

**STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Agenda Item:

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
MINUTES**

**3B**

Date: Thursday, 8 February 2018

Time: 6.00 pm

Place: Shimkent Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

**Present:** Councillors: Lin Martin-Haugh (Chair) (Chair), Jim Brown, Michael Downing, Alex Farquharson, James Fraser, Michelle Gardner, Liz Harrington, Adam Mitchell CC and Robin Parker CC

**Start / End Time:** Start Time: 6.00 pm  
End Time: 8.30 pm

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

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Bibby, J Lloyd and Mead.

There were no declarations of interest received from Members.

**2 LGA COMMUNICATIONS PEER REVIEW FEEDBACK**

The Committee considered a report, which recalled the timeline around the scrutiny of the Council's media and communications to date following its selection for review by the then Committee at its meeting held on 16 March 2015.

It was noted that, subsequent to this, a scoping document had been prepared and considered by the then Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting held on 19 October 2015 then, at a further meeting of the then Committee held on 16 November 2015, Members received a presentation, following which it was agreed that the Local Government Association (LGA) be approached to carry out an independent peer review of the Council's Communications. Members had agreed that their review be kept on hold pending the outcome of the peer review.

The Committee welcomed to the meeting, Mr David Holdstock, Director of Communications at the LGA, who delivered the findings of the peer review. In his presentation, Mr Holdstock addressed:

- The make-up of the Peer Team
- Introduction
  - Part of bespoke sector led improvement
  - "Critical friend" support and challenge
  - Acknowledgement of support received by those who took part in the review
  - Acknowledgement of the openness and honesty of those who took part in the review

- Review Team's feedback was based upon what it had heard, seen and read
- An opportunity to discuss the Review Team's findings and consider the next steps and any other further support required
- The agreed focus of the Review
  - Structure, Capacity and Capability
  - Internal Communications
  - Place Branding
- Why are good communications important?
- Achieving good communications
- Context
- Corporate Communications
- Place Branding – Strengths
- Place Branding – Issues
- Internal Communications – Strengths
- Internal Communications – Issues
- Structure, Capacity and Capability – Strengths
- Structure, Capacity and Capability – Issues
- Key issues to address
- Strategic Recommendations
- Further Recommendations
- Operational Recommendations

Responses were given to a number of issues and questions raised by Members, which included:

- The Council's good reputation of producing standard news releases
- Making better use of resident insight to inform communications activity (operational recommendation 6)
- Do residents' surveys collect the right information
- Was the regeneration of the Town Centre being dealt with in a more sensible way?
- Establishment of residents' meetings and neighbourhood engagement
- Encouraging younger people to respond
- Improving website search options
- Inclusion of Members and external contributors on editorial boards
- Involving all Members in communications
- Lack of local daily newspaper provision
- Inviting the Youth Parliament to own a strand of the place brand and to promote this amongst the Town's young people
- What do other organisations do in terms of communications and could the

Council learn from these?

In order to fully consider the recommendations put forward by the Peer Team, as detailed in the presentation and which is attached as an appendix to these minutes, the Committee agreed that Members be given time to assess the outcomes of the Review and the recommendations put forward for further consideration at a future meeting of the Committee.

Accordingly, it was **RESOLVED** that, in addition to those recommendations put forward by the Peer Team:

1. That the Council explores how best to better engage residents in developing its communications;
2. That the Stevenage Youth Council be invited to own a strand of the place brand and to promote this amongst the Town's young people; and
3. That the matter be brought back before the Committee at its meeting to be held on Thursday 8 March 2018.

### 3 **POLICY DEVELOPMENT ITEM - ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY**

The Committee considered the Council's Draft Asset Management Strategy 2018 to 2023 and welcomed to the meeting, Councillor Mrs Joan Lloyd, Executive Member for Resources, who introduced the item and provided the background to the Draft Strategy.

Members confirmed with the Executive Member for Resources and the Council's Property Development Manager that the Draft Strategy was a positive step forward to meet the challenges of the Council's Asset Management Portfolio, taking it into the next decade, and would be keen to be kept involved in the decision-making process regarding the changes to the governance arrangements described in the Strategy and with the development of its related plans.

Accordingly, it was **RESOLVED** that the Draft Asset Management Strategy 2018 to 2023, be noted.

### 4 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

### 5 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

**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 Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006; and
2. That, Members consider the reasons for the following report being in Part II and determine whether or not maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein, outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

6 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

**CHAIR**