

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - SITTING AS A SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 14 January 2020

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, Andy McGuinness, John Mead, Sarah 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 Councillor Michelle Gardner.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 11 NOVEMBER 2019

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 11 November 2019 be noted subject to Councillor Margaret Notley being added to the attendance for the meeting.

3 POSSIBLE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF THE FUNCTION

The Committee considered the report from the Scrutiny Officer which set out a number of possible recommendations for the review derived from the self-evaluation scoring matrix comments.

The following recommendations were agreed:

Work Programming:

- (i) Use the Customer Service Centre & Satisfaction Surveys data as a source to generate local issues to scrutinise;
- (ii) Work with Scrutiny Members to capture their ideas – possibly with a one day event to gather ideas rather than relying on the current survey;
- (iii) Address the problem of the lag in the system – describe as a rolling work programme that items can drop off and be added to during the year but still be published in the spring
- (iv) The process must be Member led with Scrutiny Members having the last word on subjects to scrutinise
- (v) The Communications Team should be asked to advise on what is

trending on social media.

Scoping:

- (i) That prior to a review starting, a short introductory background presentation detailing the issues around the scrutiny be brought to Members, this would help all Members but especially new Councillors who may not be familiar with the issues and process
- (ii) An updated scoping document identifying the changes, should be provided at strategic points during a review, reflecting on any changes of focus or additions and what has been achieved so far
- (iii) That all Scrutiny Members be given the chance to comment on the scope

Evidence Gathering/site visits/interviews:

- (i) Promote ways to engage more with the public in the evidence gathering process
- (ii) Provide a range of options including some evenings for Member site visits
- (iii) Provide opportunities to engage with all Scrutiny Members on a Committee and acknowledge Members who take a lead role in a specific issue the review.

Final Reports and recommendations

- (i) Final reports should incorporate fewer, SMART, recommendations relevant to the objective of the Scrutiny, to maintain the review's impact (where possible these could be grouped together)
- (ii) That a process be drawn together to invite comment from all Scrutiny Members regarding the final report and recommendations – (possibly an item on an agenda with draft recommendations for comment and amendment prior to the publishing of the final report)

Monitoring Recommendations:

- (i) That officers are expected to adopt recommendations that are in scrutiny reports once agreed with the relevant Portfolio Holder, but that this should be acknowledged in responses and not passed off as being current practise when it is actually in response to the review.
- (ii) Executive responses should be displayed prominently on the Council's web site (in addition to just being published with an agenda on the web site).
- (iii) Following a review the loop should be closed by providing feedback to witnesses and with any tenants or members of the public who have contributed via a satisfaction survey.

Additional Recommendations:

- (i) That an action tracker be reported to each Committee meeting to enable the monitoring of outcomes and recommendations from previous reviews;
- (ii) That the Portfolio Holder Advisory Groups be Chaired by Scrutiny Members as a Pre Scrutiny Advisory Group, which could include the Executive Portfolio Holder as a key contributor answering questions along with the relevant Assistant Director, prior to the Policy being considered at the Executive.

4 **SURVEY OF HERTS SCRUTINY NETWORK**

The meeting considered the responses received from the County Council and 2 District Authorities regarding a short survey about their response to the Statutory Scrutiny Guidance and the way scrutiny was conducted in their authority.

Members agreed that the Scrutiny Officer should include an agenda item for all meetings incorporating an action plan to enable members to monitor outcomes or scrutiny recommendations made previously. This would enable Members to keep informed about progress and help any new Members appointed to the Committee after the Annual Meeting.

The possibility of appointing opposition members as chairs of scrutiny was discussed although it was agreed that the importance of those Chairs having the necessary skills, commitment and knowledge was of more importance.

It was also considered that the feedback was not clear on the way other authorities undertook pre-scrutiny work. In terms of the Portfolio Holder Advisory Groups (PHAG's) established, Members were pleased to note that a recommendation would be included under item 3 to suggest that the Groups be chaired by a Scrutiny member rather than the relevant Executive Portfolio Holder. Some Members were of the view that on occasions they had prepared extensively their own research for PHAG meetings but that their input did not appear to be included in the Policy report to Executive.

Officers agreed to circulate to Members the original report establishing the Portfolio Holder Advisory Groups.

A number of Members were interested in a scrutiny review of those authorities who had returned to the pre-2000 committee system and how it was working within those Councils.

It was **RESOLVED** that the responses be noted.

5 **CENTRE FOR PUBLIC SCRUTINY (CFPS) SUMMARY OF STATUTORY GUIDANCE SYMPOSIUM**

The Committee considered the notes from the summary of the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) Symposium on the Statutory Scrutiny Guidance.

The committee considered and debated the guidance relating to the appointment of

scrutiny chairs in particular the appointment being made by non-executive members only or by secret ballot. Members noted that the Guidance recommended that each authority should consider selecting their Chairs by secret ballot, but reiterated that this was ultimately a matter for each authority to decide.

Following further discussion it was agreed to look at this issue further at the next meeting.

It was **RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

6 URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

None.

7 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

Not required.

8 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

CHAIR