

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Monday 16 March 2015

Time: 6.00 p.m.

Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors L Martin-Haugh (Chair), R Parker CC (Vice-Chair) (left at 7.20 p.m.), L Bell, P Bibby, J Brown, M Cherney-Craw (left at 7.15 p.m.), M Gardner, L Harrington, C Latif, S Mead 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 R Broom and J Hollywell.

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES – OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 10 FEBRUARY 2015

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 10 February 2015 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. NEW HOMES BONUS

This report had not been published on the Forward Plan of Key Decisions and therefore 28 days' notice had not been given that this matter is to be considered by the Executive on 30 March 2015. Accordingly the Chair was asked to consider, given the reason for urgency, whether or not it was appropriate for the matter to be considered by the Executive without such notice being given.

The Committee was advised that as the New Homes Bonus allocation formed part of the Council's Budget and Policy framework it was necessary to consider these proposals in the March cycle of meetings so that the report could be submitted for recommendation to the Executive meeting on 30 March 2015, therefore allowing the projects to commence from early April 2015.

Additionally this report had not been circulated to Members five clear days before meeting nor had it been made available for public inspection. The Chair determined however that it be considered on this occasion.

The Committee was reminded that the report, containing the proposals for the spend of the New Homes Bonus as detailed by the Leader at the Council meeting on 25 February, was to be considered as part of the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

The Committee received a brief introduction to each of the seven spend proposals under consideration from the projects' lead officers.

Town Centre Improvements

The Head of Planning, Regeneration and Transport advised the Committee that the proposed spend was to support the town centre regeneration programme by repairing, replacing and removing items of street furniture as appropriate to make the town centre environment more attractive.

The removal of street furniture would ease the movement of pedestrians around the town and enable more ready access to shelter under the canopies on rainy days. A Member requested that the cycle racks be exempted from the decluttering regime.

In reply to a question concerning the choices of replacement equipment the Committee was further advised that a number of options concerning street furniture would be presented the Major Projects Group to enable Members to decide on the most appropriate designs.

A Member expressed concern that the repainting scheduled as part of the Town Centre Improvements scheme would only be a temporary measure and would require further maintenance in the future. It was suggested that perhaps a more permanent solution could be determined. The Committee wished for this comment to be passed to the Executive.

No More Project

The Head of Housing Management advised the Committee that 56 people to date had been helped by the project.

In reply to a question the Committee was advised that the project retained contact with those that had been helped, but there had been a small number of referrals for a 'refresher'. The Head of Housing Management undertook to provide the number of referrals.

Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator and Panel

The Head of Leisure, Environmental Health and Children's Services advised the Committee that the project would help those whose circumstances fell below the intervention criteria set by the County Council. The project was seen as important as the town had the highest incidences of domestic abuse in the County and evidence suggested that the abused became abusers in their turn.

In reply to questions the Head of Leisure, Environmental Health and Children's Services undertook to provide the number of people helped by the programme since 2013 and the number of referrals to the programme that had been made by the Lister

Hospital.

Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator

The Head of Business Strategy, Community and Customer Services introduced this item and advised the Committee that the post of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Co-ordinator had been vacant since 2011. Council services dealt with ASB on an individual case level but since 2014 instances of ASB had increased in the town. Some 'hotspots' had been identified but it was believed that the issue now required an individual to take a strategic overview of the situation and to interact with both SoSafe and the police to address the problems.

In reply to a question the Committee was advised that the post would be for a two year fixed term contract.

The Women's Cycling Tour

The Head of Leisure, Environmental Health and Children's Services advised the Committee that the exact details of the event were now known and that detailed planning could commence. Additionally the event would be used to promote cycling across the town through the involvement of cycling clubs and groups.

It was noted that the event would take place on Saturday 20 June and not 22 June as detailed in the report.

The Committee was further advised that it was unknown if roads in the town would be resurfaced prior to the event although the cats eyes in the High Street would be removed, and then replaced after, the event.

Clean and Green projects

The Head of Environmental Services advised the Committee that there were two strands to the project; replacing litter/dog bins and rejuvenating shrub and hedge sites. As there would be insufficient funds to undertake a town wide operation 'hotspots' would be targeted in the first tranche of the work.

The Committee was further advised that no works would be undertaken without appropriate consultation of residents and local Members.

In reply to Member concern about managing residents' expectations the Committee was advised that there would be a full media campaign and that the Executive had expressed a desire that, in time, the whole town could be covered.

The Committee welcomed the project, especially the litter/dog bin replacement programme.

