

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 20 June 2023

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: Lin Martin-Haugh (Chair), Rob Broom, Jim Brown, Forhad Chowdhury, Michael Downing, Bret Facey, Graham Lawrence CC (substitute), Conor McGrath, Andy McGuinness (substitute), Sarah Mead, Margaret Notley, Robin Parker CC, Carolina Veres and Anne Wells.

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 6.56pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Phil Bibby CC and Stephen Booth. Councillor Graham Lawrence CC was substituting for Councillor Bibby and Councillor Andy McGuinness was substituting for Councillor Booth.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 21 MARCH 2023

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday, 21 March 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee received and noted its terms of reference, as approved at the Annual Council Meeting on 24 May 2023.

4 PART I DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

2. Minutes – 15 March 2023

Noted.

3. Minutes of Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees

Noted.

4. Implementation of Building Safety Act 2022

The Committee was informed that the Executive had raised no questions and

had approved the recommendations set out in the report.

In reply to a Member's questions, the Operations Manager (Investing in Homes & Properties) confirmed that the costs of implementation of the Act would fall on the Housing Revenue Account. In terms of staffing, the proposed draft structure indicated some new posts, although there could be some flexibility about using existing staff, and this would be looked at in more detail as the project progressed.

5. DLUHC Future Councils Grant Award

The Committee was advised that the recommendations in the report had been approved by the Executive.

In reply to a number of Members' questions, the Head of Customer & Digital Services responded as follows:

- the benefits of the use of the Grant Award of £750,000 would be in improved resilience and more effective service delivery. For example, the housing IT system would be migrated into the cloud, which would provide quicker access to information/records for housing officers when operating in the field;
- it was acknowledged that the value added to the end service needed to be visible, and a report back on the overall Transformation Programme was to be submitted to the September 2023 meeting of the Executive;
- "Agile" project management was defined as being able to bring forward elements of an overall IT package at an earlier stage, rather than the traditional method of waiting until the whole package was ready before going live. The "agile" method allowed evaluation of the early elements of the package before other elements were added: and
- The Programme would be delivered by a mix of internal and external resources (eg. for cybersecurity). The work on migration to the cloud would be undertaken by a mix of internal resource and one-off external support.

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

None.

6 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24

The Committee considered a report in respect of its Work Programme for 2023/24.

In respect of the Scrutiny Review items for 2023/24, the Scrutiny Officer advised that, subject to consultation with the Assistant Director (Technology), he was hoping to bring the one-off performance review of ICT item forward from early 2024 to September/October 2023.

A Member felt that there should be a specific focus for this review, and that a

specific list of concerns should be drawn up in advance for consideration at the meeting. Another Member was of the view that part of the focus should be on how IT affected the way the public communicated with the Council, and how this could be improved and simplified. A comment was made that the information collected via IT systems was important, but equally important was the speed and efficiency of officers in responding to such information (both to the public and Members).

In relation to consideration of the 2021 Census Data for Stevenage, it was noted that the scope of the review could look at local and wider socio-economic issues. A comparison was drawn with the Council's Residents' Surveys, which was less representative than the Census and not did not always identify residents' priorities.

The Strategic Director (TP) commented that the information in the Census could be compared with other data sets held by the Council, as well as the information coming out of the Equalities Commission work on the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.

In respect of the Committee's Action Tracker, the Scrutiny Officer confirmed that this was last updated in July 2022, and that an updated Tracker would be prepared in the near future.

The Scrutiny Officer concluded by referring to the Budget and Policy Framework items to be considered by the Committee during 2023/24.

A Member asked how the work of the Council's Financial Security Group would feed into the Committee's scrutiny of the Making Your Money Count Budget Options for 2023/24. The Strategic Director (TP) stated that he would request the Strategic Director (CF) to provide a written response to this question.

With regard to pre-scrutiny of the Council Tax Support Scheme (CTSS) for 2024/25, the Chair explained that this was now scheduled to take place in July 2023, although the method of pre-scrutiny was yet to be determined. The Scrutiny Officer agreed to ask appropriate officers to provide Committee Members with details of the proposed CTSS as soon as possible.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for 2023/24, as set out in the agenda, be noted.

7 **URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

None.

8 **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.

9 **PART II MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 21 MARCH 2023**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 21 March 2023 be approved as true record of the proceedings and signed by the Chair.

10 **PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE**

9. **Appointment of Developer at Brent Court Garages and Shephall View Development Sites**

The Committee asked a number of questions regarding this item, which were answered by the Housing Development Delivery Manager.

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

None.

12 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR