

**Meeting: COUNCIL**

**Council Agenda  
Item:**

**11**

**Date: 11 JULY 2017**

## **ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT 2016/2017**

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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 2016/17 Municipal Year.

### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That the work undertaken by Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Select Committees during 2016/17 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 Council's 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 2016-17 Municipal Year.
- 3.4 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.
- 3.5 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.

#### **4. SUMMARY OF SELECT COMMITTEE REVIEWS FOR 2016/2017**

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 Damp & Mould in Council Homes**

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:

- Executive Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health and Older People, Cllr Jeannette Thomas
- Strategic Director, Matthew Partridge
- Head of Asset Management, Neil Wilson Prior
- Two tenants, who had experienced problems with damp, mould and condensation took part in the review

4.2.2 The review focused on the following issues:

- Establish whether there is a single cause of damp, mould and condensation in SBC housing stock?
- Establish the scale of the problem of Council stock that suffer from damp, mould and condensation?
- Establish what procedures can be put in place to improve the current response?

4.2.3 The review made 10 separate recommendations on the above themes. The Executive Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People has provided the Community Select Committee with a response to the review recommendations, which the Committee considered on 6 March 2017.

4.2.4 In summary the review recommended improvements and changes to the current way the Council responds to tenants that have problems with damp and mould in their properties around the following issues:

- Improved handling of tenants who report damp, mould and condensation in their properties – Officer Training
- Improved communications
- Agreed timescales to respond to tenants
- Improved processes following the first visit
- Improved measures to record damp and mould including by property
- Health Impacts be taken into consideration and linked to Housing Allocations

#### **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 and the emerging priorities for 2017-18 on 15 March 2017.

4.3.2 The Committee interviewed the Chair of the Responsible Authorities Group (SBC CE) Scott Crudginton, acting Exec Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Cllr Richard Henry, SBC Anti-Social Behaviour & Community Safety Manager and Chief Inspector Simon Tabert and asked questions and made comments on the following issues:

Domestic violence; vehicle crime; greater use of the SoSafe branding logo; theft from shops; use of body worn cameras; public space protection orders; drugs awareness in schools; location, volume and trends of dangerous driving and road traffic accidents and the pressures on funding to support joint working to address community safety issues.

#### **4.4 Community Select Committee - Public Health Meeting**

4.4.1 The Community Select Committee held a meeting focusing on Public Health. The Committee has previously held similar themed meetings on Public Health as it considers it an important area that requires attention. At the meeting held on 25 October 2016 the HCC Director of Public Health and the SLL Healthy Hub Manager met with Members to discuss the Stevenage Healthy Hub and also what partners and Public Health officials and NHS providers can do along with the Borough Council to address the huge task of improving local public health outcomes. It was agreed that the Committee would support a local public health summit for Stevenage in 2017.

#### **4.5 Environment & Economy Select Committee – Review of Allotments**

4.5.1 In conducting this review the Environment & Economy Select Committee met on 5 occasions undertaking a review of Allotments and received written and oral evidence from the following people:

- Head of Environmental Services, Lee Myers
- Environmental Performance & Development Manager, Julia Hill
- Members of Stevenage Gardens and Allotments Association (SGAA)
- Allotment hirers

4.5.2 The review considered the following issues:

- How well are the current arrangements with Stevenage Garden & Allotments Association (SG&AA) administrating the running of the Allotments Scheme since they took over its administration some 18 months ago?
- What are the future plans for Stevenage Allotments?

- How secure is the future of Stevenage Allotments, pressure to use land for residential use?
- Are there good practices as a Co-operative Council that could be replicated elsewhere?
- Are there examples of best practice in other authorities re allotments that could be adopted in Stevenage?
- Numbers on the waiting list

4.5.3 The review made 9 separate recommendations on the following themes:

- That Members and officers work with SGAA and local schools to establish ways to encourage young people to take up gardening and keeping allotments, as a way of widening the demographics of allotment users
- That officers explore the possibility of working with SGAA to explore the possibility of Community Ownership of Allotments
- That officers revisit the current Appeals arrangements to improve and speed up the process
- That officers discuss with SGAA ways in which overgrown allotments might be tidied up (without using a cultivator that spread weeds) to encourage new allotment hirers to take on new allotment strips
- That officers work with the SGAA to consider ways in which new allotment hirers could be trained to gain the basic understanding and knowledge to work an allotment successfully
- That officers consider what measures can be taken to direct allotment holders to publicly available toilets in the area, as any further onsite provision is not viable within the current budgetary restraints, but better information such as a map would be helpful
- That, building on the achievements already made, officers consider along with SGAA, ways in which the security can be improved and vandalism designed out of the allotment sites
- That a detailed breakdown of the internal service charges be provided to Members of the E&E Select Committee in order that they can better understand why this makes up the largest proportion of the Allotment services overall costs
- That improved facilities for disabled plot holders will be monitored by Members when they revisit the review at a future meeting of the Environment & Economy Select Committee.

4.5.4 The Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment & Economy provided the Environment & Economy Select Committee with a response to the review recommendations, which the Committee considered on 3 July 2017 (after the date this report was published).

#### **4.6 Other Scrutiny review matters considered by the Environment & Economy Select Committee**

4.6.1 In addition to the above main review the Environment & Economy Select Committee also undertook scrutiny review work into the following issues which Members made comment on and are being responded to by Officers:

- Maintenance of Underpasses, 29 September and 15 November 2016
- Open Spaces, 29 September 2016
- Provision of Public Toilets, 12 October 2016 and 1 March 2017

#### **4.7 Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

4.7.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 11 occasions to provide overview of the work of the Executive, specifically looking at all Key Decisions made by the Executive and all Budget and Policy Framework items.

#### **4.8 Monitoring outcomes from previous reviews**

4.8.1 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 Local Community Budgets, Community Select Committee, 28 June 2016
- Update on Museum review, Community Select Committee, 19 October 2016
- Executive Member response to review of the Business Technology Centre, Environment & Economy Select Committee, 4 July 2016
- Update on SBC Green Travel Plan – action plan, Environment & Economy Select Committee, 15 November 2016
- Update on Dog Fouling Fixed Penalty Review, Environment & Economy Select Committee, 31 October 2016

#### **5.0 2017/2018 Scrutiny Work Programmes**

5.1 The two Select Committees have agreed their outline Scrutiny work programmes for the 2017/18 Municipal Year:

- Community Select Committee: Review of the application of the Housing Allocations Policy (linked to Lettings), SoSafe RAG Community Safety Priorities/Action Plan & Local Public Health Meeting, carry out a 'one off' meeting on Rough Sleepers in the Town Centre
- Environment and Economy Select Committee – Review of the Indoor Market & Review of Open Spaces & 'one off' briefings on Flood Risk Management & Buses

- 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 LGA peer review findings are published and to review the success of shared services as Select Committee review items. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has also agreed to sit as a select committee to review Complaints and Feedback Handling.
- 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 2017-18 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 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; and (ii) Revisit the recommendations for the review into Damp and Mould in Stevenage Council Homes.
- Environment & Economy – (i) Revisit the recommendations for the review into Inward Investment Opportunities & Business Support; and (ii) Consider the Executive Member response to the Allotments review.
- 5.2.6 Policy Development work will be undertaken as and when requested by Executive Portfolio Holders in consultation with Assistant Strategic Directors.

## **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 2017-18 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.

## **APPENDICIES**

None.