

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Tuesday 22 September 2015

Time: 6.00 p.m.

Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors L Martin-Haugh (Chair), L Bell, P Bibby, L Briscoe, J Brown, M Downing, M Gardner, L Harrington, M Hurst, C Latif, S Mead and P Stuart

Start / End Time Start Time: 6.00 p.m.
 End Time: 8.15 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

An apology for absence was received from Councillor R Parker CC.

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES – OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 16 JULY 2015

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

3. 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 29 September 2015, it be considered on this occasion.

ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW OF 2014/2015

The Assistant Director Finance presented the Treasury Management Review of 2014/2015.

The Committee was advised that the report had been recommended by both the Audit Committee and the Executive for approval by Council at its meeting on 7 October.

In reply to a question concerning the level of the Council's balances the Committee was advised that monies were being held against known future expenditure.

PUBLIC SPACE PROTECTION ORDER (PSPO)

The Strategic Director Community presented the report and advised the Committee that in response to Member's requests a third recommendation covering the possibility of extending the PSPO area to cover the Bedwell shops had been added to the original report.

The Committee raised a number of queries about the report especially with regard to the potential for a negative label to be attached to areas attached to PSPOs, the role of the police and council officers in enforcement, the consultation process, the possible outlawing of legitimate fund-raising activities and the evidence base used to determine the proposed zones.

The Committee was advised that once established PSPO zones could be extended, or revoked, after further consultation.

In reply to specific questions Officers undertook to provide feedback on the following topics:

- The use of CCTV footage as evidence
- The evidence considered by the Responsible Authorities Group to determine the proposed PSPO areas
- The role of Police and Council Officers in enforcement

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL: ANNUAL REPORT 2014/2015

Head of Business Strategy, Community and Customer Services presented the report and advised the Committee that the format of the document had been designed as a 'quick read' for residents.

The Committee was positive in its feedback for the report.

2015/2016 CAPITAL BUDGET – FIRST QUARTER CAPITAL STRATEGY UPDATE

The Assistant Director Finance presented the update and advised the Committee that the number of Right to Buy applications was expected to exceed 100 by the end of 2015/2016.

Members then asked a number of detailed questions about Right to Buy receipts which were answered by the Officer.

FIRST QUARTER REVENUE MONITORING REPORT – GENERAL FUND AND HRA

The Assistant Director Finance presented the monitoring report and advised the Committee of the reasons behind the first quarter variances highlighting issues with off-street parking income, the potential to lease space at Daneshill House and the Building Maintenance Organisation.

Clarity was sought at the level of the Council's outstanding debts, especially the level of Housing Benefit Overpayments. In response the Officer advised the Committee that the Council had limited recovery options where clients remained on benefits.

Members then asked a number of questions about the recovery of deposit advances and Right to Buy entitlements which were answered by the Officer.

GENERAL FUND BUDGET – MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (MTFS) (2015/16 – 2019/20)

The Assistant Director Finance presented the MTFS and advised the Committee that it had been rewritten with the intention of the Council reducing its reliance on the Governments Revenue Support Grant (RSG). To reflect this two recommendations had been amended to reflect the Council's ambition to achieve the General Fund's emerging financial security objective (paragraph 4.5.2 of the Executive report refers).

Some questions were asked concerning the merit of this approach and the pressures it would place on the Council to meet its budgets. The Committee then discussed the options around realising ongoing underspends and the need to realise those savings wherever possible.

2015/2016 BALANCED SCORECARD – QUARTER 1

The Strategic Director Community presented the balanced scorecard and advised the Committee that the scorecard and its measures would be updated in line with a new Corporate Strategy which was due to be launched early in 2016.

Members expressed a preference to retain the measure relating to staff performance reviews within a new performance management framework.

It was noted that the Customer Service Centre (CSC) had been designated an area for specific focus and the Committee was advised that the Council's on-line payment and balance service had recently been launched which was welcomed. It was anticipated that this new service should reduce the number of telephone calls to the CSC.

In reply to a question concerning data provided against measure NI15b (rate of violence against the person) the Strategic Director Community undertook to clarify the situation and feedback to the Committee.

In reply to a further question concerning Equality Impact Assessments the Committee was advised that an assessment would be carried out on any improvement activities identified through the use of the scorecard.

URGENT PART I BUSINESS

The Committee welcomed the Leader's statement concerning the Syrian refugee crisis.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following Part 1 decisions taken by the Executive at its meeting on 21 September 2015 be noted:

- Minutes – 14 July 2015
- Minutes – 24 July 2015
- Minutes – Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees
- Annual Treasury Management Review of 2014/2015
- Public Space Protection Order (PSPO)
- Stevenage Borough Council: Annual Report 2014/2015
- 2015/2016 First Quarter Capital Strategy Update
- First Quarter Revenue Monitoring Report – General Fund and HRA
- General Fund Budget – Medium Term Financial Strategy (2015/16 – 2019/20)
- 2015/2016 Balanced Scorecard – Quarter 1
- Urgent Part I Business – Leader’s Statement.

4. MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS SCRUTINY REVIEW

The Scrutiny Officer presented the Scoping Document for the Media and Communications review.

Members were requested to volunteer for questioning topics and to feedback any comments on the Scoping Document to the Scrutiny Officer by Wednesday 7 October.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Scoping Document be noted and that the Scrutiny Officer incorporate any comments made by Members into the next version of the document for presentation at the next meeting.

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

None.

6. URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

7. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Not required

8. PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

None

9. URGENT PART II BUSINESS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

None.

10. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

Chair