

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 24 January 2023

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: Lin Martin-Haugh (Chair), Philip Bibby CC (Vice-Chair), Rob Broom, Jim Brown, Michael Downing, Bret Facey, Wendy Kerby, Conor McGrath, Andy McGuinness, Sarah Mead, Robin Parker CC, Claire Parris, Loraine Rossati and Anne Wells.

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 7.00pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

2 MINUTES - 13 DECEMBER 2022

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday, 13 December 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair subject to Councillor Robin Parker being added to the list of apologies for the meeting.

3 PART I DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

2. Minutes – 7 December 2022

Noted.

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

Noted.

4. Temporary Accommodation Placement and Procurement Policy

In response to a question, Officers advised that availability of hotel places had become more of a challenge following the Government's decision to use two hotels in the Town for refugees. Officers confirmed that the Council's ambition to reduce the use of bed and breakfast for homeless cases remained but that the Government's decision had added to the complexity of sourcing this accommodation when it was needed. This had been raised by officers at appropriate levels.

Members were also reminded that due to the difficulties in being able to set a balanced budget for 2023/24, only the Capital Budget had been considered by the Leaders Financial Security Group this year. It was hoped that this would revert back to revenue and capital in future years.

5. Joint Housing for Older people Strategy Update

The Committee was informed of progress made and some of the activities and achievements to date since emerging from the Pandemic.

In response to questions, officers advised:

- All properties were fitted with emergency alarms as part of the design and development work of particular housing schemes. For any properties that were not specifically designed this would be picked up as part of aids and adaptation work and retrofitted to these properties;
- In relation to the downsizing project, officers were pleased with the success of the pilot to date and advised that this would become business as usual in the way the Council approached downsizing of properties.

6. Stevenage Design Guidance Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

In response to questions, officers advised:

- That they would consider the possibility of producing a more user friendly guide to the SPD;
- In relation to parking provision, the parking standards would remain the same as they were included in other SPD's and there were no plans to change these currently;
- In relation to the planning Inspectorate, officers advised that they had tried to echo and build on the Central Government guidance around the design on better buildings.

7. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) – Final Budget and Rent Setting 2023/24

Members were advised that there had been a change to one of the recommendations at Executive relating to additional service charge income. The charges would now only be payable for the last 6 weeks of 2022/23 and would be reflected in the report to Council on 25 February for final approval.

In response to a question about future liability for damp and mould cases, Officers advised that within the budget, additional money had been set aside for damp and mould and compliance issues and a full refresh of the Business Plan would be undertaken.

Officers also confirmed that the progress on the Council's approach to damp and mould had been reported to the Community Select Committee. There had been a significant improvement over the past 4 to 5 years on how cases

of damp and mould were dealt with. A spike in cases had been seen partly due to the Cost of Living crisis and the impact it was having on people being able to heat their homes. Further requirements from the Government were expected but the Council was building in capacity to be able to do further work.

The work of the Community Select Committee in conjunction with officers, particularly the Council's Investment Programme Manager, in addressing this issue was acknowledged by the Committee.

8. Draft General Fund and Council Tax Setting 2023/24

In response to a question, officers confirmed that in accordance with the Government's guidelines this year, the Council would be imposing a 2.99% increase rather than the £5 on Band D properties as this would raise an additional £63.5k for the Council.

9. Draft Capital Strategy 2022/23 – 2027/28

Noted.

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

None.

5 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

Not required.

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 - 13 DECEMBER 2022

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 13 December 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

8 **PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE**

12. Part II Minutes – Executive – 7 December 2022

Noted.

13. Sundry Debt and Housing Benefit Overpayments Write Offs Greater than £10,000

The Strategic Director (CF) answered a number of Members' questions in relation to this item.

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

None.

10 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR