

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 13 February 2024

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

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

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 7.04pm

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies were received from Councillor Bret Facey.

There were no declarations of interests.

2 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - 23 JANUARY 2024**

The minutes from the previous meeting were **APPROVED** as a correct record.

3 **PART I DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE**

- Minutes
- Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees
- Select Committees
- Stevenage Works Skills Framework – Unlocking Jobs, Skills, and Opportunity for Local People
- Final General Fund and Council Tax Settings 2024/25
- Final Capital Strategy 2023/24 – 2028/29
- Annual Treasury Management Strategy Including Prudential Indicators 2024/25
- Stevenage Cycle Hire Scheme – Report and Public Consultation Feedback

Stevenage Works Skills Framework – Unlocking Jobs, Skills, and Opportunity for Local 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
- 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 to ensure Stevenage residents and given every opportunity to take advantage of the excellent opportunity. It also has benefits such as 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 over 800 people that 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 are the barriers within the area. It was explained Mission 44 is specifically focused on not just focusing on getting young people on board but people from ethnic minority backgrounds, and there would also be worked to help expand routes for women and girls. 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 local people do not 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 could be due to not being confident enough to apply for jobs or routes. It was explained they believe mentoring from year 8 could give the confidence needed. The Officer explained the pilot project was aimed for year 9s which allows them to spend a Monday afternoon in the STEM centre, this would be beneficial as it would give them much needed experience and boost confidence to try new things.
- It was stated 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 but may require additional future bids.

Final General Fund and Council Tax Settings 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. The Country 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, that if a Council wishes to raise Council Tax over the Statutory limit of 2.99%, would require a referendum which would cost over £50,000, equivalent to 1% Council Tax increase.

Final Capital Strategy 2023/24 – 2028/29:

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

Annual Treasury Management Strategy Including Prudential Indicators 2024/25:

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

Final General Fund and Council Tax Setting:

A Member raised a query around the Equalities Impact Assessment for the report that the Council had taken a simplistic approach to grouping all 'White Other Groups' together. The Member stated that by doing this the Council integrated all possible categories into one statistical-group, and 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 the Committee.

Stevenage Cycle Hire Scheme – Report and Public Consultation Feedback:

The Assistant Director, Planning Policy 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 see 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.

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

There were none.

5 **URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

There were 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 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 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**

The minutes of the previous meeting were **APPROVED** as a correct record.

8 **PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE**

The Part II decisions of the executive were noted.

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

There were none.

10 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

There were none.

CHAIR