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Daneshill House
Danestrete
Stevenage
Hertfordshire

11 July 2023

Dear Sir/Madam

Notice is hereby given that a meeting of the Stevenage Borough Council will be held in the Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage on Wednesday, 19 July 2023 at 7.30pm or at the rising of the Special Council meeting, whichever is the later, and you are summoned to attend to transact the following business.

Yours faithfully



Matthew Partridge
Chief Executive

AGENDA

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2. MINUTES - ANNUAL MEETING - 24 MAY 2023

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of Annual Council held on 24 May 2023.

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3. MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS

To receive any communications that the Mayor may wish to put before the Council.

4. COMMUNITY PRESENTATIONS

None received.

5. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

None received.

6. QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL

None received.

7. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None received.

8. LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S UPDATE

In accordance with the Council's Standing Orders, the Leader of the Opposition shall be given the opportunity to raise one matter relevant to the Borough that has arisen since the last meeting of the Council. The Leader of the Council shall then have the opportunity to advise the Council of matters relevant to the Borough that have arisen since the last meeting.

9. UPDATE FROM SCRUTINY CHAIRS

To receive updates from the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees on the recent activities of those Committees.

10. SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23

To consider the Annual Scrutiny Report 2022/23.

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11. NOTICE OF MOTIONS

In accordance with Standing Orders, the following motions have been received for consideration:

(1) Education provision in Hertfordshire

To be moved by the Labour Group.

"In view of the difficulties being experienced by schools in Hertfordshire due to reductions in education funding, including:

- That Hertfordshire schools are running at a combined deficit of £1.8 million;
- That the equivalent of one in 22 (4.6 per cent) LA-maintained schools in Herts are now spending more than their income;
- That with the lack of Pupil Premium Grant since 2020, Hertfordshire schools are missing out on £1.9million of vital funding;
- That Hertfordshire's education department are glossing over the 800 children already awaiting special school's provision and cutting mainstream budgets to prop up special school places; and
- The worrying rate of teachers leaving the state sector for reasons other than retirement grew to a record high last year,

We as a Council have a duty of care to put pressure on the government to properly fund our state education system.

In recognition of the above stated points, this Council instructs the Portfolio Holder for Co-operative Council and Neighbourhood Communities to write to the Secretary of State for Education and Hertfordshire County Council to ask the Government to properly fund the state education system, and to challenge the County Council to cease formulating budgets that attempted to camouflage what is, in reality, an educational crisis.”

(2) Consultation on planning applications

To be moved by Councillor Stephen Booth and seconded by Councillor Robin Parker CC.

“That Council requests a report on the widening of the number of properties consulted over planning applications, including consulting with ward councillors when planning applications are received involving green space unspecified in the 2018 Local Development Plan.”

(3) Mayor of London’s Ultra-Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) Expansion

To be moved by Councillor Graham Lawrence CC and seconded by Councillor Bret Facey.

“That this Council notes that:

- On 4 March 2022 the Mayor Khan announced his plan to expand the Ultra-Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) from its current boundary to cover all of outer London. The expansion is due to come into force by 29 August 2023.
- The expansion will mean that those with non-compliant vehicles will pay £12.50 per day to drive within the ULEZ each day.
- Stevenage is a commuter town, with a significant number of residents travelling into outer London for work via public transport, but in their own vehicles also.
- Many Stevenage residents also have family connections to outer London and so need to visit outer London to see relatives.
- The less well-off will be disproportionately penalised by this expansion, as such residents will be reliant on their cars and are unable to replace them with more modern (compliant) vehicles.
- The Mayor of London has set aside almost £400 million towards expanding the ULEZ and related projects.
- 5 Councils (Bexley, Bromley, Harrow, Hillingdon and Surrey Councils) have joined together to oppose the Mayor’s decision to expand the ULEZ and have successfully taken the issue to the High Court for Judicial Review.

That this Council resolves to:

- Condemn this expansion which will push up the cost of living for some of our poorest residents, who rely on their cars and trades vehicles to commute to outer London, by imposing this de facto tax on motorists.
- Call on the Mayor of London to withdraw his unworkable and discriminatory ULEZ expansion.
- Publicly express solidarity with, and support for, the local authorities involved

in the 'Coalition Against ULEZ Expansion' legal challenge against the Mayor of London's flawed decision."

12. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRS / PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

In accordance with Standing Orders, written answers to the following questions will be circulated on a supplementary agenda.

(A) Question from Councillor Graham Lawrence CC

"After spending so much time on children's play areas in the Borough, inspecting, reviewing upgrading some and closing others, does the Council think it should maintain those that remain, rather than allow them to become damaged and overrun with plant growth and rubbish?"

(B) Question from Councillor Phil Bibby CC

"To try and avoid road sweepers having to skirt round parked cars, leaving unsightly detritus on the roads, could the Council advise residents in advance, asking them not to park where there is such detritus on planned routes?"

(C) Question from Councillor Bret Facey

"Does the Leader still believe that the £110,000 refurbishment of Shephalbury Park's tennis courts, which was funded by the Lawn Tennis Association and Conservative government, is 'fantastic news' for Stevenage people?"

(D) Question from Councillor Chris Howells

"When will this Council start to take the safety of pedestrians in the Town Centre seriously? We are having to dodge cyclists, skateboarders and e-scooters in what is meant to be a pedestrianised zone. It is hardly surprising that Stevenage as a Town suffers from a poor reputation across the County when this is what visitors get to see."

(E) Question from Councillor Stephen Booth

"Will SBC undertake to consult with ward councillors ahead of Council sales of green space or other land for development?"

(F) Question from Councillor Andy McGuinness

"What progress is being made on decarbonising the Council by its target of 2030?"

(G) Question from Councillor Robin Parker CC

"What publicity or other actions are the council promoting, in conjunction with the police, about the use of electric scooters being illegal when used other than on private land?"

(H) Question from Councillor Graham Snell

“Can the Council explain what the long-term plans are for the use of the currently vacant former car park area to the north of the new multi-storey car park on the train station site?”

(I) Question from Councillor Tom Wren

“Does the Council think that an electric bicycle hire scheme could be viable in Stevenage and help to meet our climate change objectives?”

13. AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES

To note the Minutes of the meetings of the Audit Committee held on 27 March 2023 and 6 June 2023.

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14. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

To consider the following motions –

1. That under Section 100A 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.

15. REGENERATION PROGRAMME UPDATE AND SG1 PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION

To consider financial recommendations in respect of a proposal to create a Joint Venture structure to deliver the first project (Plot A Swingate House) of the SG1 regeneration scheme.

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STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 24 May 2023

Time: 7.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: Margaret Notley (Mayor), Myla Arceno, Julie Ashley-Wren, Sandra Barr, Philip Bibby CC, Stephen Booth, Lloyd Briscoe, Rob Broom, Jim Brown, Forhad Chowdhury, Nazmin Chowdhury, Michael Downing, Bret Facey, Alex Farquharson, Richard Henry, Jackie Hollywell, Chris Howells, Mason Humberstone, Graham Lawrence CC, Mrs Joan Lloyd, Conor McGrath, Andy McGuinness, Maureen McKay, Sarah Mead, Adam Mitchell CC, Robin Parker CC, Claire Parris, Ellie Plater, Loraine Rossati, Graham Snell, Simon Speller, Baroness Taylor of Stevenage, OBE, Jeannette Thomas, Carolina Veres, Anne Wells and Tom Wren

Start / End Start Time: 7.00pm
Time: End Time: 9.15pm

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Wendy Kerby and Lin Martin-Haugh.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES - 23 FEBRUARY 2023 AND 8 MARCH 2023**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meetings of the Council held on 23 February and 8 March 2023 be approved as correct records and signed by the Mayor.

3 **ELECTION OF MAYOR**

The Mayor was saddened to hear of that former Councillor John Gardner, who had served as an SBC Member for the Roebuck Ward between 1998 and May 2023, including being Deputy Leader of the Council between 2006 and 2018, had passed away in the early hours of the day.

The Leader of the Council advised that he had known John Gardner as a friend and fellow Labour councillor for over 20 years. His passion and commitment to the Borough was amazing in terms of the Regeneration of the Town, sustainability and his work on the environment agenda and the Council's Climate Change

commitment.

The Leader advised that the Council would be considering, following liaison with John's wife Michelle at an appropriate time, a suitable and fitting memorial somewhere in the Town in tribute to John. Thoughts and prayers were with Michelle and her family at this very difficult time.

Councillor Bibby CC, Leader of the Opposition spoke of John Gardner's commitment and as a politician with conviction and passion.

Councillor Robin Parker CC, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group spoke of John's contribution to the Town and his brave fight with his recent illness. He was committed to his socialist principles and could always be relied upon to speak up for the disadvantaged.

A number of other Members spoke in tribute to former Councillor Gardner, following which the Council stood to observe a minute's silence.

The Mayor then gave a speech thanking the Council for a wonderful year in office and she recounted some of the highlights of the year, including events celebrating the King's Coronation, various concerts such as the Hertfordshire Schools Evening Gala at the Royal Albert Hall and choosing and declaring Stevenage's Friendliest Street. The Mayor also spoke about a number of events she had held throughout the year and thanked everyone that had supported the events from her Charities and local musicians, singers and dancers.

The Mayor then thanked her Mayoress, Cathy Bibby; The Deputy Mayor-Councillor Myla Arceno and her Consort John Arceno; her Chaplain the Revd Ruth Carroll; the Youth Mayor Paige Abrey; and the Council officers who had helped her throughout her year in office, particularly the Mayor's PA Tracey Frost.

She then wished the incoming Mayor and Deputy Mayor every success for the coming year.

The Mayor asked for nominations for the Office of Mayor for 2023/24.

Councillor Richard Henry nominated Councillor Myla Arceno for the Office of Mayor.

The nomination was seconded by Councillor Lloyd Briscoe.

There being no other nominations, a vote was taken and it was **RESOLVED** that Councillor Myla Arceno be elected as Mayor for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

Councillor Myla Arceno then made the statutory declaration of office.

The Mayor announced that her son John Arceno would be the Mayor's Consort for 2023/24.

The Mayor thanked the Council for her election, and gave an inaugural speech, including the announcement that her chosen charities for the year would be the

Douglas Drive Day Care Centre, The Red Shed, Hertwise and Stevenage World Forum.

The Mayor Advised that it was a privilege to be given the role of Mayor and the opportunity to serve the Town and its residents. She spoke of her journey to Stevenage from the Philippines and her work in the NHS as a specialist physiotherapist in cardiac rehab.

The Mayor thanked her friends and colleagues for their support along with her supporters from the Filipino community in Stevenage and Worldwide. The mayor also thanked her husband, son and daughter for their love and encouragement.

4 **ELECTION OF DEPUTY MAYOR**

The Mayor asked for nominations for the Office of Deputy Mayor for 2023/24.

Councillor Lorraine Rossati nominated Councillor Jim Brown. The nomination was seconded by Councillor Jeannette Thomas.

There being no other nominations, a vote was taken and it was **RESOLVED** that Councillor Jim Brown be appointed Deputy Mayor for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

Councillor Jim Brown then made the statutory declaration of office. The Deputy Mayor announced that Penny Schenkel would be his Deputy Mayoress for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

5 **APPOINTMENT OF YOUTH MAYOR**

The outgoing Youth Mayor, Paige Abrey, thanked the outgoing Mayor, Councillors, Officers, family and friends for their support over the year. She outlined some of the highlights of her year in office and wished the incoming Youth Mayor every success in the role.

It was then moved by Councillor Sandra Barr, seconded by Councillor Mason Humberstone and **RESOLVED** that Ella Lacey be elected as Youth Mayor for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

Ella Lacey then signed the declaration of office. In her acceptance speech, the new Youth Mayor thanked the Council for her election. She further thanked the outgoing Youth Mayor and outlined a number of initiatives that she hoped to be involved with during the year. She then announced that Anisa Mathew would be her Deputy Youth Mayor for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

6 **BOROUGH COUNCIL ELECTIONS 2023**

The Council considered a report that detailed the results of the Borough Council Elections that were held on 4 May 2023.

The Leader in moving the report paid tribute to the outgoing Councillors, John Gardner, Liz Harrington Teresa Callaghan and Adrian Brown and welcomed the

newly elected Councillors Mason Humberstone, Forhad Chowdhury, Ellie Plater and Carolina Veres.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Jackie Hollywell was pleased that the public had continued to show confidence in the Council and that it was encouraging to see greater diversity in the Council following the elections.

Thanks were given to Matt Partridge (Returning Officer), Luke Fattorusso, the Elections Team and all SBC staff who supported before and during the day for the excellent and huge amount of work carried out behind the scenes ensuring the smooth running of the Election process.

It was moved by Councillor Henry, seconded by Councillor Hollywell and **RESOLVED** that the results of the Stevenage Borough Council Elections 2023 be noted.

7 **APPOINTMENT OF LEADER AND DEPUTY LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION**

The Chief Executive advised that the Leader of the Opposition would be Councillor Phil Bibby CC and that Councillor Bret Facey would be his Deputy.

8 **APPOINTMENT OF LEADERS AND DEPUTY LEADERS OF POLITICAL GROUPS ON THE COUNCIL**

The Chief Executive advised the Council that Councillors Richard Henry, Phil Bibby CC and Robin Parker CC had been appointed as Leaders of the Labour and Co-operative, Conservative and Liberal Democrat Groups respectively. It was noted that Councillors Jeannette Thomas, Bret Facey and Stephen Booth would be Deputy Leaders of the Labour and Co-operative, Conservative and Liberal Democrat Groups respectively.

9 **CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES**

Council considered various matters relating to the Member level decision making structure of the Council and the Council's constitution for the forthcoming Municipal Year.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED**:

1. That the Terms of Reference, as detailed in the appendices to the report; and the size and political composition for the following bodies that form the non-Executive Member level decision making structure of the Council be approved subject to the rules of proportionality where appropriate for 100 Committee places where applicable (relevant Committees are identified thus*) -
 - Overview and Scrutiny Committee* (Appendix A) – 14 Members (9 Labour & Co-operative Group, 3 Conservative Group, 2 Liberal Democrat Group)
 - Community Select Committee* (Appendix B) – 10 Members (6 Labour &

Co-operative Group, 3 Conservative Group, 1 Liberal Democrat Group)

- Environment and Economy Select Committee* (Appendix C) – 11 Members (7 Labour & Co-operative Group, 2 Conservative Group, 2 Liberal Democrat Group)
- Planning & Development Committee* (Appendix D) – 14 Members (9 Labour & Co-operative Group, 3 Conservative Group, 2 Liberal Democrat Group)
- Licensing Committee (Appendix E) – 14 Members (8 Labour & Co-operative Group, 4 Conservative Group, 2 Liberal Democrat Group)
- General Purposes Committee* (Appendix F) – 14 Members (8 Labour & Co-operative Group, 4 Conservative Group, 2 Liberal Democrat Group)
- Appointments Committee* (Appendix G) - 8 Members (5 Labour & Co-operative Group, 2 Conservative Group, 1 Liberal Democrat Group)
- Standards Committee* (Appendix H) – 8 Members (5 Labour & Co-operative Group, 2 Conservative Group, 1 Liberal Democrat Group)
- Audit Committee* (Appendix I) – 10 Members (6 Labour & Co-operative Group, 2 Conservative Group, 2 Liberal Democrat Group) + 1 Co-opted non-elected member
- Statement of Accounts Committee* (Appendix J) – 8 Members (5 Labour & Co-operative Group, 2 Conservative Group, 1 Liberal Democrat Group)
- Joint Consultative Committee* (Appendix K) – 3 Members (2 Labour & Co-operative Group, 1 Conservative Group)

* Indicates where those bodies covered by the rules of proportionality for the purposes of the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups), Regulations 1990 – total Committee places being 100

2. That the membership of the Executive and the individual Portfolios, as set out below, be noted:

Councillor Richard Henry – Leader, Regeneration, Communication and Strategic Partnerships

Councillor Jeannette Thomas – Deputy Leader, Housing and Housing Development

Councillor Sandra Barr –Co-operative Council and Neighbourhood Communities

Councillor Lloyd Briscoe – Economy and Transport

Councillor Jackie Hollywell – Community Safety and Equalities

Councillor Mrs Joan Lloyd – Resources and Transformation

Councillor Loraine Rossati – Culture, Leisure and Information Technology

Councillor Simon Speller – Environment and Performance

3. That the various Executive bodies appointed by the Leader, detailed in Paragraph 4.3 of the report and the relevant Terms of Reference for each body set out in Appendix L to the report, be noted.
4. That the dates for Council meetings for the Municipal Year 2023/24, as shown at Paragraph 4.6 of the report, be approved, and that the calendar of formal meetings shown at Appendix M to the report, be noted.
5. That the amendment to Standing Order 10(a) Council Tax and Budget Setting Debate, as set out in paragraph 4.10 of the report be approved.

10

APPOINTMENT TO COMMITTEES OF THE COUNCIL

Details of the individuals nominated to serve on each Committee, together with the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of those Committees, where stated, had been circulated prior to the meeting.

The Chief Executive advised that in relation to the membership of the Environment and Economy Select Committee, Councillor Julie Ashley-Wren had been added as a member in error and should be removed from the list.

Councillor Mrs Joan Lloyd moved and Councillor Claire Parris seconded the appointment of Committees. Councillor Mrs Joan Lloyd moved and Councillor Jeannette Thomas seconded the appointment of Chairs and Vice-Chairs to the Committees.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the membership of Committees, together with the Chairs and Vice-Chairs, where detailed, are appointed for 2023/24 Municipal Year as follows:

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14 Members (9-3-2)

Councillors – L Martin-Haugh (Chair), P Bibby, CC (Vice-Chair), S Booth, R Broom, J Brown, F Chowdhury, M Downing, B. Facey, C McGrath, S Mead, M Notley, R Parker CC, C Veres and A Wells.

COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE

10 Members (6-3-1):

Councillors – S Mead (Chair), A Farquharson (Vice-Chair), J Ashley-Wren, F Chowdhury, J Duncan, M Humberstone, W Kerby, C McGrath, E Plater and C Veres.

ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE

11 Members (7-2-2):

Councillors – R Broom (Chair), A Mitchell, CC (Vice-Chair), J Brown, B Facey, C McGrath, C McGuinness, S Mead, C Parris E Plater, G Snell and S Taylor OBE,CC.

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

14 Members (9-3-2)

Councillors – M Downing (Chair), C Parris (Vice-Chair), J Ashley-Wren, R Broom, F Chowdhury, N Chowdhury, C Howells, G Lawrence CC, M McKay, A Mitchell CC, E Plater, G Snell C Veres and A Wells.

Substitutes - P Bibby CC
A Farquharson
A McGuinness
T Wren
+ 5 Labour substitutes (tba)

LICENSING COMMITTEE

14 Members (8-4-2)

Councillors – C Parris (Chair), S Barr, N Chowdhury, M Downing, J Duncan, C Howells, G Lawrence CC, Mrs J Lloyd, L Martin-Haugh, M McKay, M Notley, G Snell, A Wells and T Wren.

Substitutes - P Bibby CC
S Booth
W Kerby
A McGuinness
+ 4 Labour substitutes (tba)

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

14 Members (8-4-2)

Councillors – C Parris (Chair), S Barr, N Chowdhury, M Downing, J Duncan, C Howells, G Lawrence CC, Mrs J Lloyd, L Martin-Haugh, M McKay, M Notley, G Snell, A Wells and T Wren.

Substitutes - P Bibby CC
S Booth
W Kerby
A McGuinness
+ 4 Labour substitutes (tba)

APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE

8 Members (5-2-1)

Councillors – S Barr, P Bibby CC, B Facey, R Henry, J Hollywell, R Parker CC, S Speller and J Thomas.

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

8 Members (5-2-1)

Councillors – Mrs J Lloyd (Chairman), P Bibby CC, L Martin-Haugh, M Notley, L Rossati, S Speller, J Thomas and T Wren.

Independent Person who must be consulted on alleged breaches to the Code of Conduct – Dr. Robert Cawley

AUDIT COMMITTEE

10 Members (6-2-2) + 1 Independent Co-opted Member (G Gibbs)
Councillors – M McKay (Chair), S Booth, L Briscoe, R Broom, N Chowdhury, A Farquharson, G Lawrence CC, S Taylor OBE, CC, C Veres and T Wren.

STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

8 Members (5-2-1)
Councillors – Mrs J Lloyd (Chairman), P Bibby CC, J Hollywell, M Humberstone, S Mead, A Mitchell CC, L Rossati and G Snell.

JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

3 Members (2-1-0)
Councillors – Richard Henry (Employer Side Chair), P Bibby CC and A Wells.

11 **APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES**

Council considered a list of individuals nominated to serve on Outside Bodies which had been circulated before the meeting.

It was moved by Councillor Mrs J Lloyd, seconded by Councillor Thomas and **RESOLVED** that the following individuals are appointed to represent the Council on the various bodies detailed below for one year, unless otherwise stated:

COUNCIL FOR THE PROTECTION OF RURAL ENGLAND: THE
HERTFORDSHIRE SOCIETY - Portfolio Holder for Environment and Performance

EAST OF ENGLAND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION - The Leader of the
Council

EAST OF ENGLAND REGIONAL PLANNING - Portfolio Holder for Environment and
Performance

HERTS WASTE MANAGEMENT PARTNERSHIP - Portfolio Holder for Environment
and Performance

HERTFORDSHIRE GROWTH BOARD – The Leader of the Council

HERTFORDSHIRE INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING AND POLICY GROUP -
Portfolio Holder for Environment and Performance

HERTFORDSHIRE LOCAL AUTHORITIES LEADERS GROUP - The Leader of the
Council

HERTFORDSHIRE LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP – The Leader of the
Council

HERTFORDSHIRE CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY PARTNERSHIP -
Portfolio Holder for Environment and Performance

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION - The Leader of the Council

SOSAFE PARTNERSHIP - Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, and Equalities

STEVENAGE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP - Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, and Equalities

SOSTEVENAGE PARTNERSHIP - The Leader of the Council and Deputy Leader

STEVENAGE DEVELOPMENT BOARD - The Leader of the Council and Deputy Leader

AGE CONCERN STEVENAGE – Jeannette Thomas

BEDWELL COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION – Conor McGrath

CHELLS MANOR COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION - Andy McGuinness

CROSSROADS CARE – Anne Wells

DOUGLAS DRIVE SENIOR CITIZENS ASSOCIATION – Maureen Mckay

HOME-START STEVENAGE – Rob Broom

KADOMA LINK ASSOCIATION - Graham Snell and Margaret Notley

LIVING ROOM PROJECT - Jackie Hollywell

OLD STEVENAGE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION – Loraine Rossati

OVAL COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION - Lloyd Briscoe

PIN GREEN COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION - Jeannette Thomas

SHEPHALL COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION – Simon Speller

ST NICHOLAS COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION - Sandra Barr

STEVENAGE CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU – Rob Broom

STEVENAGE COMMUNITY TRUST – Sandra Barr and Maureen McKay

STEVENAGE CREDIT UNION LIMITED – Joan Lloyd

SPRUSE – Lin Martin-Haugh

HAVEN FIRST – Mason Humberstone

STEVENAGE/AUTUN/INGELHEIM ASSOCIATION – Sandra Barr and Simon Speller

STEVENAGE WORLD FORUM FOR ETHNIC COMMUNITIES – Forhad Chowdhury

and Mason Humberstone

SYMONDS GREEN COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION – Jackie Hollywell

TIMEBRIDGE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION – Tom Wren

TURN THE TIDE – Nazmin Chowdhury

EAST OF ENGLAND LGA IMPROVEMENT AND EFFICIENCY PANEL - Richard Henry

HCC HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - Maureen McKay

LOCAL GOVERNMENT INFORMATION UNIT – Jim Brown

LUTON AIRPORT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE – Loraine Rossati

CHAIR

Meeting COUNCIL
Portfolio Area ALL
Date 19 JULY 2023



ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT FOR 2022-23

Author – Stephen Weaver, Scrutiny Officer (on behalf of the Scrutiny Members) Ext.No. 2332

Lead Officer – Tom Pike, Deputy Chief Executive Ext. No. 2288

Contact Officer – Stephen Weaver Ext.No. 2332

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To report on the work undertaken by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Select Committees during the 2022/23 Municipal Year and to outline the Work Programme for the three Committees for 2023/24.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the work undertaken by Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Select Committees during 2022/23 be noted.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 This Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000, Overview and Scrutiny's role is to operate as an independent function of the Council's decision-making process, by having overview of the Council's decision making, holding the Executive to account, having the power to "call in" decisions for reconsideration and undertake internal and external scrutiny reviews.
- 3.2 The Council's Constitution requires that there be an annual report to Council on the scrutiny activity over the past Municipal Year (see Article 6.3 of the Constitution).

- 3.3 This report is a retrospective look at the scrutiny review work undertaken by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the two Select Committees during the 2022-23 Municipal Year.
- 3.4 In accordance with the Constitution the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was also charged with scrutinising the Executive's proposals on Budget & Policy Framework items that go before Council for decision. In addition, the Committees considered updates on Scrutiny studies that had been undertaken previously, examining the progress of recommendations and where appropriate following up on matters raised.
- 3.5 The Committees have also worked with their relevant Executive Portfolio Holders on a number of separate policy development meetings developing policies and considering reports before their submission to the Executive. This report, however, focuses on the role of the Committees' Scrutiny post Executive decision.

4 SUMMARY OF SELECT COMMITTEE REVIEWS

- 4.1 Each Select Committee review made formal recommendations to the relevant Executive Member, Officers and external partners. The following is a summary of the outcomes of each scrutiny review.

4.2 COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE

4.2.1 Scrutiny of Housing Voids

In conducting this review, the Community Select Committee met on 3 occasions in total with 3 formal Committee meetings to undertake the review as follows: On 5 September 2022, 11 October 2022 and 2 November 2022, and held 2 site visits days on 13 October to visit 3 properties at various stages of the void process at properties in the Roebuck, Bedwell and Martins Wood ward areas and a revisit on 2 November to the property in Bedwell and were supported by the following officers Rob Gregory, Assistant Director, Communities and Neighbourhoods; Assistant Director SDS Steve Dupoy; Operations Manager, Providing Homes, Tracy Jackson; SDS Service Delivery Manager, Dean Stevens; Kemal Hulusi, Commercial and Contracts Manager; Executive Portfolio Holder for Housing Development and Housing, Cllr Jeannette Thomas.

- 4.2.2 The review made recommendations on the following 7 areas:

1 Carry out programmed Tenancy Audit of properties

Carry out a programmed cycle of inspections on properties. Officers to consider how such an inspection regime would be instigated and whether there could be agreed triggers that would necessitate a visit, such as complaints from neighbours due to the dumping of rubbish, non-payment of rent as well as any planned maintenance or reactive maintenance visits to the property etc. and on any such visits a checklist in relation to a disrepair/defects survey should be completed.

- ###### **2 Parallel processes** – When a tenant has given the Council notice and hands in the keys early, the voids team will carry out works and

administrative processes that are required to minimise the void loss period.

- 3 **Regular sharing of data on voids with Members** – Provide data on all void properties for a twelve-month period. To see what the actual performance of Void properties with general needs is, as this data has hitherto not been collected. Currently there is a standard target of 26 days, and some properties with major needs had a turnaround of up to 64 days.
- 4 **Recruitment** - Provide periodic updates to the Executive Portfolio Holder for Housing and Housing Development, and in turn the Community Select Committee on the progress with recruitment and retention of DSO officers and with any temporary outsourcing of voids work to external contractors.
- 5 **A revised Officer data capture of end-to-end void process** – That officers provide Members with a detailed proposal of the end-to-end void process so they can make a view as to whether this process is likely to have the desired Impact of raising the current performance levels of the voids service
- 6 **Investigate potential incentives and penalties to encourage tenants to maintain their rented properties in a reasonable condition** - for officers to explore ways to hold tenants to account for keeping SBC's property/their home in good repair. Where there are rechargeable repairs identified in inspection activity or otherwise, throughout the term of the tenancy, that the tenant is charged, at discretion, to avoid leaving multiple repairs and a large bill at the end of the tenancy. This should include unauthorised modifications.
- 7 **Pursue better benchmarking with similar local authorities** - Officers saw the benefit of local, meaningful benchmarking discussions and future sharing of data compared with the current national benchmarking group – Housemark. Housing officers will continue to reach out to other similar sized authorities who have a retained housing stock to share experiences and where possible data.

4.2.3 The details of the review report but can be found by following the link to the meeting that they were agreed 9 March 2023 – [Report and Recommendations - Voids Review - 9 March 2023](#)

4.3 **Update on Damp and Mould**

4.3.1 Following the tragic death of Awaab Ishak, who died of a respiratory condition caused by mould in his housing association home in Rochdale, all public sector housing providers were required to provide a statutory response to the Secretary of State regarding their current practises regarding damp and mould cases. In addition to this, the Chair of the Community Select Committee was keen to update scrutiny Members on the previous work that the Committee had undertaken regarding damp and mould. Members received a presentation from the Housing Investment Programme Manager, Keith Pierson, regarding the latest position with damp and mould cases in the Council's housing stock, detailing what action had taken place since the

Committee's review into the issue in 2017. In 2020 a new policy was adopted following Members' recommendations including:

- carrying out a review of the Council's damp & condensation policy to ensure it remained fit for purpose and further develop the improvement plan
- an ambitious condition survey programme targeting 50% of stock to identify future improvement programmes
- developing case management processes further to improve resident engagement. Additional capacity would be built into the HRA Budget for 2023/24 to support this
- developing the IT system for case management including reporting tools to get more data enabling more targeted and earlier interventions
- planning further projects such as air quality monitors, use of technology and alternative wall finishes
- improving reporting and feedback mechanisms to make it easier for tenants

4.3.2 Given the raised profile of damp and mould in the media, there had been unhelpful developments more recently with regards to disrepair claims, with instances of residents following legal advice to ignore the advice of the Council and not engage with Officers. Moreover, cases were increasing due to the cost-of-living crisis which was currently contributing to the rise in cases. These included not enough air changes, the refusal to use extractor fans and to turn central heating on due to the increase in utility charges added to the problem of poor air quality.

4.3.3 Members stated that they were confident in the work that officers were undertaking regarding damp and but would keep the matter under review.

4.3.4 [Agenda for Community Select Committee on Monday, 9 January 2023, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#) and [CSC Minutes 9 January 2023](#)

4.4 **Community Select Committee sitting as the Council Statutory Crime & Disorder Committee**

4.4.1 Members invited the Police to provide a presentation and answer questions regarding the following issues:

- Policing of the town centre
- Recent burglaries - information to help Members understand if this is potentially a trend or more isolated cases?
- Prevalence of marijuana across the town - is anything being done?
- Are ward priorities too focussed on cars?
- Explanation of what resources exist to tackle crime of all types in Stevenage

4.4.2 Prior to the meeting the Chair asked the Police to comment on what the impact for them had been from the publishing of Baroness Casey's review

into the standards and internal culture of the Metropolitan Police, for the processes and procedures for Hertfordshire Constabulary. The Police agreed that there was work for the Police to do to restore and maintain public confidence and trust following recent troubling incidents, and they gave assurances to the Committee that Hertfordshire Police had the appropriate processes and procedure in place to address the issues raised in Baroness Casey's report. The Police advised that there are mechanisms in place for anyone both internal and external to the Police, for them to come forward with any concerns regarding the Police's conduct.

4.5 ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE

4.5.1 Climate Emergency Review

4.5.2 The Committee continued its review of the Climate Emergency:

4.5.3 The review was completed in two stages, with an interim report published on 23 March 2022 including 13 recommendations. Overall, the Committee met formally on 11 occasions over the two years in 2021 and 2022 and informally on 3 occasions to undertake the review.

4.5.4 For the second part of the review the Committee received input from the following groups and people on the following dates:

- Thursday 23 June 2022, to consider the University of Hertfordshire's Zero Carbon Lab report providing theoretical carbon reduction measures which could help the Council reach its net zero ambitions
- Wednesday 13 July 2022, interview with the Leader of the Council, Cllr Sharon Taylor and Executive Portfolio Holder for Resources and ICT, Cllr Joan Lloyd
- Tuesday 22 September 2022, interview with the new Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change, Cllr Simon Speller
- Thursday 20 October 2022, interviews with the Executive Portfolio Holders for Culture, Leisure, Children and Young People, Cllr Richard Henry; Communities, Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Council, Cllr Sandra Barr; and Executive Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Equalities, Health and Older People and received specific Officer updates on the Council's tree policy and on efforts towards improved recycling rates and a drive to encourage residents to use less in the hierarchy of waste management.
- Monday 24 October 2022, informal meeting of the Committee to interview Friends of the Earth, Peter Foord and Andy Holtham
- Wednesday 16 November 2022, representatives of the Committee met Members of the Young People's Climate Change Committee (a sub-group of the Youth Council) to engage with young people re climate change
- Thursday 17 November 2022, interviews with HCC Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment, Cllr Eric Buckmaster and Chair of the

Hertfordshire Climate Change Sustainability Partnership, Cllr Graham McAndrew, and with HCC Head of Sustainability, Julie Greaves and Lead Officer for Climate Change, East of England LGA, Matt Partridge

- Tuesday 17 January 2023, final report and recommendations of the review.

4.5.5 The review made recommendations on the following 6 areas:

1. **SBC and area wide pathway and targets** It is recommended that clear targets and a pathway to 2030 for both SBC targets and area wide targets need to be established. It is not currently clear what the targets or pathway are to see how Stevenage gets from where it is now to 2030. The way progress against the 2018 baseline figure is measured and publicised needs to be thought through so that this is clearly described to show what progress is being made each year and understood by Officers, Members and by the public.
2. **Pace** Is the climate emergency really being treated as an emergency? It is recommended that there is a need to ramp up the pace to get to net zero for the town by 2030. Members accept there are challenges around funding but where it sits in corporate priorities is an area that is a decision for the authority. Members will be looking to see how the pace is picked up leading to 2030.
3. **Adaptations** The review established that due to extreme weather events linked to climate change there is already a need for adaptations to buildings and for up-to-date emergency response plans to care for older residents in sheltered housing schemes. It is recommended that there be an audit of all adaptations required across the Council.
4. **Behaviour Change** It is recommended that officers from SBC link up with officers from the HCC Behaviour Change unit to work together on behaviour change initiatives.
5. **Future review** It has been recommended by the Chair of the Environment and Economy Select Committee that the issue of the climate emergency should be under regular review by the Committee and that a progress report should be brought back to the committee on a yearly basis.
6. **Training** The Committee recommends the creation of a training package for members, and additional training for senior Officers, on climate change mitigations and adaption, so that future decision makers are well informed in all aspects of the councils' operations, and the bearing climate change mitigation and adaption may have on them.

4.6 **Executive Member Response to the Climate Emergency review**

4.6.1 The Select Committee received the formal response from the Executive Member for Environment and Climate Change, Councillor Simon Speller to the recommendations listed above. Based on the Executive response Environment & Economy Members provided the following critique:

- Members discussed the ongoing need to provide clear data that showed progress against the baseline figures from 2018, which

Members understood would be soon available via the Council's website.

- The need for adaptations to buildings, creating cool spaces during increasing episodes of extreme heat which was going to be an ongoing feature of climate change.
- The need for ongoing behavioural change to help harness community involvement in climate change practises and specific projects.

4.6.2 In addition to the formal review work undertaken by Environment and Economy Select Committee Members, selected Members and Officers supported the work of the Executive Portfolio Holder for Climate Change by contributing to 7 informal meetings of the Portfolio Holder's Climate Change Progress Group.

4.7 Cost of Living Review

4.7.1 The Committee started its review of the Cost of Living with a scoping document in December 2022 where it decided that the focus of the review should be on three areas including a focus on the impact on (i) local residents, (ii) impact on local businesses and (iii) the impact on Council staff.

4.7.2 The Committee received an officer presentation in January 2023 providing an overview of the cost of living crisis in a national, County and local context from the interim Head of Policy and Communities, Ben Threadgold. The Committee also interviewed Charlotte Blizzard-Welch, CEO Stevenage Citizens Advice and SBC officer, Gemma Maret, Co-operative Neighbourhoods Programme Manager regarding the operation of warm spaces.

4.7.3 In February 2023 the Committee received a presentation from the Business Relationship Manager, Mena Caldbeck on the impact of the cost of living crisis on small to medium sized businesses (SMEs) in Stevenage.

4.7.4 Members interviewed Simon Holmes, Director of Client Services and Enterprise Partnership Manager and Emma Wright, Client Services Operations Manager from Wenta (an independent, not-for-profit social enterprise that run the Council's Business Technology Centre (BTC)) to present on how businesses at the BTC are being impacted by the cost-of-living crisis. The Executive Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport, Cllr Lloyd Briscoe, also attend the meeting and joined in the discussion.

4.7.5 In March 2023 the Committee received responses to questions they had set for the Trade Unions and interviewed the Head of Human Resources (job-share), Kirsten Frew and Clare Davies regarding the impact on Council's employees.

4.7.6 The Committee intends to revisit the same three themes during 2023-24 to complete the review.

4.8 Overview & Scrutiny Committee

4.8.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 9 occasions to provide overview of the work of the Executive, specifically looking at all Key Decisions made by the Executive and all Budget and Policy Framework items. In addition to these meetings the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

5.1 **2023/2024 Scrutiny Work Programmes**

5.1 Following the usual practise, the Scrutiny Officer canvassed scrutiny Members in January and February for their feedback on scrutiny activity and ideas for future scrutiny reviews. This informed a report to each of the three scrutiny Committees in March 2023. The shape of the three committees work programmes are as follows:

5.2 Community Select Committee:

The Community Select Committee agreed to scrutinise the following issues:

- Undertake a main review item on Housing Repairs
- Hold the statutory meeting on Crime and Disorder
- Continuation of a standing item on Public Health looking specifically at the impact of the new NHS health bodies Integrated Care Boards replacing Clinical Commissioning Groups
- Hold a one-off update on the Cultural Strategy
- Receive the Executive Member Response on the Housing Voids Review
- Undertake pre-scrutiny on the Community Centres strategy
- Undertake pre-scrutiny of the Allocations Policy
- Undertake pre-scrutiny of the new Housing Management Governance arrangements (replacement for the Housing Management Advisory Board (HMAB))
- Undertake pre-scrutiny of Fairlands Valley Activity Centre

5.3 Environment and Economy Select Committee:

The Environment & Economy Select Committee agreed to scrutinise the following issues:

- Continuation and completion of review on the impact of the Cost of Living Crisis
- Undertake a main review on Bus Services and the collapse of the Zero Emission Bus Scheme
- Hold two update monitoring meetings in November 2023 and March 2024 on progress of the Climate Emergency actions following the Committee's completed review
- Schedule a one-off single meeting performance review on commercial vehicles parking in residential areas
- Scope a review of STEM employment opportunities for Young People
- Undertake pre-scrutiny of the Biodiversity Strategy
- Undertake pre-scrutiny of Waste and Recycling Strategy

The programmes above will be prioritised to ensure the key review activity takes place during the Municipal Year. As well as carrying out review work the Committee will also undertake any other pre-scrutiny Policy Development work as directed by the officer Strategic Leadership Team and the Council and Executive Forward Plan.

5.4 Overview & Scrutiny Committee Work Programme:

5.4.1 In addition to undertaking all scrutiny of Budget & Policy Framework items and decisions of the Executive, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has the capacity to undertake a “Select Committee” style meeting during the year if it so wishes. The Committee agreed to add the following items to its work programme:

- Scrutiny of the Council’s Information Communication Technology (ICT) delivery
- Scrutiny of the 2021 Census Data for Stevenage

As well as carrying out review work the Committee will also undertake pre-scrutiny Policy Development work as directed by officer Strategic Leadership Team the Council and Executive Forward Plan.

5.4.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will review the Council’s Forward Plan of Key Decisions and also consider all ‘Call-in’ requests in accordance with the Council’s Constitution as well as considering any Councillors Call for Action in relation to matters relating to Resources and any Petition appeals, in accordance with the Councils Petition Scheme, regarding matters relating to Resources or of a Corporate or Council wide nature.

5.5 Scoping reviews

5.5.1 A schedule of dates for meetings for the two Select Committees has been arranged for the 2023-24 Municipal Year, as and when any further meetings are scheduled electronic diary invites will be sent to Members on the Committee. These meetings will incorporate the scoping of the review where Members will identify the areas they wish to cover during the review, who to interview, what evidence/background information is required and which Members will lead the questioning on a specific area, as well as undertaking site visits, where appropriate. Meetings will also be arranged to revisit previous reviews to monitor actions.

5.6 **Pre-Scrutiny Policy Development Meetings**

5.6.1 Pre-scrutiny Policy Development meetings will continue to be undertaken as and when directed by the Strategic Directors/Assistant Strategic Directors. These meetings are chaired by the relevant Overview & Scrutiny or Select Committee Chairs and the relevant Executive Portfolio Holders are invited to attend.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

5.5.1 There are no financial implications for this report.

5.2 Legal Implications

5.2.1 There are no legal implications for this report.

5.3 Climate Change Implications

5.3.1 All Climate Change implications are addressed in paragraphs 4.5.1 to 4.6.

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Monday, 27 March 2023

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: Teresa Callaghan (Chair), John Gardner (Vice-Chair), Myla Arceno, Stephen Booth, Alex Farquharson, Jackie Hollywell, Maureen McKay, Adam Mitchell (substitute) and Loraine Rossati.
Mr Geoffrey Gibbs – Independent Co-opted Non-voting Member.

Start / End Start Time: 6.00pm
Time: End Time: 6.38pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Graham Lawrence CC and Tom Wren. Councillor Adam Mitchell CC was substituting for Councillor Lawrence.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 7 FEBRUARY 2023

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 7 February 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 2019/20 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS UPDATE

The Committee considered an update from Karen Cunanan (Ernst & Young) in respect of Ernst & Young's (E & Y) audit results report for SBC for 2019/20.

Karen advised that work outstanding as at the date of the report was:

- The outcome of the internal consultation with E & Y's professional practice department on the non-compliance with the minimum decent home standards and whether or not E & Y needed to include an emphasis of matter with regard to property asset valuation uncertainty;
- Completion of subsequent events review up the date of E & Y's audit report, including update of E & Y's review of committee minutes;
- Final review and completion checks on the financial statements;
- Completion of audit conclusion procedures, in order to issue the audit report;

and

- Receipt of the signed management representation letter.

Karen commented that, subject to satisfactory completion of the outstanding items listed above and the result of E & Y's consultation relating to emphasis of matter with regard to property asset valuation uncertainty, E & Y expected to issue an unqualified opinion on the Council's financial statements.

Karen referred to the update in the scope of the audit, including timescale, materiality and information provided by the entity (IPE). She then referred to the unadjusted and adjusted audit differences set out on Page 7 of the report.

Karen drew attention to the audit risks and areas of audit focus, together with E & Y's findings, set out on Pages 9 – 11 of the report. She added that E & Y expected to issue an unmodified value for money conclusion related to the audit.

In response to Members' questions, Karen Cunanan stated:

- The intention was to have the 2019/20 SBC Statement of Accounts signed off by 31 March 2023. The significant outstanding item of work was the outcome of internal consultation with E & Y's professional practice department on the non-compliance with the minimum decent homes standards; and
- The unadjusted audit differences set out in the report. Known differences represented items that could be accurately quantified and related to a definite set of facts or circumstances. Judgemental differences generally involved estimation and assumptions that were open to interpretation. The total value of the unadjusted audit differences was below the accepted overall audit planning materiality figure of £1.05Million.

The Committee then received an update report from the Assistant Director (Finance) concerning the 2019/20 SBC Statement of Accounts.

The Assistant Director (Finance) advised that the Committee had met jointly with the Statement of Accounts Committee in February 2022 to consider the 2019/20 Statement of Accounts. He confirmed that no changes had been made that were material in nature. The changes outlined in Section 4.1 of the report in respect of Infrastructure Assets, Pension Liability and Going Concern had therefore been approved by the Chief Finance Officer in accordance with the delegation authorised at the February 2022 meeting.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Ernst & Young audit results report 2019/20 and the changes to the final 2019/20 SBC Statement of Accounts, as outlined in the report of the Assistant Director (Finance), be noted.

4 SHARED ANTI-FRAUD SERVICE (SAFS) PROPOSED ANTI-FRAUD PLAN 2023/24

The Shared Anti-Fraud Service (SAFS) Manager presented the proposed Anti-Fraud Plan for 2023/24.

The SAFS Manager reminded the Committee that the documents referred to in Paragraph 3 of the report, together with guidance from the National Audit Office, Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the Local Government Association recommended that organisations had effective and robust counter fraud and corruption measures. These measures required the acknowledgement of fraud as a tangible risk, policies, and procedures to deter and prevent fraud, and the provision of sufficient resources to investigate fraud and recover losses caused by fraud.

The SAFS Manager advised that the proposed SAFS Anti-Fraud Plan for 2023/24 set out at Appendix A to the report broadly followed the plans of previous years, in that it had been designed to meet the recommendations of the Fighting Fraud and Corruption Locally Strategy by adopting the “pillars” of Protect, Govern, Acknowledge, Prevent and Pursue.

The SAFS Manager referred to the Key Performance Indicators relating to SAFS set out in Appendix B to the report, and had been designed to deliver value for money for the Council.

The Committee was informed that SAFS had changed the way it would deliver its services to all of its Partners in 2023/24, with a measurable number of service/workdays (450 for SBC) which would include staff training, investigation capacity, access to SAFS management, intelligence and fraud alerts, and data-analytics. The days, allocation across service areas, and programmes of work, had all been agreed with senior officers across the Council. Specialist support would be provided to Housing Officers in relation to tenancy fraud. SAFS would maintain its relationship with third party specialist providers and national networks to keep the Council informed of new and emerging fraud threats or changes to best practice that would assist in deterring/preventing fraud and corruption.

The SAFS Manager explained that the lack of statistics relating to 2022/23 performance had been due to a staff shortage. A new SAFS Data Analyst had recently been appointed, and the next SAFS report to the Committee in the summer would contain statistics, including comparison with previous years.

In reply to a Member’s question, the SAFS Manager commented that the most common types of fraud for SBC related to Revenues and Benefits issues and Housing tenancy fraud (misuse of the Council’s housing stock).

It was **RESOLVED** that the proposed SAFS Anti-Fraud Plan for 2023/24, as attached at Appendix A to the report, be approved.

5 SIAS INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2023/24

The SIAS Client Audit Manager presented a report in respect of a proposed SBC Internal Audit Plan for 2023/24.

The SIAS Client Audit Manager advised that the approved the SIAS Internal Audit Strategy outlined how SIAS would achieve the mission of Internal Audit and ensure

ongoing compliance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS). The report followed the key principles within the Strategy relating to Audit Planning and Resourcing.

The SIAS Client Audit Manager stated that the table at Paragraph 2.14 of the report showed a breakdown of the total number of audit days (300) purchased for 2023/24, as agreed with the Council's Strategic Leadership Team. The outline scope of each of the audits contained within the Plan was set out in Appendix A to the report. The proposed audit start dates were set out in Appendix B to the report, although it was acknowledged that some of these would be flexible according to key staff availability and other work priorities.

The SIAS Client Audit Manager reminded the Committee that it would receive regular progress reports regarding the Internal Audit Plan throughout 2023/24.

In response to a series of Members' questions, the SIAS Client Audit Manager stated:

- The reduction in the number of SIAS audit days from 315 to 300 for Stevenage for 2023/24 had been agreed by the SIAS Board, and would be based on key elements of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. The number of audit days had been reduced for all partner authorities, which would be reflected in the lower level of fees charged;
- The innovation introduced by SIAS was in the way it approached its work. Traditionally, this was very labour intensive, but the use of information technology to analyse data sets negated the need to work through individual transactions;
- Commercial activities taken on by SIAs included fee paying audit work for a number of Academy schools. The income received for this work would be shown in SIAS's Trading Account, and would contribute to keeping costs down;
- There had been no planned audit for Section 106 Agreements in 2022/23. There was one planned for 2023/24. This audit was carried out on a cyclical basis, unlike the annual audits, such as coverage of key financial systems;
- The Sickness Absence Management audit was an audit covering the risks linked to complying with sickness absence management policies and procedures.

It was **RESOLVED** that the proposed Stevenage Borough Council Internal Audit Plan for 2023/24, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be approved.

6 CORPORATE GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

The Corporate Performance and Improvement Officer presented a report in respect of the activity carried out in 2022/23 (Appendix A to the report) to strengthen the Council's corporate governance arrangements, together with corporate governance enhancement for delivery in 2023/24 (Appendix B to the report, which would be reflected in the Council's 2022/23 Annual Governance Statement to be submitted to the Committee in June 2023.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the progress on corporate governance enhancement activity during 2022/23, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be noted.
2. That the corporate governance enhancement activity identified for 2023/24, as set out in Appendix B to the report, for inclusion in the Council's 2022/23 Annual Governance Statement, be noted.

7 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

8 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

It was **RESOLVED** that:

1. Under Section 100A 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. Members 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.

9 STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER

The Corporate Performance and Improvement Officer presented a report providing the Quarter 3 2022/23 (October to December 2022) update in respect of the Strategic Risk Register.

It was **RESOLVED** that the latest Strategic Risk Register, as set out at Appendix A1 to the report, be noted.

