

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 26 January 2021

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Virtual (via Zoom)

Present: Councillors: Lin Martin-Haugh (Chair), Philip Bibby CC (Vice-Chair), Sandra Barr, Laurie Chester, Michael Downing, Michelle Gardner, Andy McGuinness, John Mead, Sarah Mead, Adam Mitchell CC, Robin Parker CC, Claire Parris and Simon Speller.

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 7.20pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no apologies for absence and no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 15 DECEMBER 2020

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 15 December 2020 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

In response to a question, the Assistant Director Housing and Investment agreed to follow up the suggestion of contacting the Stevenage MP in relation to the request to the Minister of Housing, Communities and Local Government to recognise and assist with the significant funding gap now experienced by Local Authorities operating a Housing Revenue Account.

3 PART I DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

The Committee considered the decisions on the following matters arising from the Executive meeting held on 20 January 2021.

Minutes of the Executive – 9 December 2020

Noted.

Minutes of Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees

Noted.

Covid-19 – Update

The Strategic Director (RP) advised that he would be providing a brief update on the latest Covid-19 position at the Council meeting on 28 January 2021 and a fuller

report to the Coronavirus Executive Committee on 2 February 2021.

In response to a series of Members' questions, the Strategic Director replied as follows:

- Statistical information relating to the rate of those individuals who had refused the vaccination had been requested from the Local Resilience Forum and would be shared with Members when it was available.
- A lot of coverage had been made recently regarding the efficacy of the vaccine since the change in the timing of the administration of the second dose. Further clarity was awaited from the Director of Public Health.
- In relation to the provision of free school meals, the SD advised that free school meals had been confirmed for February half term but that confirmation was currently awaited from the County Council regarding the provision for the school summer holidays.
- The armed forces had been involved in the planning of the Mass Vaccination Centre at Robertson House. The testing centre at Primett Road had been established by the County Council and SERCO.
- In terms of the upcoming elections, officers were continuing to prepare for the May 2021 polls following the formal Government advice to continue to plan for the poll.

Launch of Stevenage Amenity Tree Management Policy

In response to Members' questions, the Environmental Policy and Development Manager replied as follows:

- Although less trees were being planted than in the past, a wider, more interesting selection of trees were now being used.
- Any new developments in the town would require the developers to replace trees on a 3 to 1 basis. Where resources allowed the Council would replace any felled trees on a 2 to 1 basis.

Launch of Stevenage Cemetery Policy

In response to a question, the Cemeteries Services Supervisor advised that she would look at the suggestion of the Council providing a service to tend graves when nobody was able to look after them once resources would allow the Council to consider it.

Future Town Future Transport Strategy

Members were pleased to note that the Executive had requested a further report back in 12 months' time in order to review progress on the Strategy post-pandemic.

Council Tax Base 2021/22

In response to a question, the Strategic Director (CF) advised that although every year was different, this was the first year she had ever seen a decrease in the

Council Tax Base. She also advised that there had been a marked increase in Council Tax Support claims.

Final Housing Revenue Account and Rent Setting 2021/22

In response to a question, the Strategic Director (CF) advised that there were 2 free rent weeks per year at Christmas and at the end of the financial year.

Draft General Fund and Council Tax Setting 2021/22

A Member expressed concern regarding the level of LCB's and in particular that the Stevenage Youth Mayor's budget was higher than the rest of the Members. The Strategic Director (CF) advised that following consideration it had been agreed to reduce all budgets by 40%.

The Strategic Director (CF) advised that due to the current financial situation no modelling had been undertaken in respect of a zero increase to the Council Tax.

Draft Capital Strategy 2021/21 – 2025/26

Noted.

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

None.

5 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

The Strategic Director (TP) reported to the Committee on the lifting of the holding direction by the Secretary of State on the SG1 planning application.

6 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That, under Section 100A 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 Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by SI 2006 No. 88.
2. That having considered the reasons for the following item being in Part II, it be determined that maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

7 PART II MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 15 DECEMBER 2020

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16 December 2020 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

8 **PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE**

The Committee considered the Part II decisions on the following matters arising from the Executive meeting held on 20 January 2021.

Locality Review land and Sites Disposal Report

Noted.

The Formation of a Wholly Owned Housing Development Company – Renewed Business plan Approval and Financial Projections

The Borough Solicitor gave an explanation to the Committee on the differences between a Wholly Owned Company and a Local Authority Trading Company.

Leisure Contract – Covid-19 and Mitigation Measures

Noted with the additional recommendation agreed by the Executive.

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

None.

10 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR