

**Meeting: COUNCIL**

**Council Agenda  
Item:**

**Date: 18 JULY 2012**

**15**

## **SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2011/2012**

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### **1. PURPOSE**

To report on the work undertaken by the Development and Scrutiny Committees during the 2011/12 Municipal Year.

### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That the work undertaken by the Development and Scrutiny Committees during 2011/12 be noted.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000 Overview and Scrutiny's role is to operate as an independent function of the Council's decision making process, by having overview of the Council's decision making, holding the Executive to account, having the power to "call in" decisions for reconsideration, undertake internal and external scrutiny reviews.
- 3.2 The Council's Constitution requires that there be an annual report to Council on the scrutiny activity over the past Municipal Year (see Article 6.3 of the Constitution).
- 3.3 In the 2011/12 Municipal Year the Scrutiny function was conducted by 7 Development and Scrutiny Committees. This was the first year of a new Scrutiny Committee structure, prior to 2011/12 Scrutiny was undertaken in one off "Topic Groups" who reported to a single Scrutiny Overview Committee.
- 3.4 This report is a retrospective look at the scrutiny review work undertaken by the seven Development and Scrutiny Committees during 2011-12, which mirror the Executive Portfolio areas of:
- Children and Young People, Culture, Sport and Leisure
  - Community, Health and Older People
  - Economy, Enterprise and Transport

- Environment and Regeneration
- Housing
- Resources
- Safer and Stronger Communities

3.4.1 The Committees have worked with their relevant Executive Portfolio Holders Developing Policies and considering reports before their submission to the Executive. This report, however, focuses on the Committees' Scrutiny role.

#### **4. SUMMARY OF DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REVIEWS FOR 2011/2012**

4.1 Throughout the 2011/12 Municipal Year the Development and Scrutiny Committees carried out 6 Scrutiny reviews, which were conducted over 18 meetings, they also met on 15 separate occasions to agree and amend work plan items and sign off review reports. The Development and Scrutiny Committees also met on a further 10 occasions to conduct Budget and Policy Framework scrutiny and respond to formal consultation. Overall the Development and Scrutiny Committees held 43 Scrutiny meetings during the 2011/12 Municipal Year. The Development and Scrutiny Committees also met on a further 11 occasions to carry out Policy Development work. A list of all Development and Scrutiny Committee meetings are detailed at Appendix A.

4.2 Each Development and Scrutiny Committee review made recommendations to the relevant Executive Member, officers and external partners. This process has been fully reported to each of the Development and Scrutiny Committees and recorded in its agenda papers and Minutes. The following is a summary of the outcomes of each scrutiny review.

#### **4.3 Children and Young People, Culture, Sport and Leisure Development and Scrutiny Committee – Review of Stevenage Leisure Limited**

In conducting this review the Scrutiny Members received written and oral evidence from the following people:

Aidan Sanderson, SBC Head of Leisure, Community and Children's Services  
 Geoff Caine, SBC Leisure Services Manager  
 Jon Stone, Marketing Director, Stevenage Leisure Limited  
 Keiron Vango, Operations Director, Stevenage Leisure Limited  
 Audrey Salisbury, Contract Manager, Stevenage Leisure Limited  
 Cllr Howard Burrell, Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People, Culture, Sport and Leisure  
 Christine Neyndorff, Director at Herts Sports and Physical Activity Partnership – University of Hertfordshire

The findings and key recommendations of this review were that the Council and SLL should consider:

- exploring the screening of 'art house' films at the theatre to tap into niche or special interest groups
- adopting a 'critical friend' to help review the theatre programme
- ways SLL can further work with its partners to raise public involvement levels in Stevenage
- further utilising the type of innovative marketing and improved signage that it carried out for promotion of the Pantomime as a projection on the side of the Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre building
- more subsidised 'bring a friend' events/offers, utilising the 'word of mouth' marketing, as this is often the most effective marketing tool
- staging specific events that encourage young people to attend, with perhaps a limited number of free tickets for young people or children, to encourage families to attend who might not otherwise use the facilities.
- looking at ways of enhancing SLL's Google position
- refreshing the regular publicity advert in the Comet
- offer an affordable rate for hard pressed local families to use the High Ropes Facility
- That the Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People, Culture, Sport & Leisure consider the provision of an awning at Fairlands Valley Lakes Café to further enhance the facility
- That the Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People, Culture, Sport & Leisure consider offering to SLL to take over the running of the Ridlins Athletic facility

#### 4.4 **Community, Health and Older People Development and Scrutiny Committee – Review of Smokebusters**

In conducting this review the Scrutiny Members received written and oral evidence from the following people:

Marilyn Emerson, SBC Policy Officer Health and Wellbeing  
 Karen Griffiths, SBC Corporate Policy Partnerships Team Leader  
 Cllr Sherma Batson, Portfolio Holder for Community, Health and Older People  
 Wendy Tooke, NHS Herts Tobacco Control Co-ordinator  
 Michelle Constable, Herts Stop Smoking Services

The Committee had intended to interview representatives from a number of other organisations who had taken part in the Smokebusters campaign but were unable to make any of the 3 meeting dates.

The findings and key recommendations of this review were:

- There is potential for closer partnership working, especially from Children's Services at HCC. If the programme is repeated it would be hoped that Children's Services would be more active in liaising between the schools and SBC
- Look at ways that there could be links made with the Healthy Schools initiative (Marriotts School) if Smokebusters is repeated

- SBC should review its own policies to see how “smoke-free” friendly the Council is to staff and Members? Its important that the Council does all it can to be positive about helping staff to quit smoking if it is seen to have any credibility when asking residents to consider stop smoking. Officers to further investigate what measures are being taken to influence staff and Members to stop smoking
- Staff should be reminded of the requirement to sign out to take smoke breaks and should not be allowed to stand directly outside the building to smoke, nor should they be recognisable as employees. In parallel with this there should be increased support for those members of staff wishing to give up smoking
- Utilise SBC publications and web site to let residents know the cost of smoking on local services (litter) and what this money could be spent on alternatively
- Invite Stop Smoking Services (currently NHS but will transfer across to HCC by April 2013 – pending NHS Reforms legislation) to provide training session for SBC Members and staff, in order that more people can promote and deliver the Stop Smoking Service. Also Training would raise awareness of the service as not all Members on the Working Group knew that there was a drop-in service at Daneshill Reception
- Ensure that all Stevenage Children’s Centres have access to the Herts Stop Smoking training package (as free of charge to Children’s Centres)
- Ensure that there is an active link with the Stevenage Educational Trust and that this is maintained with ongoing dialogue
- That should the Council repeat Smokebusters or a similar health programme, that the Health and Wellbeing Policy Officer be recommended to consider extending the age range of School visits to encompass the 13 – 15 age range of pupils in addition to the year six visits, as Members felt that the 13 – 15 age range was the age that many young people take up smoking

#### **4.5 Economy, Enterprise and Transport Development and Scrutiny Committee – Review of Inward Investment and Business Support**

In conducting this review the Scrutiny Members received written and oral evidence from the following people:

Cllr Ralph Raynor, Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport  
 Viv Evans, SBC Head of Planning Regeneration & Transport  
 Neil Cuttall, SBC Regeneration Manager  
 Liz Dand, SBC Economic Development Officer

Chris Pichon, Chief Executive, WENTA  
Paul Maguire, MD of a public relations marketing company based at the  
Stevenage Business and Technology Centre

The findings and key recommendations of this review were:

