



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 18 February 2019

Time: 6.00pm,

Location: Shimkent Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Contact: Lisa Jerome

Members: Councillors: L Martin-Haugh (Chair), P Bibby CC (Vice-Chair), S Barr, J Brown, M Downing, J Fraser, J Hanafin, ME Gardner, L Kelly, J Mead, S Mead, A Mitchell CC, R Parker CC and S-J Potter

AGENDA

PART 1

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**
2. **MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 15 JANUARY AND 29 JANUARY 2019**

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees held on 15 January and 29 January 2019.

Minutes attached

Pages 3 – 12

3. **PART I DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE**

To consider the following Part I Decisions of the Executive taken on 13 February 2019

Executive Agenda Item		Page No
2.	Minutes of the Executive – 23 January 2019	5
3.	Minutes of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees	15
4.	Final General Fund and Council Tax Setting 2019/20	25
5.	Final Capital Strategy 2018/19 – 2023/24	139
6.	Annual Treasury Management Strategy Including Prudential Code Indicators 2019/20	187
7.	Community Engagement Framework	219

Notice of Decisions to follow

PLEASE BRING YOUR AGENDA AND REPORTS FOR THE EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON 13 FEBRUARY 2019.

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

None.

5. URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

To consider any Part 1 business accepted by the Chair as urgent.

6. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

To consider the following motions –

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 Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

2. That Members consider the reasons for the following reports being in Part II and determine whether or not maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

7. PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

To consider the following Part II decisions of the Executive taken on 13 February 2019

Executive Agenda Item		Page No
10	West of Stevenage Development	243

Notice of Decisions to follow

PLEASE BRING YOUR AGENDA AND REPORTS FOR THE EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON 13 FEBRUARY 2019

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

None.

9. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

To consider any Part II business accepted by the Chair as urgent.

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - SITTING AS A SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 15 January 2019

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Shimkent Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Lin Martin-Haugh (Chair) (Chair), (Vice Chair), Sandra Barr, Jim Brown, Michael Downing, James Fraser, Michelle Gardner, Jody Hanafin, Lizzy Kelly, John Mead, Sarah Mead, Adam Mitchell CC, Robin Parker CC and Sarah-Jane Potter

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 7.45pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Phil Bibby CC.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 REVIEW OF SBC SICKNESS MANAGEMENT

The Committee considered a report detailing the information requested at the evidence gathering meeting on 14 November 2018.

The Chair reminded Members of the context of the review, what had already been established and what this meeting would cover including:

- The split between long term and short term sickness;
- The Council's policy of identifying patterns of sickness and underlying causes;
- What the Council does to help people back to work;
- Peer performance;
- Departmental split;
- The cost to the Council in productivity/pay;
- Impact on staff covering for long term absences;

The Chair welcomed Ann Tomlin, Branch Secretary of Unison and Diane Wenham Chair of Unison to the meeting who gave their views to the Committee on the introduction of First Care as part of the Council's sickness policy. On the whole, First Care would be welcomed as it would provide consistency across the Council with every employee being treated fairly. The representatives advised that a Unison awayday had been organised and would have a focus on health and wellbeing which would allow the matter to be considered further.

Members expressed concern that views of employees had not been received on the new system. Officers advised that a date had not yet been identified for the system

to go live as background preparatory work was still being undertaken. It was noted that officers would develop a comprehensive communications plan to ensure employees were clear on the implications of First Care prior to the system going live.

Officers advised that unfortunately it had not been possible to arrange for the two officers recommended by HR to be interviewed. It was agreed that this now be done as a paper exercise with the outcomes to be reported back to Members. Members were asked to provide any suggestions for questions to the Scrutiny Officer.

Members raised a number of points around the review including:

- People who were carers might suffer from stress and anxiety – it was important the Council recognised this hidden group;
- The importance of timely and caring return to work interviews;
- The importance of the continued commitment to the “Time to Change” pledge which had been drawn up by organisations including Mind and the Department of Health;
- An example of a private sector organisation where the sickness levels reduced following a relaxing of the sickness policy combined with a monthly staff survey;
- Improvement in the reporting process for sickness management since MyView had been installed for Managers;
- In relation to the Volunteering Policy, as the policy had not been in place for too long, officers agreed to report the take-up figures to a future meeting;

Following further consideration, it was **RESOLVED**:

