

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 26 September 2023

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: Rob Broom (in the Chair), Stephen Booth, Jim Brown, Forhad Chowdhury, Michael Downing, Conor McGrath, Margaret Notley, Carolina Veres and Anne Wells

Substitute Members: Councillors Alex Farquharson and Graham Lawrence CC

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm

End Time: 6.45pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In the absence of the Chair and Vice-Chair, nominations were invited to Chair the meeting. Councillor Rob Broom was nominated and seconded and it was **RESOLVED** that Councillor Broom be appointed to Chair the meeting.

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Lin Martin-Haugh (Chair), Phill Bibby CC (Vice-Chair), Bret Facey, Sarah Mead, and Robin Parker CC. Councillors Alex Farquharson and Graham Lawrence CC were in attendance as substitute members.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 24 July 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair subject to the deletion of the reference to the east and west of the Town in Item 4, bullet point 6.

3 PART I DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

2. Minutes – 18 July 2023

Noted.

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

Noted.

4. Future Council 2025 Transformation Programme Savings Update

The Committee was advised by the Assistant Director (Digital and Transformation) that the report had been brought to the Executive due to a number of factors such as the changing behaviours of customers. The main proposal within the report was to move the Customer Service Centre (CSC) to the main entrance of Daneshill House and to move to one shift for staff of 9.00am – 5.00pm.

In response to questions from Members, the Head of Customer and Digital Service gave the following responses:

- The move from the CSC to the front entrance of Daneshill House had not been carried out in the previous year as Officers considered that it had been important to track the trend of customer behaviour before making the decision;
- One of the major savings from the move would be the reduction in having to staff both entrances replacing this with a single meet and greet entrance for customers;
- The Council's Estates Team were working on a valuation of the current CSC space and opportunities would be looked for in the commercial market for a rental for the space;
- Customer satisfaction was a corporate performance measure and was currently around 87%. The Strategic Director (CF) advised that the 5 star customer service referred to in the report related to keeping the customer at the heart of the service. It was considered that the measure of housing front and back office staff together in the new space should significantly help improved communication;
- In terms of reporting issues with rubbish collection, new technology was now being used by operatives which allowed validation of complaints and it was hoped that this would address some concerns in this area. Officers agreed to look at the specific issue raised by a Member outside of the meeting;
- The planned date for the move of the CSC was 1 November 2023;
- In relation to monitoring the success of this part of the Transformation Programme, officers advised this would be reflected in the existing suite of performance measures for customer satisfaction. It was envisaged that having specialist officers on hand would avoid the need for transferring calls to other departments and would speed up the response to more complex cases.

5. Corporate Performance – Quarter 1 2023/24

SD (TP) advised that the Executive had considered issues relating to recruitment challenges; retrofitting of solar panels to seven of the Council's refuse lorries and had also welcomed the progress toward the completion of Helston House, with 29 new Council homes being delivered.

A Member commented that Helston House was a development to celebrate as a first class Local Authority project and hoped that there would be similar

schemes coming forward in the future.

It was confirmed that alongside the solar panels fitted to the refuse vehicles, the Council had purchased its first fully electric van.

SD (RP) responded to a question and advised that Wates was the current contractor assisting the Council in undertaking void works in council homes.

In relation to the recruitment challenges faced by the Council, SD (TP) advised that a number of steps had been taken including:

- Maximising the benefits of working for a Council including flexible working arrangements and support for training and progression;
- Approaches for staff to be able to move onto managerial roles by developing skills and experiences;
- Use of external recruitment agencies to target particular roles alongside growing the Council's own talent.

It was noted that consideration of Market Factor Pay Supplements would have to be given for roles where our pay was below nearby and London authorities or for recruitment into particular skill sets such as Local Government Audit.

6. Council Tax Support Scheme

SD (CF) advised that consideration to change the Council Tax Support Scheme (CTSS) to a banded scheme would take place in late May/early June 2024 once it was known if there had been further transition to Universal Credit.

7. General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy Update (2023/24-2027/28)

In response to a question regarding the Swingate development and concerns regarding the length of time taken to begin the work on site, officers advised that progress had started following the demolition of Swingate House, including work on the utilities. The development was now actively being pursued and developers would be fully on site in early 2024.

8. First Quarter Revenue Budget Monitoring 2023/24

In response to a question, Officers confirmed that the short course fees for Refuse and Recycling and Street Scene operatives was circa £14k.

9. Annual Treasury Management Review 2022/23 and Prudential Indicators

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 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**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 24 July 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

8 **PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE**

12. Part II Minutes – 18 July 2023

Noted.

13. Stevenage (Survivors) Against Domestic Abuse (SADA) Service Update

The Committee received a report and asked a number of questions regarding this item which were answered by the Operations Director (RG).

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

10 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

The Committee expressed their best wishes to the Chair, Councillor Lin Martin-Haugh as she was currently unwell.

CHAIR