

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 21 March 2023

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: Lin Martin-Haugh (Chair), Philip Bibby CC (Vice-Chair), Rob Broom, Jim Brown, Michael Downing, Bret Facey, Wendy Kerby, Conor McGrath, Andy McGuinness, Sarah Mead, Robin Parker CC, Claire Parris and Anne Wells.

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 7.47pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Loraine Rossati.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 14 FEBRUARY 2023

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday, 14 February 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 PART I DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

2. Minutes – 8 February 2023

Noted.

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

Noted.

4. Corporate Performance Quarter 3 2022/23

The Strategic Director (RP) advised that the Executive had received a presentation from the Chief Executive regarding Quarter 3 performance against the Future Town Future Council indicators, together with other corporate indicators, and proposed improvement activities for the red indicators. All four recommendations in the report were approved by the Executive.

5. Third Quarter Revenue Monitoring Report 2022/23 – General Fund and Housing Revenue Account

The Assistant Director (Finance) advised that the Executive had approved a Quarter 3 net decrease in General Fund expenditure of £205,150 and a net increase in Housing Revenue Account expenditure of £157,750. All six recommendations in the report were approved by the Executive.

6. Third Quarter Capital Monitoring Report 2022/23 – General Fund and Housing Revenue Account

The Assistant Director (Finance) advised that the Executive had approved all five recommendations in the report, which primarily concerned the reprofiling of Capital projects from the 2022/23 budget to 2023/24 and/or future years.

7. Urgent Part I Business – Zero Emission Bus Scheme

The Strategic Director (TP) stated that the Executive had received a verbal report from the Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise & Transport conveying the disappointing news that Arriva had opted not to progress with the Zero Emission bus scheme in Stevenage. The Portfolio Holder had informed the Executive that the Council had been led to believe that lower than expected passenger numbers had made it difficult for Arriva to justify their business case of match funding the Government's investment for the scheme. He had commented that SBC officers were engaging with HCC, who had led this bid, to help to consider if there were any solutions or routes forward.

In response to a series of Members questions, it was confirmed:

- HCC was in discussions with a bus operator in another part of the county to see if a zero emission scheme could work for that provider in that location; and
- There was no indication from the Department of Transport as to when and if any other rounds of support funding would be provided in the future for zero emission bus schemes.

A Member stated that the Committee's anger, as well as disappointment, at Arriva's decision to not participate in the scheme should be conveyed to the Executive. The Member hoped that a report would be presented at a later date on the progress made with regard to potential solutions for the future.

The Chair of the Environment & Economy Select Committee commented that he would give consideration to the inclusion of an item on bus services in Stevenage, including the zero emission scheme, on the agenda for a future meeting of that Committee.

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

None.

5 WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24

The Scrutiny Officer submitted a report requesting the Committee to agree its Work Programme for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

The seven Member suggestions for inclusion in the Committee's Work Programme for 2023/24 were referred to as follows:

- ICT performance and future direction;
- Census data assessment;
- Re-assessment of Scrutiny of Scrutiny review carried out in 2021;
- Joint Service provision/Shared Services;
- Review of SBC's use of consultants;
- Possible changes to SBC services that would benefit the customer experience; and
- The establishment of an autonomous cross-party team (with a membership without senior Members or officers), including employees from each department, to identify areas requiring change or improvement.

The Committee debated these suggestions and, whilst appreciating that there would be capacity issues associated with delivering them all in 2023/24, agreed that Members be invited to rank them. In addition, it was agreed that officers be requested to give consideration to, and report back to the Committee on, the method of delivery of the seven suggestions, which for some could be via informal methods of delivery other than review by formal meetings of the Committee.

In relation to the Scrutiny of Scrutiny review, the Scrutiny Officer agreed to re-circulate the 2021 review report to Committee Members, together with the then Leader of the Council's responses to the recommendations contained in that report.

The Committee discussed scrutiny of the budget, and expressed disappointment that the Leader's Financial Security Group (LSFG) had not met at all during 2022/23 to consider the 2023/24 Revenue Budget and had only met on one occasion to consider the 2023/24 Capital Budget. The Committee was advised that this had been due to the complex and challenging nature surrounding the preparation of the 2023/24 budget. The Strategic Director (TP) and Assistant Director (Finance) agreed to seek confirmation from the Strategic Director (CF) regarding the plans for LSFG meetings later in the year to scrutinise the 2024/25 budget proposals, and to advise Members of the Committee accordingly.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That Scrutiny Members' feedback on ideas from improving Scrutiny (as set out in Section 4 of the report, be noted.

2. That Committee Members be invited to rank the seven suggestions for inclusion in the Committee's Work Programme for 2023/24.
3. That officers be requested to give consideration to, and report back to the Committee on, the method of delivery of the seven suggestions, which for some could be via informal methods of delivery other than review by formal meetings of the Committee.
4. That the Portfolio Holder Advisory Group meetings to carry out policy development work identified so far for the Committee, as set out in Section 7 of the report, be noted.

6 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

7 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.

8 PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

9. Youth Skills Investment in Stevenage

The Committee raised a number of comments regarding this item.

10. Affordable Older Persons Housing Stock – New Supply and Stock Management

The Housing Development Delivery Manager answered a Member's question regarding this item.

11. Land Acquisition and Scheme Contract Approval

The Committee noted this item.

12. Site Disposal Report

The Assistant Director (Finance) and Commercial Asset Manager answered a number of Members' questions regarding this item.

13. Proposed Development – The Forum

The Assistant Director (Regeneration) 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