

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**SPECIAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Thursday 2 March 2017

Time: 6.00 p.m.

Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors L Martin-Haugh (Chair), J Brown, M Downing,
M Gardner, J Hollywell, A Mitchell, and R Parker CC

Start / End Time Start Time: 6.00 p.m.
 End Time: 7.20 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P Bibby, E Harrington and C Saunders. There were no declarations of interest.

2. NEW HOMES BONUS PROPSALS

This report had not been circulated 5 clear days before the meeting, nor had it been available for public inspection. The Chair determined however that given the need to provide comment to the Executive meeting on 14 March in order that the initiatives could be implemented with effect from 1st April, it be accepted on this occasion.

Some Members commented that because the report had only been circulated to them electronically on the day of the meeting and a hard copy tabled at the meeting they had not had sufficient time to consider all of the New Homes Bonus proposals sufficiently to be able to comment fully on them. Members asked that this be recorded. Members were informed by the Assistant Director Finance and Estates that if they let her know (prior to the report being uploaded for the Executive) any comments regarding the specific New Homes Bonus proposals these would be included in the report to the March Executive, and if they had any subsequent comments they wished to make then these could still be incorporated orally by her to the Executive. The Assistant Director Finance and Estates also provided Members with an explanation as to how the changes made by the Government had impacted on the amount of New Homes Bonus monies that were now available and how the monies awarded had now been reduced from six years to four years.

Initiative 1: Enhancing Life Chances

In response to a question Officers confirmed that Baby Boxes included essential items such as clothes, nappies etc. which would assist the parents of vulnerable infants. The Children's Services Manager stated that the exact details of the initiative were still being discussed with relevant agencies and partners such as Children Centre Staff, CAB, Health Visitors. Members welcomed this initiative and the broader investment which will help address child poverty locally.

Initiative 2: Stevenage Festival of Cycling (CycleFest – First and Best)

In response to a question from Members, officers agreed to investigate if it would be possible to update and reprint the cycle way map and the pages on the SBC web site and discuss cycle network issues with the County Council ahead of the event. If improvements could be made more people may take up cycling. Members warmly welcomed this initiative noting it would be the third year of events which was raising the towns profile nationally and internationally and putting Stevenage on the map for cycling.

Initiative 3: Acknowledge the end of World War 1

Officers agreed to amend the wording of the summary to replace the sentence "celebrate the end of the war" and replace this with commemorate or a similar phrase. Other than this comment Members expressed support for this initiative.

Initiative 4: No More Service

The Assistant Director Housing & Investment explained to Members the background to this initiative which had previously been funded by New Homes Bonus funds. The project was making a significant impact to the lives of those supported by its interventions. In the two years from January 2015 to December 2016 the project had supported 111 clients and made numerous referrals to other services. No More Service offers a comprehensive 1 to 1 service helping people with important life skills.

Members supported this initiative but asked why this work locally was not also being supported financially by the NHS and the County Council as they were all benefiting from this work and investment in reduced visits to hospital and Social Services.

Members commented that paragraph 4.17 was hard to understand so suggested that it be reworded to be made clearer.

Initiative 5: Homelessness Initiative 'Next Steps' – extension of 2016/17 initiative

The Assistant Director Housing & Investment provided Members with an outline of this ongoing initiative. Members overall welcomed this initiative but with some reservations. Members questioned whether by offering a financial incentive to local private landlords this was not distorting the market. The Assistant Director Housing &

Investment stated that the amount on offer to landlords was modest compared to the £3k to £4k offered by London Boroughs, whereas the Council offered in the region of £400 to landlords to sign up with the authority.

Members questioned officers about possible exit strategies when the New Homes Bonus funds were no longer available? The Assistant Director Finance and Estates stated that the Council would need to evaluate the success of the initiative and at that point make a decision on whether to keep the same level of service but resource it centrally.

Members asked the officer to amend a typographical error at paragraph 4.18.

Initiative 6: Woodland Burials

The Services Manager, Street Scene & Amenities, answered questions that Members raised about this initiative, such as how the scheme would work, whether remains are buried in existing woodland, and are individual trees planted above remains? The Services Manager, Street Scene & Amenities informed Members that the area was yet to be selected but some sites were being considered but would be subject to a planning application for change of use. The area used would not be existing woodland. Members asked if the officer could investigate whether plaques with identification numbers could be used on trees rather than crosses or plaques in the ground which can become messy when they rot and the officer agreed to consider this suggestion.

Initiative 7: Neighbourhood Wardens

It was reported by the Strategic Director & Deputy Chief Executive that this initiative and funding would cover a third warden for a second year. The Strategic Director & Deputy Chief Executive agreed to circulate more information on this initiative to Members. It was noted that the post holders would predominantly work out in the community and not be office based.

Members asked officers to amend some typographical errors at paragraph 4.27.

Initiative 8: Apprenticeship Programme 2017/18 new cohort

Members were in support of this initiative to continue to offer an apprenticeship programme. The Interim Senior HR Manager informed Members that the New Home Bonus element of the funding paid for 6 of the Council's 14 apprentices.

Members commented on the options available for crèche facilities under childcare provision linked to the Employer of Choice FTFC Programme. The Interim Senior HR Manager noted that this was not directly linked to this initiative but welcomed a discussion on the merits of providing childcare provision in a new Public Sector Hub as part of the Town Centre Regeneration as a potential income stream to the Council. In response to a question Members were informed that this potentially would be the last year that the Apprenticeship Programme would be funded from New Homes

Bonus funds and that the aim was to incorporate apprentices into Senior Management Reviews (SMR2) from 2018.

Initiative 9: Funding to facilitate new Residents Groups

In response to a Member comment the Strategic Director & Deputy Chief Executive agreed that the title should be amended to perhaps drop the term “new” from the title as it was envisaged that this fund would predominantly be used to support residents groups, whether new or existing. The Strategic Director & Deputy Chief Executive stated that this initiative would require a scope to establish what support could be provided to the residents’ groups and noted that an audit of existing groups had recently been undertaken. Given the Council’s Cooperative ambitions it was suggested that this scope be pulled together in conjunction with current existing Residents’ Groups. The support required would vary as it would be difficult to provide generic support as each group has developed its own working practices, for instance some currently require officer support and others, when offered have declined.

A Member commented that they found it very difficult to support this initiative or make any further comment without more information as the detail provided was brief.

Initiative 10: Co-operative Neighbourhood Management

In response to a request for some information on how the areas were agreed for allocation, the Strategic Director & Deputy Chief Executive agreed to circulate to Members the priority Ward order list. The Strategic Director & Deputy Chief Executive reminded Members that the origin of this FTFC programme came about following the ward walks undertaken by the senior officer team and Members that had identified needs across the whole town.

Initiative 11: Memorial for Cllr Sherma Batson

Members noted the initiative to honour the memory of Councillor Sherma Batson with a lasting tribute for her work for the Council and Stevenage as a whole.

It was **RESOLVED** that the comments of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee would be reported to the Executive by the Assistant Director (Finance & Estates)

3. URGENT PART I BUSINESS

As detailed above at Item 2, the Chair had agreed to take the New Homes Bonus report as Urgent Business.

4. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Not required.

5. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None

Chair