

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Wednesday 24 January 2018

Time: 6.00 pm

Place: Shimkent Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors L Martin-Haugh (Chair), P Bibby CC (Vice-Chair), J Brown, M Downing, A Farquharson, J Fraser, ME Gardner, L Harrington, C Latif, J Lloyd, S Mead, A Mitchell CC and R Parker CC

Also Present: Councillor J Gardner, Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Environment and Regeneration.

Start and End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 8.14pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

An apology for lateness was received on behalf of Councillor A Farquharson (who arrived at 6.10pm).

There were no declarations of interest received from Members.

2. MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on held on 13 December 2017, are approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. PART I DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

This report had not been circulated to Members five clear days before the meeting nor had it been made available for public inspection. The Chair determined however that given the short time left before the end of the call-in period on 31 January 2018, it could be considered on this occasion.

(i) Budget and Policy Framework Item – Council Tax Base 2018/2019

The Council's Assistant Director (CF) introduced the report, which had sought the Executive's approval of the Council Tax Base for 2018/19, and an increase in the long-term empty property premium from 1 April 2018, or such later date when the required regulations were introduced. It was reported that it had been confirmed to the Executive that there were three types of 'empty' property categories: 'Empty-unfurnished', 'Empty-undergoing structural repair' and those properties that were in such a state of disrepair and unoccupied that they were referred to the Valuation Office to determine.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part 1 decisions taken by the Executive at its meeting on 23 January 2018 be noted.

(ii) Budget and Policy Framework Item – Council Tax Support Scheme

The Council's Assistant Director (CF) introduced the report, which proposed a Council Tax Support Scheme for 2018/19 and informed Members that there had been nothing further to add to what Members had previously received when the Committee undertook a policy development meeting on this matter and since it had been last considered by the Executive and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part 1 decisions taken by the Executive at its meeting on 23 January 2018 be noted.

(iii) Draft Stevenage Cultural Strategy – A Ten-Year Strategy for Arts and Heritage

The Council's Assistant Director (RG) introduced the report, which outlined the development of a Cultural Strategy for Stevenage and summarised a number of cultural ambitions over the next 10 years in order for Stevenage to become a destination-creative town. He said that whilst there were no immediate financial implications for the Council, the delivery of key ambitions would require financial investment and that the Council would seek to work with other co-investors such as the Arts Council England, Heritage Lottery Fund and Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to help realise these ambitions. He referred to a supplementary paper (tabled), which provided strong endorsement by the Council's Community Select Committee (CSC), for a bold and inspirational approach to cultural development, building on the town's unique cultural heritage and the clear links to health, well-being, skills and industry. The CSC also acknowledged that the involvement of the private sector and broader stakeholder buy-in would be key actions to the Strategy's success.

Officers responded to a number of questions raised by Members in relation to:

- Utilising the Music Centre and other facilities within Nobel School
- Refurbishment of the Gordon Craig Theatre including its seating capacity and the merits of a partition, the artists it attracted, users of the facility and what the Council was doing to try and get other people involved
- Fairlands Valley and whether the farmhouse fitted into the thinking within the Strategy
- The night-time economy
- Stevenage Leisure Centre and Stevenage Leisure Limited
- Provision of a park-based bandstand

- Looking at access to facilities and charges applied e.g. what facilities could local people enjoy at a reasonable cost?
- Tackling inequalities and promoting inclusion

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part 1 decisions taken by the Executive at its meeting on 23 January 2018 be noted.

(iv) 2018/2019 Housing Revenue Account Rent-Setting and Budget

The Council's Assistant Director (CF) introduced the report, which updated Members on the final proposals on the HRA budgets and rent-setting for 2018/19, to be considered by Council on 30 January 2018. It was noted that a typographical error had been corrected at Paragraph 4.9.1 to the report to the effect that the first line should read "Housing Revenue Account Growth" and not "General Fund Growth" as stated. It was further noted that comments from the Council's Housing Management Advisory Board and its Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been included in the report.

The Executive was advised that, with reference to Paragraph 5.4.8 to the report, £50,000 had been included in the risk assessment of balances should the Council need to borrow to fund fire safety works for high rise blocks.

In response to a Member's question, it was confirmed that the 1% referred to in the existing rent formula (CPI + 1%) was applicable to Year 3 of four.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part 1 decisions taken by the Executive at its meeting on 24 January 2018 be noted.

(v) Budget and Policy Framework Item – Draft General Fund and Council Tax-Setting 2018/2019

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

None.

5. URGENT PART 1 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 item of business on the grounds that it 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 DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE**

This report had not been circulated to Members five clear days before the meeting. The Chair determined however that given the short time left before the end of the call-in period on 21 December 2017, it could be considered on this occasion.

(i) **Part II Minutes of the Executive of 28 November 2017**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II decisions taken by the Executive at its meeting on 28 November 2017 be noted.

8. **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

NONE

CHAIR