

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Monday, 10 September 2018

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Shimkent Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Lin Martin-Haugh (Chair), Philip Bibby CC (Vice-Chair), Sandra Barr, Jim Brown, James Fraser, Jody Hanafin, Michelle Gardner (from 6.50pm), Lizzy Kelly, John Mead, Sarah Mead, Adam Mitchell CC, Robin Parker CC and Sarah-Jane Potter.

Start / End Start Time: 6.00pm
Time: End Time: 7.50pm

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

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Michael Downing and for lateness from Councillor Michelle Gardner.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES - 16 JULY 2018**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 16 July 2018 are approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 **PART I 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 14 September 2018 it be considered on this occasion.

Minutes – Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees

The Committee noted the comments of the Executive.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

The Planning Policy Manager advised that, in 2015, the Executive had agreed to the progression of the CIL. It had not been progressed, as priority had been subsequently given to preparation work on the Stevenage Local Plan. The Executive had approved two rounds of consultation, on the CIL Preliminary Draft Charging Schedule and Draft Charging Schedule, respectively.

In reply to a number of questions on the report, the Committee was advised:

- CIL was now recommended, as (unlike Section 106) it allowed the Council to charge for all development applications that created net additional floorspace of at least 100 square metres or development of any size that resulted in a new house or flat. CIL was not subject to the pooling restrictions imposed on Section 106 Agreements introduced in 2015, whereby a maximum of 5 payments could be used to contribute towards infrastructure improvements on larger schemes. Also, the level of CIL charges proposed struck an acceptable balance in terms of the viability of schemes progressing.
- CIL rates would be non-negotiable, which should help speed up the process of the receipt of contributions. CIL monies could be used to fund infrastructure improvements required by the Council anywhere in the Borough. However, Section 106 would still apply to those larger schemes which required site-specific infrastructure improvements (ie. new schools, highway improvements etc.).
- CIL would be regularly monitored by the Planning and Development Committee, and the Audit Committee would be used to monitor CIL on a retrospective basis. CIL performance would also be added to the Executive's Performance Monitoring indicators.

Council Tax Support Scheme

The Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) reminded Members that she had informed the Committee in March 2018 that the existing software was not robust enough to bring about the introduction of a new scheme for 2019/20 based on claimants' income bands. Hence further modelling would be required with the aim of operating a new scheme for 2020/21. In the meantime, it was proposed that the existing (2018/19) scheme would remain operational for 2019/20, and would form an additional recommendation in the Budget report in January 2019.

General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy 2018/2019 to 2022/2023

The Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) reminded Members that the Council had a significant savings target of £2million over the next 3 years. In 2021/22 the Council will be in a position of minimum balances, and so a contribution to balances will be required in this year. The financial forecast in the report was on the assumption of 2.99% per year Council Tax increase. There would be a need to consider the prioritisation of services in order to contribute towards the savings target.

In reply to a question, the Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) confirmed that the Leader's Services Financial Group would be considering potential savings for the next 3 financial years, even though the annual General Fund/HRA budget only contained one year's information.

1st Quarter Revenue Monitoring Report 2018/2019 – General Fund and Housing Revenue Account

The Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) advised that the major adverse variance in the General Fund of £105,000 was due to a reduction in the sale price

for recycled paper. One of the most significant variances in the Housing Revenue Account related to rent variances due to out of management properties and the timing of stock acquisition.

The Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) referred to the peppercorn rent issue set out in Paragraph 4.2.8 of the report, and the fact that the Leader had requested that officers take further steps to secure higher rent levels from Registered Social Providers.

In response to questions, the Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) commented:

- The minimum investment rating for organisations that the Council invested in as part of its Treasury Strategy was AA.
- The Council's investment portfolio assumed an annual increase in the Bank of England base interest rate of 0.25%.
- The works to the St. George's Multi-Storey Car Park entailed refurbishment works carried out and funded by the Council, followed by new cladding works to the elevation facing the Park Place Development, the funding for which would be provided by the Park Place developer.

1st Quarter Capital Programme Monitoring Report 2018/2019 – General Fund and Housing Revenue Account

The Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) drew attention to slippage on the General Fund Capital Programme relating to the re-profiling of vehicle replacements and Town Square Improvements.

The Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) confirmed that works had been carried out to boilers at both Springfield House and St. Nicholas Community Centre.

The Committee noted that the potential figure at risk of repayment of Right to Buy receipts to the Government had increased to £336,000, given the tight restrictions on use, particularly when land assembly and other elements were required to bring forward more complex sites.

Annual Treasury Management Review of 2017/18, including Prudential Code

The Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) drew attention to the cash balances (as at 31 March 2018) pie chart tabled at the meeting, which was a clearer representation of the pie chart set out in Paragraph 5.7.3 of the original report to the Executive.

The Committee noted an additional resolution agreed by the Executive that the provisions of the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 be invoked to call upon the Government to share with the Council information it had on Brexit and its impact on Stevenage.

Corporate Performance – Quarter One 2018/19

The Assistant Director (Corporate Services and Transformation) drew attention to

the new suite of performance indicators for 2018/19, and explained that, for Quarter One, 40 indicators were at green status; 2 were at amber; and 11 were at red. Officers had focussed on the 3 red indicators relating to the Future Town, Future Council (FTFC) Programme (namely homelessness; Customer Service Centre; and sickness absence management), and had authorised improvement plans for these areas.

Members asked a number of detailed questions on the report which were answered by officers.

The Committee acknowledged the Executive's suggestion that it brings forward its planned consideration of staff sickness. The Chair agreed to liaise with the Scrutiny Officer with the aim of revising the Committee's Work Programme to bring forward this item, ideally before the end of 2018.

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

- Minutes – Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees
- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)
- Council Tax Support Scheme
- General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy 2018/2019 to 2022/2023
- 1st Quarter Revenue Monitoring Report 2018/2019 – General Fund and Housing Revenue Account
- 1st Quarter Capital Programme Monitoring Report 2018/2019 – General Fund and Housing Revenue Account
- Annual Treasury Management Review of 2017/18, including Prudential Code
- Corporate Performance – Quarter One 2018/19

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

None.

5 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

6 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 SI 2006 No. 88.
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.

7 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 14 September 2018 it be considered on this occasion.

Members asked a number of detailed questions about the report which were answered by officers.

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

- Part II Decisions of the Executive – 11 July 2018
- Town Centre Regeneration – Regenerating Queensway North

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

None.

9 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

CHAIR