

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Monday, 8 October 2018

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Shimkent Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Lin Martin-Haugh (Chair), Philip Bibby CC (Vice-Chair), Sandra Barr, Michael Downing, Jody Hanafin, Michelle Gardner, Lizzy Kelly, John Mead, Sarah Mead and Adam Mitchell CC

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 6.50pm

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Brown, J Fraser, R Parker CC and S-J Potter.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES - 10 SEPTEMBER 2018**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 10 September 2018 are approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 **PART I DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE**

Minutes – Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees

The Committee noted the comments of the Executive.

The Formation of a wholly owned Housing Development Company

The Assistant Director (Housing Development) introduced the report on the formation of a wholly owned housing development company. Members were informed that a report comprising a fully costed financial projection of the wholly owned company (WOC)'s operational activities and a Business Plan will be brought to a future Executive meeting.

Members asked that security of tenure be considered to aid social cohesion.

In response to questions, the Assistant Director informed Members that:

- It was standard market practice for purchasers to negotiate discounts on multiple property purchases. Discounts received by the WOC would,

- ultimately be to the benefit of the Council when the assets are sold
- There was no risk of competition between the proposed housing development company and properties that were provided under the Housing Revenue Account and General Fund's existing development programmes
 - Income from the proposed company would boost the Council's General Fund (GF) and ultimately could contribute towards the provision of more social housing when decisions to prioritise spend were made by the Council
 - The Council was facing revenue and capital pressures related to the one percent reduction for HRA rent setting introduced by the previous Government
 - There was a shortage of good quality private sector housing in Stevenage and any delays in formation of the proposed company would result in a loss of income
 - The proposed company would buy services from the Council, subject to procurement protocols and assurances over quality
 - Tenancies offered by the WOC will not be the same as those offered under current Council arrangements through the HRA. Officers were exploring tenancy models including twelve month tenancy with extension options that would provide added security to prospective tenants
 - The governance arrangements and structure of the proposed SBC WOC would be different from the set up in other local authorities as they had to be personalised to the Council's priorities

It was **RESOLVED** that the following Part I decisions of the Executive are noted:

1. Minutes of the Executive – 5 September 2018
2. Minutes of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees
3. The formation of a wholly owned Housing Development Company

4 **DIVERSITY IN SBC WORKFORCE**

The Committee considered the Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) Workforce Diversity Statistics. The Council undertook equality and diversity assessments on new policies, policy reviews and major projects. There was a legal obligation for the Council to publish gender pay gap figures annually. The next report is due in March 2019 but provisional assessments indicate that the Council's gender pay gap position has improved.

In response to questions about low percentages of some ethnic groups, the Senior Human Resources Manager indicated that the statistics were broadly reflective of the Stevenage community and were similar to figures of other local authorities in the region. There was no obligation on staff to disclose protected characteristics. The Council's recruitment procedures were fair and inclusive. Members were informed that there had been no evidence of discrimination against any ethnic group, religion or gender.

It was **RESOLVED** that the statistics are noted.

5 **SBC SICKNESS MANAGEMENT SCOPING DOCUMENT**

The Scrutiny Officer and the Senior Human Resources Manager presented the scoping document for SBC Sickness Management for Members to consider.

Members were informed that a strategy was now in place to reduce sickness absence. The Council was now able to produce a monthly sickness absence report that included details of sickness categories (short term and long term) and reasons for sickness. Members recommended that numbers, percentages and day trends be included in the sickness data report.

It was **RESOLVED** that the scoping document is noted.

6 **URGENT PART I DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

None.

7 **URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

None.

8 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

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 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 Members consider the reasons for the following reports being in Part II and determine whether or not maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

9 **PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE**

The Assistant Director (Stevenage Direct Services) introduced the Garage Business Plan Update.

Members asked a number of questions about the update which were answered by officers.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following Part II decisions of the Executive are noted:

1. Part II Minutes – 5 September 2018
2. Garage Business Plan Update

10 **URGENT PART II DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

None.

11 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR