

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 21 September 2022

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: Lin Martin-Haugh (Chair), Rob Broom, Jim Brown, Andy McGuinness, Robin Parker CC and Anne Wells.

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 7.45pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Phil Bibby CC, Matt Creasey, Michael Downing, Bret Facey, Wendy Kerby, Sarah Mead, Claire Parris and Lorraine Rossati.

Councillors Farquharson (Facey), Lawrence CC (Kerby) and Mitchell CC (Bibby CC) were in attendance as substitute Members.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 19 JULY 2022

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday 19 July 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 PART I DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

2. Minutes – Executive 12 July 2022

Noted.

3. Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Select Committees

Noted.

4. Garages Investment Business Case

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee were informed that the Executive had made a number of comments including:

- A meeting should be arranged for relevant officers to co-ordinate the strategic element of the Garage Improvement Programme with the actual works taking place on the ground;

- A further report outlining the Strategic Management Plan for the Council's garage stock had been requested by the Leader to be brought to Executive in early 2023;
- Officers had been requested to ensure that Ward members were consulted in advance of any works to garage blocks in their wards.

In response to a number of comments/questions from Members, Officers responded as follows:

- The original Garage Improvement Plan had been considered by Members in 2015. The asbestos issue had been discovered over the last 12 months and it was now planned to come back with an Asset Management Strategy for all garages in terms of next steps;
- In relation to the underspend reported, a number of challenges were identified including void garages waiting to be refurbished but some garages had owner/occupiers which could cause delays in relation to redevelopment.
- It was noted that there was a long waiting list for garages but the programme would give a current view of which garages should be invested in for future development;
- The £55k requested was for an additional surveyor to be employed to carry out the surveying work;
- The Executive report contained a breakdown of the funding required for the Programme;
- Some garages were used to house cars but many across the Town were used for storage purposes. Consideration would be given within the programme to building bigger garages to house modern cars.
- Officers agreed to ensure that any communications to residents related to the Improvement Programme should also be sent to Ward Members;
- In relation to safety regulations, Officers agreed to circulate to Members the regulations around storage allowed in garages.

5. Station Gateway Area Action Plan – preferred Options

The Committee was informed that the Executive had asked for as wide a consultation as possible on the preferred options including community and local disability groups. Members had also asked Officers to ensure that Social Media channels should also be used where possible.

Members were pleased with the widening of the consultation and were keen to ensure younger people were included.

Members also made the point that the focus and assumption seemed to be about those people using the train station when in fact this area was also extensively used by residents who come to the Town Centre or going through the area from the northern part of the town to the southern part.

The access for pedestrians to the train station was also raised as the

pedestrian access into the station from the Old Town had been blocked off was affecting local residents. The Assistant Director agreed to take this issue back to the Regeneration Team for consideration.

The importance of the name of the consultation was discussed as it was important to ensure that it was clear that the consultation was for the plans around Lytton Way and the area around the Station.

In relation to the timing of the consultation over the Christmas period, the Assistant Director Planning and Regulation advised that the consultation period was quite flexible and could start in November for example. The consultation would include methods such as in person meetings at the Station, public meetings, the Chronicle and the wider press and Social Media.

In terms of the preferred option and in response to concerns about congestion, the Assistant Director advised that extensive modelling work had been undertaken in conjunction with the County Council. The purpose of the consultation was for the people of the Town to give their views on the preferred option. The proposal did not require modal shift in itself but supported modal shift.

6. Confirmation of Two Article 4 Directions to Require Changes of Use from Class (E)(g)(i) (Offices) and Class (E)(g)(iii) (Light Industrial) to class C3 (Residential) to Obtain planning Permission

In response to a question, the Assistant Director Planning and Regulation advised that the areas exempt from this change were renewed with the new Article 4 Direction.

7. Corporate Performance – Quarter 1 2022/23

The Strategic Director (RP) advised that the Executive had asked for Officers to investigate the potential for increasing the level of commercial sponsorship of Council events and activities.

In relation to staff shortages, it was noted that this was not just a local issue but had been seen across the County and also at a national level. Officers were endeavouring to develop creative solutions to seek to reduce the associated service impact.

It was also noted that the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Housing Development had reported on the potential increased need for emergency and temporary accommodation due to the cost of living crisis.

Officers responded to the following comments and questions from members:

- Information relating to commercial sponsorship would be fed back to Executive and then on to Overview and Scrutiny Committee once Officers had concluded their investigations into potential options. A further concern relating to sponsorship was around the criteria used

and that it should be clear that a community event was advertised as such and not lead with the name of the sponsor company. Members also asked how the Council could ensure that the sponsor was appropriate. Officers reassured Members that there was a criteria that the Council used about the type of advertising the Council would accept, including not using a company that was in a commercial relationship with the Council;

- In relation to current call waiting times for the Customer Services Centre, Officers agreed to report current call waiting times in future reports. The Committee was advised that Executive had agreed to the recruitment to 5 additional CSC posts. The transition to more on-line contact was being encouraged. A report relating to the Transformation Programme would be submitted to Executive in October;
- Officers agreed that the signposting on the website to the Corporate Performance presentation should be clearer for those members of the Public viewing on-line.

8. General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy Update (2022/23 – 2026/7)

The Strategic Director (CF) advised that she had estimated that there would still be approximately £500k of parking losses in 2023/24. The new MSCP opening in March 2023 would gradually improve the situation but there would still be a loss.

In response to a question, the Strategic Director advised that there was a 2021/22 underspend but one of the Council priorities was to add to the reserves which were being used to fulfil the Council's regeneration aims.

9. First Quarter Revenue Budget Monitoring Report 2022/23 – General Fund and Housing Revenue Account

In response to a question about the potential rise in interest rates, the Assistant Director Finance and Resources advised that the Council would gain on the interest earned on investments but any future borrowing costs would increase.

In terms of inflationary pressures, the Strategic Director advised that high inflation was a concern as there was no additional funding coming from the Government. In addition to high inflation, the Government was also consulting on a cap for rent increases.

10. Annual Treasury Management Review of 2021/22 Including Prudential Code

The Committee was advised that there had been no breaches within the 21/22 indicators that were reported on.

In response to a comment, Officers agreed that Appendix B should be titled Borrowing Portfolio not Investment Portfolio.

11. Urgent Part I Business – Cost of Living

The Committee was reminded that the Council had approved a Motion at Council in July 2022 on the Cost of Living crisis and that an Action Plan would be formulated by an Executive Member and Officer Working Group to take this issue forward.

A Member asked how the recent Government announcement regarding the energy cost freeze would impact the Council. The Strategic Director (CF) advised that this was currently being worked on and that she would ensure Members were kept updated.

In relation to the Warm Space Initiative, the Strategic Director (RP) advised that this was at the early stages of consideration and plans would be worked up in conjunction with the Stevenage Together Partnership.

It was noted that Community Centres had experienced their own financial challenges over recent years and there might be an issue around 24 hour presence in the building.

Cllr Broom as Chair of the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee advised that the Select Committee would also be looking to undertake some scrutiny work on the cost of living crisis in the New Year.

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 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 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 - 19 JULY 2022**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday 19 July 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

8 **PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE**

14. **Part II Minutes – Executive – 14 September 2022**

Noted.

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

None.

10 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR