on the SBC website to capture all previous scrutiny reviews including any subsequent monitoring.

5.3.2 The following items have been agreed for monitoring by the two Select Committees:

Community Select Committee – (i) Revisit the recommendations for the review into Housing Conditions in the Private Rented Sector; (ii) Revisit the

recommendations for the review into Community Transport for Older People
(iii) Revisit the recommendations for the review into Stevenage Museum

Environment & Economy – (i) Revisit the recommendations for the review into the Maintenance of Trees, Hedges & Shrub beds; (ii) Revisit the recommendations for the review into the Green Travel Plan; (iii) Revisit the recommendations for the review into Fixed Penalty Notices (Dog Fouling); Revisit the recommendations for the review into Cycleways.

6. IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial Implications

There is a budget of £2,500 to support study activities, site visits and specialist advice and training where necessary.

6.2 Legal Implications

Any legislative changes during the 2016-17 Municipal Year, will be reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the relevant Select Committee(s).

6.3 Equalities and Diversity Implications

Equalities and Diversity issues are considered at the scoping stage of each Scrutiny review with regards to questioning of witnesses and the collection of oral and written evidence. Also E&D issues are addressed in the final report for each review.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Local Government Act 2000

Individual agendas and study material for each Scrutiny review undertaken by the Select Committees as described in this report are available for inspection.

The full Executive responses to the Scrutiny Reviews are available for inspection.