- That when Government guidance is issued on the changes to locally determine Business Rates (from April 2013) a meeting be arranged with the Federation of Small Businesses to explore ways the Council can be flexible to encourage Small and Medium Sized Enterprises into the area.
- That the Council build upon the opportunity provided by the New Homes Bonus to provide more apprenticeships and employment opportunities for young people in future years.
- That the Council investigate ways that it can support more local businesses via its procurement for goods and services (especially under the £75k ceiling).
- That Stevenage Borough Council promote and advertise the 'Supply Hertfordshire' website.
- That Officers consider ways, including face to face meetings, to provide more promotion and marketing of the Business Technology Centre 'My Incubator' around the neighbourhood shops and indoor market.
- That a promotional DVD video clip be created as a link from the SBC website and linked from other relevant sites to give a flavour of the diverse businesses based in the town and the opportunities that new companies choosing to base themselves in the town could enjoy.
- That Officers from Legal and Environmental Health contact the owner of the former Kodak building requesting that efforts be made to tidy the appearance of the site.
- That Officers consider ways in which the Council and its partners could support the locally skilled workforce in Stevenage to take advantage of employment opportunities when they arise.
- That, where economically viable and with regard to long-term payback of the initial investment, the Council incorporate sustainable building methods into any future building projects.

#### **4.6 Environment and Regeneration Development and Scrutiny Committee – Review of Use of Garage Compounds for Parking**

In conducting this review the Scrutiny Members received written and oral evidence from the following people:

Cllr John Gardner, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration  
Cllr Joan Lloyd, Portfolio Holder for Resources  
Keith Brown, SBC Head of Property and Estates  
Kevin Clark, SBC Principal Estates Manager  
Carlo Perricone, SBC Property Manager  
Viv Evans, SBC Head of Planning, Transport and Regeneration  
Robert Woodisse, SBC Principal Engineer

The findings and key recommendations of this review were:

- That the Portfolio Holders for Resources and Environment and Regeneration instruct officers to undertake a consultation exercise based around the four compounds identified in Chells, as detailed in the report with consultation questions based on the following issues
  - What would encourage people to use the compounds, e.g.
    - Cost
    - Improvements to security and lighting
    - Implementation of roadway parking restrictions
  - Would people be interested in acquiring land (in the compound) for self-build garages?
  - What form of 'protection' should there be for dedicated spaces?:
    - Lockable posts
    - Permits
- That should the Portfolio Holders agree to undertake consultation as recommended at 4.2 that the results of the consultation be shared with the Environment and Regeneration Development and Scrutiny Committee and that the Committee make further recommendations at that time based on the consultation findings
- If there is a favourable response to consultation, that the Chells garage compounds be used as a test case to gauge public reaction, and where possible the consultation be rolled out to other areas of the town, (being mindful that each area has unique challenges and may not lend themselves to the solution being consulted upon in Chells)
- Use the findings of the consultation and study to provide a benchmark for Shephall when the traffic restrictions are delivered in that area
- If the Consultation in Chells is acted upon that any refurbishments which provide additional lighting columns that they be equipped with a spur to allow the deployment of CCTV should vandalism become an issue
- If subsequently any works are carried out in the undeveloped garage compounds that as a minimum parking bays should be marked out to prevent parking from becoming a 'free for all'

#### 4.7 **Resources Development and Scrutiny Committee – Review of Treasury Management**

In conducting this review the Scrutiny Members received written and oral evidence from the following people:

Scott Crudgington, SBC Strategic Director (Resources)

Clare Fletcher, SBC Assistant Director Finance

Independent challenge was provided by Andy Cavanagh, Head of Finance, North Herts District Council.

The findings and key recommendations of this review were:

- Members concluded that using the Audit Commission's 'Risk and Return' best practise guidance as a guide then Stevenage Borough Council's Treasury Management procedures were offering the right expertise, based on the knowledge of key finance staff at the authority, the prudent low risk approach to investment (given the low yields to investment currently available), linked to the daily monitoring of financial markets, the regular TM reporting to the Executive and Audit Committee and the challenge offered by the Audit Committee.
- That the current practises and procedures regarding Treasury Management at Stevenage Borough Council be commended to the Resources Portfolio Holder
- That when information is available and at an appropriate stage Officers provide Resources Development and Scrutiny Members with more information on how long term partnerships with private sector investors could be developed to finance large scale capital infrastructure projects that are beyond the current means of a district council
- That Members of the Resources Development and Scrutiny committee be trained in the Council's Finances and Treasury Management. If agreed by the Portfolio Holder, Officers to investigate if a CIPFA representative could be booked to facilitate a training session with these Members.

#### 4.8 **Statutory Crime and Disorder Committee – Safer and Stronger Communities Development and Scrutiny Committee – Review of Anti Social Behaviour**

In conducting this review the Scrutiny Members received written and oral evidence from the following people:

Karen Griffiths, SBC Corporate Policy Partnerships Team Leader

Iman Heflin-Scott, SBC Community Safety Officer

Debbie Barker, SBC Community Safety Officer

Cllr Richard Henry, Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities

Cllr Ann Webb, Portfolio Holder for Housing  
Cllr Brian Underwood, Ward Councillor for Bedwell  
Richard Protheroe, SBC Head of Housing, Partnerships and Communications  
Debbie Rabot, Director of Housing Management, Stevenage Homes Limited  
Debbie Redman, Business Manager – Tenancy Services, Stevenage Homes Limited  
Inspector Simon Tabert, Stevenage Safer Neighbourhood Team, Herts Constabulary

The findings and key recommendations of this review were:

- A better exchange of live information with Ward Members is required – Officers to explore ways that this can be achieved without breaching confidentiality issues or the Polices' operational position. (A discussion would need to be entered into between Members and Officers to agree a protocol which would need to address the logistics of this proposal – perhaps identifying where and when Members wished to be kept informed rather than a blanket approach to all cases and all Ward Members was the way forward)
- An all Member training event be arranged on the Management of ASB (including Evictions resulting from ASB), explaining the evidence required to establish an eviction and where evictions sit in the possible actions available to the Council and what are the implications of evictions.
- A dedicated PR/media campaign be devised to tackle the public's perception of how SHL and the Council and its partners tackle ASB – to include an element of public education around evidence requirements – what is needed and what can be done, in order to manage expectations.
- RAG to look at ways that initiatives and projects that tackle the root causes of ASB such as advice on life skills and tackling alcohol misuse could be supported.
- Members wished to support a growth bid for 2012/13 that would protect the gap in funding to support current arrangements – It's too big and issue and priority for residents as evidenced each year in the Community Conference and Community Strategy to be left in a vulnerable position because of national cuts to funding. Members also suggested that officers look at how the long term non housing ASB is funded, any future funding arrangements should provide an equitable service to all and not be tenure specific.
- The reintroduction of the Housing Service will provide an opportunity to further strengthen the Council's approach to dealing with ASB. The Head of Housing, Partnerships and Communications is asked to address this issue.



- Safer and Stronger Communities Development and Scrutiny Committees be given the opportunity to meet with Housing Officers and comment on emerging work on the Tenancy Agreement during the 2012/13 Municipal Year, the Head of Housing, Partnerships and Communications to advise Members regarding the timing of when this would be appropriate.
- That Officers from Housing, Partnerships and Communications and Stevenage Homes liaise with the Police to see how Street Meets and Environmental Action Days could be better aligned and that this discussion addresses the issue of their timing.

#### 4.9 Scrutiny of Budget and Policy Framework Items:

Throughout the year the Resources and or the Housing Development and Scrutiny Committee carried out Budget and Policy Framework Scrutiny as required by the Constitution, these included scrutiny of:

- Medium Term Financial Strategy on 3 August 2011 (Resources D&S Committee) Scrutiny offered challenge around a wide range of budget governance issues, including; scenarios when reserves would ever be used; support for local businesses or community groups; debt write offs; local business rates; HCC Concessionary fares; HRA investment gap; sustainability of the Council's finances; projection of year on year 10% utility increases.
- Savings and Growth Options on 28 November 2011 (Resources D&S Committee) The Committee scrutinised the savings and growth option bids, both successful and unsuccessful, that were considered by the Leader's Services Priority Group prior to consideration by the Executive and Council.
- Rent Setting on 15 December 2011 (Resources & Housing D&S Committees meeting jointly) Scrutiny Members offered challenge around the development of a rent policy to help Members determine the level of rents in future years to take account of rent convergence between RSL and Council Tenants.
- Decent Homes on 19 January 2012 (Resources & Housing D&S Committees meeting jointly) The two Committees met jointly to scrutinise the arrangements for the procurement process of the awarding of the new decent homes internal works contracts.
- The General Fund Budget on 19 January 2012 (Resources D&S Committee) The Committee scrutinised the draft proposals for the 2012/13 Council Tax Setting and General Fund Budget. Members sought clarification and asked questions on a number of issues, including: use of cash reserve balances (internal borrowing) over external loans; new homes bonus; inflation assumptions for increases in NI.

- New Homes Bonus on 29 March 2012 (Resources D&S Committee)  
The Committee asked a number of detailed questions about how the New Homes Bonus scheme would work in Stevenage, with a view that as many first time buyers could be helped to own their homes in Stevenage.

#### 4.10 **Monitoring outcomes from previous reviews**

The Development and Scrutiny Committees will receive a response from the relevant portfolio holder(s) to the reviews completed in the 2011-12 Municipal Year, which will be considered by each Committee. A number of meetings have also been scheduled in for the monitoring of older reviews under the former Topic Groups to monitor progress.

### 5. **OTHER ISSUES**

#### 5.1 **SoScrutiny Scrutiny Planning Conference - Friday 10 February 2012**

In February 2012 the Council held a Scrutiny Conference which included Executive Members, Scrutiny Members, various partner organisations and stakeholders. Its purpose was to provide ideas on what Members and Partners would like the 7 Development & Scrutiny Committees to focus on in the following Municipal Year (2012-13). The outcome of the Conference then fed into the 7 D&S Committee meetings held during March and April, where they agreed their work plans for 2012-13.

- 5.2 The SoScrutiny event also provided Members and Partners with an opportunity to consider new ways of developing Community Engagement methods to better include the public and stakeholders in the scrutiny process. A summary of these methods is appended to the report at Appendix B. The methods that can be utilised quickly will be using the Council's website as a means of gathering opinions regarding ongoing reviews, also D&S Committees will utilise existing groups and networks in the community meeting them in their own environment.

#### 5.3 **Training**

A training programme was drawn up between the Scrutiny Officer and the Training and Development Manager that all Scrutiny Members were invited to attend. 65 Members attended over the four training sessions.

Training was provided by two trainers from the South East Employers Organisation. They training covered (i) Chairing and Leadership Skills (Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Development and Scrutiny Committees) on 16 June 2011; (ii) Questioning Skills on 28 July 2011; (iii) Evaluation, Research and Evidence Skills on 13 October 2011 and (iv) Community Engagement Skills on 6 February 2012.

## 5.4 2012/2013 Scrutiny Workplan

The 7 Development & Scrutiny Committees have agreed their Scrutiny work plan items for the 2012/13 Municipal Year.

- Children and Young People, Culture, Sport and Leisure - The Museum
- Community, Health and Older People - Access to GP Surgeries
- Economy, Enterprise and Transport - Employment & Training in Stevenage
- Environment and Regeneration – Fixed Penalty Notices
- Housing – Homelessness
- Resources – Budget & Policy Framework Items
- Safer and Stronger Communities – Night Time Economy

A schedule of meetings for the 7 Development and Scrutiny Committees has been agreed for the 2012-13 Municipal Year. Scoping for individual reviews is being undertaken prior to reviews and submitted to the first meeting of each D&S Committee during the Municipal Year.

- 5.4.1 Policy Development work will be undertaken as and when requested by Executive Portfolio Holders in consultation with Strategic Directors and Heads of Service.

## 6 IMPLICATIONS

### 6.1 Financial Implications

There is a budget of £2,500 to support study activities, site visits and specialist advice and training where necessary.

### 6.2 Legal Implications

Any legislative changes during the 2012-13 Municipal Year will be reported to the Development and Scrutiny Committees regarding any legal changes to the function and impact it could have on the authority.

## BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Local Government Act 2000

## APPENDICES

Appendix A – A list of all Development and Scrutiny Committee meetings are detailed at Appendix A.

Appendix B – Summary of methods of community engagement that were discussed during the 10 February 2012, SoScrutiny Scrutiny Planning Conference.