

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Tuesday 21 March 2017

Time: 6.00 p.m.

Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors L Martin-Haugh (Chair), P Bibby (Vice Chair), J Brown, M Downing, M Gardner, E Harrington, J Hollywell, S Mead, A Mitchell, and P Stuart.

Start / End Time Start Time: 6.00 p.m.
 End Time: 8.25 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C Latif, R Parker CC and C Saunders.

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES – OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 15 DECEMBER 2016

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 23 February 2017 are approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. 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 2 March 2017, it be considered on this occasion.

- **Discretionary Rate Relief Business Rates** - The Executive noted that this Committee had expressed concern that some national charities that had a presence in the Town might be excluded from entitlement, and it had been requested that details of these organisations be submitted to this Committee to consider whether or not the provision of services to local people could be demonstrated and then make a recommendation to the Executive.
- **Property Investment Strategy** - The Assistant Director (Finance and Estates)

referred to the 'Functional Economic Market Areas' quoted in the report and advised that maps of the defined areas were available if Members would like to see them.

- **Corporate Performance for Quarter Three 2016/17** - The Assistant Director (Corporate Service and Transformation) reported on the Corporate Performance Suite specifically where there were areas for improvement:
 - It was noted that the performance for the time taken to re-let sheltered void properties was skewed by hard-to-let properties. Officers advised that a feasibility study was underway to look at what improvements could be made to the hard to let properties to make them more desirable;
 - The measure for homelessness preventions was also underperforming. The Assistant Director (Housing & Investment) explained that cases coming forward had increased and were often more complex.
 - It was noted that the target for the use of agency staff was not going to be achieved as there were a number of senior vacancies following the Senior Management Review and also covering for sickness, particularly in Direct Services. Members were advised that Assistant Directors had been tasked with reducing the reliance on agency staff within their own areas. In response to a question, Officers advised that agency staff were entitled to the same terms and conditions as SBC employees after 12 weeks of working for the Council.
 - Concerning sickness absence levels, Officers indicated that the new HR system being introduced would provide statistics and trend analysis in real time which would aid performance management in this area. Members expressed concern that the average figures reported did not reflect the types of absence as one instance of long-term sickness in a section would affect the average of the whole team. Officers advised that the Absence Management Policy was to be refreshed and that the Senior Leadership Team would be looking at how to improve the process as well as the average days lost through sickness.
 - It was noted that although the quarter 3 performance for the percentage of complaints progressing to stages 2 and 3 did not reach target, the figures to be confirmed for the end of February were within the target. In response to a question officers advised that the majority of complaints received by the Council were in relation to Housing and Environmental Services and that those complaints reaching Stage 3 were mainly related to the Housing Service. Steps, however, were in place to improve the way complaints were dealt with, with early resolution a priority for the Service. It was also recognised that the incoming Assistant Director (Direct Services) had to consider the resolution and management of complaints as a priority. It was agreed that a review of the complaints procedure should be added to the work programme for this Committee for the upcoming year.
 - It was noted that the Community Safety Partnership and the Community Select Committee had recently received detailed reports on crime trends, including Anti-Social Behaviour and the rate of violence against the person. The Committee noted that the figures were seasonal and

incidents were higher during the summer months and lower in the winter.

- **New Homes Bonus – 2017/18 Scheme Allocations** - The Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) circulated a paper detailing a summary of changes to the New Homes Bonus Report from the Special Meeting of this Committee on 2 March and Executive on 14 March 2017.
- **3rd Quarter Monitoring Report General Fund and Housing Revenue Account**
- **2016/17 Third Quarter Capital Strategy Update**
- **Town Centre Regeneration – Delivering the First Phase (SG1)** - The Strategic Director updated the Committee on the progress of the first stage of the Town Centre regeneration, known as SG1.

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

4. 2017/18 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Officer submitted a report requesting agreement for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme for the new Municipal Year.

Following consideration of suggestions for future scrutiny review items from both Members and Residents, it was **RESOLVED**:

1. That Scrutiny Members' feedback on ideas for improving Scrutiny (see section 4 of the Officer's report) be noted.
2. That having considered ideas put forward by individual Members, and from the public (see section 5 of the report), the Committee agree the following subject matters to be added to a 'long list' work programme of potential Scrutiny reviews items for 2017/2018:
 - **Consultation/Communication** – the results of the Communications LGA Peer Review to be reported back to a joint meeting of this Committee and the Community Select Committee;
 - **Scrutinise the Scrutiny Process** – the recommendations of the Parliamentary Select Committee which is currently looking at Scrutiny in a national context to be reported to this Committee in due course but it was not felt that this should be a scrutiny review item;
 - **Golf Club** – once the wider review of SLL has been completed, a report to come back to this Committee with the findings which would incorporate the Golf Club.
 - **Review of the Complaints Procedure** – Following consideration of the Performance Report, it be agreed that the Council's Complaints Procedure be added to the work programme.
3. That the comments regarding the Future Town Future Council programme and the relationship between Scrutiny and the officer Senior Leadership Team (see section 5.4 & 5.5 respectively) be noted.

4. That the following Policy Development work identified so far for the Committee be agreed:

- Digital Strategy
- Co-operative Council Commitment Refresh (Summer 2017)
- Consultation Strategy (Autumn 2017)
- HR Related Policies and Strategies (including the use of agency staff)

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

None

6. URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None

7. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was **RESOLVED** that:

1. Under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it 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 Local Government (Access to information) (Variation) Order 2006.
2. Members having considered the reasons for the following reports being in Part II and determined that the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

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 2 March 2017, it be considered on this occasion.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following Part II decisions of the Executive taken on 14 March 2017 are noted:

1. That the Part II decisions of the Executive taken on 14 March 2017 are noted.
2. That a copy of the final letter sent to all Leaseholders regarding the Payment Options be sent to all Members of this Committee for their information.

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

None

10. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None

Chair