

**Meeting: COUNCIL**

**Date: 24 JULY 2019**

## **ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT 2018/2019**

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### **1. PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To report on the work undertaken by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Select Committees during the 2018/19 Municipal Year and to outline the Work Programme for the three Committees for 2019/20.

### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That the work undertaken by Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Select Committees during 2018/19 be noted.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000 Overview and Scrutiny's role is to operate as an independent function of the Council's decision making process, by having overview of the Council's decision making, holding the Executive to account, having the power to "call in" decisions for reconsideration and undertake internal and external scrutiny reviews.
- 3.2 The Council's Constitution requires that there be an annual report to Council on the scrutiny activity over the past Municipal Year (see Article 6.3 of the Constitution).
- 3.3 This report is a retrospective look at the scrutiny review work undertaken by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the two Select Committees during the 2018-19 Municipal Year.
- 3.4 In accordance with the Constitution the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was also charged with scrutinising the Executive's proposals on Budget & Policy Framework items that go before Council for decision. In addition the Committees considered updates on Scrutiny studies that had been undertaken previously, examining the progress of recommendations and where appropriate following up on matters raised.
- 3.5 The Committees have also worked with their relevant Executive Portfolio Holders on a number of separate policy development meetings developing

policies and considering reports before their submission to the Executive. This report, however, focuses on the Committees' Scrutiny role.

#### **4. SUMMARY OF SELECT COMMITTEE REVIEWS FOR 2018/2019**

4.1 Each Select Committee review made formal recommendations to the relevant Executive Member, officers and external partners. The following is a summary of the outcomes of each scrutiny review.

#### **4.2 Community Select Committee – Review of Resident Engagement**

4.2.1 In conducting this review the Community Select Committee met on 5 occasions and received written and oral evidence from the following people:

- Executive Portfolio Holder for Communities, Community Safety & Equalities, Cllr Jackie Hollywell
- Executive Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Co-Operative Working, Cllr Rob Broom
- Consultant Rachel Eden
- North Herts District Council & Hertfordshire County Councillor Judi Billing
- Housing Management Advisory Board, Jon Thurlow
- Housing Tenant & Leaseholder Customer Scrutiny Panel, Les Isaacs
- AD Communities & Neighbourhoods, Rob Gregory
- Community Development Manager, Neil Baker
- Resident Engagement Officer, Guru Lota
- AD Corporate Services & Transformation, Richard Protheroe
- Digital Transformation Manager, Hannah Brunt (Written response)

4.2.2 Members undertook the following individual research for the review:

- Cllr Adam Mitchell reviewed SBC forms of Resident Engagement
- Cllr John Mead undertook desk top research regarding Resident Engagement and online engagement tools
- Cllr Sandra Barr undertook desk top research of how other authorities carry out their resident engagement
- Cllr Jim Brown visited the Youth Council to find out their preferred methods of engagement
- The Chair, Cllr Sarah Mead undertook an informal poll of over 50 residents regarding the Council methods of engagement (the majority still contact the Council by telephone, but the Council's web site is the main source of information, most respondents contacted the Council about local issues including refuse collection, parking, shops and town centre regeneration).

The review focused on the following issues:

- Summarise the key issues/focus of the review
- Look at the effectiveness of Resident Engagement by SBC,

incorporating Consultation Demographic of Residents' Survey and the diversity of currently involved groups

- Can the Council adopt more creative, dynamic engagement? Use of social media/digital platforms? Establish how and why we do resident engagement and in which areas?
- Have a focus on Housing resident engagement as this is the largest service that the Council operates

Key findings of the review:

- The overarching Digital Transformation Programme is key to the success of a number of the reviews findings and recommendations.
- Focus on face to face, time bound themes and projects to build engagement
- More broadly to: Integrate engagement into individual Business Unit work; address consultation demographics; promote engagement methods and branding; provide an engagement toolkit; improve diversity on Housing tenant and leaseholders forums
- That the review recommendations link to the Community and Neighbourhood Business Unit Review (including the independent consultant, Rachel Eden, Holy Brook Associates, review recommendations).

4.2.3 In summary the review made specific recommendations around the following issues:

- A number of digital agenda recommendations
- Face to face engagement
- Integrate community engagement work into individual Business Units
- Promotion of engagement methods and branding
- Toolkit and corporate reports
- Neighbourhood Wardens
- SBC diversity on housing tenant and leaseholder forums
- Publicising the results of and responding to consultation
- Using time bound themes and projects
- Provide an annual review of resident engagement methodology and framework

4.2.4 The review made 19 separate recommendations on the above themes. The Executive Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Working, Cllr Rob Broom has provided the Community Select Committee with a response to the review recommendations, which Members have received and will consider formally at a Committee meeting.

