

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Monday, 16 July 2018

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Shimkent Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

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

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 7.42pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

An apology for absence was received from Councillor S-J Potter.

Councillor M Gardner declared a non-pecuniary financial interest in item 4 on the Decisions of the Executive (The Future of Fairlands Valley Farmhouse) and left the meeting for the discussion of that item.

There were no other declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 5 APRIL 2018

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 5 April 2018 are approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 PART 1 DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

This report had not been circulated to Members five clear days before the meeting nor had it been made available for public inspection. The Chair determined however that given the short time left before the end of the call-in period on 20 July it be considered on this occasion.

Minutes – Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees

The Committee noted the comments of the Executive.

The Future of Fairlands Valley Farmhouse

Councillor M Gardner left the meeting for this item.

The Strategic Director (Tom Pike) introduced the report and advised the Committee

of the recent history of the Fairlands Valley Farmhouse from its use by the Digswell Arts Trust through to the two community group bids and the current position whereby the Council had received an earlier expression of interest for the freehold of the property from a third party commercial interest, prior to the Asset of Community Value process.

The Committee noted its appreciation for the work undertaken by the two community groups that had made bids for the property and acknowledged that the Council had given full consideration to those bids.

In reply to a question concerning the costs of retention of the property the Committee was advised that the most recent condition survey indicated that it would cost in the region of £630,000 to make the property good to a base standard, whereas to restore it to a condition where it could generate an income for the Council would probably cost between £1.5 to £2 million. It was acknowledged that these costs would be prohibitive should the Council wish to enter into a joint venture with a third party given other priorities in the Council's capital programme and Corporate Plan and major reductions in funding from government.

In reply to a further question the Committee was advised that any future use of the property would be dependent on the award of planning permission and that any proposed structural alterations to the building to provide, for example, improved accessibility, could be limited by its Grade 2 listing.

Other Members spoke in favour of the Executive's decision to expedite the disposal of the property.

4th Quarter Monitoring Revenue Report – General Fund and HRA 2017/18

The Assistant Director (Finance & Estates) presented the report which updated Members on the outturn positions for the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) together with an update on the Council's balances and reserves. In reply to questions concerning Housing Benefit overpayments the Assistant Director (Finance & Estates) advised the Committee of the processes involved and further advised the Committee that the Council was working proactively with the Joint Revenues and Benefits service to both reduce the potential for overpayment and to improve overpayment recovery rates.

With regard to the introduction of Universal Credit the Committee was advised that there were no signs of a deferral or reversal of the Governments policy and it was expected that Universal Credit would be introduced from October 2018.

In reply to a question concerning Council deposits held abroad it was confirmed that those amounts were held in sterling.

4th Quarter Monitoring Capital Report – General Fund and HRA 2017/18

The Assistant Director (Finance & Estates) presented the report which updated Members on the outturn position on the 2017/18 capital programme, the Council's Capital Strategy and the actual 2017/18 Minimum Revenue Provision.

In reply to a question concerning the repayment of £112,000 Right to Buy receipts to the Government the Committee was advised that all options had been considered and that repayment could be made early to avoid the accrual of extra interest charges.

In reply to a further question it was confirmed that the cost shown at Appendix A of the report for Christmas lights was for the replacement of faulty units.

Statement of Community Involvement

The Strategic Director (Tom Pike) presented the report which provided an update on the progress in producing a revised Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). It was acknowledged that whilst it was not a central government requirement to produce an SCI, the Council had found it beneficial to do so.

The Committee was advised that the consultation period for the draft SCI had been extended to 8 weeks (from 4) at the request of the Executive to take into account any potential impact of the school holiday period.

In reply to a question concerning potential improvements resulting from the Statement, the Committee was advised that the Council was seeking to establish a proactive interaction with residents and to draw out comment early in any process. The Council would also look to increase the use of social media.

A Member commented on the consultation process in planning applications and the Strategic Director (Tom Pike) invited the Member to raise those concerns outside of the meeting.

Adoption of General Fund Asset Management Strategy and Action Plan

The Assistant Director (Finance & Estates) presented the report which sought the Executive's approval to the adoption of a revised new General Fund Asset Management Strategy and Action Plan.

In reply to a question concerning the valuations of the Council's properties, the Committee was advised that the valuations shown reflected those listed in the Council's Asset Register which would be presented to the Statement of Accounts Committee on 26 July. It was noted that the valuation was not the potential sale value, rather the asset's replacement cost or a measure of the income that it generated.

2017/18 Annual Report and Performance Overview

The Strategic Director (Matt Partridge) presented the report and advised the Committee that it had received a favourable reception from the Executive. He advised the Committee that the Executive had requested a social media campaign highlighting the work of the Council.

In response to a Member request the Strategic Director (Matt Partridge) undertook

to liaise with Hertfordshire Constabulary to determine the factors behind the increase in the reporting of criminal damage between December 2017 and March 2018.

The Committee requested that the performance table shown at Appendix B be printed in black, rather than blue, in future. Officers also agreed to amend column 9 of the table on page 228 of the Executive agenda that referred to March 2017. It should read March 2018.

In reply to a question concerning the circulation of the Annual Report the Committee was advised that the report was published on line and the Strategic Director (Matt Partridge) undertook to clarify who received a hard copy.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following Part I decisions of the Executive are noted:

- Minutes – Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees
- The Future of Fairlands Valley Farmhouse
- 4th Quarter Monitoring Revenue Report – General Fund and HRA 2017/18
- 4th Quarter Monitoring Capital Report – General Fund and HRA 2017/18
- Statement of Community Involvement
- Adoption of General Fund Asset Management Strategy and Action Plan
- 2017/18 Annual Report and Performance Overview

4 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2018-19

The Scrutiny Officer presented the Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme for 2018/19.

The Committee was advised that the review of the complaints/feedback handling would be referred to the Committee, sitting as a Select Committee, before Christmas and that the review of the scrutiny function at SBC would be undertaken in the Autumn.

The Committee requested that a robust approach be taken to the topic 'Diversity in SBC Workforce' and suggested a number of areas that could be included in the review.

It was **RESOLVED** that the report is noted.

5 EXECUTIVE MEMBER RESPONSE TO MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS REVIEW

The Scrutiny Officer introduced the Executive Member response to the Media and Communications review.

In reply to a question concerning the follow up process for Executive Member responses the Committee was advised that follow up reviews could be scheduled into the Committee's workplan.

Members requested that the response to the Media and Communications review be reviewed to tie in with the launch of the Council's Communications Plan.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Executive Member response to the Media and Communications review is noted.

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

None.

7 URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

None.

8 EXCLUSION OF 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 items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1-7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 20016; and
2. That, having considered the reasons for the following items being in Part II, it be determined that maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

9 PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

This report had not been circulated to Members five clear days before the meeting. The Chair determined however that given the short time left before the end of the call-in period on 20 July it be considered on this occasion.

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

- Property Investment Strategy – Update
- Award of Contract for the Refurbishment and Maintenance of Lifts (2018 – 2023)
- Award of Contract for Insurance Services

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

None.

11 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

CHAIR