

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Wednesday 26 July 2017

Time: 6.00 p.m.

Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: L Martin-Haugh (Chair), J Brown, H Burrell, M Downing, A Farquharson, C Latif, J Lloyd, S Mead, A Mitchell CC, R Parker CC and C Saunders.

Start / End Time Start Time: 6.00 p.m.
 End Time: 7.45 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P Bibby CC (Vice Chair), M Gardner, and E Harrington.

There were no declarations of interest.

2. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Terms of Reference were noted.

3. MINUTES – OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 10 APRIL 2017 & THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (SITTING AS A SELECT COMMITTEE) 28 JUNE 2017

It was **RESOLVED** that

- (i) the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 10 April 2017 are approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair; and
- (ii) the Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, sitting as a Select Committee held on 28 June 2017 are approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. 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 27 July 2017, it could

be considered on this occasion.

Biodiversity Action Plan

The Strategic Director, Tom Pike, provided Members with an overview of the Action Plan and reminded Members that the Council was the only authority in Hertfordshire that had a Biodiversity Action Plan. Members commended the work of the Environmental Performance & Development Manager in establishing the Action Plan and specific note was given to the work of the Green Space Volunteers who were providing excellent support to the Council with regards to protecting and managing the environment in Stevenage. Members discussed the merits of the Action Plan and commented on specific sites which the Strategic Director encouraged Members to raise with the Environmental Performance & Development Manager.

Members made further comment on the action plan including; the ability of the Council to be mindful of the advice of the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust but that ultimately the Council needed to control its own areas which may cause tensions with the Trust and its own policy; being clear where and when grass verges are being cultivated with wild flowers.

In response to a Member question it was agreed that the Environmental Performance & Development Manager would be asked to confirm if the Arboretum was included in the Action Plan and that, in due course, the officer be invited to provide some feedback on the effects of the Action Plan.

Community Safety Performance Update

The Community Safety/Anti-Social Behaviour Manager presented the report to Members and advised the Committee that the Executive had amended the report and had withdrawn recommendations 2.2 and 2.3 from the report as a direct response to the loss of annual grant funding from the Police and Crime Commissioner to support the delivery of Stevenage Crime Reduction priorities. The officer stated that SBC had not secured any funding from the first round of the new PCC funding mechanism which requires officers to bid against specific criteria. The Community Safety/Anti-Social Behaviour Manager stated that most of the current SoSafe priorities should be able to be delivered this year but the Responsible Authority Group (RAG) would monitor the impact of the reduced funding to support priorities and it would be inevitable that the priorities and commitments would need to be reduced for future years unless alternative funding streams were identified. RAG's monitoring of the delivery of the Priorities would be reported to the Community Select Committee through the regular scheduled meetings.

The Community Safety/Anti-Social Behaviour Manager informed Members that the Executive had said that it would be possible for bids to be made to both Borough and County Members Local Community Budgets to support one-off community safety projects.

In response to Members' questions regarding the geographical boundaries of the Policing Priorities Meetings, the Community Safety/Anti-Social Behaviour Manager

agreed to discuss with the Chief Inspector whether alternative arrangements could be considered, which more closely align to recognised political boundaries, but recognising that this would also need to fit in with the Police's local resources.

2016/17 ANNUAL REPORT AND PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW

The Strategic Director, Matt Partridge, reported to Members that the Executive had welcomed the Annual Report and that the new format which encapsulates the key themes and achievements of the Council in a short and visual format. The report would be publicised via the website, social media and a special edition of the Chronicle.

Members commented that they were keen to see what measures the Council could take to reduce the number of voids in sheltered accommodation but appreciated that these properties were currently not popular so would require a significant improvement for the voids figures to turnaround.

In response to a Member request it was agreed that for future editions Appendix B would be provided with a key to help explain the symbols. It was also agreed that Members would be provided with an update on where and when the Neighbourhood Wardens were scheduled to visit specific areas of the town.

QUARTER 4 MONITORING REVENUE REPORT GENERAL FUND & HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT

The Assistant Director, Finance and Estates, reported that the Executive had commended officers that the closure of the accounts had been achieved within 2 months, which next year would be a mandatory requirement.

The Assistant Director, Finance and Estates, informed Members that the Executive had requested that Scrutiny consider scrutinising the collection methods for Housing Benefit Overpayments. It was reported that the Head of Revenues and Benefits would bring a report to Members on a pilot of collection methods by the end of the year. A review of this could include issues like; how quickly we deal with cases; how we can target help to the vulnerable; helping people in a "circle of debt" to cross match with rent areas and other debt; how enforcement would be carried out in these cases; and the wording of letters. All these issues could be considered in a review by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Members agreed to add this item to their work programme.

QUARTER 4 MONITORING CAPITAL PROGRAMME REPORT GENERAL FUND & HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT

The Assistant Director, Finance and Estates updated Members on the outturn position of the 2016/17 capital programme. Specific attention was drawn to recommendation 5 in the report which, in line with the constitutional rules of the Budget and Policy Framework, sought the approval of the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny to waive call-in on the additional expenditure of £4,024,160 above the amount delegated to the Executive in order to make use of RTB one for one receipts of £2,165,000 for

Registered Providers as there would not be a meeting of the Council held in time to approve this expenditure and would provide the Council with future Social Housing nomination rights. Members wished that their thanks be recorded to that the Assistant Director, Housing Development for securing this positive outcome.

It was noted that the Executive had asked officers to confirm that in future the Equalities and Diversity aspects of the report pick up on the need for a disabled facilities grant.

Following the discussion the Chair stated that she agreed with recommendation 2.5 of the Executive report, that the decision is a matter of urgency and should be implemented in time for the grant to be spent within the statutory deadline.

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

5. URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

6. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Officer drew Members' attention to the Work Programme which had been agreed earlier at its March 2017 meeting. The report was before Members to be updated on details of the work programme and for noting, with the addition of a further item to the work programme as agreed at item 4 of the agenda regarding the scrutiny of how the Council handles the overpayment of Housing Benefit Payments.

It was **RESOLVED** that the report be noted with the additional item of scrutiny of overpayment of Housing Benefit Payments.

7. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was **RESOLVED** that:

1. 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 Act as amended by Local Government (Access to information) (Variation) Order 2006.
2. Members having considered the reasons for the following report being in Part II and determined that the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

8. PART II 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 27 July 2017, it be

considered on this occasion

Procurement of Repairs & Voids Supply Chain

Write off of Business Rates

The Procurement of Building Compliance & Maintenance Services for Housing & Corporate Properties

It was **RESOLVED** that the recommendations in the report are noted.

9. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None

Chair