

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Monday 15 June 2015

Time: 6.00 p.m.

Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors L Martin-Haugh (Chair), L Bell,
J Brown, M Downing, M Gardner, L Harrington, M Hurst,
S Mead and R Parker CC

Start / End Time Start Time: 18.00 hrs
 End Time: 19.35 hrs

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P Bibby, L Briscoe, C Latif and P Stuart

There were no declarations of interest.

2. TERMS OF REFERENCE

It was reported that a short report would be submitted to the next Council meeting to amend the terms of reference of the Committee to recognise that the post of Strategic Director (Resources) no longer existed and in place quote that the Committee was responsible for scrutiny of services that were the responsibility of the Chief Executive.

It was **RESOLVED** that the terms of reference be noted.

3. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that Councillor P Bibby be appointed Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2015/2016.

4. MINUTES – OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 16 MARCH 2015

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 16 March 2015 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. SCRUTINY REVIEW OF SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS

The Scrutiny Officer introduced the report that set out the draft recommendations arising from the Committee's scrutiny review into Section 106 Agreements.

In response to a Member's question the Scrutiny Officer explained that the final recommendations agreed by the Committee would be referred to the relevant Executive Portfolio Holder and officers who would have two months to respond. The Committee would then have the opportunity to consider the progress of the implementation of those recommendations accepted. This review was usually 6-12 months after the recommendations had been agreed.

Members referred to the draft recommendation at paragraph 4.4 of the report and considered that it was not helpful to quote the instances where it had been suggested that projects delivered had been inappropriate.

A Member referred to paragraph 3.9.1 of the report and was concerned that this issue had not been addressed in the draft recommendations. The Head of Planning, Regeneration & Transport explained the process of negotiations regarding S.106 projects and it was agreed that the Committee would request officers to further explain this process and report on instances where the projects ultimately delivered significantly to those first suggested when planning permission had been granted.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following recommendations be presented to Portfolio Holders for Environment & Regeneration and for Resources, and the Strategic Director (Environment) and the Assistant Director (Finance) for a response be provided to the Committee within two months.

1. That officers investigate an improvement on the current arrangements for alerting Members to planning applications that may involve a Section 106 Agreement and consider a mechanism to highlight such applications with ward Members, allowing a fixed timeframe to respond so as not to delay any applications, but to provide Members with the opportunity to comments on possible enhancements to their wards.
2. That individual officers responsible for negotiating a Section 106 Agreement are aware of the local needs and priorities of the area where the planning permission is being sought, by in part undertaking consultation with the local Members and that the case officer adequately communicates with other colleagues internally and with the County Council in order that the best provision is negotiated for that area.
3. That although cases are rare, officers investigate ways of avoiding situations where the infrastructure projects that are delivered are not subsequently criticised for being either the wrong provision or in the wrong location.
4. That SBC officers approach Hertfordshire County Council to enquire how they make their decisions regarding issues like the siting and provision of sustainable transport to help Members better understand their reasoning.
5. That officers provide Members with confidence that sufficient ongoing revenue

funding is being provided to maintain capital infrastructure schemes funded by Section 106 Agreement monies.

6. That officers address the issue of the perception that on occasions commitments given by developers at the time planning permission may be withdrawn during the subsequent negotiations.

6. 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 18 June 2015, it be considered on this occasion.

Appointment of Executive Bodies

Noted

Stevenage Borough Local Plan: Revised Housing Targets Consultation

Officers introduced the report. In response to Members' questions it was explained that the process allowed the authority to quote its preferred option for housing targets, but it was necessary to ensure that there was sufficient evidence to support the preferred option as the Plan would have to go before a Government Inspector for approval.

It was confirmed that any new properties built by the Council would be included in the target figure. It was also explained that the target percentages of affordable homes did not form part of the current consultation. These will be presented at the next stage of the plan but are subject to a national policy in relation to viability testing.

A Member referred to Appendix B of the draft Plan where objective 9 quoted 'improve access to all services.....', the new town had been built around neighbourhoods with services, including shops, in each vicinity. He asked if access to shops etc. was included in the term 'services'. The Head of Planning, Regeneration & Transport stated that when the plan was developed to the next stage and sites identified this would be a consideration.

Housing Energy and Sustainability Strategy 2015-2018.

Officers introduced the report. In response to a Member's question the officer stated that the provision of Smart Meters was a matter for the energy suppliers, but although the Council had no remit officers would work with suppliers to ensure that tenants received advice on how these meters worked.

It was explained that the definition of 'fuel poverty' had now changed and no longer

related to household income but to the energy efficiency of a dwelling.

The Committee was of the view that it was important that all the relevant information be sent out to tenants before the autumn/winter when heating bills were higher.

Stevenage Borough Council Balanced Scorecard for Quarter Four 2014/2015

The Chief Executive presented the report and explained that officers were looking to improve the information going forward to try to address the time lag and align the Scorecard with other data and information that was available.

The yearend overall score of 97.7 was an improvement on the Quarter 3 score of 95.8, but there remained 10 red scores which he then addressed in turn.

During discussion Members referred to the consultations undertaken in the community regarding savings that were required and were of the view that it was necessary to ensure that those consulted were also made aware of the consequences of resourcing particular services over others.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following Part I decisions taken by the Executive at its meeting on 9 June 2015 be noted:

- Minutes – 30 March 2015
- Appointment of Executive Bodies
- Minutes – Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees
- Stevenage Borough Local Plan: Revised Housing Targets Consultation
- Housing Energy and Sustainability Strategy 2015-2018
- Stevenage Borough Council Balance Scorecard – 2014/2015 Quarter Four

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

None.

8. URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

9. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Not required

10. PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

None

11. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

Chair