- (1) That a comprehensive staff communication plan be developed and implemented prior to the introduction of First Care which, amongst other points, will highlight that this process has been introduced to improve employee wellbeing which in turn should reduce sickness levels.
- (2) That officers seek to measure the return on investment post implementation of First Care. If possible the First Care contribution to the Council meeting its sickness target should be quantified and measured noting also that the First Care service contract also included a target for demonstrating an improvement in staff wellbeing.
- (3) That officers work with the Portfolio Holder to seek to reduce sickness absence which has been specifically associated with the undertaking of the Business Unit Reviews.
- (4) That the seasonal variations and peaks and troughs in certain Business Units sickness levels be recorded by officers and be provided to Members through the quarterly performance report.
- (5) That the Portfolio Holder and officers continue to seek to identify specific interventions which might help reduce sickness absence associated with stress, anxiety and depression (Please see Appendix E – Time to Change Action Plan and Section 4 of the Report dated 14 November 2018).
- (6) Approximately half of all staff has little or no sickness leave each year, the other half account for the remainder of the sickness figures (16-18 days a year). As such, Scrutiny Members support the Senior Leadership Team’s efforts and measures they have introduced to address this issue and request

that an update report be provided in approximately one year to further consider performance in this regard.

- (7) That as a joint working exercise with Human Resources, Unison consults its Members at its forthcoming awayday which would be focussing on health and wellbeing, on the sickness policy and in particular the First Care proposal.
- (8) That the impact of ill health and pressures on staff who act as carers be acknowledged by the employer side as a genuine pressure and that the Council's sickness policy and other Council policies address this issue and provides sufficient support for carers.
- (9) That as it had not been possible to arrange for the two officers recommended by HR to be interviewed, it was agreed that this now be done as a paper exercise and the outcomes reported back to Members. Members should provide any suggestions for questions to the Scrutiny Officer.
- (10) That Councillor John Mead be requested to provide an example of the monthly staff survey undertaken in his workplace as part of the wellbeing policy with a view to potentially using a similar anonymous staff survey to gauge the wellbeing of SBC staff.
- (11) That the Volunteer Policy be publicised and promoted amongst staff and that an evaluation of its success be brought back to Members.

3 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

4 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

5 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR

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STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 29 January 2019

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Shimkent Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Lin Martin-Haugh (Chair), Philip Bibby CC (Vice-Chair), Sandra Barr, Jim Brown, Michael Downing, Jody Hanafin, Michelle Gardner, Lizzy Kelly, Sarah Mead, Adam Mitchell CC and Robin Parker CC

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 7.35pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs J Fraser, J Mead and S-J Potter.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 13 DECEMBER 2018

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 13 December 2018 are approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 PART I DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

Minutes of the Executive – 12 December 2018

The Committee noted the comments of the Executive.

Minutes of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees

The Committee noted the comments of the Executive.

Final Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Rent Setting Report 2019/20

The Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) gave a presentation to the Committee on the key aspects of the Final Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Rent Setting Report 2019/20.

In response to a question, the Assistant Director advised that the 2019/20 53 rent week issue could potentially result in a loss of about £110,000 to the Council per year as a result of Universal Credit regulations. This may also be impacted by Housing Benefit regulations. Local authorities have been in discussion with the Department for Work and Pensions and Ministry of Housing, Communities in a

coordinated effort to resolve the rent loss issue at a national level as this impacted on those Councils with housing. .

A question was asked regarding the charge for retrospective permissions granted. The Assistant Director stated that the charge was dependent upon the nature of work. The charge covered costs of inspections and corrective work. The charge had been introduced to act as a deterrent and to encourage residents to seek consent before carrying out building alterations.

The Assistant Director informed Members that funds had been set aside for work to fix damp and mould cases. More damp and mould cases were being resolved following restructuring of the Housing Investment team and the decision to carry out damp and mould repair work as part of the Major Refurbishment Contract. Members were informed that the Community Select Committee carried out a review on Damp and Mould in January 2017 and a revisit of the review was done in October 2018. It was acknowledged that the Council had departed from its previous position predominantly linking damp and mould to the lifestyle of residents.

The Committee highlighted cases in which the Council replaced doors and carpets that were in good conditions and passed on the costs of these repairs and alterations to the vacating tenants or estates of the deceased. The Assistant Director clarified that the Council recovered costs for damages to property or unapproved alterations carried out by a vacating tenant. The rechargeable costs were assessed on a case by case basis and in some cases, the costs were written off. It was acknowledged that there were inconsistencies in Council practice on this issue. The Assistant Director pointed out that this issue could be solved by more frequent tenancy audits and documentation (including photographs).

Council Tax Base 2019/20

The Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) provided an update on Council Tax Base 2019/20.

Draft General Fund and Council Tax Setting 2019/20

The Assistant Director provided an update on the Draft General Fund and Council Tax Setting 2019/20.

In response to a question about the disbursement of funds from the pilot, the Assistant Director pointed out that 75% of the business rates were retained in the County. Local authorities in the county had a 35% share in the funds and the County Council had the bigger share. District councils were eligible to bid for funding from the central projects budget.

The Committee asked questions regarding funding for IT. The Assistant Director (Corporate Services & Transformation) informed Members that SBC was following the current trend of investing less in physical servers and more in software solutions that can be run in the cloud (virtual servers). Funding was required to purchase licences for new products such as Microsoft 365. An IT improvement programme is

underway, with a new senior manager overseeing this programme. One element of this programme is to help move to a more proactive approach to planning upgrades, investment and changes. The Council is stabilising IT services and there was a focus on planning for the future needs from IT services.

The Strategic Director informed the Committee that the Council may need to consider making an annual provision for IT upgrades such as an annual capital budget rather than larger one-off allocations, and will need to consider the revenue implications. The Council was learning from the experience of other councils such as Milton Keynes. SBC was also consulting its IT partner (East Herts) and local government IT experts to get the best plan for SBC IT services.

The Assistant Director clarified that the increase in parking fees was effective from the first of January. The Executive had granted approval of the parking fees increase in November 2018.

It was reported that some residents had received notification of increases to Flexicare fees. The Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) acknowledged a typographical error in the report (page 158). SC18 should read "Increase contribution to support costs to £2 per week per year as part of phased support costs agreed in 2016/17". The Assistant Director clarified that tenants who started using the Flexicare service before 2003 were previously not charged for the service. Service fee increase for the ring-fenced tenants was staggered at £2 per week year. New tenants will pay £18.30 for the service for 2019/20. It was confirmed that residents who used the service were eligible for Attendants Allowance.

Draft Capital Strategy 2018/10 – 2023/24

The Assistant Director provided an update on the Draft Capital Strategy for the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the period 2018/19 – 2023/24.

Members sought clarification on funding arrangements for the bus station. The Strategic Director informed the Committee that the Council was considering a number of funding options as back up options. Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) funding was available subject to the Secretary of State approving the governance arrangements. Discussions have taken place between the LEP and government regarding this funding. The LEP had indicated that have informed government that they are willing to implement updates to the governance arrangements for Stevenage to be able to access the funding allocation. It was pointed out that revenue generation initiatives will include a café and departure fees.

Potential Impact of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union

The Assistant Director (Corporate Services & Transformation) updated the Executive on emerging national and regional issues in respect of preparations for a "no deal" exit from the European Union (Brexit). In the event of an economic downturn, a partnership response would be essential to ensure that residents and businesses were supported. It was recommended that Stevenage Together re-established the

Stevenage Economic Taskforce to co-ordinate this activity. Central government had appointed Resilience Officers and other additional resources to local authorities. Stevenage and similar-sized authorities will receive £35,000 over two years. In response to Member concerns about potential disruptions to social cohesion, the Assistant Director indicated that the Community Safety Partnership would be able to assist any residents who felt threatened. It was noted that issues related to Brexit were high on the agenda of the Council's Senior Leadership Team.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That Part 1 Decisions of the Executive are noted
2. That the Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) provides an update to Members regarding the 2019/20 53 rent week issue
3. That Assistant Director (Housing and Investment) provides a brief to Members clarifying the policy on the recharges for damages to properties
4. That the Housing Management Advisory Board (HMAB) considers the policy for recharges on damages to properties
5. That Assistant Director (Housing and Investment) provides a brief note to Members detailing the cases of retrospective permissions for building alterations
6. That the Assistant Director (Corporate Services & Transformation) provides an IT services briefing for Members
7. That Tenancy officers advise eligible residents to apply for Attendance Allowance

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

Stevenage Local Plan

The Strategic Director provided an update on the decision by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to place a holding direction on the Stevenage Local Plan. The Council had been in regular contact with officials from the Ministry. The last meeting was held in January 2019. It was made clear to the Ministry officials that if no positive decision was made to remove the Holding Direction on the Local Plan by 28 January 2019, the Council would have no choice other than to commence legal processes to challenge the continuation of the Holding Direction, which had been in effect since November 2017. The Council was now preparing to challenge the holding direction.

It was confirmed that the County Council was in support of the decision by Stevenage Borough Council. It was also confirmed that the local MP was not a party to the legal challenge as the case relates to the use of a Holding Direction by the Secretary of State. The Council was still hopeful of a resolution of the issue. The

Council will incur legal costs related to the holding direction; however, this is dependent on whether the court decides to hear this case. The full cost to the Council will depend on the MHCLG's response. Members were informed that a full hearing could take six to nine months and future updates would be provided in due course. A briefing note will be provided and sent to all Members regarding this issue.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the update is noted
2. That Members be given guidance on how communicate about the issue so as not to prejudice the case

5 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

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 involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraphs 1 to 7 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by SI 2006 No. 88.
2. That having considered the reasons for the following items being in Part II, it be determined that maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

6 **PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE**

It was **RESOLVED** that the following Part II decisions of the Executive be noted:

- Part II Minutes of the Executive – 21 November 2018
- West of Stevenage Development

7 **URGENT PART II DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

None.

8 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR

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