

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 16 March 2022

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Sarah Mead (Chair), Margaret Notley (Vice-Chair), Myla Arceno, Stephen Booth, Matt Creasey, John Duncan, Alex Farquharson, Claire Parris and Simon Speller.

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 7.50pm

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

2 **MINUTES - 30 NOVEMBER 2021**

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of Community Select Committee meeting held on Wednesday 30 November 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 **REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PRE-SCRUTINY REVIEW OF THE NEW TOWNS HERITAGE CENTRE**

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report setting out the recommendations of the Community Select Scrutiny looking to support the Towns Deal funding bid for a New Towns Heritage Centre in Stevenage.

Members noted the scope, focus and process of the review.

The Committee had met on 6 occasions to undertake the review including 2 site visits to Milton Keynes and Colchester.

In relation to the external witnesses that had been interviewed as part of the Review, the Scrutiny Officer agreed that John Mead should be added to the list.

Following the Review, the following comments and additions to the conclusions and recommendations were made:

Curation

- We need to match aspirations with the resources we have available and that we are prepared to procure to deliver those aspirations
- If there are to be charges made for entry to any exhibits then any offers have to be fair across the whole community, i.e. not targeted at one group for example retirees if offer a cheaper day or time slot over another group who would not be able to access the same offer. The concept of inclusivity is important to maintain.
- Members who attended the site visit suggested that the example given in the report for separate charging was only for certain unique exhibits not for

general visits.

Hub and Spoke

- It was agreed that the hub and spoke concept for arts around the town could be extended to other New Towns with the New Towns Visitor Centre in Stevenage being the hub and the other new towns the spoke as they are all unique in their own way but have a shared overlapping history.
- It was recommended that an extra bullet point be included at paragraph 3.1.8 of the report to reflect that the New Town's experience should extend beyond the Town boundaries so that exhibits and costs can be shared amongst the new towns.

Management/Governance Structure

- It was agreed that the question mark should be removed from paragraph 3.1.4 as this was a statement not a question "...*In this way SBC would still be a major player but the independent voice of the board and would assure investors that independent voices are given equal voice.*"
- It was noted that collaboration is important. The Council needs to shift to a facilitation/convening role. Having an independent clear governance structure will be important for the future and will help the new towns heritage centre be able to bid for additional funding sources that would not be open to it if it remained in the current Council only control model. Officers would be looking into charitable status and other governance models including not-for profit social enterprises that would help with future funding options.
- The Chair stated that it would be important to make sure that the Council contains an active role in any new structure, as there was a danger that independent organisations who have talented people involved can leave and when they do this can threaten the future of the body without their presence and driving force, so the Council would look to retain a significant presence for continuity.
- A Member suggested that the Council should consider issues such as communal copyright for the museum so that local social history is captured and shared, as locally we are losing historical data at a County level.

Financial security

- Members discussed concerns around the financial security of the New Towns Heritage Centre. Some were concerned that overtime it could become over reliant on grant funding and may need a covenant to protect the Museum part of the building, others suggested that it would be well supported being part of the civic hub as this will be hosting the Council, Library and the NHS so the costs were shared and the idea of small commercial operations to support the Heritage Centre such as a Café and book/gift shop would also bring in extra revenue to support the activities at the centre.

It was **RESOLVED** that with the additions of the issues raised above that the report be noted.

4 COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2022-23

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report on the Committee's Work Programme for the new Municipal Year 2022/23.

He advised Members that a survey was conducted with all Scrutiny Members on

improving scrutiny work. All Members of the Council's Scrutiny Committees were emailed a survey for their views on the Scrutiny work and possible work programme items. A total of 8 responses were received from the 23 Scrutiny Members. Members responses were all summarised in the Officer report.

During discussion the following points were raised regarding possible items to include in the work programme:

- It was acknowledged by the Scrutiny Officer that there had not been an equal share of his and Committee time between the Community Select Committee (CSC) and the Environment and Economy (E&E) Select Committee. The context had been that the E&E Select Committee had completed a large review into the economic impact of Covid-19 pandemic on Stevenage and then went straight into a review of the Climate Emergency, as such the CSC had only been able to hold a truncated session over a couple of months on the New Towns Heritage Centre and one off sessions on Public Health and Crime and Disorder and updates on damp and mould and the work of the Neighbourhood Wardens. The Scrutiny Officer agreed that he would attempt to get a more equal use of his time between the two select committees.
- Members considered looking at their locality budgets and the ability to review how much money is remaining in the budgets each year. The Operations Director, Rob Gregory agreed to look into the way the locality budgets scheme is operating with a report back to Members
- Members asked why it had taken so long for the review of the Community Centres to be completed? Members suggested that they are likely to be struggling due to all of the current financial pressures so a look at them could be timely. The Director suggested that there would be an opportunity for Members to consider this by way of a Portfolio Holder's Advisory Group (PHAG) during the next municipal year.
- Members agreed to continue to hold a Public Health themed meeting and this could be linked to overall health and wellbeing, look at health inequalities
- Regarding Housing Members stated that they would be interested in looking at the allocations banding system as they were still concerned about the process with what look like anomalies and they also indicated that they would like to take a look at repairs and voids standards, which could start with a broad overview presentation from officers and then a more narrow area could be decided on to specifically scrutinise, such as the standard of void properties and response levels?

It was **RESOLVED** that the Community Select Committee's work programme should include:

- An officer presentation updating Members into the way the Local Community Budgets scheme is operating
- A Portfolio Holder's Advisory Group (PHAG) meeting on the Community Centres
- The statutory meeting on Crime and Disorder and continuation of a standing item on Public Health looking specifically at Health Inequalities for Stevenage
- An update on the Housing Allocations Policy

- A main review item on Housing Repairs and Voids standards, the review to begin with a broad presentation from officers on the service and then Members to agree a more narrow scope for a review

5 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

6 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

None

7 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None

CHAIR