

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Monday 28 November 2016

Time: 6.00 p.m.

Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors L Martin-Haugh (Chair), P Bibby (Vice Chair),
M Downing, M Gardner, E Harrington, J Hollywell,
A Mitchell, R Parker CC, C Saunders and P Stuart

Start / End Time Start Time: 6.00 p.m.
 End Time: 7.00 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Brown, C Latif and S Mead. There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES – OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 24 OCTOBER 2016

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 24 October 2016 are approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Clarification was sought by Members on the following matters:

- **Local Community Budgets** - The Chair advised that discussions had been held with the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Council and the Chair of the Community Select Committee regarding the Local Community Budget (LCB) limits. Agreement had been reached to continue with the £100 limit but that 10% of the LCB should be set aside for Members to use in smaller amounts if and when required. The Chair agreed to follow this up to ensure that all Members were informed of this change in procedure.
- **Land Registry Maps** - The Strategic Director (Community) advised that he would request the Strategic Director (Environment) to send out to Members the Land Registry Maps referred to in the Minutes.
- **Sickness Information** - Officers advised that detailed information relating to the days lost due to sickness, broken down to reflect long term sickness against short term illness and section by section, would be produced as part of the next performance report submitted to this Committee.

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 30 November 2016, it be considered on this occasion.

Executive Minutes – 18 October 2016

Environment & Economy Select Committee Minutes – 12 October 2016

Community Select Committee Minutes – 19 October 2016

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Minutes – 24 October 2016

Community Select Committee Minutes - 25 October 2016

Environment & Economy Select Committee Minutes – 31 October 2016

2016/17 Mid-Year Treasury Management Review

The Assistant Director (Finance) introduced the report for the approval of updates to the 2016/17 Treasury Management and Investment Strategy. She advised that the report would be submitted to the December meeting of Council for approval.

Members requested clarification on the implications of the removal of the current treasury management limit to maintain £10million in instant access or overnight balances limits. Officers considered the prescribed amount to be unnecessary but would have due regard to the day to day cash flows required by the Council. The aim was not to undertake short term borrowing but should this be required it would be permitted within the authorised limit.

Stevenage Borough Council Co-operative Corporate Plan Future Town Future Council

A revised version of the Appendices were circulated showing minor revisions to the Plan following the Executive meeting. Officers advised that the Plan would be published on the Council website immediately following the Council Meeting in December and regular Future Town Future Council updates would be reported to the public via Chronicle.

Housing Revenue Account Business Plan Review

The Head of Housing Management introduced a report that sought approval to the HRA Business Plan. She reported that the decision of the Government not to implement the so-called 'pay-to-stay' proposals whereby higher-earning social housing tenants would have to pay more in rent was not reflected in the Draft Plan and therefore it would be necessary to amend the document accordingly.

Revised Rent and Service Charge Setting Policy (Residential Properties)

The Head of Housing Management presented a report detailing recommended amendments to the Council's Rent and Service Charge Policy which would be reported in the Special Council meeting in January 2017 in conjunction with the Rents Setting and HRA budget report.

It was noted that as with the previous report, the Policy would have to be amended to account for the decision of the Government not to implement the so-called 'pay-to-stay' proposals whereby higher-earning social housing tenants would have to pay more in rent.

In response to a question, Officers clarified the difference between social rents which were calculated based on a formula including location and earnings within a particular area and affordable rents which were calculated at 80% of the current market value.

2nd Quarter Monitoring Report – General Fund and Housing Revenue Account

The Assistant Director (Finance) presented a report that updated Members on the General Fund and HRA 2016/17 net expenditure and revisions to the 2016/17 revenue budgets and the allocated reserves.

The Committee was pleased to note the improving position in relation to the Repairs and Voids Service.

Officers advised that in terms of Housing Benefit overpayments, Cllr Joan Lloyd, Executive Member for Resources would be reviewing all those cases that had been in the system for 12 months or longer.

A number of questions were asked regarding the Indoor Market. It was noted that a review of the Market, led by the Strategic Director (Environment) would be taking place in early 2017. A report would be presented to Members on the outcome of the review. It was noted, however, that although income was down, the Council still made a surplus on the Market. It was also suggested that the Market could be considered as the subject of a future scrutiny review.

In response to a question about recycling, officers advised that there had been a mechanical breakdown which had led to an exception of having to 'co-mingle' recycling but this had now been rectified and recycling was now being separated again.

The Assistant Director (Finance) agreed to take on board the concern that when the position with regard to the Council's reserves was reported publicly, the Council should be clear as to why the Reserves were required as this could be misunderstood by the public.

In respect of Neighbourhood Wardens, the Committee was advised that the first round of recruitment had been unsuccessful but it was hoped that interviews would be taking place in the next few weeks and appointments subsequently made.

2016/17 2nd Quarter Capital Strategy Update

The Assistant Director (Finance) presented a report detailing revisions on the General Fund and HRA Capital Programme.

The Committee noted the slippage in the delivery of three replacement refuse freighters and also a reduction in the numbers of Right to Buy sales in this quarter.

Appointment of External Auditors (for Audit of Accounts from 2018/19 onwards)

The Assistant Director (Finance) presented a report which would be submitted to the December Council meeting outlining the preferred mechanism for the appointment of the Council's external auditors for the Statement of Account, 2018/2019 onwards.

The Committee noted the main benefits of the new arrangements would be for the Council to secure a competitive price and also to avoid the requirement to establish a separate Auditor Panel.

In response to a question, officers advised that the change in process following the decision to join the Public Sector Audit Appointments for the appointment of external auditors would not affect the Council's current Audit Committee arrangements.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part I decisions of the Executive taken on 22 November 2016 are noted.

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

None

5. URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None

6. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was **RESOLVED** that:

1. Under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1-7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as amended by Local Government (Access to information) (Variation) Order 2006.
2. Members having considered the reasons for the following reports being in Part II and determined that the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

7. 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 30 November 2016, it be considered on this occasion.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following Part II decisions of the Executive taken on 22 November 2016 are noted:

Part II Minutes – Tuesday 22 November 2016

Financial Security 2017/18 – 2018/19

The Committee noted that subject to the deferral of proposal S7 recommendations in the report the Executive had approved the report.

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

It was **RESOLVED** that the following Part II decision authorised by the Chair is noted:

- Financial Security Budget Options (had not appeared on the Forward Plan)

9. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None

Chair