

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 19 July 2022

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: Lin Martin-Haugh (Chair), Philip Bibby CC (Vice-Chair), Stephen Booth, Rob Broom, Jim Brown, Matt Creasey, Michael Downing, Wendy Kerby, Andy McGuinness, Sarah Mead, Claire Parris, Loraine Rossati and Anne Wells.

Start / End Time: Start Time: 06:00 pm
End Time: 08:42 pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Robin Parker and Bret Facey.

Councillor Stephen Booth substituted for Councillor Robin Parker.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 21 JUNE 2022

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday 21 June 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair subject to the following points.

- Item 5 – paragraph 5 and 7: A Member advised that the climate change emergency was about the Council and the Town as a whole, and not just about the Council, which the Minutes seem to imply, so the words ‘and the town’ should be next to the words ‘the Council’.
- The Committee noted some of the discussions on climate emergency that took place in the Committee’s previous meeting. This included the wording ‘the Committee urged a focus on achieving outcomes that reduced carbon emissions. It was agreed that the following wording should be included that ‘the Committee highlighted the need for an urgent, emergency response’.

3 PART I DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

2. Minutes – Executive 15 June 2022

Noted.

3. Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees

Noted.

4. Housing First Business Plan

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee were informed that the Executive had received a report in relation to a proposed Housing First Business Plan. The Housing Supply Manager advised the Committee that the report set out the Housing First approach for rough sleepers until the end of 2023/24. Members were informed that 106 individuals were assisted under the Council's Housing First Service since April 2020. The Service continued to meet demand and as a result, there had been a reduction in rough sleepers in the Town.

Members were advised that the Housing First provision would seek to maintain between 25-30 units to mitigate the risk of under occupancy and the associated costs that came with this. The remaining units not utilised for Housing First would be re-purposed to help offset the increasing demand for Temporary Accommodation and reduce reliance on expensive hotel accommodation. The recommendation agreed by the Executive was in line with the aims of Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-2024 to eradicate the rough sleeping in Stevenage.

The Housing Supply Manager advised Members that the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Housing Development advised the Executive that longer term provision would be kept under review, dependent on demand and the status of ongoing Government funding availability.

The Executive supported the recommendation in addition to instructing that a review of the Housing First Service Model be undertaken in 12 months' and reported back to the Executive.

In response to a question from a Member, the Housing Supply Manager advised Members that the Service was monitoring the amount of accommodation it used to ensure the Service did not have underoccupancy and monitored demand to ensure that the Service had enough properties.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Housing First Business Plan be noted.

5. Consultation on Two Article 4 Directions to Require Changes of Use From Class E(G)(I) (Offices And Class E(G)(Ii) (Light Industrial) to Class C3 (Residential) to Obtain Planning Permission

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee were advised that the Executive had considered a report seeking approval for consultation purposes of two revised Article 4 Directions to remove permitted development rights in relation to changes of use from office and light industrial uses to residential use in Gunnels Wood and Pin Green. The Assistant Director for Planning and Regulation advised Members that the current Article 4 Directions would expire at the end of July 2022. The consultation would be for 28 days starting on 20 July 2022 to ensure continuity, and the revised Article 4 Directions would be in effect by October 2022.

In Response to a question from a Member, the Assistant Director for Planning and Regulation advised that there were currently two main Article 4 Directions in Stevenage Gunnels Wood and Pin Green, and there were also Article 4 Directions for a number of HMOs (Houses of Multiple Occupations) in Stevenage.

It was **RESOLVED** that the proposed Article 4 Directions report be noted.

6. Overview Proposal for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee were informed that the Executive had received a report in relation to an overview proposal for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The Corporate Policy and Research Officer advised Members that the report outlined the proposed approach for the delivery of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) in Stevenage between 2022/23 and 2024/25 ahead of the closure of the Local Investment Plan. The UKSPF was the Government's domestic replacement for the European Structural and Investment Programme which the UK continued to participate in until 2023. The Hertfordshire District and Borough councils were allocated £13m, and Stevenage had received an allocation of 1m.

The Chief Executive at the Executive meeting confirmed that he had written to the local MP and had offered to meet to discuss the UKSPF submission and a response from the MP had yet to be received.

In response to a question from a Member, the Corporate Policy and Research Officer advised Members that the funding was broken down over three years and split between revenue and capital. The UKSPF would be for the three year and probably would continue beyond three years.

Members were advised that the UKSPF would fund three core pillars which were the Community and Place, supporting Local Businesses and People and Skills. The funds would support the regeneration programme and Community Safety, in addition It would also fund some of the Co-operative Neighbourhood projects to help tackle the climate change emergency.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Overview Proposal for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund be noted.

7. Approval to re-confirm the Building Control Delegated S3 – S8 Powers

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee were advised that the Executive had received a report seeking approval to re-confirm the delegated Building Control Powers. The Assistant Director for Planning and Regulation advised Members that the SBC along with six other District and Borough councils across Hertfordshire agreed to combine the building control function and the agreement came in to effect in 2016.

Members were advised that the building control services were contracted from the building control authorities to Hertfordshire Building Control through the service agreement which had a term of 5 years ending on 16 August 2022. Three Rivers

District Council (TRDC) had acted as the host local authority for the partner's building control functions that could not be passed on to Hertfordshire Building Control. Under the current arrangements, all the building control authorities had delegated their statutory control functions to TRDC, and it was proposed to continue with TRDC hosting the LA1 functions, but with an interim sign off host authority anticipated to be East Herts District Council.

Members were informed that the interim sign off scheme delegation was arranged till March 2023, and discussions would take place with all 8 shareholding local authorities on how to proceed for a more permanent arrangement beyond March 2023.

A Member raised a question regarding what happens after March 2023? Members would like the opportunity to review the quality of the service and whether it was meeting the needs of Stevenage? The Assistant Director Planning and Regulatory confirmed that this decision was only concerned with the sign off of the function but in time Members could look at the quality of service.

It was **RESOLVED** that the approval to re-confirm the building control delegation be noted.

8. Corporate Performance Quarter 4 2021/22; Annual Report 2021/22; and Corporate Performance Suite for 2022/23

The Strategic Director (RP) advised the Overview and Scrutiny Members that the Executive had considered a report regarding the Corporate Performance Quarter 4 of 2021/22. The report also covered the proposed draft Annual report 2021/22 and the Corporate Performance Suite 2022/23. He explained that the Chief Executive advised the Executive on the following points:

- The Chief Executive highlighted the progress made on the Corporate Performance against some of the recognised areas for improvement including the homelessness, housing voids, garages and customer services.
- Members were advised on the progress made on the delivery of the Future Town Future Council programme and the Council priorities for 2022/23.
- The training audit relating to staff effectiveness to deal with the Temporary/Emergency Accommodation was underway and would be shared with Members post completion.
- Members were advised that the fencing repairs budget was increased to £750,000.

Members discussed the issues related to the customer services including the time handling for calls. In response to a question from a Member, The Strategic Director (RP) advised Members that the average call handling time was about 12 minutes, and the Service was currently assessing to introduce prioritised line for emergencies and urgent issues, however, the Service was currently treating all calls at the same level. The Service encouraged customers to use the online services where they could, to ease off the pressure on the phone lines including reporting repairs, if it was a non-urgent.

He explained that the SBC was not the only authority dealing with increased demand peaked up following the pandemic, however, further steps could be taken to ease the pressure, this could be an increase in the fencing repairs budget, and other similar measures. He advised that due to high Covid sickness levels the Service was depleted and on few occasions it only had 40% capacity in recent weeks.

The Strategic Director (RP) agreed to find out whether the call back function from the web-site was currently working and to communicate this to Members.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Corporate Performance for Quarter 4 2021/22, Annual Report for 2021/22 and Corporate Performance Suite for 2022/23 be noted.

9. 4th Quarter Revenue Budget Monitoring 2021/22 – General Fund and Housing Revenue Account

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee were advised that the Executive had received a report in relation to the 4th Quarter Revenue budget Monitoring 2021/22 for both the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The Assistant Director for Finance and Estate advised Members that the 2021/22 accounts were being finalised with a view to publish the draft Statement of Accounts by the statutory deadline 31 July 2022.

It was **RESOLVED** that the 4th Quarter Revenue Budget Monitoring 2021/22 for General Fund and HRA be noted.

10. 2021/22 Capital Expenditure Outturn

The Assistant Director for Finance and Estate advised Members that the Executive had considered the Capital Expenditure Outturn for 2021/22. He advised Members that that there was underspend in the HRA Capital Programme, which would be carried forward.

In response to a question regarding Cavendish Road fire preparedness and a sum of money in report the Assistant Director Finance agreed to provide a full breakdown of this for Members.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Capital Expenditure Outturn for 2021/22 be noted.

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

None.

5 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

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 - 21 JUNE 2022**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 21 June 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

8 **PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE**

12. Part II Minutes – Executive –15 June 2022

Noted.

13. Write Offs

The Strategic Director (CF) answered a number of Members' questions regarding this item.

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

None.

10 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR