

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Monday, 18 March 2019

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, James Fraser, Michelle Gardner, Lizzy Kelly, John Mead, Sarah Mead, Adam Mitchell CC and Robin Parker CC.

Start / End Start Time: 6.00pm
Time: End Time: 8.20pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The meeting opened with a one minute silence in memory of the victims of the shootings that took place at mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand on 15 March 2019.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Hanafin and S-J Potter.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 18 FEBRUARY 2019

A Member sought clarification on the reason for not including the Leader's New Homes Bonus Funding Initiatives for 2019/20 on the agenda. Officers informed the Committee the funds for the Leader's Initiative had been accounted for in the 2019/20 Budget and the amount was below the threshold for Key Decisions. It was indicated that officers were preparing briefing note for all Members.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 18 February 2019 are approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 PART I DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

Minutes of the Executive – 13 February 2019

The Committee noted the comments of the Executive.

Minutes of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees

The Committee noted the comments of the Executive.

Third Quarter Revenue Monitoring Report 2019/20 – General Fund and Housing Revenue Account

The Committee noted the comments of the Executive. In response to a question regarding rent loss from increased voids for the Indoor Market, Members were informed that the Council had introduced a number of initiatives such as flexible opening times, parking charge variations and spaces for casual traders. Officers assured the Committee that a Liaison Officer will be in place in time for Phase Two of the Kenilworth Close development.

Third Quarter Capital Monitoring Report 2019/20 – General Fund and Housing Revenue Account

The Committee noted the comments of the Executive. Members sought clarification on underspend for works to the Timebridge boiler and indoor market. Officers reported that there was an equal split of costs between Timebridge and Hertfordshire County Council. It was highlighted that works related to lighting, heater replacements and electrical distribution board had been carried out at the Indoor Market at a lower cost and without compromising the quality of work.

Housing Revenue Account Asset Management Strategy

The Committee noted the comments of the Executive.

Corporate Performance for Quarter Three 2018/19

The Committee noted the comments of the Executive. Members raised the following issues:

- Handling of customer documents
- New website features
- IT resources
- Customer complaints
- Third-party absence management provider (FirstCare)

The Assistant Director (Corporate Services and Transformation) advised that:

- The Council had procured of a new website platform
- A new website was due to be launched in the summer
- A cross-party group was working on IT solutions including a customer service management solution
- The Document Management System was scheduled to go live at the end of March 2019. The system will improve document management for customers and SBC teams
- There was a steady improvement in call handling as a result of customer care training and collaborative working
- Telephone call statistics are cumulative from the beginning of the financial year
- The customer services team escalates customer queries to relevant officers –

- if necessary
- Members will be able to access the internal telephone directory once the interactive features of the intranet become fully functional
- The introduction of the third-party absence management provider (FirstCare) had been held back pending consideration of the Sickness Management review and liaison with the Portfolio Holder
- The Council had earmarked projects for the IT underspend
- A soft launch will be used to test the new website and this will precede the hard launch
- The Customer Relationship Management System, Housing Portal and other IT services will plug into the new website
- The Council had identified future IT staffing requirements based upon current anticipated operations and developments
- Like many others, the Council faced an issue of retaining experienced IT staff
- There is likely to be a twelve week leading in period prior to the implementation of FirstCare

Co-operative Neighbourhood Management Programme Delivery 2018/19

The Committee noted the comments of the Executive. The Committee raised questions regarding boundaries, neighbourhood wardens and community development officers. Officers advised that there were four area-based teams. Each team was led by a Community Development Officer. There were plans for practical area based teams comprising of Communities & Neighbourhoods, Housing and Stevenage Direct Services officers. Members enquired about recent resignations from the Community Development team.

Members were optimistic that the introduction of the Community Engagement Framework will improve resident engagement. Members commended the work of neighbourhood wardens particularly those based in St Nicholas, Martins Wood and Shephall. It was confirmed that names, job descriptions and working arrangements of neighbourhood wardens were previously provided to Members. The Committee assured officers that Members want to be more involved in community engagement matters.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the Indoor Market Review report be circulated to the Committee
2. That Cooperative Neighbourhoods Manager sets up meetings to introduce Members to their respective neighbourhood wardens

4 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2019/20

The Committee considered the Scrutiny Work Programme for the Municipal Year 2019-20. The Scrutiny Officer reported that the draft Overview & Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2019-20 was based on Members feedback on ideas for improving Scrutiny and ideas put forward by Individual Members and the public.

