

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
**ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Tuesday, 16 July 2024
Time: 6.00pm
Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Rob Broom (Chair) (Chair), Andy McGuinness (Vice-Chair) (Vice Chair), Leanne Brady, Forhad Chowdhury, Alistair Gordon, Claire Parris, Ellie Plater, Graham Snell, Nigel Williams and Jade Woods

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 7.15pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies of absence were received from Councillor Sarah Mead.

There were no declarations of interest.

At this juncture, the Chair welcomed those Members who were newly appointed to the Committee and welcomed back returning Members.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - 27 MARCH 2024

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Environment & Economy Select Committee held on 27 March 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 TERMS OF REFERENCE

At this juncture, the Chair provided the Committee with an overview of the work of the Environment and Economy Select Committee, which included its scrutiny functions, policy formulation support, ongoing monitoring responsibilities, and key areas of interest such as climate change mitigation, local transport policy, the cost-of-living crisis, and the local skills agenda.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Terms of Reference as agreed at Annual Council on 22 May 2024 be noted.

4 **CABINET MEMBER & EXTERNAL PARTNERS RESPONSE TO BUS SCRUTINY REVIEW**

The Chair introduced the Cabinet Member & External Partners response to the Bus Scrutiny Review and welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Economy, Skills, and Transport.

The Chair talked the Committee through each recommendation and the Cabinet Member and External Partner responses. They recognised the actions that had been taken and those which were still ongoing.

The Portfolio Holder for Economy, Skills, and Transport reiterated support for an annual stakeholder seminar as detailed in Recommendation 1. He emphasised the importance of involving Hertfordshire County Council, particularly the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport, and local stakeholder groups such as Stevenage Bus Users Group (BUGS).

The Chair invited a representative from BUGS to comment from the Public Gallery. The representative from BUGS criticised the real-time information system provided by Interlink and highlighted inefficiencies and inaccuracies.

Some Members shared personal experiences related to the lack of accurate real-time information at bus stops throughout the town and highlighted issues faced by elderly users.

A Member recognised the frustrations of elderly and disabled groups regarding the relocation of the bus station and the impact on their access to shops and services.

A Member inquired about mystery shopper-like spot checks for bus drivers to ensure courtesy and care towards disabled passengers.

The Assistant Director, Planning and Regulation advised the Committee that investigations were ongoing into the lowering of existing screens in the interchange to make them more accessible for disabled users whilst balancing against potential antisocial behaviour.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Cabinet Member & External Partners response to the Bus Scrutiny Review be noted.

5 **STEVENAGE SKILLS FRAMEWORK - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENT AND OFFICER PRESENTATION**

The Chair introduced the item, noting the ongoing work on the student skills framework from March. He emphasised the focus on high-end technical and vocational skills to match Stevenage's evolving employment opportunities. He also mentioned plans to address access to work for those facing re-entry challenges.

The Chair introduced the Corporate Policy and Performance Manager to present to the Committee.

For the benefit of newer Members and as a reminder to longer-standing Members of the Committee, the Corporate Policy and Performance Manager reprised the presentation he had given to the March 2024 meeting.

In addition to the reprised presentation, the Corporate Policy and Performance Manager provided an update on progress since the March 2024 meeting. The Corporate Policy and Performance Manager informed the Committee that the final year of UK SPF funding had commenced. This was a £1m package that replaced the European Social Investment Fund. He advised that 65% of that funding had been utilised, focused on various skills elements.

The Corporate Policy and Performance Manager highlighted the completion of the evaluation for the pioneering discovery phase of work with Mission 44 and ongoing discussions for a long-term partnership over the next three to five years.

The Committee were informed of a Generation Stevenage Event, delivered by the Council's Business Relationship Manager in collaboration with the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, that took place in May 2024.

The Corporate Policy and Performance Manager advised the Committee that funding had been secured and an Enterprise and Skills Partnership Officer had been appointed to start in September 2024.

The Committee were informed about an upcoming STEM Skills update with key partners, businesses and Mission 44 scheduled for 18 July 2024.

The Corporate Policy and Performance Manager concluded by outlining the next steps which included additional witness interview sessions and a potential site visit to the SITEC site at North Hertfordshire College. The Corporate Policy and Performance Manager referenced the Draft Scoping Document and welcomed any questions.

Some Members emphasised the need for reskilling older individuals both in and out of work. The Corporate Policy and Performance Manager confirmed the strategy included young people, unemployed adults, and those looking to retrain. The Chair advised the Committee of a planned session on reskilling older individuals in the autumn.

A Member stressed the importance of including all students in skills initiatives and not just the more academically minded students. The Corporate Policy and Performance Manager affirmed the inclusivity focus, mentioning efforts with disenfranchised groups through Mission 44 and partnerships with organisations like the Prince's Trust, highlighting positive outcomes such as increased participation of young women in sciences.

A Member emphasised the importance of non-technical skills, especially in mental health and human services, alongside tech skills.

A Member inquired about potential impacts of new government policies on the skills

agenda. The Corporate Policy and Performance Manager responded stating the need for clearer alignment between councils and government departments and highlighting the complexity of the current skills funding landscape.

It was **RESOLVED** that the update from the Corporate Policy and Performance Manager be noted and that the Draft Scoping Document be agreed.

6 **ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2024-25**

The Chair introduced the Environment and Economy Select Committee Work Programme 2024-25.

A Member requested that the Policy Development Item, Refuse and Recycling service, also address the latest position with regards fly tipping enforcement.

The Assistant Director, Planning and Regulation, suggested that the one-off performance review meeting – update on the Indoor Market, would be better placed in the Environment and Economy Select Committee Work Programme 2025-26. After a brief discussion the Committee agreed.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Environment and Economy Select Committee Work Programme 2024-25 be agreed subject to the amended detailed above.

7 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

There was none.

8 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

9 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

There was none.

CHAIR