

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 19 March 2024

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: Lin Martin-Haugh (Chair) (Chair), Philip Bibby CC (Vice-Chair) (Vice Chair), Stephen Booth, Rob Broom, Jim Brown, Forhad Chowdhury, Michael Downing, Bret Facey, Conor McGrath, Sarah Mead, Margaret Notley, Robin Parker CC and Carolina Veres

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 8.08pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Anne Wells.

2 MINUTES - 13 FEBRUARY 2024

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 13 February be approved as a correct record subject to the following changes:

- Item 3 (4) in relation to STEM, a Member commented that the minutes should reflect the concern that other subjects had been missed and potentially blurred academic subjects with employment routes.
- Item 5 EQIA – a Member asked that in relation to ethnicity and diversity, the minute reference to ‘other groups’ to be removed.

3 PART I DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

The Committee considered the following Part I Decisions of the Executive taken on 13 March 2024.

• **Minutes – 7 February 2024**

The Minutes of the Executive on 7 February 2024 were **NOTED**.

• **Minutes of Overview and Scrutiny Committee & Select Committees**

The Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee & Select Committees were **NOTED**.

• **Regeneration Programme delivery update**

The Committee received the update and raised the following queries:

- Concern was expressed regarding artist impressions of new developments that could create the wrong impression. The Officer stated they would take this concern into consideration for future developments.
- Councillors accepted the need for flats in the town centre but a Member raised concerns about the perceived lack of car parking in the area. The Officer stated there was parking capacity in the town centre, the new multi storey car park at the station, the existing multi storey car park in the town centre and other car parks which always had spaces available.
- A Member commented about importance of quality and engaging public realm, underpasses artwork, public art and planting. The Officer agreed the need to create something that the people wanted to live and work in and would be working with developers to ensure this.
- It was stated that the Executive Portfolio Holder has committed that the Gordon Craig Theatre would stay in its current location unless there was a better new theatre offer in the Town. The Strategic Director suggested that the Community Select Committee could be engaged in discussions regarding what future uses there could be for the current Sports and Leisure Centre building.
- Following a request from a Member, Officers agreed that the deadline for the photography competition could be extended.
- Councillors were concerned regarding the significant dip in Stevenage pupils' attainment at Key Stage 2. This along with the Skills Strategy was a subject to be considered by the Environment and Economy Select Committee.

• **Housing Consumer Standards – Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023:**

The Committee received the report from Officers and raised the following queries:

- Councillors were concerned regarding the number of complaints that had been raised by residents.
- Members suggested that a new Housing Working Group should be established including representatives from the minority groups, which was supported by the Committee.
- Councillors queried how the Council would capture the experience of tenants. It was explained that a range of methods would be in place to listen to tenants and a summary report would be taken to the Executive on a quarterly basis and then onto Overview and Scrutiny for consideration.

- The Officer explained the new inspection regime. Once the Regulator had completed their analysis, a grade would be given to each Council or Registered Social Landlord. The inspection would be carried out including early scoping and guidance such as access to existing reports and data, a desk top exercise, risk-based inspection, and the anticipation for 2 to 3 days working with Officers and Members as the Regulator develops their report and conclusion.
- Councillors queried if the grading process will be similar to Ofsted and if it would be investigated on a regular basis. The Strategic Director stated that the introduction of the new regulations does have positive elements, aiming to ensure multiple needs were being addressed, but that there will be a time of transition to the new regime.
- The Officer explained that the first round of results would be received in July or August and officers would consult those authorities in first tranche to learn from them and this would be shared with Councillors.

• **Corporate Performance – Quarter 3 2023/24:**

The Committee received the report and raised the following queries:

- Members were informed that a review of voids had been undertaken by the Community Select Committee resulting in an improvement plan, and several steps have been taken with specialist contractors.
- It was noted that performance clinics had been held, including the Portfolio Holder for Housing, to consider complaints and challenges around repairs. Officers believed there had been improvement. Members advised that repairs were of real importance for the public, but through the work programme they would also like to look at improving complaints handling overall. Officers stated that a new complaints policy and a reasonable adjustment policy would be in place in due course.
- Officers also explained that taken in context, the number of complaints on repairs was a low number and that a new Assistant Director had been appointed to get services working together efficiently; Member feedback was always welcome.
- Councillors questioned why SBC had the lowest numbers in the area in terms of prosecutions towards fly tipping. The Officer explained that SBC worked with the perpetrators to educate and inform to try to avoid prosecution and the Strategic Director agreed to circulate a position statement regarding fly tipping. The Chair asked if it was possible to receive this update with the Minutes for the meeting.
- In relation to the percentage of success SBC had with the way fly tipping was dealt with, it was explained that repeat offenders are prosecuted but generally the approach was successful. It was stated fly tipping was a high priority and could be looked at as part of the Environment and Economy Select Committee's work programme.
- The Committee questioned whether they could see the list of void properties. The Officer stated that SBC did not publish the list as they did not want

squatters, but details of void properties were available through the choice based letting system.

- The Officer agreed to supply Members with the details of properties that were included in the Major Refurbishment Programme.
- In response to a question, officers advised that although SBC were still struggling to recruit trade persons, this was a national issue. Apprenticeships were a way forward, but consideration was needed to ensure there was continuity following the apprenticeship. The Council was also considering establishing in house workforce.

4 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2024-25**

The Scrutiny Officer presented the proposed Scrutiny Work Programme for the Committee for the new Municipal Year from a list of suggested possible work programme items by Members.

Following consideration of the replies received to a survey gauging views of Members, the following areas were identified to be included in the work programme for the Committee:

Customer Service Centre:

- The Committee supported the idea as there had been some complaints from the public following the relocation of the CSC to the Reception Area in Daneshill House.

YourSay:

- Councillors stated they were not happy with the YourSay system as the responses were quite standardised; Officers explained that a new system was being considered to deal with Member enquiries/complaints as the current system did not work as it should do.
- The new system would allow improved tracking and reporting for enquiries.

SBC Website:

- Councillors were of the view that the website was not an effective vehicle to communicate with residents.
- Members stated that the current website was not easy to navigate.
- The Committee agreed they would like this on the work programme and the Chair suggested that before the Committee considers this that Members put together a list of the issues they have with the website.

ICT:

- The Chair had suggested that ICT be included into the work programme to address problems such as upgrades to capital hardware, systems and personnel levels with a focus on value for money on ICT upgrades and how to avoid systems failures as well as cyber security. The Strategic Director stated that the details of reports that are shared with the Joint ICT Committee can be brought to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee will agree a schedule of meetings with the Scrutiny Officer to include the following work programme items for 2024-25:

- Customer Services Centre – how well has the move to one reception area gone?
- YourSay Councillors Complaints System – What will the new system provide?
- SBC Website – How user friendly is the website and is it fit for purpose?
- ICT – consider the upgrades to hardware, systems failures, personnel levels and cyber security.

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

There was none.

6 **URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

There was none.

7 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

8 **PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE**

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