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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date: Tuesday, 19 March 2024

Time: 6.00pm,

Location: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Contact: Chris Liasi

committees@stevenage.gov.uk

Members: 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

AGENDA

PART 1

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2. MINUTES - 13 FEBRUARY 2024

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 13th February 2024.

Pages 3 – 8

3. PART I DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

To consider the following Part I Decisions of the Executive taken on 13th March 2024.

- Minutes – 7th February 2024
- Minutes of Overview and Scrutiny Committee & Select Committees
- Regeneration Programme delivery update
- Housing Consumer Standards – Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023
- Corporate Performance – Quarter 3 2023/24
- Third Quarter Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring 2023/24 – General Fund and Housing Revenue Account

Notice of Decisions to follow

4. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2024-25

To consider the Committee's draft Work Programme for 2024/25.

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

To consider any urgent Part I Decisions authorised by the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

6. URGENT PART I BUSINESS

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

7. 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.

8. PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

To consider the following Part II Decisions of the Executive taken on 13th March 2024.

10. Part II Minutes – Executive – 7 February 2024

Notice of Decisions to follow

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

To consider any urgent Part II Decisions authorised by the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

10. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

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

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: TUESDAY, 13 FEBRUARY 2023

TIME: 6.00pm

LOCATION: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

MINUTES

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

Start/End Time: Start: 6:00pm
End: 7:04pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Bret Facey.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES – 17 OCTOBER 2023

It was **RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 12 October 2023 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

3 PART I DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

2. Minutes – 17 January 2024

Noted.

3. Minutes of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees

Noted.

4. Stevenage Works Skills Framework – Unlocking Jobs, Skills and Opportunity for Young People

Officers provided a presentation on the ‘Stevenage Works Skills Framework’, and key points made by the Executive. Officers explained since Stevenage Works has been formed it has:

- Supported over 500 people to attend training courses

- Put in place over 50 apprenticeships and
 - Secured over £50,000 in investment into the local community in Stevenage
- Members queried whether the Officers could clarify the ambition of the Stevenage Works. The Officer explained the skills framework, maximising resources, ongoing momentum and activity in order to ensure Stevenage residents are given every chance to take advantage of the excellent practical and experimental opportunities.
 - A Member queried if there is a reason Stevenage Works is not partnered with sixth form centres of the town and questioned how many young people attended Generation Stevenage. It was explained the council has also been promoting apprenticeships through videos and case study's (HR led), Officers are also establishing the links and reaching out to secondary schools as part of the Skills Framework, and two secondary schools are directly engaged in two pilot projects. Officers confirmed that over 800 people attended Generation Stevenage.
 - A Member stated the presentation emphasised STEM throughout the document, potentially creating a hierarchy in schools, as it could seem as more important than other subjects. Officers agreed STEM has been spoken about in greater detail given the initial partnership funding from Mission 44 prioritised opening opportunities in that sector, and as there is significant growth in opportunities in STEM sectors. Officers reiterated that STEM is not seen as more important than other sectors, with construction, healthcare, public services, culture and heritage and beyond.
 - Members questioned whether the council are monitoring women in STEM going forward and what the barriers are in this area. It was explained Mission 44 is not solely focusing on getting young people on board but is also working to ensure that people from ethnic minority backgrounds and women and girls are included. As set out in the Framework, a challenge is that there needs to be better connection between employers, providers, schools and the community, to help overcome barriers, and to access current opportunities. Some people may know who to get in contact with, and via the Framework, Officers are looking to tailor information and access to a local level.
 - Councillors believed there was a confidence issue with young people and believed the council should try encouraging confidence in Stevenage's younger generation. This may discourage local people from applying for jobs. It was explained they believe mentoring from year 8 could give the confidence needed. The Officer explained the pilot project was aimed at year 9s which would allow them to spend a Monday afternoon in the STEM centre, giving them much needed experience and boosting their confidence to try new things.
 - This is not a statutory service, Members asked how the Council could carry out this project if funding becomes unavailable. Officers stated the Stevenage Works project has a good level of certainty, as it is part funded from confirmed Section 106 funding, alongside funding from

Mission 44 and UK Shared Prosperity Funding. It was recognised that additional future bids may be required.

5. Final General Fund and Council Tax Setting 2024/25

The Committee received further information from Officers. It was stated that the Business Rates gains are greater than first calculated and it was recommended that any surplus goes into a reserve. It was believed there could be a high number of Business Rate appeals. It was explained the Police-Commissioner and County have set their budgets. County will be setting Council Tax at 4.99% which equals a 5.4% increase which will be included in the report for Council.

Members raised queries on the agenda item:

- Councillors queried who are the key partners the Council consults with and do we need to take in consideration what they raise, and if it is a statutory requirement. It was explained it is general consultation, but also includes specific engagement with the Police and Crime Commissioner and Hertfordshire County Council which Stevenage Council must do. It is good practice to consult broadly to help ensure there is support for the budget package.
- Councillors queried how the consultation is undertaken, with Officers confirming the steps taken with the Police and Hertfordshire County Council, and the consultation with service users if changes are planned. Officers also gave the example in relation to Council Tax: if a Council wishes to raise Council Tax over the Statutory limit of 2.99%, it would require a referendum which would cost over £50,000, equivalent to 1% Council Tax increase.

A Member raised a concern regarding the Equalities Impact Assessment for the report that the Council had taken a simplistic approach by grouping all 'White Other Groups' together. By doing this, the Council integrated all possible categories into one statistical-group, when it should be separated out into smaller groups. The Strategic Director (Chief Finance Officer) stated that the Member had received a full written response to this issue before explaining the rationale for why the White Other Group was being used currently and a more nuanced category would be available in future reports. The Strategic Director (Chief Finance Officer) agreed to circulate the response to all of the Committee.

6. Final Capital Strategy 2023/24 – 2028/29

This remained unchanged and fixed but the Council are planning to spend £88 million, a significant proportion of which relates to regeneration.

7. Annual Treasury Management Strategy including Prudential Indicators 2024/25

It was explained up to December 2023 there had been no breaches.

8. Stevenage Cycle Hire Scheme – Report and Public Consultation Feedback

The Assistant Director (Planning & Regulation) briefly outlined what the scheme would provide:

- The first part of the report is the overview of the strategic approach towards the cycle hire.
- The Officer explained they would like to bring it forward to another meeting of the Environment and Economy Select Committee to gauge how it is working once it is up and running.

A Councillor queried whether there has been any thought of provision for cycle repair facilities, had Stevenage Council investigated this? An Officer stated that it is not directly part of the cycle hire scheme, but Officers had been looking into the approach of repairs and how cycling can be promoted and supported is part of the wider work with the scheme.

9. Urgent Part II Business

There was none.

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

There was none.

5 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

There was none.

6 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

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 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 Acts as amended by Local Government (Access to information) (Variation) Order 2006.
- (2) That Members consider the reasons for the following reports (if any) 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 MINUTES – OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 23 JANUARY 2024

It was **RESOLVED**: That the Part II Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 23 January 2024 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

8 PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

11. Part II Minutes – 17 January 2024

Noted.

12. Stevenage Cycle Hire Scheme – Report and Public Consultation Feedback

Noted.

13. Urgent Part II Business

There was none.

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

There was none.

10 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

There was none.

CHAIR

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Meeting OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Portfolio Area

Date 19 March 2024

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME ITEMS FOR 2024-25

Authors Stephen Weaver | 2332

Contributors Tom Pike, Strategic Director

Contact Officer Stephen Weaver | 2332

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To agree the Scrutiny Work Programme for the Select Committee for the new Municipal Year from a list of suggested possible work programme items by Members.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Scrutiny Members' feedback on ideas for improving Scrutiny (see section 4) be noted.
- 2.2 That having considered ideas put forward by individual Members, (see section 5), the Committee determines the subject matters to be added to a work programme of potential Scrutiny reviews items for 2024/25.
- 2.3 That any pre-scrutiny policy development items to carry out policy development work that is identified to the Committee (see section 7.1) be noted.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Scrutiny Committees are asked to draft their work programme ahead of the new Municipal year in order that work may begin as soon as the Committees are appointed at Annual Council. Any outstanding and unfinished studies, where applicable, might also need to be included.

- 3.2 During January 2024 Members provided feedback on the current Scrutiny activity and on ideas for the Work Programme for the 2024/25 Municipal Year.
- 3.3 When considering what work to undertake in the coming year, Members may wish to consider if the matter in question is of a cross-cutting nature and might lend itself to being considered jointly with another Select Committee.
- 3.4 Officers have also been requested to bring to the Committee's attention, likely pre-scrutiny policy development items that the Select Committee might be requested to consider and comment on before reports there are submitted to the Executive.
- 3.5 The Committee may also consider whether specific time should be allocated for monitoring or review of recommendations of previous studies. During the summer the Committee will receive a copy of the Action Tracker for the Community Select Committee at which time the Committee can note progress on past reviews and determine whether they wish to bring back any further detailed updates on specific former review items at that time.
- 3.6 It is recognised that there is a limited dedicated officer resource for the scrutiny work of three Scrutiny Committees and therefore it is important to ensure that work plans are in place in order that the call on those resources and on each Committee's time on all its activities are prioritised and evenly spread across the year. To make best use of the resource it is suggested that each Select Committee chooses 1 substantive review item for the year which will be the Committee's main review, undertaken over a number of meetings. In addition each Select Committee could receive between 2 or 3 one-off single issue performance items and 3 to 4 Portfolio Holder Advisory Group (PHAG) meetings during the year. The O&S Committee will have to make a judgement as to whether it has the extra capacity to take on more work.

4 MEMBERS' IDEAS FOR IMPROVING SCRUTINY

- 4.1 In January 2024, all Members of the Council's Scrutiny Committees were emailed a survey to gauge views of the Scrutiny work undertaken and ideas for future studies. The following summary is based on the 8 replies received from the 25 Members who are on one or more of the Council's Scrutiny Committees.
- 4.2 Members were asked to (i) comment on current scrutiny activity and (ii) identify any issues that could be addressed to improve the current arrangements and (iii) state what training needs they may have. Members provided comment and challenge around the following areas that relate to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee:

Survey Question 1 - Please rate the following aspects of this year's scrutiny activity:
Ever – the review into teenage pregnancy. Recently – the necessary review into progress with the climate emergency. Grinding slow but starting to get the outcome-based information we need and some evidence that the issue is getting embedded in SBC.
The local bus service review was one of the few topics where I felt the discussion was meaningful and could actually have a beneficial impact on residents and inform my handling of casework.
For outcomes, Climate. The discussion has I believed impacted the direction of SBCs response to Climate Change. For breadth, and relevance to concerns in the community, The Bus Review, and the Cost of Living in equal measure.
Bus service, local economy, biodiversity, all good.
Scrutinising the Executive Committee and the session on the Census data but the format should probably be improved especially the graphs.
Survey Question 2 - What aspect of scrutiny could be improved to provide a better scrutiny service?
Confidence in what we are doing. Recognition that scrutiny is not a threat but a necessary part of a Council's work. In theory scrutiny is on a par with the Executive. Maybe but we have got closer to being independent of the Executive with changes to the way chairs are appointed, knowing that the way we investigate is unlikely to be a series of set piece speeches but probing and follow up questions, recognising that scrutiny cannot be whipped (or there would be little point seeking and uncovering information).
More bread-and-butter issues, things people engage with and care about every day. Less focus on high level things, like climate change (which has been done to death). While issues like this are important, with all the best will in the world the realistic ability of the Council to impact these high-level issues is microscopic. More everyday issues that we can have realistic influence over.
I think our scrutiny is very open and ideas are considered by chair and officers.
More opportunities for pre-scrutiny, so that members impact policy decisions, though a balance has to be struck with scrutiny work that originates outside of the Exec, or senior leadership team. Communication between Portfolio Holders and scrutiny. The attendance of Portfolio Holders at scrutiny is mixed. Sticking to a structure where scrutiny topics come back around again. This has been the case with Climate. The Bus Review deserves an annual airing. I respect there is limited time and resource, and we must prioritise.

<p>Within my own Committee, on large topics like climate change, I (The Chair) needs to delegate more, and give committee members an area to work on, and lead on questions.</p>
<p>Survey Question 3 - Regarding supporting you in your Scrutiny role is there any specific training you would like for next year, and would you (occasionally) like to receive information about possible Member Scrutiny training?</p>
<p>Yes please, to any relevant training</p>
<p>We need training by local government linked organisations outside SBC (e.g. CfPS and successors, LGIU, LGS) so we can explore other ways of doing things and be aware of the risks of not doing scrutiny properly. That must include in person interactive training perhaps working through an example.</p>
<p>Any aspect of scrutiny training is always beneficial and therefore would like to receive all information about possible Member Scrutiny training.</p>
<p>I believe scrutiny is an invaluable space to develop thinking around policy areas. In so many areas of the SBCs work national policy is evolving at pace (housing, climate, planning). Scrutiny can be a space where SBCs approach can be modified. This is also an invaluable for member education as well. Member education needs to keep pace with changes in Local Government, but Members have a responsibility themselves to do groundwork on this and shouldn't expect to be spoon fed by officers.</p>

5. MEMBERS' IDEAS FOR FUTURE SCRUTINY REVIEWS

5.1 Scrutiny Members' Suggestions for Future Scrutiny Review Items

- 5.1.1 In response to Survey question 4 "What issues would you like to be considered for inclusion in scrutiny work programme for next year" The following issues have been raised by Members as potential Scrutiny review items:

<p>Survey Question 4 - What issues would you like to be considered for inclusion in the (O&S Committee) scrutiny work programme for next year? (Max 3 items)</p>	<p>What type of review (main, PHAG, one off performance)?</p>
<p><u>Town Centre Regeneration</u></p>	<p>(Main review item)</p>
<p><u>Finance, Ethical Behaviour and Investments</u></p>	<p>(Main review item)</p>
<p><u>A review of how the Customer Service Centre is performing</u> now that it is in the reception area in Daneshill House and has there been a survey on how the Customers feel about this change and if not, should there be one?</p>	<p>(One-off performance review item)</p>
<p><u>A look into Officer's time when personally delivering information/posters to community centres</u>, when most of it could be delivered by email.</p>	<p>(One-off performance review item)</p>

<p><u>YourSay responses</u> - there is still times when we are not informed of the outcomes of cases.</p> <p><u>The Customer Service Centre</u> - what experience are the public having in the new set up? I would also like to see the Customer Service Centre complaints list to see what the top complaint is.</p> <p><u>Use of the website</u> - are we over reliant on its use/effectiveness?</p>	<p>(All one-off performance review items)</p>
<p><u>Transformation Programme</u></p> <p><u>ICT</u>- The Chair notes that it has not been possible to hold a session on ICT during the municipal year, but strongly requests a session to update Members on the work that is underway to address problems such as upgrades to capital hardware, systems and personnel levels.</p>	<p>(One-off performance review item)</p> <p>(Main review item)</p>

5.2 **Budget and Policy Framework Items**

5.2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has responsibility to scrutinise Budget and Policy Framework items. The following matters have been identified for scrutiny by the Committee as Budget & Policy Framework items -

- The HRA and Rent Setting
- General Fund Budget and Council Tax Setting
- Savings and Growth Proposals
- Council Tax Support Scheme

5.2.2 The Committee may be required to scrutinise any further Budget and Policy Framework items as and when required in accordance with the Council's Constitution, Article 4 and Section 4 Rules of Procedure.

5.3 Members should note that whatever issues they agree to be scrutinised as a main review item would be subject to a full scoping process and subsequently a scoping document would need to be agreed by the Committee at a future meeting. Other items, which can be addressed by a briefing and discussion item, may not require a full scoping document.

5.4 **Work Programme Schedule for 2024/25**

5.4.1 When the Scrutiny Work Programme is agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Scrutiny Officer will, using the agreed dates for generic Select Committee meetings in the Calendar of Meetings, draw together a work programme schedule for the 2024/25 Municipal Year, including scrutiny review meetings, monitoring of previous reviews selected by Members and policy development meetings, which will be circulated to Members, and electronic diary invites will be sent to all Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members.

5.5 Role of the Assistant Directors and Scrutiny

- 5.5.1 The Assistant Directors will take a leadership role in assisting and supporting the relevant Scrutiny Committees and specific reviews that align to their area of expertise. The Assistant Directors (ADs) will support each review through its various stages, from scoping of reviews, attending Chair and Vice-Chair briefings and offering support to the Scrutiny Officer in providing written and oral evidence for reviews as well as identifying 'Critical Friends' and other review witnesses. The Assistant Directors will liaise with the relevant Executive Portfolio Holder(s) and the Senior Leadership Team (CE and Assistant CE's).
- 5.5.2 Strategic Director, Tom Pike from the Strategic Leadership Team has overall responsibility for the Scrutiny function, deputised by Strategic Director Richard Protheroe.

6 **MONITORING REVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS VIA THE ACTION TRACKER**

- 6.1 The Committee may consider there is a need to undertake some follow-up work on recommendations arising from previous studies. It may be considered sufficient to simply request update briefings from the relevant Heads of Service to be circulated to Members at appropriate intervals. However, if the Committee requires more detailed consideration or examination of the progress of previous recommendations, this should be factored into its work programme. To help assist Members to consider this, an updated Action Tracker document will be brought to the Committee in the summer and any additional work programme items will need to be added following that meeting.

7 **PRE-SCRUTINY POLICY DEVELOPMENT WORK FOR 2024/25**

- 7.1 In line with the Council and Executive work plan, items that are identified for potential Policy Development to be undertaken with the relevant Portfolio Holders during the 2024/25 Municipal Year and will be diarised as an agenda item. It may be necessary, on occasions, for a separate pre-scrutiny policy development meeting.

8 **IMPLICATIONS**

Financial Implications

- 8.1. There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Legal Implications

- 8.2. The role of Overview and Scrutiny Committees is set out in the Local Government Act 2000. The recommendations made in this report are to facilitate the Committees to fully undertake this role.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 8.3. There are no direct Equalities and Diversity implications arising from the recommendations in this report. Specific equalities and diversity implications are considered during each scrutiny review.

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