

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 18 December 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, Laurie Chester, Michael Downing, Michelle Gardner, Andy McGuinness, John Mead, Adam Mitchell CC, Robin Parker CC and Claire Parris.

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 8.05pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sarah-Jane McDonough and Sarah Mead.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 11 NOVEMBER 2019 AND 25 NOVEMBER 2019

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meetings of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 11 November 2019 and 25 November 2019 be approved as correct records for signature by the Chair.

In relation to Minute 2 of the meeting of the Committee held on 25 November 2019, it was confirmed that the Assistant Director (Planning and Regulatory) had circulated a briefing note to Members on the status of cycleways in Stevenage.

3 PART I DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

A Member commented that the Notice of Decisions of the Executive meeting held on 16 December 2029 had been tabled, thereby allowing limited time for Members to prepare for the Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting. Upon asking if the items for consideration could be deferred to January 2020, officers responded that this would not be possible as many of them were time critical. Another Member commented that he was happy for the meeting to proceed because the agenda related to the papers of the Executive that had been in circulation for some time. However, it was suggested that the timing of Overview & Scrutiny Committee meetings in relation to Executive meetings could form part of the Committee's ongoing review of the SBC scrutiny function.

The Committee considered the decisions of the following matters arising from the Executive meeting held on 16 December 2019:

Minutes of the Executive – 20 November 2019

Noted.

Minutes of the Overview & Scrutiny and Select Committees

Noted.

Co-operative Neighbourhoods

The Committee was advised that the Executive had approved the recommendations set out in the report, and had agreed that the pilot neighbourhood of St. Nicholas and Martins Wood should encompass the streets to the north that bordered St. Nicholas Park which were currently in Woodfield Ward.

In reply to a series of Members' questions, officers commented:

- The pre-2017 County Division boundaries were chosen as the 6 neighbourhood areas as they were more synchronised with the existing SBC ward boundaries;
- The St. Nicholas / Martins Wood prototype neighbourhood area was selected as some initial community engagement work and neighbourhood investment had already taken place or was being planned in the area. The order of wards to benefit from the CNM programme had been determined as a consequence of the results of the Residents' Survey;
- The bringing together of teams across the organisation would enable issues to be tackled in a more streamlined and co-ordinated manner, with clear accountability within services for each area and engagement with local residents to build community capacity; and
- Community Wealth Building (CWB) aimed to focus on building social value, in endeavouring to "lock in" investment for local communities within those communities. CWB would be the subject of the Main Debate item at the 29 January 2020 Council meeting.

A Member suggested that the roles of Members within the Co-operative Neighbourhood Management (CNM) programme could perhaps form the topic for a future All-Member Seminar following on from the related session help with the CNM team in 2019.

Community Centres Review

The Committee was informed that the Executive had approved an additional recommendation that organisations using SBC buildings, community assets or managing facilities or delivering services to the people of Stevenage should reflect the Council's values and policies of inclusion and be politically neutral.

In response to Members' questions, the Assistant Director (Communities and Neighbourhoods) advised:

- There would be potential additional capital costs for any additional community

centre floorspace, but these would be unknown until any required works were scoped and business cases considered. However, there was provision in the Council's Capital Strategy for a new Community Centre associated with the Kenilworth redevelopment;

- There was no list of which community centres would be hubs and which would be spokes. The principle of the hub and spoke model had been approved by the Executive, and further detailed work would be carried out in the 2020/21 Financial Year;
- The emphasis would be on providing a sustainable future model of community centre provision, both for existing and any proposed new centres. Community centres would not be considered in isolation, but rather as part of the Asset Management Strategy;
- Consideration would be given to the location of the hub community centres, in terms of accessibility from all parts of each hub and spoke area;
- In order to provide a level of sustainability, a balance would need to be struck between commercial and community based activities offered by each community centre;
- There was no expectation that Community Associations would be asked to divert from their defined geographical focus, although the hub and spoke model could provide an opportunity for them to operate as touchdown points for SBC staff and partner organisations in providing an outreach service to residents; and
- It was clarified that the additional Executive recommendation regarding the political neutrality of groups using the centres would not affect their use by local Members in conducting their regular Ward surgeries.

In respect of Community Centre leases, a Member raised a particular issue regarding the ongoing determination of a lease for the Old Stevenage Community Association. The Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) undertook to investigate the matter and advise the Member of the latest position.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

It was explained that the Executive had approved an additional recommendation requesting officers to commence the review of the level of fees contained in the CIL Charging Schedule after the first year of its operation.

The Conservative Group Members on the Committee stated that they could not support the reduced CIL rate of £40 per square metre for Market housing in Zone 1 (Stevenage Central, West and North Stevenage developments), as they felt that insufficient CIL funding would be generated for associated infrastructure improvements. Furthermore, they considered that a lower level of CIL levy adversely affected the value of development land.

