

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Thursday 13 December 2018

Time: 6.00 p.m.

Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors L Martin-Haugh (Chair), P Bibby CC (Vice-Chair),
S Barr, J Brown, M Downing, J Hanafin, M Gardner, L Kelly,
J Mead, A Mitchell CC and R Parker CC.

Start / End Time Start Time: 6.00 p.m.
 End Time: 8.00 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Fraser and S Mead.

Councillor M Downing made a declarable interest in Item 5 of the Executive Notice of Decisions (Town Centre Regeneration Update) as the Chair of the Bus Users Group.

There were no other declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES – OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 14 NOVEMBER 2018

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (sitting as a Select Committee) held on 14 November 2018 are agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. MINUTES – OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 26 NOVEMBER 2018

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 26 November 2018 are agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. PART 1 DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

This report had not been circulated to Members five clear days before the meeting nor had it been made available for public inspection. The Chair determined however that given the short time left before the end of the call-in period on 20 December it be considered on this occasion.

Minutes – Overview and Scrutiny and Select Committees

In reply to a Member question the Committee was advised that following discussion between the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Working and the Assistant Director (Communities and Neighbourhoods) the suggested change of title for the Neighbourhood Wardens would not go ahead.

Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Rent Setting and Budget Report

The Assistant Director Finance and Estates presented the report to the Committee.

The Committee was advised that any comments made on the report would be fed back to the next meeting of the Executive prior to the report being presented to Council at the end of January.

In reply to Member comments concerning the level of leaseholder satisfaction with service charges the Committee was advised that a review of service charges was scheduled to be undertaken in 2019/2020 with a view to implementing and resultant changes in 2020/2021.

In reply to a Member question about possible outcomes of the service charge review the Committee was advised that it was impossible to prejudge any outcome at this stage, although part of the remit of the review would include ensuring transparency so that those paying service charges would know exactly what the charges covered.

Following a discussion of the impact of the centrally imposed 1% rent reduction and in response to a Member request the Assistant Director Finance and Estates undertook to circulate a paper detailing the Government's reasons for the four year 1% rent reduction.

Town Centre Regeneration Update

Councillor M Downing advised of a declarable interest in this item as the Chair of the Bus Users Group.

The Strategic Director (TP) Assistant Director Regeneration and Assistant Director Communities and Neighbourhoods presented an update on the Town Centre Regeneration project.

Members asked a number of questions and commented on the report, in particular the relocation and funding of the bus station and the options for the Leisure Centre / Theatre.

In respect of the relocation of the bus station the Committee was advised that funding was currently subject to delay. The projected cost of the relocation, approximately £6.1 million, was questioned to consider whether there are cheaper alternatives. It was acknowledged that as a gateway to the town the new bus station would play a pivotal role in signposting the identity of the regenerated centre, the importance of good quality public transport facilities, the opportunity to improve facilities, and that

every effort should be made to ensure that the new location and facilities should be good quality.

Alternative funding sources were discussed and the Committee was advised that borrowing the required monies against capital receipts would be a high risk strategy with potential implications for other capital projects should repayment prove difficult and that Officers would look at all funding options to support this project.

Members asked questions regarding the current status of Growth Deal 3 funding. Officers confirmed that Growth Deal 3 is a funding agreement between central government and Hertfordshire LEP for schemes across Hertfordshire, including £19m which has been allocated in principle for schemes in Stevenage. Officers confirmed that there are governance requirements that need to be in place to access the funding for Stevenage, and that Hertfordshire LEP are awaiting a formal response from government to progress the release of this funding.

In respect of the Leisure Centre / Theatre the Committee was advised that options including new build and renovation of the existing site had been considered and costed. Members then debated the pros and cons of both options with no clear preference emerging.

The Committee was advised that a final decision on Leisure / Theatre had yet to be taken.

Members also asked a number of detailed questions about other aspects of the regeneration, including Park Place and Queensway North which were answered by the Officers.

In reply to a comment concerning commercial use of public space in the Town Centre the Strategic Director (TP) undertook to review the licenses of the enterprises involved.

Corporate Performance for Quarter Two 2018/2019

The Assistant Director Corporate Services and Transformation presented the report highlighting those areas of performance which had been discussed by the Executive, in particular staffing arrangements for the Customer Service Centre (CSC) and sickness absence management.

The Committee was advised that measures taken to minimise vacancies within the CSC had led to initial improvements in the percentage of telephone calls to the answered within 20 seconds and the percentage of abandoned calls to the CSC.

It was remarked that the data in the report highlighting this improvement did not appear to correspond with the data included in the report's appendices and the Assistant Director Corporate Services and Transformation undertook to review the tabulated telephony data in the report to provide extra clarity.

Members commented that they sometimes experienced delays when contacting the

CSC and asked to be put through to a named officer. In reply to a Member request the Assistant Director Corporate Services and Transformation undertook to investigate the possibility of amending the CSC operators' script to facilitate the prompt transfer of Member telephone calls to officers.

The Committee was advised that the Council's intranet, which included a staff telephone directory, had recently been relaunched and was available to all Members.

With regard to sickness absence management the Committee was reminded that it would continue to undertake a review of sickness management at a meeting on 15 January 2019.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following Part 1 decisions of the Executive are noted:

- Overview and Scrutiny and Select Committee Minutes
- Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Rent Setting and Budget Report
- Town Centre Regeneration Update
- Corporate Performance for Quarter 2 2018/2019

5. URGENT PART 1 DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

None.

6. 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 involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1-7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2016: and
2. That, having considered the reasons for the following items being in Part II, it be determined that maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

7. PART II MINUTES – OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 26 NOVEMBER 2018

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 26 November 2018 are approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

8. PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

This report had not been circulated to Members five clear days before the meeting. The Chair determined however that given the short time left before the end of the call-in period on 20 December it be considered on this occasion.

West of Stevenage Development

The Committee welcomed the decision of the Executive to call for a more detailed report on this issue and the subsequent deferral of the decision thereon.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following Part II decision of the Executive is noted:

- West of Stevenage Development

9. URGENT PART II DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

None.

10. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

Chair