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COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE

Date: Thursday, 29 February 2024

Time: 6.00pm,

Location: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

**Contact: Chris Liasi committees@stevenage.gov.uk
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Members: Councillors: S Mead (Chair), A Farquharson (Vice-Chair), J Ashley-Wren, F Chowdhury, J Duncan, M Humberstone, W Kerby, C McGrath, E Plater and C Veres

AGENDA

PART 1

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2. MINUTES - 8 JANUARY 2024

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the Community Select Committee held on 8 January 2024.

3 – 4

3. COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2024-25

To consider the draft work programme for the Community Select Committee for 2024-25.

5 – 10

4. URGENT PART I BUSINESS

To consider any Part I business accepted by the Chair as urgent.

5. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

To consider the following motions:

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 ground 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.

6. PART II MINUTES - 8 JANUARY 2024

To consider as a correct record the Part II minutes of the meeting of the Community Select Committee held on 8 January 2024.

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7. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

To consider any Part II business accepted by the Chair as urgent.

Agenda Published **21 February 2024**

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Monday, 8 January 2024

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: Sarah Mead (Chair), Alex Farquharson (Vice Chair), Julie Ashley-Wren, Forhad Chowdhury, Mason Humberstone, Conor McGrath and Carolina Veres.

Start / End Start Time: 6.00pm
Time: End Time: 6.30pm

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

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Wendy Kerby and Ellie Plater.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES - TUESDAY 14 NOVEMBER 2023**

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Community Select Committee held on 14 November 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 **DRAFT REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE HOUSING REPAIRS REVIEW**

The Chair stated that as Members had read the report, she would not go through each section of the report line by line but invited Members to make comment on the report and recommendations or provide any suggested changes to the wording or any additional recommendations that they might have.

A Member suggested that perhaps recommendation 8 "Development of Customer Self-serve App" might be the hardest to deliver as it would likely be resource intensive. The Chair stated that as many Council services were becoming accessible online it was important to also make the repairs service accessible via an App. The Chair stated that it was the Committee's role to make recommendations and for Executive Members and Officers to evaluate the recommendation and decide if it is deliverable. The Assistant Director, Building Safety and Housing Property Services, Denise Lewis, stated that the review findings and this particular recommendation would be welcomed as the principle that Officers were working towards was to make the service as accessible as possible to the public.

The Chair stated that the Committee had carried out a thorough review and it was

pleasing that many of the findings of the Independent Housing expert, Ridge, had come to similar conclusions as the Member scrutiny review.

It was **RESOLVED** that the draft report and recommendations of the Housing Repairs Scrutiny Review be agreed.

4 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

5 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That under Section 100A 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 the reasons for the following reports being in Part II were accepted, and that the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

6 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

The Chair agreed to receive a part II urgent item on activity proposals for Fairlands Valley Sailing Centre and main lake. The reason for urgency was that the matter needed to be considered at this meeting prior to formally being considered at the Executive and then the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and then possible awarding of a contract in time for possible summer 2024 activities to be in place.

The Cultural, Wellbeing and Leisure Services Manager, Geoff Caine provided Members with an outline of options which Members commented on as a piece of pre-scrutiny policy development work ahead of the report being considered at the Executive and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee later in January.

It was **RESOLVED**:

That the report be noted, and Members comments be verbally passed on by the Cultural, Wellbeing and Leisure Services Manager to the Executive in January 2024.

CHAIR

Meeting COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE

Portfolio Area

Date 29 February 2024



COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE - DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME ITEMS FOR 2024-25

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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To agree the draft scrutiny work programme for the Select Committee for the new Municipal Year from a list of suggested possible work programme items by Members and items previously suggested by Members.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Scrutiny Members' feedback on ideas for improving Scrutiny (see section 4) be noted.
- 2.2 That having considered ideas put forward by individual Members, (see section 5), the Committee determines the subject matters to be added to a work programme of potential Scrutiny reviews items for 2024/25.
- 2.3 That any pre-scrutiny policy development items to carry out policy development work that is identified to the Committee (see section 7.1) be noted.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Scrutiny Committees are asked to draft their work programme ahead of the new Municipal year in order that work may begin as soon as the Committees

are appointed at Annual Council. Any outstanding and unfinished studies, where applicable, might also need to be included.