10 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

CHAIR

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**AUDIT COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Tuesday, 6 June 2023

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Maureen McKay (Chair), Carolina Veres (Vice Chair), Stephen Booth, Rob Broom, Nazmin Chowdhury, Alex Farquharson, Graham Lawrence CC, Tom Wren, and Claire Parris (substitute)

Geoffrey Gibbs – Independent Co-opted Non-Voting Member

Start / End Start Time: 6.00pm
Time: End Time: 7.00pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Lloyd Briscoe (substituted by Councillor Claire Parris) and Baroness Taylor OBE CC.

There were no declarations of interest.

The Chair welcomed the new Members of the Committee to the first meeting of the Municipal Year.

The Chair thanked Geoff Gibbs (Independent Co-opted Non-Voting Member) for his service to the Committee over the past 4 years as this would be his last meeting before stepping down. Mr Gibbs thanked the Committee and wished everyone at Stevenage Borough Council all the best in their future endeavours.

At this juncture, the Chair referred to the sad news of the recent passing of former Councillor and Vice-Chair of this Committee, John Gardner. The Chair spoke of his role as a mentor to her on her early days on the Committee and that he would be sorely missed by all at the Council.

2 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

It was moved, seconded and, following a vote, **RESOLVED** that Councillor Carolina Veres be elected as Vice-Chair of the Audit Committee for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

3 MINUTES - 27 MARCH 2023

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 27 March 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Terms of Reference for the Audit Committee, as agreed by the Annual Council meeting on 24 May 2023, be noted.

5 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND AUDIT FIRMS**

The Committee were given a verbal update from Ernst and Young (EY) regarding the recent Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' letter regarding local Government and Audit Firms.

The Committee was advised that the audit of Stevenage Borough Council's statement of accounts in the prior year had not been straight forward for a number of reasons, including the following:

- The Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic both in terms of audit risks and planned procedures to address those risks;
- The accounting treatment required for Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) funding and the complexity of the Queensway complex leasing arrangements;
- Significant risk in relation to the valuation of market-based properties and errors identified in some of these valuations by EY valuers;
- The impact consideration of the following subsequent events in the statement of accounts:
 - Accounting for Infrastructure assets;
 - The 2022 triennial pension valuation;
 - Non-compliance with minimum decent homes standards.
- In relation to decent homes EY had to consider the potential impact on the valuation of council dwellings.

It was noted that the above subsequent events would also need to be considered by EY in the 2020/21 audit.

The Committee was advised that in terms of quality and preparation issues, significant amendments and complex adjustments had been required to the initial statement of accounts provided to the audit team resulting in increased time for consideration by EY.

In relation to resourcing, changes in the Council's key financial personnel throughout the audit period had increased the time taken to resolve audit queries and agree on amendments to the financial statements. It was also acknowledged that the resourcing of local government audits had been a challenge due to the shortage of staff within the local government audit market with the specific skills and knowledge required to conduct effective audits. In addition, the EY manager assigned to the audit had been unwell and there had also been a change in the Partner and

Manager of the engagement before the 19/20 audit could be concluded.

It was **RESOLVED** that the verbal update from Ernst & Young be noted.

6 **2020/21 EXTERNAL AUDIT OF SBC ACCOUNTS - UPDATE**

The Committee received a verbal update from Ernst & Young (EY) in respect of the 2020/21 External Audit of SBC accounts.

In terms of the 2020/21 audit, there were 35 outstanding queries pending the Council's responses. Delays had been noted due to the closing for the 2022/23 accounts of the Council. The planned completion and presentation of the audit results report for the 2020/21 audit is aiming to be submitted to the 27 September 2023 Audit Committee Meeting.

In relation to the 2021/22 Audit, work was scheduled to start on 16 October 2023 with a conclusion target of 15 December 2023.

In response to a question from a Member, EY advised that there would be a significant increase in the fees due to the time and complexities of the Audits undertaken.

The Assistant Director Finance advised that in terms of borrowing, the Council used the Public Works Loan Board. There was no requirement for the Council to go to the market and therefore no impact in relation to delay in accounts being signed off.

The Committee was also advised that the requirement to publish the 2022/23 Statement of Accounts had not been met due to the delay in information regarding pension report which should hopefully be received in June/July 2023.

It was **RESOLVED** that the verbal update from Ernst & Young regarding the 2020/21 External audit of SBC accounts be noted.

7 **ANNUAL ASSURANCE STATEMENT AND SIAS ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23**

The SIAS Client Audit Manager presented a report in respect of the SIAS Annual Assurance Statement and Annual Report 2022/23.

The SIAS Client Audit Manager stated that in line with the previous year, a reasonable assurance opinion had been issued regarding the Council's financial and non-financial systems, and that SIAS had concluded that SBC's corporate governance and risk management frameworks substantially complied with the CIPFA/SOLACE best practice guidance on corporate governance.

The Committee was advised that the proposed Audit Charter, set out at Appendix D to the report, was unchanged from the 2022/23 version.

In response to a question regarding the Cyber Security and Commercial Properties Audits, the SIAS Client Audit Manager stated that they had been cancelled at the

end of the last Audit year but would be rescheduled later this year. He confirmed that Cyber Security was of high importance and would remain on the radar of the Team.

In relation to Environmental Maintenance, further details would be included in the next progress report which would be submitted to the Committee in September

The Assistant Director of Finance confirmed to the committee that there was no inappropriate limitations on Internal Audit during 2022/23.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the Annual Assurance Statement and Internal Audit Annual Report 2022/23 be noted.
2. That the results of the self-assessment required by the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) and the Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme (QAIP) be noted.
3. That the SIAS Audit Charter 2023/24, as attached at Appendix D to the report, be approved.
4. That it be confirmed that the scope and resources for internal audit were not subject to inappropriate limitations in 2022/23.

8 **ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2022/23 AND LOCAL CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE**

The Corporate Performance and Improvement Officer presented the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) and Local Code of Corporate Governance for 2022/23.

The Corporate Performance and Improvement Officer stated that the Local Code of Corporate Governance had been drawn up in conformity with the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework “Delivering Good Governance in Local Government (2016)”. The document had been reviewed, and the major changes were summarised in the table set out in Paragraph 3.2.4 of the report.

In response to a question, Officers confirmed that the Leader’s Financial Security Group had been renamed the Council’s Financial Security Group

The Corporate Performance and Improvement Officer then advised that the AGS was required to be reviewed each year. It described the Council’s governance arrangements, how they were reviewed, significant governance challenges and actions to address them.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the changes to the Council’s Local Code of Corporate Governance, as attached at

Appendix 1 to the report, be approved.

2. That the Council's 2022/23 Annual Governance Statement, as attached at Appendix 2 to the report, be recommended for approval by the Statement of Accounts Committee.

9 **URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

None.

10 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

It was **RESOLVED** that:

1. Under Section 100A 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. Members 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.

11 **PART II MINUTES - AUDIT COMMITTEE - 27 MARCH 2023**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 27 March 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

12 **STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER**

The Corporate Performance and Improvement Officer presented a report providing the Quarter 4 2022/23 (January to March 2023) update in respect of the Strategic Risk Register.

The Corporate Performance and Improvement Officer, assisted by the Assistant Director Finance, responded to a number of questions raised by Members on the report.

It was **RESOLVED** that the latest Strategic Risk Register, as set out at Appendix A1 to the report, be noted.

13 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR

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