

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: TUESDAY, 13 FEBRUARY 2023

TIME: 6.00pm

LOCATION: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

MINUTES

Present: Councillors: L Martin-Haugh (Chair), P. Bibby (Vice-Chair), S Booth, R Broom, J Brown, F Chowdhury, M Downing, C McGrath, S Mead, M Notley, R Parker CC, C Veres, and A Wells.

Start/End Time: Start: 6:00pm
End: 7:04pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Bret Facey.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES – 17 OCTOBER 2023

It was **RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 12 October 2023 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

3 PART I DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

2. Minutes – 17 January 2024

Noted.

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

Noted.

4. Stevenage Works Skills Framework – Unlocking Jobs, Skills and Opportunity for Young People

Officers provided a presentation on the ‘Stevenage Works Skills Framework’, and key points made by the Executive. Officers explained since Stevenage Works has been formed it has:

- Supported over 500 people to attend training courses

- Put in place over 50 apprenticeships and
 - Secured over £50,000 in investment into the local community in Stevenage
- Members queried whether the Officers could clarify the ambition of the Stevenage Works. The Officer explained the skills framework, maximising resources, ongoing momentum and activity in order to ensure Stevenage residents are given every chance to take advantage of the excellent practical and experimental opportunities.
 - A Member queried if there is a reason Stevenage Works is not partnered with sixth form centres of the town and questioned how many young people attended Generation Stevenage. It was explained the council has also been promoting apprenticeships through videos and case study's (HR led), Officers are also establishing the links and reaching out to secondary schools as part of the Skills Framework, and two secondary schools are directly engaged in two pilot projects. Officers confirmed that over 800 people attended Generation Stevenage.
 - A Member stated the presentation emphasised STEM throughout the document, potentially creating a hierarchy in schools, as it could seem as more important than other subjects. Officers agreed STEM has been spoken about in greater detail given the initial partnership funding from Mission 44 prioritised opening opportunities in that sector, and as there is significant growth in opportunities in STEM sectors. Officers reiterated that STEM is not seen as more important than other sectors, with construction, healthcare, public services, culture and heritage and beyond.
 - Members questioned whether the council are monitoring women in STEM going forward and what the barriers are in this area. It was explained Mission 44 is not solely focusing on getting young people on board but is also working to ensure that people from ethnic minority backgrounds and women and girls are included. As set out in the Framework, a challenge is that there needs to be better connection between employers, providers, schools and the community, to help overcome barriers, and to access current opportunities. Some people may know who to get in contact with, and via the Framework, Officers are looking to tailor information and access to a local level.
 - Councillors believed there was a confidence issue with young people and believed the council should try encouraging confidence in Stevenage's younger generation. This may discourage local people from applying for jobs. It was explained they believe mentoring from year 8 could give the confidence needed. The Officer explained the pilot project was aimed at year 9s which would allow them to spend a Monday afternoon in the STEM centre, giving them much needed experience and boosting their confidence to try new things.
 - This is not a statutory service, Members asked how the Council could carry out this project if funding becomes unavailable. Officers stated the Stevenage Works project has a good level of certainty, as it is part funded from confirmed Section 106 funding, alongside funding from

Mission 44 and UK Shared Prosperity Funding. It was recognised that additional future bids may be required.

5. Final General Fund and Council Tax Setting 2024/25

The Committee received further information from Officers. It was stated that the Business Rates gains are greater than first calculated and it was recommended that any surplus goes into a reserve. It was believed there could be a high number of Business Rate appeals. It was explained the Police-Commissioner and County have set their budgets. County will be setting Council Tax at 4.99% which equals a 5.4% increase which will be included in the report for Council.

Members raised queries on the agenda item:

- Councillors queried who are the key partners the Council consults with and do we need to take in consideration what they raise, and if it is a statutory requirement. It was explained it is general consultation, but also includes specific engagement with the Police and Crime Commissioner and Hertfordshire County Council which Stevenage Council must do. It is good practice to consult broadly to help ensure there is support for the budget package.
- Councillors queried how the consultation is undertaken, with Officers confirming the steps taken with the Police and Hertfordshire County Council, and the consultation with service users if changes are planned. Officers also gave the example in relation to Council Tax: if a Council wishes to raise Council Tax over the Statutory limit of 2.99%, it would require a referendum which would cost over £50,000, equivalent to 1% Council Tax increase.

A Member raised a concern regarding the Equalities Impact Assessment for the report that the Council had taken a simplistic approach by grouping all 'White Other Groups' together. By doing this, the Council integrated all possible categories into one statistical-group, when it should be separated out into smaller groups. The Strategic Director (Chief Finance Officer) stated that the Member had received a full written response to this issue before explaining the rationale for why the White Other Group was being used currently and a more nuanced category would be available in future reports. The Strategic Director (Chief Finance Officer) agreed to circulate the response to all of the Committee.

6. Final Capital Strategy 2023/24 – 2028/29

This remained unchanged and fixed but the Council are planning to spend £88 million, a significant proportion of which relates to regeneration.

7. Annual Treasury Management Strategy including Prudential Indicators 2024/25

It was explained up to December 2023 there had been no breaches.

8. Stevenage Cycle Hire Scheme – Report and Public Consultation Feedback

The Assistant Director (Planning & Regulation) briefly outlined what the scheme would provide:

- The first part of the report is the overview of the strategic approach towards the cycle hire.
- The Officer explained they would like to bring it forward to another meeting of the Environment and Economy Select Committee to gauge how it is working once it is up and running.

A Councillor queried whether there has been any thought of provision for cycle repair facilities, had Stevenage Council investigated this? An Officer stated that it is not directly part of the cycle hire scheme, but Officers had been looking into the approach of repairs and how cycling can be promoted and supported is part of the wider work with the scheme.

9. Urgent Part II Business

There was none.

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

There was none.

5 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

There was none.

6 EXCLUSION OF THE 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 item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraphs 1- 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Acts as amended by Local Government (Access to information) (Variation) Order 2006.
- (2) That Members consider the reasons for the following reports (if any) being in Part II and determine whether or not maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

7 PART II MINUTES – OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 23 JANUARY 2024

It was **RESOLVED**: That the Part II Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 23 January 2024 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

8 PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

11. Part II Minutes – 17 January 2024

Noted.

12. Stevenage Cycle Hire Scheme – Report and Public Consultation Feedback

Noted.

13. Urgent Part II Business

There was none.

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

There was none.

10 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

There was none.

CHAIR