

**STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**MINUTES**

**Date: Wednesday 11 September 2013**

**Time: 6.00 p.m.**

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

Present: Councillors J Thomas (Chair), J Brown, M Cherney-Craw,  
G Clark, J Hollywell, R Parker CC, S Speller, P Stuart,  
H Tessier and S Walker.

Start / End Time      Start Time: 6.00 p.m.  
                                 End Time: 7.40 p.m.

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Hearn and B Underwood.

The Committee extended its best wishes to Councillor Underwood and wished him a speedy recovery.

There were no declarations of interest.

**2. SUMMARY OF DECISIONS – OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 29 AUGUST 2013**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Summary of Decisions from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 29 August 2013 be noted.

**3. PART 1 DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE**

The Committee had before it the agenda and reports from the meeting of the Executive held on 3 September together with the Notice of Decisions as published after the meeting.

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 period of time left before the end of the call-in period on 11 September 2013, it be considered on this occasion.

## **Treasury Management Review 2012/2013**

The Strategic Director (Resources) presented the Executive report which detailed the Council's capital expenditure for 2012/13 together with the impact of that expenditure on the Council's underlying level of debt and how the level of borrowing to meet expenditure had impacted on investment balances.

The Committee was advised that due to low interest rates for investments the Council had used some of its cash reserves rather than borrow money to fund part of its capital expenditure.

The Committee was further advised that Officers would be unwilling to allow the Council's cash reserves to fall any lower than its current level.

Members then asked a number of detailed questions about the report which were answered by the officer.

## **1st Quarter Monitoring Report - General Fund and Housing Revenue Account**

The Strategic Director (Resources) presented the Executive report which detailed the projected net expenditure from both the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account, and advised the Committee of the factors behind the revisions to both accounts.

In reply to a question concerning provision of support services for the elderly living in sheltered housing schemes the Strategic Director (Resources) undertook to provide a breakdown of the costs involved.

In reply to a further question concerning the costs of parking enforcement the Strategic Director (Resources) undertook to consult with the relevant department to determine the need for a review of the Council's policy in this area.

## **Capital Strategy Update**

The Committee was advised that the spend profile for the year to date met expectations, although there had been a number of unforeseen issues necessitating expenditure which included the replacement of the air circulation unit at the swimming pool and the strategic purchase of an area of the Town Square.

In reply to a question the Strategic Director (Resources) undertook to liaise with Housing to confirm that adequate checks were carried out to ensure that all 'Right to Buy' sales were bona fide and that vulnerable residents, and the system, were not being exploited by a third party. He also undertook to provide Members with a breakdown of the profile of properties that had been sold under the 'Right to Buy' agreement.

It was commented that the Council was now allowed to enter into 'Buy Back' arrangements and the Committee was advised that officers had been requested to develop a 'Buy Back' policy. It was anticipated that the Housing Select Committee

would be involved in the development of this policy.

### **Balanced Scorecard 2013/2014 – Quarter 1**

The Strategic Director (Resources) presented the Balanced Scorecard for Quarter 1. A total of eight red indicators were identified which were explained by the Officer.

In reply to a request for comparison data the Strategic Director (Resources) undertook to provide details of the previous quarter's balanced scorecard results.

Members expressed concern at the inclusion of the Community Engagement: Community Development (LCB2) measure in the scorecard believing it to be a low priority indicator and one that was out of the direct control of Council Officers.

Concerns were also expressed at the representation of Black and Ethnic Minority Groups in consultation events and it was debated whether the Council's methods of engagement excluded such groups. A Member remarked that adverse comments made by the public about the closure of the Café Choice event in the Town Square at 1pm had been overheard as the event was closing.

Following on from discussions about red indicators and the need for the Strategic Director (Resources) to pass on some Member's questions to other departments to answer the Scrutiny Officer undertook to invite Strategic Directors as appropriate to subsequent meetings when the Balanced Scorecard was due to be reviewed.

Members requested that they be forwarded details of the red indicators in advance of the meeting, however it was noted that the appendix to the Executive report contained this information.

### **Urgent Part 1 Business - Local Government Act 1972 – Section 85**

The Committee was advised that under Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 a member of a local authority failing to attend a meeting of the authority throughout a period of six consecutive months would cease to be a member unless the failure to attend was due to a reason approved by the authority before the end of the six month period.

Councillor Cullen last attended a meeting on 23 May 2013 and had recently undergone major surgery. The Executive had approved his absence before the six month deadline to ease any concerns that Councillor Cullen may have had personally regarding his Council position.

The Committee acknowledged the decision of the Executive in respect of Councillor David Cullen under the provisions of the above act.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following Part 1 Decisions of the Executive taken on 3 September 2013 be noted:

- Treasury Management Review 2012/2013.

- 1st Quarter Monitoring Report - General Fund and Housing Revenue Account.
- Capital Strategy Update.
- Balanced Scorecard 2013/2014 – Quarter 1.
- Urgent Part 1 Business – Local Government Act 1972 – Section 85

**4. URGENT PART 1 DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

None.

**5. URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

None.

**6. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Not required.

**7. PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE**

None.

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

None.

**9. URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

**Chair**