Supporting Private and Housing Association Renters

The Head of Housing Management advised the Committee that the primary aim of the project was to assist those families in private and housing association properties maintain their tenancies in the wake of the changes introduced by the Welfare Reform Act and in advance of any possible implications of the introduction of Universal Credit.

In reply to a question it was confirmed that the targets at each quarter were cumulative and the overall target would be 300.

In reply to a further question the Committee was advised that at any one time the Council were offering advice to approximately 200 tenants covering such topics as rent arrears or hoarding issues.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED**:

1. That given the reason for urgency the Executive may consider the report at its meeting on 30 March even though the required 28 days' notice had not been given.
2. That the report be noted and the following comment be passed to the Executive:

'The Overview and Scrutiny Committee welcomes the proposals put forward under the New Homes Bonus scheme but wished to express its concern that the repainting proposed as part of the Town Centre Improvements may require further maintenance at extra cost in the near future.'

4. 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 19 March 2015, it be considered on this occasion.

Resident Involvement Strategy 2015/2018

The Head of Housing Management presented the report and advised the Committee that an amended version of the strategy, revised to take account the comments of the Executive, would be presented to the Housing Management Board on 19 March.

2014/2015 Capital Strategy Update

The Assistant Director Finance presented the report and advised the Committee that the Executive had requested that a report be presented, if possible, to its meeting on 30 March detailing the background to the current position and further action that could be taken to reduce the likelihood of deferred capital spend occurring in the future.

3rd Quarter Monitoring Report General Fund and Housing Revenue Account.

The Assistant Director Finance presented the report.

A typographical error was identified in recommendation 2 on the Executive Notice of Decisions which the Constitutional Services Officer undertook to correct in the final version of the Executive minutes.

Stevenage Borough Council Balanced Scorecard for Quarter Three 2014/2015

The Strategic Director (Resources) presented the report.

The Committee was advised that the overall score had reduced to 96%, from 99.12 %

at the same time in 2013/2014, and that there were 11 red indicators.

The Strategic Director (Resources) then identified each of the red indicators and advised the Committee of the remedial actions being taken in each case.

The Committee was informed of the Executive's interview with the Head of Business and Technology Services and advised that the project designed to reduce customers' reliance on telephone contact with the Customer Service Centre should go live in June 2015. Entitled 'Changing Channels' it was expected that changes to the Council's website would enable customers to check their accounts and pay bills on-line, thus reducing the number of abandoned calls, and increasing response times to calls with the Centre.

Members asked a number of questions about the PDM completion measure, which were answered by the Officer.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following Part I decisions taken by the Executive at its meeting on 20 January 2015 be noted:

- Minutes – 16 February 2015
- Minutes – Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees
- Resident Involvement Strategy 2015/2018
- 2014/2015 Capital Strategy Update
- 3rd Quarter Monitoring Report General Fund and Housing Revenue Account
- Stevenage Borough Council Balanced Scorecard for Quarter Three 2014/2015

5. **2015/2016 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered proposals for its workplan for the Municipal Year 2015/2016.

The Committee was of the view that SBC Media and Communications and the IT Partnership with East Herts DC should be scrutinised.

A review of Local Community Budgets, and the possibility of undertaking a joint review with the Community Select Committee, was discussed. The Committee was of the view that the Community Select Committee could undertake the review, should they choose to do so, and refer back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as appropriate.

The Committee considered that it was not necessary to monitor or review the recommendations from previous scrutiny studies at this time.

The Committee was advised that a review of concessions given, which the Committee would undertake as a piece of Policy Development, would be welcomed as it was believed that the Council's existing practices were no longer fit for purpose.

The Scrutiny Officer undertook to draft a schedule of meetings to deliver the

programme for the studies.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That feedback from the Scrutiny Evaluation Questionnaire completed by Members be noted.
2. That having considered ideas previously agreed and suggestions put forward by individual Members from their Scrutiny Evaluation Survey through January and February 2015 the Committee determined the subject matter of its Scrutiny Studies for 2015/2016 to be:
 - a. SBC Media and Communications
 - b. The IT Partnership with East Herts DC
3. That the Policy Development work identified for the Committee in 2015/16 as listed below be noted:
 - a. Design of the 2016/2017 Council Tax Support Scheme
 - b. Concessions – looking at all of those concessions that the Council currently provides and whether these are still appropriate.

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

None.

7. URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

8. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1-7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by SI 2006 No. 88.
2. That having considered the reasons for the following item being in Part II it be determined that maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

9. 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 19 March 2015, it be considered on this occasion.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following Part II decision taken by the Executive at its meeting on 10 March 2015 be noted:

- Property Acquisitions at Fresson Road.

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

None.

11. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

Chair