

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Tuesday, 30 July 2024

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Lin Martin-Haugh (Chair), Philip Bibby CC, Myla Arceno, Stephen Booth, Rob Broom, Forhad Chowdhury, Peter Clark, Lynda Guy, Sarah Mead, Tom Plater, Ceara Roopchand, Anne Wells and Nigel Williams

Start / End Start Time: 6.00pm
Time: End Time: 7.10pm

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

Apologies of absence were received from Cllr Robin Parker CC.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - 11 JUNE 2024**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part I minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 11 June 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 **PART I DECISIONS OF THE CABINET**

The Committee considered the following Part I Decisions of the Cabinet taken on 24 July 2024:

2. *MINUTES – 5 JUNE 2024*

The minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 5 June 2024 were noted.

3. *MINUTES OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY AND SELECT COMMITTEES*

The Cabinet's review of the minutes of the following Overview & Scrutiny and Select Committee meetings was noted:

Overview & Scrutiny Committee, 11 June 2024
Community Select Committee, 13 June 2024

4. RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY AND FRAMEWORK

The Assistant Director, Housing & Neighbourhoods introduced the report.

The Committee noted the decision of the Cabinet.

At this juncture, a Member raised concerns about the lengthy agenda and extensive reports. They recommended shorter, more concise reports for better efficiency and suggested reducing the number of items on the agenda for more thorough review.

5. HOUSING ANNUAL REPORT

The Assistant Director, Housing & Neighbourhoods introduced the report.

The Committee noted the decision of the Cabinet.

6. HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPER STRATEGY 2025 – 2030

The Assistant Director, Housing & Neighbourhoods introduced the report.

Members asked questions related to the residency requirements and the importance of engagement with homeless individuals and rough sleepers for the success of the strategy.

The Assistant Director, Housing & Neighbourhoods responded that support was typically for those with local connections to Stevenage but mentioned collaboration with other local authorities for individuals from neighbouring areas. Homeless individuals fleeing domestic abuse were assessed with input from their original local authorities to ensure appropriate support and refuge.

The Assistant Director, Housing & Neighbourhoods added that the Council actively sought input from homeless individuals and attempted to engage non-participants. Some identified as rough sleepers might not be genuinely homeless but were engaged through support measures.

The Committee noted the decision of the Cabinet.

7. TENANCY POLICY

The Assistant Director, Housing & Neighbourhoods introduced the report.

Members asked questions related to the tenancy agreement, anti-social behaviour (ASB), collaborative working, and resourcing.

The Committee were advised that enforcement powers existed and efforts were ongoing to make service standards and tenant obligations clear and accessible. The tenancy agreement would be refreshed to ensure accountability for breaches,

supported by annual inspections and tenancy audits.

The Assistant Director, Housing & Neighbourhoods acknowledged there were no additional resources sought at this stage, but emphasised a coordinated approach with the ASB team within the housing department. Efforts included policy review and preventive measures to support tenants in maintaining their tenancies.

The Assistant Director, Housing & Neighbourhoods confirmed ongoing partnership work with local health services, police, and other agencies through forums like the So Safe Partnership and Joint Action Group. The ASB team coordinated with neighbourhood policing to improve outcomes for victims and perpetrators.

The Committee were informed of the complexity of evictions, especially for cannabis use, which required persistent evidence and legal proceedings. More severe cases, such as those involving county lines or drug dealing, could lead to quicker actions, including property closures.

The Committee noted the decision of the Cabinet.

8. RESPONSIVE REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE POLICY

The Assistant Director, Building Safety and Housing Property Services introduced the report.

Members asked questions related to fencing, the consultation timeline, leasehold properties, and resourcing.

The Assistant Director, Building Safety and Housing Property Services acknowledged the need for a modernised approach to fencing due to rising material costs and weather damage. They proposed the use of more durable options like chain-link fencing instead of traditional timber, aligning with practices of other local authorities.

The Committee were informed that the consultation process with tenants and leaseholders would begin in early August, with a survey already designed for this purpose.

The Assistant Director, Building Safety and Housing Property Services clarified that while many repairs were done in-house by council tradespeople, some specialist work, such as roofing and drainage, continued to be outsourced to contractors.

The Committee heard that the Council maintained responsibility for the structural and exterior maintenance of blocks, including roofs, for leasehold properties. Day-to-day repairs were carried out by the Council.

The Assistant Director, Building Safety and Housing Property Services confirmed that, with regards wilful damage, the Council sought to recharge tenants for damages, though recovering costs remained challenging.

Addressing concerns about repair delays, the Assistant Director, Building Safety and Housing Property Services noted improvements and efforts to clear backlogs. They emphasised the importance of setting clear expectations and service standards for tenants.

The Assistant Director, Building Safety and Housing Property Services mentioned ongoing efforts to improve internal resources and the use of temporary contractors. They recognised the challenge of recruiting and retaining skilled staff, particularly in technical roles and highlighted the strategy to retain interim staff where possible and attract new hires. They spoke of the current use of agency surveyors to meet demand and the goal of converting temporary roles into permanent positions and/or attracting candidates to fill positions on a permanent basis. Members suggested keeping the progress of this on the agenda for future updates.

Members emphasised the need to distinguish between repairs and replacements, highlighting that delays often occurred with replacements rather than repairs. They suggested finding a clear term to differentiate those processes.

The Committee noted the decision of the Cabinet.

9. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE SUITE 2024/25, PRODUCTIVITY PLAN 2024/25 AND ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

The Strategic Director (TP) introduced the report.

The Committee noted the decision of the Cabinet.

10.4TH QUARTER MONITORING REPORT GENERAL FUND, HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT, CAPITAL AND GROUP COMPANIES

The Assistant Director, Finance introduced the report.

Members asked questions related to the increase in the allotment setup fee.

The Assistant Director, Finance explained that the increase was due to the rising costs of labour and administrative work required to set up new allotment holders. The previous fee did not fully cover those costs, and the adjustment aimed to align with the actual cost of providing the service.

The Strategic Director (CF) emphasised the Council's financial position and the need to recover the full cost of services provided. They mentioned ongoing efforts to digitalise the process to reduce administrative costs.

The Committee noted the decision of the Cabinet.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part I Decisions of the Cabinet taken on 24 July 2024 be noted and that the Responsive Repairs and Maintenance Policy be kept on the agenda for future progress updates regarding resourcing.

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

There were none.

5 **URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

There was none.

6 **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 involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraphs 1 – 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as amended by Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.
2. That the reasons for the following reports being in Part II were accepted, and that the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

7 **PART II MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 11 JUNE 2024**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 11 June 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

8 **PART II DECISIONS OF THE CABINET**

The Committee considered the following Part II Decisions of the Cabinet taken on 24 July 2024:

13. MINUTES – 5 JUNE 2024

The Part II minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 5 June 2024 were noted.

14. SOCIAL HOUSING DECARBONISATION PROGRAMME CONTRACT AWARD

The Assistant Director, Building Safety and Housing Property Services introduced the report.

The Committee noted the decision of the Cabinet.

15. TOWNS FUND – SKILLS AND ENTERPRISE

The Assistant Director, Regeneration introduced the report.

The Committee noted the decision of the Cabinet.

16. INVESTING IN THE TOWN CENTRE ASSETS

The Town Centre Manager introduced the report. Members asked a number of questions, which were responded to by officers.

The Committee noted the decision of the Cabinet.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Decisions of the Cabinet taken on 24 July 2024 be 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 was none.

CHAIR