It was noted that the process for deciding section 106 (Town and Country Planning Act 1990) arrangements and Members refreshments were reviewed in recent years. The Assistant Director (Corporate Services and Transformation) informed the Committee that refreshments for Members could be included in the scope of the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) review. Members were advised that a Portfolio Holder Advisory Group meeting involving the O & S Committee will be scheduled to consider the (Information and Communications Technology) ICT Strategy and Investment Programme.

The Committee discussed reviews on planning consultations and complaints handling. Members also highlighted Scrutiny training requirements. It was noted that the Planning & Development Committee was quasi-judicial and this could limit the scope of a review on planning consultation. In relation to training, the Scrutiny Officer stated that Members had previously attended scrutiny training course run by the Local Government Association, Centre for Public Scrutiny, Birmingham University and the Local Government Information Unit.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2019-20 is noted
2. That Complaints Handling be the main review subject for the Overview & Scrutiny Committee for the 2019-20 Municipal Year

5 **SBC SICKNESS MANAGEMENT REPORT**

The Committee considered the draft report and recommendations for the Sickness Management Scrutiny Review. Members sought clarification on arrangements for the proposed wellbeing policy staff survey, formal and informal sickness management interviews and the Absence Management service provider (FirstCare).

Officers reported that they were currently reviewing several wellbeing policy staff survey templates. Members were re-assured that the starting point for officers when assessing sickness/absence cases was that they are genuine. The Council has a duty though to protect public sector resources while providing compassion to officers. There was a trigger point for initiating informal sickness absence interviews. However, the trigger points were not just statistically based and managers were encouraged to exercise discretion. The Human Resources (HR) team monitors sickness absence management and liaises with Assistant Directors to ensure consistency. It was confirmed that current staff policies cover issues such as dealing with an employee's multiple absences for several unrelated reasons. The Council offered a suite of support initiatives including referral to occupational health specialists. It was reported that employees were offered the opportunity to talk to another manager about the reasons for their absence if they felt more comfortable doing so (i.e. if the employee wanted to speak to a manager of the same sex) not obliged to have an informal interview with their direct manager. Employees had a right of appeal to a third party independent manager after any informal absence interview.

The Scrutiny Officer informed the Committee that the Sickness Management

Scrutiny Review report will be brought before the next O & S Committee meeting for approval. The report will be submitted to the Portfolio Holder (Resources) and relevant officers for comment.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the draft report is noted
2. That Recommendation 2.1.8 be amended to reflect the fact that the HR team and not Councillor John Mead will be providing an update on the suitability of a monthly wellbeing staff survey template
3. That the following recommendations be added to the report:
 - a. That officers consider amending the existing policy to address the issues raised by officers from Customer Service Centre and Housing Investment detailed at 4.1.14 to 4.1.26 to address the following issues:
 - (i) Providing flexibility to Managers to use discretion when managing sickness and inconsistencies across the organisation
 - (ii) That planned medical operations/procedures and accidents be treated differently from other sickness reporting
 - (iii) That the offer from CSC and Housing Investment be tied in with the option of a wider staff questionnaire/survey at Recommendation 8
 - (iv) That managers have access to past Return to Work Interviews, sickness data and reasons for informal/formal meetings all in one place
 - (v) That officers consider clarifying the trigger points between formal and informal interviews

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

Future High Street Fund: Expression of Interest

The Committee noted the comments of the Executive. It was reported that unfortunately the Old Stevenage High Street did not meet the criteria for the submission of an expression of interest. However, it was hoped that other funding sources could be identified for investment in the Old Town High Street area. Officers confirmed that the submission of expression of interest will not jeopardise the town centre regeneration projects. Projects for the Future High Street Fund will be identified if Stevenage was successful in the first phase of the bidding process.

7 URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

None.

8 **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

9 **PART II MINUTES - 18 FEBRUARY 2019**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 18 February 2019 are approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

10 **PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE**

The Committee noted the comments of the Executive.

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

None.

12 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR