

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Monday 16 November 2015

Time: 6.00 p.m.

Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors L Martin-Haugh (Chair), P Bibby (Vice Chair), L Bell, L Briscoe, J Brown, M Downing, M Gardner, L Harrington, M Hurst, C Latif, S Mead, R Parker CC and Resources Portfolio Holder Mrs J Lloyd.

Start / End Time Start Time: 6.00 p.m.
 End Time: 8.50 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no apologies for absence and no declarations of interest.

As there were no members of the press or public present at the meeting with the agreement of the Chair Item 10 was brought forward and dealt with after Item 3.

2. MINUTES – OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 19 OCTOBER 2015

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 19 October 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 20 November 2015, it be considered on this occasion.

2015/2016 MID-YEAR TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW

The Assistant Director (Finance) presented the report and advised the Committee that the Executive had discussed the impact of the Government's proposed 1% rent reduction over 4 years and the potential repayment of £8m of 'Right to Buy' receipts which would require the Council to 'match fund' with a contribution of £19.7m to utilise fully.

In reply to a question concerning the Council's house building programme the Committee was advised that the current plan to build 550 social rented homes over the next 10 years remained in place subject to any changes being agreed by Members as part of the HRA Business Plan review in light of the aforementioned Government policy proposals.

In reply to a further question the Committee was advised that approximately 100 properties were expected to be sold by the Council as Right to Buy purchases in 2015/2016.

2ND QUARTER MONITORING REPORT GENERAL FUND AND HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA)

The Assistant Director (Finance) presented the report and advised the Committee of a typographic error in paragraph 3.8.2 of the Executive report which should read that the shrub bed and hedge rejuvenation project was due to commence in (not be completed by) November.

The Committee discussed the recovery arrangements for Housing Benefit Overpayments and questioned whether the Council could be more proactive in preventing overpayments occurring. In reply the Officer advised the Committee of the Council's current processes and the Portfolio Holder for Resources confirmed that she was satisfied that those arrangements were robust.

2ND QUARTER CAPITAL STRATEGY UPDATE

The Assistant Director (Finance) presented the report and advised the Committee that project spends were on track.

In reply to a question concerning Disabled Facilities Grants the Committee was advised of funding arrangements for the service. It was also noted that demand for grants had been high so far this year.

The Committee was further advised that the Executive had recognised the impact that an aging population could have on this budget.

HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2015-2020

The Head of Housing Management introduced the report and advised the Committee that the Executive had requested details of the number of households subject to the 'bedroom tax' that were reliant on the discretionary housing payments. This information would be shared with members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee when available.

GAMBLING ACT 2005 – STATEMENT OF POLICY

The Head of Leisure, Community and Children's Services presented the report and advised the Committee that the amendment to the policy had been prompted by legislative changes.

The Committee was further advised that no responses to the consultation exercise had been received.

URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS – SBC UPDATE TO THE RESPONSE TO THE REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMME

The Head of Housing Management presented the report and advised the Committee of recent developments in the refugee resettlement programme.

Members then asked a number of detailed questions about the report, preparations for the public meeting on 28 November and the Council's arrangements to receive refugees which were answered by the Officer.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following Part 1 decisions taken by the Executive at its meeting on 11 November 2015 be noted:

- Minutes – 13 October 2015
- Minutes – Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees
- 2015/2016 Mid-Year Treasury Management Review
- 2nd Quarter Monitoring Report General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA)
- 2nd Quarter Capital Strategy Update
- Homelessness Strategy 2015-2020
- Gambling Act 2005 – Statement of Policy
- Urgent Part 1 Business – SBC update on the response to the refugee resettlement programme.

4. MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS SCRUTINY REVIEW

This item was dealt with after item 10.

The Committee received a presentation covering the role of the Council's Communications Unit and the methods of communication employed by the Council from the Head of Service (Chief Executive's Unit) and the Corporate Communications Manager.

Members raised a number of points about the presentation which included:

- The importance of intelligence to pre-empt issues and proactively engage with local press.
- The benefit of positive news, especially with regard to any developing issues which might be of concern to Stevenage residents.
- The need to build and maintain relationships with local media agencies.
- The need to exercise caution when using social media such as Twitter or Facebook.
- The need to strengthen 'out of hours' coverage especially for social media comments.

Members thanked the officers for the presentation and requested that they be forwarded a copy of the slides after the meeting.

In response to a Member request the Scrutiny Officer undertook to recirculate the background documents to the review that had previously been sent out.

It was **RESOLVED** that the points raised be noted and incorporated into the review as appropriate.

5. SCRUTINY RESPONSE INTO SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS – EXECUTIVE PORTFOLIO HOLDER RESPONSE

The Committee was advised that since the review into Section 106 Agreements there had been a major change in legislation which had impacted on the recommendations made.

The Scrutiny Officer undertook to liaise with the Head of Planning and Engineering to arrange a briefing for Members on this issue.

It was **RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

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

Not required.

9. PART II MINUTES – OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 19 OCTOBER 2015

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 19 October 2015 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

10. PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

This item of business was dealt with after Item 3.

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 20 November 2015, it be considered on this occasion.

GENERAL FUND BUDGET & HRA PROPOSALS 2014/15, 2015/16 SAVINGS OPTIONS, FORWARD PLAN AND UPDATED FINANCIAL STRATEGY

The Assistant Director (Finance) presented the report and the Committee was advised of the changes made by the Executive to the recommendations contained therein.

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

It was noted that a revised Concessionary Fees and Charges structure was due to be introduced from 1 April 2016. The Scrutiny Officer undertook to liaise with the Head of Environmental Services to arrange a date for a Policy and Development meeting of the Committee to undertake this task.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following Part II decision taken by the Executive at its meeting on 11 November 2015 be noted:

- Part II Minutes – Executive – 11 November 2015
- Part II Minutes – Overview and Scrutiny
- General Fund Budget & HRA Proposals 2014/15, 2015/16 Savings Options, Forward Plan and Updated Financial Strategy

Councillor Mrs J Lloyd left the meeting at the conclusion of this item of business.

The meeting then reverted to the original running order.

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

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Decision taken by the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 23 October 2015 in respect of the acquisition of a commercial property in the Town Square, Stevenage be noted.

12. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

Chair