- 3.2 During January 2024 Members provided feedback on the current Scrutiny activity and on ideas for the Work Programme for the 2024/25 Municipal Year.
- 3.3 When considering what work to undertake in the coming year, Members may wish to consider if the matter in question is of a cross-cutting nature and might lend itself to being considered jointly with another Select Committee.
- 3.4 Officers have also been requested to bring to the Committee's attention, likely pre-scrutiny policy development items that the Select Committee might be requested to consider and comment on before reports there are submitted to the Executive.
- 3.5 The Committee may also consider whether specific time should be allocated for monitoring or review of recommendations of previous studies. During the summer the Committee will receive a copy of the Action Tracker for the Community Select Committee at which time the Committee can note progress on past reviews and determine whether they wish to bring back any further detailed updates on specific former review items at that time.
- 3.6 It is recognised that there is a limited dedicated officer resource for the scrutiny work of three Scrutiny Committees and therefore it is important to ensure that work plans are in place in order that the call on those resources and on each Committee's time on all its activities are prioritised and evenly spread across the year. To make best use of the resource it is suggested that each Committee chooses 1 substantive review item for the year which will be the Committee's main review, undertaken over several meetings. In addition, the Committee could receive a number of one-off single issue performance items and a number of pre-scrutiny policy development items during the year.

4 MEMBERS' IDEAS FOR IMPROVING SCRUTINY

- 4.1 In January 2024, all Members of the Council's Scrutiny Committees were emailed a survey to gauge views of the Scrutiny work undertaken and ideas for future studies. The following summary is based on the 6 replies received from the 25 Members who are on one or more of the Council's Scrutiny Committees.
- 4.2 Members were asked to (i) comment on current scrutiny activity and (ii) identify any issues that could be addressed to improve the current arrangements and (iii) state what training needs they may have. Members provided comment and challenge around the following areas that relate to the Community Select Committee:

Survey Question 1 - Please rate the following aspects of this year's scrutiny activity:
Ever – the review into teenage pregnancy. Recently – the necessary review into progress with the climate emergency. Grinding slow but starting to get the outcome-based information we need and some evidence that the issue is getting embedded in SBC.
The local bus service review was one of the few topics where I felt the discussion was meaningful and could actually have a beneficial impact on residents and inform my handling of casework.
For outcomes, Climate. The discussion has I believed impacted the direction of SBCs response to Climate Change. For breadth, and relevance to concerns in the community, The Bus Review, and the Cost of Living in equal measure.
Bus service, local economy, biodiversity, all good.
Survey Question 2 - What aspect of scrutiny could be improved to provide a better scrutiny service?
Confidence in what we are doing. Recognition that scrutiny is not a threat but a necessary part of a Council's work. In theory scrutiny is on a par with the Executive. Maybe but we have got closer to being independent of the Executive with changes to the way chairs are appointed, knowing that the way we investigate is unlikely to be a series of set piece speeches but probing and follow up questions, recognising that scrutiny cannot be whipped (or there would be little point seeking and uncovering information).
More bread-and-butter issues, things people engage with and care about every day. Less focus on high level things, like climate change (which has been done to death). While issues like this are important, with all the best will in the world the realistic ability of the Council to impact these high-level issues is microscopic. More everyday issues that we can have realistic influence over.
I think our scrutiny is very open and ideas are considered by chair and officers.
Survey Question 3 - Regarding supporting you in your Scrutiny role is there any specific training you would like for next year, and would you (occasionally) like to receive information about possible Member Scrutiny training?
Yes please, to any relevant training
We need training by local government linked organisations outside SBC (e.g. CfPS and successors, LGIU, LGS) so we can explore other ways of doing things and be aware of the risks of not doing scrutiny properly. That must include in person interactive training perhaps working through an example.
Any aspect of scrutiny training is always beneficial and therefore would like to receive all information about possible Member Scrutiny training.
I believe scrutiny is an invaluable space to develop thinking around policy

areas. In so many areas of the SBCs work national policy is evolving at pace (housing, climate, planning). Scrutiny can be a space where SBCs approach can be modified . This is also an invaluable for member education as well. Member education needs to keep pace with changes in Local Government, but Members have a responsibility themselves to do groundwork on this and shouldn't expect to be spoon fed by officers.

5 MEMBERS' IDEAS FOR FUTURE SCRUTINY REVIEWS

5.1 Scrutiny Members' Suggestions for Future Scrutiny Review Items

5.1.1 In response to Survey question 4 "What issues would you like to be considered for inclusion in scrutiny work programme for next year" The following issues have been raised by Members as potential Scrutiny review items:

Survey Question 4 - What issues would you like to be considered for inclusion in the (Community Select Committee) scrutiny work programme for next year? (Max 3 items)	What type of review (main, Pre-Scrutiny Policy Development, one off performance)?
<p>1. <u>Housing - engagement</u> - how is the new direction going? What evidence do we have that the public consultation methods we are using are effective?</p> <p>2. <u>Housing investment</u> - we need a clear picture of how cases are considered and decided on as we hear that some replacement work can't be afforded. Are we meeting our obligations in terms of housing standards in replacement works?</p>	<p>Possible main review</p> <p>Possible main review</p>
<p>1. <u>Looking at the help that is available for Residents in Sheltered Housing</u> especially at weekends and evenings when the Wardens are not on duty. To explain this, I have had a couple of residents phone me with practical problems in their property who have informed me that when they have phoned the out of hours number have been told their problem is not classed as an emergency and would have to wait for someone to come out on a working day. As these residents are usually elderly any problem, however small can be a major concern to them.</p>	<p>One off performance meeting</p>
<p>1. <u>Review the impact of the new Allocations Policy & provide a training session for new Members on the Housing Allocations Policy</u> Ongoing work could be to review the impact of the policy and look at how this is being communicated to the public. (Implementation date of the new policy is July 2024, therefore the earliest it could be considered is Jan/Feb 2025). So many people still hold unmanageable expectations that fall outside the guidance, and I feel we need to be much clearer about the limitations faced by SBC.</p>	<p>One off performance meeting/Training</p>

5.2 **Statutory and Standing Items**

5.2.1 Crime and Disorder Committee (Statutory Committee)

5.2.2 Public Health Meeting (Standing Item) – This will only be possible if the new HCC Director of Public Health is as willing to engage as much as their predecessor.

5.3 Members should note that whatever issues they agree to be scrutinised as a main review item would be subject to a full scoping process and subsequently a scoping document would need to be agreed by the Committee at a future meeting. Other items, which can be addressed by a briefing and discussion item, may not require a full scoping document.

5.5 **Work Programme Schedule for 2024/25**

5.5.1 When the Scrutiny Work Programme is agreed by the Community Select Committee, the Scrutiny Officer will, using the agreed dates for generic Select Committee meetings in the Calendar of Meetings, draw together a work programme schedule for the 2024/25 Municipal Year, including scrutiny review meetings, monitoring of previous reviews selected by Members and policy development meetings, which will be circulated to Members, and electronic diary invites will be sent to all Community Select Committee Members.

5.6. **Role of the Assistant Directors and Scrutiny**

5.6.1 The Assistant Directors will take a leadership role in assisting and supporting the relevant Scrutiny Committees and specific reviews that align to their area of expertise. The Assistant Directors (ADs) will support each review through its various stages, from scoping of reviews, attending Chair and Vice-Chair briefings and offering support to the Scrutiny Officer in providing written and oral evidence for reviews as well as identifying 'Critical Friends' and other review witnesses. The Assistant Directors will liaise with the relevant Executive Portfolio Holder(s) and the Senior Leadership Team (CE and Assistant CE's).

5.6.2 Strategic Director, Tom Pike from the Strategic Leadership Team has overall responsibility for the Scrutiny function, deputised by Strategic Director Richard Protheroe.

6 MONITORING REVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS VIA THE ACTION TRACKER

6.1 The Committee may consider there is a need to undertake some follow-up work on recommendations arising from previous studies. It may be considered sufficient to simply request update briefings from the relevant Heads of Service to be circulated to Members at appropriate intervals. However, if the Committee requires more detailed consideration or examination of the progress of previous recommendations, this should be factored into its work programme. To help assist Members to consider this, an updated Action Tracker document will be brought to the Committee in the

summer and any additional work programme items will need to be added following that meeting.

7 PRE-SCRUTINY POLICY DEVELOPMENT WORK FOR 2024/25

7.1 In line with the Council and Executive work plan, the following items have been identified for potential Policy Development to be undertaken with the relevant Portfolio Holders during the 2024/25 Municipal Year:

- Future Model for Community Centres (currently to be scheduled for consideration at the Executive, any pre-scrutiny to be advised).
- Supported Housing Strategy (to be scheduled when guidance and secondary legislation is published from Government)
- Housing First Update (Prior to consideration at Executive in October 2024)
- Housing Allocation Policy – 12 month review (Prior to consideration at Executive likely to be in July 2025).
- Healthy Stevenage Strategy (Currently to be scheduled for consideration at the Executive, any pre-scrutiny to be advised).

8 IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

8.1. There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Legal Implications

8.2. The role of Overview and Scrutiny Committees is set out in the Local Government Act 2000. The recommendations made in this report are to facilitate the Committees to fully undertake this role.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

8.3. There are no direct Equalities and Diversity implications arising from the recommendations in this report. Specific equalities and diversity implications are considered during each scrutiny review.

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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