4.2.5 The Portfolio Holder accepted 18 of the reviews 19 recommendations but with regard to recommendation 15 the Portfolio Holder was of the view that having now secured 4 Neighbourhood Wardens for the town this number could not be increased to the 6 to match the County Divisions for the town.

#### 4.3 **Community Select Committee sitting as the Council Statutory Crime & Disorder Committee**

4.3.1 The Committee considered performance of the Responsible Authority Group, SoSafe Community Safety Partnership against the Community Safety Action Plan and the emerging priorities for 2019-20 on 26 March 2019.

4.3.2 The Committee interviewed the Chair of the Responsible Authorities Group (SBC CE) Matt Partridge, Exec Portfolio Holder for Community Safety Cllr Jackie Hollywell, Sarah Pateman SBC Anti-Social Behaviour & Community Safety Manager and Hertfordshire Constabulary, Chief Inspector Simon Tabert and asked questions and made comments on the priorities for 2019-20:

Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB); Safeguarding; Hate Crime and Domestic Abuse; Modern Slavery and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE); Alcohol and Drug Related Crime and Disorder; Knife Crime and Scams and Fraud

4.4 **Other Scrutiny review items considered by the Community Select Committee** – (i) Review of the Leisure Contract with Stevenage Leisure Limited (ii) Young Enterprise (iii) Update on the Third Sector Scrutiny Review (iv) Revisit Damp & Mould Scrutiny Review (v) Revisit Decent Homes Review (vi) Public Health meeting with the HCC Director of Public Health

4.4.1 (i) **Review of the Leisure Contract with Stevenage Leisure Limited** - The Community Select Committee considered the review of the Leisure Contract with Stevenage Leisure Limited to consider the value derived from the current contract and the initiatives that the SBC & SLL joint Innovation Group were working on. Members were of the view that the action areas to improve the efficiency of the contract for the Council were welcomed and they would be interested to receive an update on the new initiatives at Fairlands Lakes to improve the offer there including pedaloes on the Millennium Lake, archery and an adventure play area and a new Fairland Valley Park Summer Brochure. Members were interested in the way SLL were supporting the Council's health, cultural and social strategies with a wide variety of ways, including the provision of NHS referrals, cardio-vascular facilities via the Healthy Hub and also the theatre being heavily involved in the Council's Cultural Strategy. Members further welcomed SLL's proposed introduction of performance indicators regarding local people's use of the gym and theatre which would begin to be recorded in the 2018-19 financial year.

(ii) **Young Enterprise** - The Committee received a presentation on the work of Young Enterprise to help young people into work, offering a wide range of programmes to help young people develop key employability competencies.

(iii) **Update on the Third Sector Scrutiny Review** - The Committee considered an update on the scrutiny review into support for the Third/Voluntary Sector, four key priority areas had been selected for development in the 2012-2015 Voluntary Sector Strategy. Members noted that none of the priority areas of voice and representation, sustainability,

harnessing corporate giving and volunteering had recorded clear evidence of progress against the objectives. Members and Officers expressed concern that the strategy did not have a clear action plan on how objectives were measured for impact and outcomes, therefore it was agreed that the strategy should not be updated but be replaced with clear and concise guidelines based on the Council's co-operative approach

(iv) **Update on the Damp & Mould Scrutiny Review** - The Committee revisited the review of damp and mould in SBC Council Homes. Officers advised that they were using a tracker to monitor progress for each individual case. Contact had now been made by Council officers with all those tenants who had previously reported problems. Members were also advised that following a reported problem, an initial inspection was now carried out within 3 weeks. The target for the completion of all works was 6 months although the majority of cases were completed a lot sooner. Members welcomed what progress had been made in this area but indicated they would continue to monitor progress.

(v) **Update on the Decent Homes Review** - Members were pleased to note that many of the 2014 original review recommendations had been implemented and that 100% post inspection work was now undertaken and endorsed the requirement to monitor customer satisfaction through surveys and feedback. There were further potential prospects for social value opportunities within future contract commitments including trade apprenticeships which the review had suggested. This included the contracts awarded for the regeneration works to the Town Centre and also the Major Refurbishment Contracts for the flat blocks around the Town.

(vii) **Public Health meeting with the HCC Director of Public Health** – Members received a presentation on the Healthy Stevenage Strategy 2018-2022 Progress Dashboard for 2018/19, NHS Long Term Plan Overview Report (released in January 2019) and NHS Long Term Plan (Opportunities and Challenges) as well as an update on the Healthy Stevenage Strategy and the success of programmes delivered to date. The Director of Public Health agreed to see what funding opportunities there could be to support local diabetes awareness training and the Committee asked that the council consider adopting a strategy for diabetes awareness.

