

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 22 September 2021

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: Lin Martin-Haugh (Chair), Philip Bibby CC (Vice-Chair), Myla Arceno, Adrian Brown, Michael Downing, Alex Farquharson, Chris Howells, Wendy Kerby, Andy McGuinness, Sarah Mead, Robin Parker CC, Claire Parris, Loraine Rossati and Simon Speller.

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 8.15pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no apologies for absence and no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 17 AUGUST 2021

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Committee meeting held on Tuesday 17 August 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 PART I DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

2. Minutes of the Executive – 11 August 2021

Noted.

3. Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Select Committees

Noted.

4. Covid-19 Update

The following comments/questions were raised:

- A Member sought to clarify the provision of data by Government. Officers confirmed that the Middle Layer Super Output Areas (MSOA's) were used by the National Office of Statistics and were closely aligned to the Council Wards although do not cover exactly the same geographic areas;
- It was confirmed that there was a rounding up error in relation to the vaccination rate set out in the report which would be rectified;
- Officers confirmed that when further information was made available on topics such as vaccination rates or demographic data, it would be

shared with Members as and when it became available.

5. Transforming Our Town Centre Programme Update and Towns Fund Decision Making

The following responses were given by Officers to a number of comments/questions raised by Members:

- In respect of the geographic focus of the Town Investment Plan (TIP) Officers confirmed that the TIP had a particular focus on achieving transformation in the central part of Town. However, not all projects benefitting from the Towns Fund were within the Town Centre boundary;
- A Member sought further information on the composition of the Stevenage Development Board and the Council elected representatives on the Board. Officers confirmed that Councillors Sharon Taylor and John Gardner were Members of the Stevenage Development Board. Officers also confirmed that the Board had been established in compliance with Government requirements and a prior report to the Executive had set out the requirements and how the Council would meet these requirements. Officers also highlighted other areas where Members have played an active role in developing projects, and noted that Councillor Richard Henry was also involved with a themed Sub-Group of the Board relating to Leisure and Culture;
- Members noted that themes for the Regeneration of the Town would mean changes such as new streets and squares. Themes for street naming had not yet been approved but it was confirmed that the Planning and Development Committee would be involved in the process;
- Officers confirmed that they would be happy to engage with Members about any ideas they had in relation to Towns Fund projects and also 'Meanwhile Use' ideas;
- Officers confirmed that every Business Case would be thoroughly scrutinised and considered by the Executive and by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and if necessary also by Full Council. Some of the larger projects would be before Members at more than one meeting. In addition, it was noted that the Community Select Committee was looking closely at the New Town Heritage Centre;
- An All Member Briefing had been scheduled for 30 September. The session was intended to be recorded for those Members unable to attend;
- Members were keen to ensure there was public engagement with projects such as the Garden Square. Officers confirmed that each project would have its own communication plan which would include public engagement;
- Members sought further clarification of how much impact could be secured through the allocated cycling and walking project. Officers indicated that final decisions would be taken in due course regarding details of where the funding for the cycling and walking infrastructure plan would be allocated informed by the Council's agreed plan. The

challenge was to come up with a package of works within the funding available which would make a visible impact and demonstrable results;

- In relation to redevelopment of other areas such as the Oval and Marymead shops, this would be coming forward for development in the future but without timescales at this stage;
- Members asked that consideration be given to inviting the Chair of the Stevenage Development Board to a future meeting where this matter was being discussed.

6. Corporate Performance Quarter One 2021/22

The following responses were given by officers to a number of comments/questions raised by Members:

- Concern was expressed regarding response times within the CSC, Officers were aware of the issue and advised that a combination of the lockdown, previous efficiency savings plus an increase in the complexity of cases for household and individuals had caused the issue. Work was now underway to address this and proposals would be forthcoming to Members in the next calendar year regarding a remodelling of the Service which would include a strengthened on-line offer;
- In relation to the recent IT issues, Officers advised that although there had been a level of disruption this week following the implementation of a major project to replace the IT network, Officers had worked to ensure that the network upgrade had been completed and would enable the Council to continue with planned IT improvements. In response to a question, Officers advised that it was not possible to quantify the cost of the IT disruption as many staff members were working remotely or able to pick up non IT based work;
- Members sought clarification on the Major Repairs Contract (MRC). The MRC contract was continuing alongside engagement with Leaseholders regarding the repayment of the charges required of them as it was recognised that there would be pressures on Leaseholders to make the repayments. The Strategic Director (CF) agreed to send a summary of the payment options available to Leaseholders to all Members of the Committee;
- A Member requested that officers make changes to the layout of the Performance Report tables. Officers indicated that they would seek to make changes to clarify the headings and to ensure the measurement of the website satisfaction was provided in the report. A Member requested that the Officer responsible for each Indicator was listed for ease of reference for Members;
- In respect of the Transformation Programme, Members highlighted that their knowledge of complex customer matters and complaints could provide useful information on areas for improvement. Officers agreed that it would be beneficial to engage Members where possible in the end to end process review including through discovery workshops;
- In relation to the Garage Programme, it was noted that further work was underway and a report had been requested on a number of issues

to ensure the Council could demonstrate safety as well as value for money;

- Following a discussion on the homelessness challenges being faced in Stevenage and other places, Officers confirmed that Statistics would be provided for Members in relation to homelessness figures, in particular the numbers with and without a local connection to the Town. Work was ongoing through the Council's Housing First approach and further work was being taken forward in conjunction with the Herts Accommodation Cell. Concern was expressed by Members that the targets had been adjusted for Homelessness Indicators. Officers advised that the measure had been amended to reflect the significant level of demand due to Covid-19 and other factors such as the private rented sector possession hearings being suspended;
- The Committee agreed that the Chair should talk to officers about the possibility of a stand-alone scrutiny into the re-letting of void properties which were currently below target due to a complexity of reasons.

7. General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy Update (2020/22 – 2025/26)

Noted.

8. Annual Treasury Management Strategy Review of 2020/21 Including Prudential Code

Officers advised that advice was taken from the Council's Treasury Management Advisers regarding the investment companies used by the Council.

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

None.

5 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

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 to 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by SI 2006 No. 88.

2. That having considered the reasons for the following item being in Part II, it be determined that maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information

contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

7 **PART II MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 17 AUGUST 2021**

Officers advised that there was no date as yet for a report back to Committee on the Future of Fairlands Valley Farmhouse.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the Committee meeting held on Tuesday 17 August 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

8 **PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE**

Noted.

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

None.

10 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR