

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Thursday, 8 March 2018

Time: 6.00 pm

Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: L Martin-Haugh (Chair), J Brown, M Downing,
A Farquharson, M Gardner, J Lloyd, A Mitchell CC and R Parker CC

Start / End Start Time: 6.00 pm
Time: End Time: 7.35 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P Bibby, H Burrell, L Harrington and S Mead.

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES - 8 FEBRUARY AND 19 FEBRUARY 2018

The Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 8 February had been circulated to Members and were tabled at the meeting.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 8 February and Monday 19 February are approved as correct records and signed by the Chair.

3. MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS REVIEW

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report which requested that Members consider the further recommendations to be incorporated into an action plan for communications for the Council.

Members were of the view that consultation with young people should not be restricted to Stevenage Youth Council who although did very good work for the Town did not represent all young people in Stevenage. Officers agreed to look at improving the level of youth engagement.

In response to a comment, Officers agreed that the Council Website did need to be improved and that resources had been allocated to deliver a new website during 2018/19.

Officers also agreed to look at the wording of the recommendations to ensure they were clear and understandable prior to submission to the Portfolio Holder for this

area.

It was **RESOLVED**:

That the following recommendations be added to those that the LGA Peer Team have made for inclusion into an action plan for Communications for the Council -

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.
3. That officers consider with the Leader as part of the resulting Communications Action Plan the community engagement response, where does the Council want to be on the (Arnstein) ladder of participation?
4. That there be a priority for informed rapid response to incidents and breaking news over planned 'ribbon cutting' events, etc., when necessary.
5. That the following issues that Members had previously highlighted as part of their review be included as areas of development -
 - The importance of intelligence to pre-empt issues and proactively engage with local press.
 - The benefit of positive news, especially with regard to any developing issues which might be of concern to Stevenage residents.
 - The need to build and maintain relationships with local media agencies.
 - The need for Members to exercise caution when using social media such as Twitter or Facebook but that training be provided to them to help build confidence.
 - The need to strengthen 'out of hours' coverage especially for social media comments.

4. COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

The Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) and the Head of Revenue and Benefits (Shared Service) gave a presentation to Members on the Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2019/20.

Members were advised that the administrative cost of Council Tax support was paid for by Stevenage Borough Council, with a small grant from the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government. The gradual transfer of claims onto Universal Credit would result in a potential increase in administrative costs for the Council partly due to the increase in the frequency and volume of changes that would need processing because of the monthly reassessments.

Officers advised that they would be looking at developing an income band scheme that was both affordable and equitable and would minimise any unintentional circumstances. To do this would require extensive data modelling and full consultation with local taxpayers, HCC and the Police. Additional software costs would also be incurred and resulting increased workloads would need to be addressed by additional staff resources.

Members agreed the need for the scheme and the importance of modelling it to meet the needs of Stevenage residents. In response to a question, Officers confirmed that the proposal did not affect pensioners who were protected from the changes.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the presentation be noted.
2. That the Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) and the Head of Revenue and Benefits (Shared Service) report back to a future meeting of the Committee when further information is available.

5. URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

The Leader's New Home Bonus Proposal presented at Council on 28 February 2018 – Stevenage Cycling Festival

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 the report would be considered and call-in would be waived due to the requirement to submit a Temporary Traffic Regulation Order (TRRO) in sufficient time and to sign the contract with the Tour promoters to secure the event, which could not wait until the next scheduled meeting on 19 March 2018.

The Leisure Services Manager presented the report and asked for Members comments prior to submission to the Executive meeting on 13 March 2018. Officers apologised for the late circulation of the report.

Members raised the following points in relation to the event:

- Was any of the money being targeted to improving the use of the cycleway network?
- More of the High Street businesses should be encouraged to join in this year;
- It was unclear how the event helped to improve the neighbourhood areas;
- The public toilets must be open during the event.

Officers advised that the cycleways were the responsibility of the County Council but that there was ongoing dialogue between SBC and HCC regarding the cycleways.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the allocation of £90,000 from the 2018/19 New Homes Bonus allocation will be subject to approval of the Executive for the implementation and delivery of the following scheme :

- Stevenage Cycling Festival incorporating the Tour Series £90,000
2. That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee's comments on the New Homes Bonus Scheme 4 - Stevenage Cycling Festival incorporating the Tour Series £90,000, will be reported to the Executive on 13th March.
 3. That Members note the achievement of the 2017/18 Stevenage Cycle Festival.

6. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

Not required.

7. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

CHAIR