#### 4.5 **Environment & Economy Select Committee**

4.5.1 It was agreed by the Committee when it considered its Work Programme for the year that there would not be a specific main review for 2018-19 but the Committee wanted to focus on a series of smaller reviews across a range of topics undertaken in more one-off meetings and updates, these included:

4.5.2 (i) **Strategic Transport Strategy 2031 – Including Living Streets** - Members commented on the seven key areas within the strategy covering Air, Bus, Cycling, Electric Vehicles, Rail, Road and Walking which could only be delivered by working with the Council's partners like HCC, SmartGo Stevenage and other stakeholders who are working together to promote and seek to secure the tangible aspects of an integrated Transport Network. The

Living Streets concept could include the following aspects of planting, cycling routes and parking, car parking changes, safety improvements / traffic calming, green of the street, lighting improvements, seating, 20 mph limits, play provision, street van bans with alternative secure van parking and on street electric vehicle charging. Members welcomed further work in this area.

(ii) **Public Toilets** - Members reviewed the provision of public toilets in the Town Centre, the Old Town and in the Indoor Market. Members stated that they were concerned regarding the opening times and accessibility of toilets during the evening, particularly with the regeneration of the town centre and the night time economy offer. Members agreed that safety and cleanliness of the facilities were the main considerations but that different styles of facilities should be looked at during the regeneration of the Town. The importance of inclusiveness and accessibility was also stressed with the requirement for ease of access to a functioning disabled toilet including for those with hidden disabilities. Members were supportive of the 'can't wait' card issued by Crohns and Colitis UK as a discreet mechanism to access toilet facilities and agreed that more promotion was needed in this area.

(iii) **Rail Station** – Although the Council does not have direct responsibility for rail, the Council has a responsibility to look after the welfare its residents including regular rail commuters and more casual rail users. Along with many other Rail Stations and areas, Stevenage was adversely effected by the May 2018 Rail Timetable change, therefore this issue was considered by the Committee. The long term objective was to establish improved communication between the Council, rail users and rail companies. Members held to account Network Rail and Govia Thameslink Railways for their poor performance and received assurances about how services were being improved and detail on the 5<sup>th</sup> Platform and temporary bus service for the Hertford Loop. An initial meeting was held in October 2018 and a follow up meeting was held in February 2019.

(iv) **Licence to Occupy** – Officers updated Members on a proposed streamlined process to acquire Licences to Occupy, which would allow the licensee to maintain council owned amenity land. The Committee was pleased to note the proposals for a review and improvement of the process which would dramatically reduce the time for licence applications and were supportive of the Assistant Director's plans to consult with interested parties on the proposals.

(v) **Stevenage Direct Services Business Review** – Members scrutinised and provided challenge to the plans of the Assistant Director, Stevenage Direct Services to modernise and bring commercialisation into the Stevenage Direct Services business unit operations covering issues like skip hire and removal of bulky waste.

(vi) **Update on the Indoor Market Review** – Members revisited a review that had been previously carried out into the future viability of the Indoor Market. As a result of the review the Council had commissioned a feasibility study for future development options or diversification of the Indoor Market through a

specialist company called Spacemakers. A preliminary report had been submitted to the Council and an annual action plan is now in place. Officers were considering alternative use options for void spaces. A Business Technology Centre-based business support social enterprise (Wenta) will hold business advice clinics at the Indoor Market for one day a month from January 2019.

(vii) **Reimaging Fairlands Valley Park** - Members received an officer presentation regarding the review of the strengths and weaknesses of the current offer in terms of both the quality and commercial viability of the services provided at Fairlands Valley Park, together with future opportunities for improving the offer. Members commented on the current offer and made a number of suggestions to improve the park and facilities. Members agreed to undertake further work to review the facility in 2019-20.

#### **4.7 Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

4.7.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 11 occasions to provide overview of the work of the Executive, specifically looking at all Key Decisions made by the Executive and all Budget and Policy Framework items. In addition to these meetings the Committee also considered the following issues:

- Sitting as a Select Committee – Sickness Management Review on 14 November 2018 and 15 January 2019, where the Committee received a presentation, agreed a scoping document and interviewed witnesses and agreed a final report
- The Overview & Scrutiny Committee also considered the diversity in the Borough Council's workforce on 8 October 2018. Officers from Human Resources provided Members with a statistical breakdown of SBC's workforce diversity and answered questions that Members raised prior to and at the meeting. Members stated that they would continue to monitor the diversity of the workforce in order that it can adequately reflect the local population.

#### **5.0 2019/2020 Scrutiny Work Programmes**

5.1 The two Select Committees have agreed their outline Scrutiny work programmes for the 2019/20 Municipal Year which are detailed at Appendix A and a list of the items are referred to below:

##### **5.1.1 Community Select Committee:**

The Community Select Committee have agreed to scrutinise the following issues:

- (i) **Sports & Leisure across the town**
- (ii) **Neighbourhood Wardens**
- (iii) **Update on the Cultural Strategy**

(iv) **Crime and Disorder Committee** (Statutory Committee)

(v) **Public Health Meeting** (Standing Item)

As well as carrying out review work the Committee will also undertake pre-scrutiny Policy Development work in Portfolio Holder Advisory Group meetings, should policies be developed or revised in the following areas:

**Homelessness & Rough Sleepers Strategy**  
**Housing Older Persons Strategy**  
**Damp & Condensation & Aids & Adaptations**  
**Housing Service Charge**  
**Rent Policy**  
**Community Centre Review**  
**Tenant Strategy**

#### 5.1.2 Environment and Economy Select Committee:

The Environment & Economy Select Committee have agreed to scrutinise the following issues:

- (i) **Local Neighbourhood Centres**
- (ii) **Post Office provision across the town**
- (iii) **Emerging Transport Strategy (to include an update on the cycling strategy)**
- (iv) **Fairlands Valley Park**
- (v) **Climate Change (defer until 2020-21)**
- (vi) **Rail Timetable and 5<sup>th</sup> Platform Update for Stevenage Rail Station**
- (vii) **Update on review of Maintenance of Trees, Hedges and Shrub beds**
- (viii) **Update on 2016 Business Technology Centre (BTC) Review**

As well as carrying out review work the Committee will also undertake pre-scrutiny Policy Development work in Portfolio Holder Advisory Group meetings, should policies be developed or revised in the following areas:

**Design Guide Supplementary Planning Guidance**  
**Parking Supplementary Planning Guidance**  
**Review of Bring Bank Recycling Sites; Economic Development Strategy**  
**Town Centre Parking Strategy**

#### 5.2. Overview & Scrutiny Committee Work Programme:

- 5.2.1 In addition to undertaking all scrutiny of Budget & Policy Framework items and decisions of the Executive, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has the capacity to undertake a “Select Committee” style meeting during the year if it so wishes. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has agreed to sit as a select Committee to consider the following items:

**Complaints/Feedback Handling**  
**Scrutiny of the Scrutiny function at SBC**



As well as carrying out review work the Committee will also undertake pre-scrutiny Policy Development work in Portfolio Holder Advisory Group meetings, should policies be developed or revised in the following areas:

**Council Tax Support Scheme**  
**ICT Strategy and Investment Programme**  
**Customer Strategy**

- 5.3 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will review the Council's Forward Plan of Key Decisions and also consider all 'Call-in' requests in accordance with the Council's Constitution as well as considering any Councillors Call for Action in relation to matters relating to Resources and any Petition appeals, in accordance with the Councils Petition Scheme, regarding matters relating to Resources or of a Corporate or Council wide nature.

5.4 Scoping reviews

- 5.4.1 A schedule of meetings for the two Select Committees has been arranged for the 2019-20 Municipal Year. These meetings will incorporate the scoping of the review where Members will identify the areas they wish to cover during the review, who to interview, what evidence/background information is required and which Members will lead the questioning on a specific area, as well as undertaking site visits, where appropriate. Meetings will also be arranged to revisit previous reviews to monitor actions.

5.6 **Portfolio Holder Advisory Groups (Policy Development Meetings)**

- 5.6.1 Pre-scrutiny Policy Development meetings will continue to be undertaken as and when requested by Executive Portfolio Holders in consultation with Assistant Strategic Directors and will be referred to as Portfolio Holders Advisory Groups (PHAG). These meetings are chaired by the relevant Executive Portfolio Holder and the relevant O&S or Select Committee Members are invited to attend. Unlike regular Select Committee meetings PHAG's are private meetings not open to the public. These meetings will continue to be clerked by Constitutional Services Officers.

**6. IMPLICATIONS**

**6.1 Financial Implications**

There is a budget of £1,500 to support study activities, site visits and specialist advice and training where necessary.

**6.2 Legal Implications**

Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government Statutory Guidance on Overview & Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities was published in May 2019 and Scrutiny Members should have regard to this when undertaking their Scrutiny review work and carrying out the function.

### **6.3 Equalities and Diversity Implications**

Equalities and Diversity issues are considered at the scoping stage of each Scrutiny review with regards to questioning of witnesses and the collection of oral and written evidence. Also E&D issues are addressed in the final report for each review.

### **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Local Government Act 2000

Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government Statutory Guidance on Overview & Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities

Individual agendas and study material for each Scrutiny review undertaken by the Select Committees as described in this report are available for inspection.

The full Executive responses to the Scrutiny Reviews are available for inspection.

### **APPENDICIES**

Appendix A - Select Committees & Overview & Scrutiny Committee Work Programmes for 2019-20