

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Monday, 26 November 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, Michael Downing, Jody Hanafin, Michelle Gardner, 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: 8.25pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor James Fraser.

Councillor Michael Downing declared an interest in Agenda Item 2.8 – Smart Choices, Better Places: A Transport Strategy for Stevenage as Chair of the Bus User Group in Stevenage (BUGS).

2 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 30 November it be considered on this occasion.

Minutes – Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees

The Committee noted the comments of the Executive.

Housing Revenue Account Medium Term Financial Strategy (2018/19 – 2022/23) and Business Plan Update

The Chief Executive gave a presentation to the Committee on the key aspects of the Housing Revenue Account 2018/19 – 2022/23.

In response to a question, the Chief Executive advised that although Government policies would change over the time, the 30 year plan was necessary from a financial modelling perspective given the need to plan for matters such as product lifecycle replacement (from decent homes works to the replacement of roofs etc.) and new housing schemes. He confirmed that this was best practice rather than a legal requirement.

A question was asked regarding the recharge costs for leaseholders as a result of the Major Refurbishment Contract (MRC) for the Flat Blocks in the Town. Officers advised that calculations were being prepared and that estimates of the recharges would be made known to the leaseholders but would be dependent on the works required to their individual flat blocks. On average the estimated recharge would be a 10th of the cost of the works. The costs of retro fitting sprinklers would not be recovered from the leaseholders.

It was noted that the Council would no longer be limited to the borrowing cap that existed now but that the Council would have to be able to finance any debt it accrued.

2018/19 Mid-Year Treasury Management Review

The Chief Executive updated members on the Treasury Management activities and the effectiveness of the Treasury Management and Investment Strategy for 2018/19.

Members were pleased to note the change in the way of reporting on the level of reserves held by the Council and asked that this be used in all public documents in future as it was much clearer to understand.

In response to questions, the Chief Executive confirmed that all Investments detailed in Appendix B to the report were in Sterling. He also agreed to ask the Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) to confirm details of the Broker used by the Council and how much the Council spent on an annual basis on debt servicing the Council's portfolio.

Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)

The Planning Policy Manager informed Members of the key outcomes of the public consultation on the draft SCI.

It was noted that seven responses had been received by the Council mainly with general comments. A summary of the responses were provided for Members. Minor amendments had been made to the SCI as a result of the responses in relation to rights of appeal and the Local Government Ombudsman.

Members expressed disappointment with the level of responses but it was agreed that it was difficult to raise public interest if the subject did not personally affect them.

In response to a question, officers agreed to send out individual replies to those who had responded to the consultation.

Community Centres Review – Direction of Travel Report

The Community Development Manager reported on the first stage of the review of Council owned community centres operating across the Town.

Members were keen that the emphasis of the review should be to work co-operatively with the community associations.

The officer confirmed that the consultation process would be by way of public consultation with local groups of interest, roadshows and the Youth Council. 50% of the consultation events would take place in the evening to seek to engage as many local people and organisations as possible. The consultation events would be publicised in a range of ways including leaflet drops and social media. Consideration would also be given to publicising the consultation programme via the Chronicle and in the local press.

It was confirmed that the local ward Councillors would be included in any part of the review affecting their areas.

Smart Choices, Better Places: A Transport Strategy for Stevenage

Members were provided with an update on progress made in preparing a Transport Strategy for Stevenage.

It was noted that there would be a change in title of the Strategy which would be agreed by the Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport.

Members were pleased that the Strategy would soon be available and hoped that the issues raised relating to the state of the roads, footpaths and underpasses and the status of cycleways would be addressed. Mobility scooter access was also an issue which would be included in the review.

It was also noted that individual responses from consultees would be responded to.

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

None.

4 URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

Stevenage Local Plan

The Strategic Director advised that, through previous correspondence, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) had stated that a decision would be taken in respect of the holding direction on the Stevenage Local Plan by 13 November 2018. However, as at 26 November 2018, no written response had been provided by the MHCLG and the holding direction remained in effect. Stevenage Borough Council officers had maintained regular contact with the MHCLG over recent weeks, but no decision had been formally taken on this matter by the Secretary of State.

Accordingly, a letter had been despatched to the MCHLG demanding an urgent face to face meeting with the Secretary of State to seek to positively resolve this matter. The Council had requested a response by no later than 30 November 2018 to avoid the need for more formal legal routes to be considered.

5 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

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 to 7 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 outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

6 **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 30 November 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 be noted:

- Part II Decisions of the Executive – 3 October 2018
- Business Technology Centre Management Contract 2019 – 24
- Financial Security Options 2019/20 – 2021/22

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

None.

8 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR