

## STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

### ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

**Date: Monday 4 July 2016**

**Time: 6:00 pm**

**Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage**

**Present:** Members: M Downing (Chair), M Hurst (Vice-Chair),  
D Bainbridge, R Broom, J Brown, J Fraser,  
E Harrington, A McGuinness and P Stuart.

**In Attendance:**

**Start/End Time:** Start Time: 6:00 pm  
End Time: 7:30 pm

#### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor J Fraser.

Cllr A McGuinness declared a personal interest as he rented an allotment from Stevenage Borough Council (SBC).

The Chair informed the Committee that as the Interim Head of Regeneration was unavailable the order of business would be altered, so that item 5 would be considered before item 4.

An update on the BTC Scrutiny Review from the Executive Member for Economy, Enterprise and Transport was circulated before the commencement of the meeting.

#### **2. TERMS OF REFERENCE**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Terms of Reference of the Environment & Economy Select Committee approved by Annual Council on 24 May 2016 are noted.

#### **3. MINUTES – 22 MARCH 2016**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Environment & Economy Select Committee held on 22 March 2016 are approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### **4. EXECUTIVE PORTFOLIO RESPONSE TO BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY CENTRE (BTC) REVIEW**

The Committee considered the Executive Portfolio Holder's response to the review of the BTC, together with an update.

The Committee was of the view that the original response could have been more positive but appreciated that the update given had been more constructive as it put into context the review recommendations against activity that is being planned regarding economic development and the town centre regeneration.

The Portfolio Holder's response had indicated that the information regarding the breakdown of the duration of time companies had been based at the Business Technology Centre (BTC) was not available at this time and Members enquired when this might be available. Additionally Members asked when the data on the Equalities & Diversity profiling would begin to be recorded.

The Committee were concerned not so much that many of their suggestions had not been pursued, which the Executive Member is entitled to do, but that the points made were not comprehensively addressed. However, the Committee welcomed the report on the Review of Town Centre Management in Stevenage going to Executive on 12 July 2016, which linked to the review recommendations and were detailed in the Assistant Director Regeneration's update on behalf of the Executive Portfolio Holder.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Executive Portfolio response to BTC review be noted.

## **5. DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENT & PRESENTATION – SCRUTINY REVIEW INTO ALLOTMENTS**

Council A McGuinness had declared a Personal Interest in this matter as he rented an allotment from the Council.

The Environmental Performance & Development Manager (EPDM) gave a presentation regarding allotments owned by SBC. Notably, the presentation focused on the following areas: benefits and challenges; allotment uptake; SBC rents compared to the other district Councils in Hertfordshire; costs to SBC for maintaining allotments; feedback from residents of Stevenage who were users of allotments and the future of allotments.

In response to Members' questions the EPDM reported that the largest [in terms of area] allotment site was Broxdell and that there was an uneven distribution of allotment sites throughout Stevenage due to historic siting of buildings and land availability issues. That SBC was presently developing its Allotment Strategy 2016-2026.

The EPDM committed to provide a comparison of the total area of the combined allotments of Stevenage against other districts in Hertfordshire.

Members drew attention to the high operating costs of the allotments in 2015/16, specifically the allocation of £33,707 towards central charges and depreciation. The Head of Environmental Services explained that the

reason for this allocation was an accounting technicality and that Finance officers would be able to explain this in detail. Therefore, the Scrutiny Officer agreed to arrange a future meeting where officers from Finance would be invited as witnesses to provide an analysis of how the allocations of charges were arrived at.

Members welcomed a suggestion for a site visit to allotments with the Scrutiny Officer advising that this would be scheduled and Members would be advised of the date.

Pertaining to the Scoping Document Members wished to add to the focus of the review questions such as:

1. Would it be possible for a demographic breakdown (such as age ranges) of the allotment users?
2. What were the governance arrangements between SBC and Stevenage Gardens and Allotments Association (SGAA)?
3. Would it be possible to explore the possibility of Community Ownership of Allotments?
4. Could Members look at the process for removing an allotment holder (notice to quit procedures)?

It was noted that the recent 2014 user survey would be a good piece of evidence for the review. It was agreed that this document would be circulated to Members.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Scoping Document, with the above amendments, be noted.

## **6. ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME AND DRAFT MEETING SCHEDULE FOR 2016-17**

The Scrutiny Officer indicated that he would liaise with Members regarding future dates for meetings.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Committee would note the Environment & Economy Select Committee Work Programme and draft Meeting Schedule for 2016-17.

## **7. URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

## **8. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Not required.

**9. URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

**CHAIR**