

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 21 June 2022

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: Lin Martin-Haugh (Chair), Philip Bibby CC (Vice-Chair), Jim Brown, Matt Creasey, Michael Downing, Bret Facey, Wendy Kerby, Andy McGuinness, Sarah Mead, Robin Parker CC, Claire Parris, Anne Wells and Myla Arceno.

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 7.10pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Rob Broom and Loraine Rossati.

Councillor Myla Arceno substituted for Councillor Rossati.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - 22 MARCH 2022

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 22 March be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 TERMS OF REFERENCE

It was **RESOLVED** that the Terms of Reference for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as agreed at Annual Council on 25 May 2022 be noted.

4 PART I DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

2. Minutes – 4 March 2022 and 16 March 2022

Noted.

3. Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees

Noted.

4. Corporate Priorities for 2022/23

The Strategic Director (RP) advised that the Executive had agreed that due to the on-going cost of living crisis, an Executive Member Task Force would be established to consider the implications for residents. The Groups findings would then be reported back to Executive.

In response to a question, Members were advised that Climate Change was part of the FTFC Programme and had its own strategy and which would also be embedded within the Council's Annual Report and is subject of progress review in its own right.

5. Climate Change Update – June 2022

The Strategic Director (TP) advised that the new Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change, Councillor Simon Speller, would be reviewing work that had been undertaken to date to help plan ahead for the future. It was noted that the significant focus he would be bringing would be how the Council engages effectively with interested and active stakeholder groups as well as more broadly in community neighbourhood areas. The Committee was advised that a further report would be taken to Executive in September and subsequently considered by this Committee which would include a detailed engagement Plan. It was also noted that the Portfolio Holder would also be working closely with the Environment and Economy Select Committee on this issue.

The following points and comments were made:

- Prioritisation needed to be given to those actions which would have the greatest impact for the Town such as greening the Council's transport fleet, increasing the recycling rate, tackling the sustainability of the Council's housing stock and encouraging sustainable travel;
- In relation to the possibility of the installation of Solar panels on council properties, Officers advised that although this would be an aspiration for the Council as it would benefit both Council and residents, the investment required would be unachievable without significant help with funding from the Government;
- In terms of council buildings (community centres, shops, pavilions etc) Members were advised that a full asset strategy would be undertaken to ascertain the type of investment required in these buildings to make them sustainable;
- The Assistant Director (Planning and Regulation) advised the Committee that the Review of the Local Plan had begun and as part of the review officers would consider new standards which could be applied in terms of sustainability;
- Concern was expressed by Members that since the resolution passed by Full Council declaring the Climate Change emergency, 3 years had elapsed without obvious outcomes and progress being publicised and it appeared that engagement was still the top priority. Officers agreed there was more the Council could do in terms of communications to

promote the progress that had been made alongside the challenges ahead;

- Officers confirmed that the Committee's views regarding the requirement of a separately branded priority of Climate Change would be communicated to the Executive;
- In relation to the ambition for the Council to be net zero by 2030, Officers agreed that this was a challenging target set by Full Council. However, Officers would continue to work towards the target and had the ambition to achieve this. It was noted that the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee would be considering this in more detail as part of their review for this year;
- It was noted that in relation to funding, a number of bids had been successfully made. Further funding was likely to be available to bid for short to medium term opportunities in the future. Officers agreed that future reports to Members would include more details in terms of those opportunities available to the Council to bid on alongside where the Council would have to raise funds.

6. Assessment of the Government's Legislative Programme for 2022/23 and Related Local Considerations

The Strategic Director advised the Committee of the new Bills which were intended to be introduced over the next year including levelling up, planning system reforms, housing regulations and rights for renters, the new Schools Bill, energy, crime and justice, health and transport and infrastructure investment.

It was noted that at the Executive, in relation to Local Government Reform, confirmation had been given that there was no appetite at District or County level for a single Unitary Authority in Hertfordshire. Any further developments on this issue would be shared with Members when available.

In response to a question regarding the potential for longer term settlements for Local Government Finance, officers agreed to ask the Strategic Director (CF) to provide further detail on this to Members following the meeting.

In relation to the Renters Reform Bill and no fault evictions, further detail was awaited but it was envisaged that where there were no grounds for evictions, tenants would have the right to remain. As soon as further details were available these would be shared with Members.

5 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2022-23

The Scrutiny Officer presented the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for 2022-23.

In response to a question regarding potentially revising the cycling strategy, it was noted that Stevenage Council and the County Council had established, and recently reviewed a Local Cycling and Walking Improvement Plan (LCWIP) where the cycling strategy had been embedded in an overarching document.

It was **RESOLVED** that the work programme be noted.

6 **OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY ACTION TRACKER**

The Scrutiny Officer presented the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Action Tracker to the Committee.

In relation to the Repairs and Voids issue, officers confirmed that this would form part of the Community Select Committee's work programme as their main item for review this year.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Tracker be noted.

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

None.

8 **URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

None.

9 **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.

10 **PART II MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 22 MARCH 2022**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 22 March 2022 be approved.

11 **PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE**

9. **Part II Minutes – Executive – 16 March 2022**

In response to a question, the Strategic Director advised that an update report would be brought to Executive in due course on the position with write offs.

10. Purchase of Strategic Land Opportunity for Use as Supported Accommodation

The Assistant Director (Housing Development) answered Members' questions on this item.

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

None.

13 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

CHAIR