In respect of questions raised by Members, officers stated:

- There would be some instances where developments would attract both CIL and Section 106 payments, the latter when infrastructure improvements were required directly as a result of that development (eg. new schools) to make the proposal acceptable in planning terms;
- Local Authorities in the south-west of the county had adopted higher CIL rates

than those proposed for SBC, but land values were higher as these Authorities were located closer to the Greater London area. The Independent Examiner for the SBC CIL had used the same viability methodology for calculation of the recommended rates as that used by the other Local Authorities;

- The allocation of the CIL funding to specific projects would be determined by officers, in consultation with appropriate Members. The Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan would be updated to identify and prioritise areas that needed funding;
- Officers agreed to provide a Member with contact details of a County Council officer who could assist in explaining the methodology on how HCC prioritises spend on Section 106/CIL monies;
- 80% of CIL monies were required to be ring-fenced for larger infrastructure projects; 15% could be spent on community-based schemes, and officers would be looking at options for local Members and communities to be involved in putting forward such schemes; and
- It was confirmed that the CIL rates would become effective from 1 April 2020. As such, any planning applications that were determined before that date would not attract a CIL levy, but would still be subject to the Section 106 regime. However, a significant advantage of the CIL system would be that, unlike Section 106, the first payment would be within 60 days of the commencement of the development, thereby allowing pooled CIL funds to be devoted to infrastructure improvements at an earlier stage.

Hertfordshire Growth Board Memorandum of Understanding

The Committee acknowledged the importance of the Hertfordshire Local Authorities working together to secure the necessary funding for progressing place-based improvements across the county.

In response to Members' questions, the Chief Executive stated:

- It was anticipated that the Herts Growth Board would approach the Government for funding in Quarter one or two of the next financial year, but this would be subject to a number of factors which could speed up or delay the bid preparation process;
- There were a number of overarching strands in the Growth Board programme, with a lead Leader and lead Chief Executive being allocated to each of them. The Chief Executive confirmed that he was the lead CE for the Climate Change strand (with the East Herts DC Leader), and would be seeking to co-ordinate the work of the Growth Board in this regard across the county. This would include the development of a Hertfordshire Climate Change / Sustainability Policy Statement that would inform all strands of the Growth Board's programme. It was also noted that Councillor Sharon Taylor was a member of the negotiating team that was meeting with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government;
- The Growth Board would be pulling together a countywide schedule of current and emerging projects. It was not believed that there was any inter-dependency between Growth Board funding and projects identified through the Town Fund Deal;
- The Growth Board would strive to not miss any opportunities by failing to consider cross-boundary issues.

Developing a Town Fund Deal

The Committee was advised that the Executive had noted the importance of culture within the Town Deal Fund and the work to develop a Cultural Strategy for Stevenage, and had requested officers to consider bringing forward culture-led projects within the emerging Town Deal Investment Plan to enable Stevenage to develop its cultural offer.

A Member raised the issue of the Town Fund Deal being administered by an unelected Board, rather than solely by the Council, bearing in mind it that Borough/District Local Authorities were expected to take the lead on the Deal.

The Chief Executive replied that the Council working with key partners locally, other agencies and the Government would seek to ensure that future Board arrangements best enabled the ongoing development of the regeneration programme. The Town Fund Deal prospectus was relatively broad when describing where in the Borough the funding secured could be spent. He confirmed that there were a number of broad project options and that these would have to be worked up for consideration by the Board in due course.

Corporate Performance Quarter Two

The Committee was advised that, in respect of the Sickness Absence Performance Indicator, the Executive had noted that the percentage figure was skewed due to instances of long-term sickness. The Senior Human Resources Manager had undertaken to provide Executive Members with statistics relating to short-term sickness absence only.

In response to a Member's question, the Strategic Director (RP) advised that the "balanced scorecard" for performance information had been discontinued a number of years ago, as it was felt important that such information focussed on updates on the Council's key ambitions as well as specific Business Unit Performance Indicators.

In relation to a query regarding the reason why there was no current available performance information relating to Asset 5b: Percentage of assets known to be health and safety compliant, the Committee was informed that the Council was 100% compliant with statutory health and safety matters as currently measured, but that discussions were ongoing with the relevant contractor to ensure that adequate systems were in place to record performance in respect non-statutory health and safety matters (planned preventative maintenance, such as gutter clearance).

Council Tax Base 2020/21

Noted.

Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Medium Term Financial Strategy (2019/20 – 2023/24) and HRA Business Plan

The Committee was advised that the HRA Business Plan had been updated to

reflect the recent 1% increase in Public Works Loan Board interest rates. The Business Plan now supported the delivery 2,433 new Council homes, which was 271 more homes than that projected in the previous year's projections.

The Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) confirmed that the projections for new homes in the first few years of the HRA Business Plan were based on site specific data supplied by the Housing Development Team.

Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Rent Setting 2020/21

The Overview and Scrutiny committee considered the draft HRA rent and service charge proposals and budget. The Assistant Director (Finance & Estates) introduced the report and the Committee was advised that the draft HRA budget included the growth set out in the HRA Business Pan and that the average rent increase for Council homes was 2.7%, based on a CPI + 1% rise.

The Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) also clarified that future HRA new build schemes includes a 50/50 split between social and affordable units, as set out in the Business Plan approved principles. At the time of presenting the report the HRA stock comprised 7,891 social homes and 35 affordable homes.

4 URGENT PART I DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW & 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 Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.
2. That Members consider the reasons for the following reports being in Part II and determine whether or not maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

7 PART II MINUTES - 25 NOVEMBER 2019

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 25 November 2019 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

8 **PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered and noted the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 20 November 2019.

9 **URGENT PART II DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF THE
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

None.

10 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR