

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 21 July 2021

Time: 7.15pm

Place: Main Auditorium, Gordon Craig Theatre, Lytton Way, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: Sandra Barr (Mayor 2021/22), Margaret Notley (Deputy Mayor), Myla Arceno, Julie Ashley-Wren, Doug Bainbridge, Philip Bibby CC, Stephen Booth, Lloyd Briscoe, Rob Broom, Adrian Brown, Teresa Callaghan, Matt Creasey, Michael Downing, John Duncan, Alex Farquharson, John Gardner, Jody Hanafin, Liz Harrington, Richard Henry, Jackie Hollywell, Chris Howells, Wendy Kerby, Graham Lawrence, Nick Leech, Mrs Joan Lloyd, Andy McGuinness, Maureen McKay, Sarah Mead, Adam Mitchell CC, Robin Parker CC, Claire Parris, Loraine Rossati, Graham Snell, Simon Speller, Sharon Taylor OBE CC, Jeannette Thomas and Tom Wren.

Start / End Start Time: 7.15pm
Time: End Time: 10.40pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Lizzy Kelly and Lin Martin-Haugh.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Mayor announced that she has accepted an urgent motion for consideration at the meeting concerning the achievements of the England Football Team at the recent European Championships.

The Mayor drew Members' attention to the fact that the Minutes of the Annual Council meeting held on 26 May 2021 were not on the agenda for the meeting due to a member of staff falling ill and not being able to complete them. However, she advised that the Summary of Decisions for the Annual Council meeting was on the SBC website, and that the finalised Minutes would be presented for confirmation at the next scheduled Council meeting in October 2021.

The Mayor summarised the activities that she and her consort had been involved with since the Annual Council meeting, which included:

- Photo shoot for the town's time line mural;
- KFC community activists team Great Britain clean up;
- Attending the online Leslie Bedford Lecture 2021 (on all things aeronautical);

- The virtual Town Twinning Conference;
- Kadoma Link Garden Fete;
- Filming a message for the virtual Stevenage Day and attending the NHS, Social Care & Frontline Workers Day;
- Starting the Knebworth Park Half Marathon;
- Various school visits;
- The virtual unveiling of the underpass mural on Martins Way; and
- A visit to Leyden House (one of her Mayoral charities), a day centre for adults with learning disabilities;

The Mayor referred to the recent terrible weather in Belgium and Germany over the past couple of weeks and the associated tragic loss of lives and livelihoods. She announced that the Leader of the Council had been in contact with the Mayor of Ingelheim (Ralf Klaus), Stevenage's twin town in Germany, to enquire both if they had been affected and to offer them the Council's sincerest condolences to those that had. Fortunately, Ingelheim itself had not been directly affected by the bad weather, but its Mayor was very touched by the Council's concern for those affected.

The Mayor had the pleasure of presenting long service awards to Councillors Mrs Joan Lloyd (45 years' service) and Margaret Notley (25 years' service), and a number of Members spoke in tribute to both councillors.

3 MAIN DEBATE

There was no Main Debate.

4 PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

There were no Petitions and Deputations.

5 QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL

There were no Questions from the Youth Council.

6 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

The Council received one question from a member of the public relating to the Council's Climate Change agenda. The response to the question had been published in the supplementary agenda for the meeting.

The questioner (Mr Jim Borchers) was present in the meeting, and made the following introduction prior to him asking a supplementary question:

"I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you along with other members of the Citizens' Panel. My concern is that this all seems to be taking a long time.

One of the things that came out of the Citizens' Panel discussions was how hard it is for people who live in flats to do recycling; they also have issues with bicycle parking - these are particular things that the Council should be helping people to resolve. The Council has started to install bike hangars (I believe there is one), but there has

been little publicity about this.

The Council should be promoting all initiatives to support action on climate change, for example you can now recycle medicine blister packs in Superdrug, the Co-op has just started an any soft plastic recycling scheme nationwide and at the Oval in Stevenage, but the SBC recycling webpage has no information about this, and it advises that some recyclable items should be put in the refuse bin.

Crucially, the Council should be providing information about what can be done not just what the Council does. All decisions the Council makes should have Climate Change factored in, in particular this should apply to Planning decisions, but it should be one of the first paragraphs of any report.

Since I submitted my question, changes have been made to the climate change website. There is now a Citizens' Panel summary report on the website which has no publication date. In the next steps section the summary states: 'It is important that the Council now identifies what the next steps are for implementing the recommendations and that a formal response to the Panel is given.'

When will the full report be published and when will these actions be taken?"

The Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration stated that he would request officers to provide a full written reply to the supplementary question. He was aware that some of the Citizens' Panel recommendations had been referred to the Hertfordshire Sustainability and Climate Change Committee for consideration. The Council was awaiting details of the Government's new Waste Strategy, which could impact significantly on recycling operations. Similarly, the Council was awaiting the Government's Environment Bill, which it was expected would require all Local Authorities to take into account Biodiversity implications in all its planning decisions. He was pleased to report that SBC had been one of the first local authorities to have adopted a Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

7 LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S UPDATE

The Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Phil Bibby, asked the following question:

"Could the Leader of the Council give an assurance that she is committed to a transformation policy aimed at delivering efficiencies as part of the Council's Covid recovery plans?"

The Leader of the Council confirmed that a report outlining proposals for an SBC transformation programme would be considered at the August meeting of the Executive. The Council had already approved emergency budgets in June and September 2020 due to a funding deficit caused by a lack of Government funding. She was fully committed to the development of a transformation programme, with the aim of protecting the delivery of Council services in spite of national Government cuts to Local Government funding.

The Leader of the Council advised that GlaxoSmithKline had recently revealed plans for the creation of one of Europe's largest life sciences parks on the

Catalyst/Catapult site adjacent to Junction 7 of the A1(M) in Stevenage. This would be an extraordinary opportunity for Stevenage, and it was hoped that 5,000 new jobs would be created over the next 10 years, together with multi-million pound investment in the science park.

The Council then received updates from relevant Executive Portfolio Holders on the following matters:

- Stevenage Economy Taskforce;
- Life Sciences Vision;
- Rough Sleeping Accommodation;
- Housing Awards;
- Resources & Waste Strategy for England;
- Regeneration progress;
- Queen's Canopies;
- Health Protection Board Covid Grants;
- Neighbourhood Management Strategic Board;
- A Future Vision for Leisure;
- Creative Recovery; and
- Equalities Commission.

The Leader of the Opposition asked the Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration if he would be agreeable to a Combined Waste Authority for Hertfordshire?

The Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration replied that he would not be supportive of such a proposal, and considered that waste and recycling collection was best provided as a public service at local Borough/District Council level.

8 UPDATE FROM SCRUTINY CHAIRS

The Chair of the Committee Select Committee reported that the Committee had recently met to determine its Work Programme for 2021/22, and that she was pleased that face-to-face meetings had resumed.

The Chair of the Environment & Economy Select Committee reported that the Committee had recently met on two occasions, and that its work on the economic impact of the Covid pandemic on the work of the Council would be completed shortly. The Committee had completed its work on a review of the Neighbourhood Centres, which he hoped would feed into the work of the newly established Co-operative Neighbourhood Teams. The next major project for the Committee would be to scrutinise the work that had been carried out in association with the Council's 2019 declaration of a Climate Change Emergency.

9 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

(i) Town & Country Planning

Councillor John Gardner moved and Councillor Sharon Taylor seconded a motion in

respect of Town & Country Planning. Following debate and upon being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED** that:

“This Council believes that planning works best when the local community, councillors and developers work together to shape local areas and deliver the new homes that are necessary and therefore calls on the government to protect the right of communities to object to individual planning applications. We demand that the Secretary of State urgently re-thinks these ill-conceived planning reforms.

Council requires that our Executive Member for Environment and Regeneration write to the Secretary of State setting out our concerns about all local democratic input being stripped from the planning system.

Council also pledges to lobby the Government to reconsider the extension to the permitted development regime. Every local development should have the benefit of community input and for both objectors and supporters to be able to express their view to decision-makers in public through the democratic process.”

(ii) Electric Bus Link

Councillor Sharon Taylor moved and Councillor Lloyd Briscoe seconded a motion with regard to an Electric Bus Link. Following debate and upon being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED** that:

“This Council asks that every effort now be made to carry out a feasibility study on this initiative complete with costings. This work should explore the possibility of delivering this service with partners, the highway authority (Hertfordshire County Council), the Local Enterprise Partnership, the Town Development Board and Hertfordshire Growth Board and explore all options for funding the project including use of grants, government initiatives, community infrastructure levy and section 106 funding and specific funds for sustainable transport initiatives.

That a report be brought before the Council’s Executive setting out the options as quickly as possible and no later than the first quarter of 2022.”

(iii) Supporting tougher action on pet thefts

The following motion was moved by Councillor Alex Farquharson and seconded by Councillor Jody Hanafin:

“That this Council notes:

- Hertfordshire Constabulary data shows a 54% increase in dog thefts in the county during 2019/20 compared to the previous year.
- Data for England and Wales shows an 11% increase in dog thefts nationally during 2020/21 compared to the previous year.
- There are currently discussions in central government and parliament about increasing penalties for pet theft, which could potentially include custodial sentences.

That this Council resolves:

- To encourage residents to ensure their pets, especially cats and dogs, are microchipped and that their microchip information is up to date. This is the best precaution to hinder the sale of stolen pets as well as identifying them once recovered by police.
- To request that the Chief Executive of the Council writes to the Home Secretary to express this Council's support for tougher pet theft penalties.
- To request that the Chief Executive of the Council writes to Stephen McPartland MP to thank him for signing a parliamentary amendment calling for tougher action on pet theft and to request that the MP continues pursuing this issue."

The following amendment to the motion was moved by Councillor Jackie Hollywell and seconded by Councillor Loraine Rossati:

'At the first bullet point beginning "Hertfordshire Constabulary data show[s]..." insert after the word "year" the words ", although Council notes that there have been no reported pet thefts in Stevenage."; and

Replace the final bullet point under "That this Council resolves:" with "To thank Stevenage Police for their proactive approach, as there have been no reported pet thefts in the Borough (as confirmed by Chief Inspector Simon Tabert). However, this Council recognises that media attention (including social media) has raised residents' concerns about the risks of pet theft, and we call on Hertfordshire's Police and Crime Commissioner to raise these concerns with the Chief Constable and to include measures to combat pet theft as part of his crime action plan."

Following debate, and upon being out to the debate, this amendment was carried.

Further debate ensued on the substantive motion, and following it being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED:**

"That this Council notes:

- Hertfordshire Constabulary data shows a 54% increase in dog thefts in the county during 2019/20 compared to the previous year, although Council notes that there have been no reported pet thefts in Stevenage.
- Data for England and Wales shows an 11% increase in dog thefts nationally during 2020/21 compared to the previous year.
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- To request that the Chief Executive of the Council writes to the Home Secretary to express this Council's support for tougher pet theft penalties.

- To thank Stevenage Police for their proactive approach, as there have been no reported pet thefts in the Borough (as confirmed by Chief Inspector Simon Tabert). However, this Council recognises that media attention (including social media) has raised residents' concerns about the risks of pet theft, and we call on Hertfordshire's Police and Crime Commissioner to raise these concerns with the Chief Constable and to include measures to combat pet theft as part of his crime action plan."

(iv) Achievements of England Football Team at European Championships

Councillor Simon Speller moved and Councillor Richard Henry seconded a motion with regard to the achievements of the England Football Team at the recent European Championships. Following debate and upon being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED** that:

"This Council wishes to express its grateful thanks and best wishes to the England Football Team, their manager Gareth Southgate and his staff for their performances in the recent Euro 2020 Football Tournament; and commends them for their conduct throughout.

They have lifted our spirits, and inspired and unified our country and communities; and we utterly condemn the abuse on social media directed at certain players immediately after the Final versus Italy."

10 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRS / PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

The Council received eight questions from Members to Committee Chairs/Portfolio Holders. The responses to the eight questions had been published in the supplementary agenda for the meeting.

(A) Question from Councillor Margaret Notley re: Leisure Management Contract

No supplementary question was asked.

(B) Question from Councillor Adam Mitchell re: paperless working

Supplementary question – "In view of the fact that the cost of printing committee agenda in 2020/21 was £39,000, and in the light of the Council having declared a Climate Change Emergency in 2019, does the Portfolio Holder find this excessive cost embarrassing and an inefficient use of tax payers money?"

The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods & Co-operative Council replied that progress was being made to move towards a paperless way of working, with Members being encouraged to use the ModernGov app for accessing committee papers. This was part of the wider transformation exercise regarding improved digital access to meet Climate Change ambitions.

(C) Question from Councillor Nicholas Leech re: Electric Vehicle Charging Points

Supplementary question – “What is SBC doing to substantially increase the number of Electric Vehicle Charging (EVC) points in the town to increase Stevenage’s position in the County “League table” of numbers of EVCs?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise & Transport replied that a recently held Local Government Association webinar on EVCs had identified a number of areas that needed to be addressed with the Government, including a requirement for the Government to clearly indicate the national rollout capacity; to provide national leadership on a preferred technical solution; and to provide sufficient capital and revenue resources. In the meantime, SBC would be working with Hertfordshire County Council to support the principles contained in their EVC Action Plan.

(D) Question from Councillor Wendy Kerby re: safety issues in relation to the major refurbishment of the Council’s flat blocks

No supplementary question was asked.

(E) Question from Councillor Graham Lawrence re: the building of new flats in the town

Supplementary question – “Will you reconsider the plans for flats, and build proper houses with gardens that people need and want to live in?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration replied that it would be difficult to double-guess the look of the post-Covid world. When the Stevenage Local Plan was produced, the Planning Inspector had considered the numbers, type and mix of residential units proposed to be acceptable. He stated that GlaxoSmithKline had just announced expansion plans for the Catalyst/Catapult life sciences park, which it was estimated would create 5,000 new jobs, and he felt that the type and quality of accommodation to be provided by the SG1 development would be suitable and ideally located for those individuals who would be looking to start or continue a career in the life sciences sector.

(F) Question from Councillor Alex Farquharson re: the relationship between the Council and staff trade unions

Supplementary question – “Why is SBC content to not charge Trade Unions a fee for allowing trade union subscriptions to be deducted from employees’ salaries, when other Councils charge Trade Unions for this service?”

The Portfolio Holder for Resources replied that she would provide a written answer to the questioner regarding this matter.

(G) Question from Councillor Andy McGuinness re: maintenance of the town’s woodlands

Supplementary question – “Will be Tree and Woodland Strategy be backed up by appropriate funding?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration replied that the condition of the Borough's woodlands had improved over recent years, assisted the work of the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust. He undertook to keep Members informed of the further improvements being made, but it should be borne in mind that there were budget limitations. However, he undertook to keep trees and woodlands high on his agenda for his portfolio.

(H) Question from Councillor Graham Snell re: mobility travel between the new Bus Station and Train Station

Supplementary question – “What specific help would disabled people be given to access the Train Station from the new Bus Station?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise & Transport replied that he would provide the questioner with a written answer to the supplementary question.

11 OFFICER REPORT - COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGY 2021 - 2024

The Council considered a report seeking approval of the proposed Community Safety Strategy 2021 – 2024.

It was moved by Councillor Jackie Hollywell, seconded by Councillor Sharon Taylor, and following debate and upon being put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED that the proposed final Community Safety Strategy 2021 – 2024, as attached at Appendix B to the report, be approved, noting its focus on the work of the SoSafe Partnership.

12 OFFICER REPORT - EMPLOYEE CODE OF CONDUCT

The Council considered a report seeking approval of a revised Employee Code of Conduct.

It was moved by Councillor Mrs Joan Lloyd, and seconded by Councillor Sharon Taylor, that the recommendations in the report be approved.

In response to a number of issues raised by a Member during the debate, Councillor Mrs Lloyd asked the Member concerned to send these in writing to her so that she could give consideration as to whether or not they could be incorporated into the Code of Conduct document.

Upon the motion being put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED:

1. That the revised Employee Code of Conduct, as attached at Appendix A to the report, be approved.
2. That the revised Employee Code of Conduct be adopted for immediate

implementation.

3. That the proposed measure that every employee must complete a declaration, confirming they have read the revised Employee Code of Conduct, be approved.

13 SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

The Council considered the Scrutiny Annual Report for 2020/21.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the work undertaken by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees during 2020/21, as set out in the report, be noted.

14 AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings of the Audit Committee held on 3 February 2021, 24 March 2021 and 8 June 2021 were received and noted.

15 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 item of business on the grounds that it involves 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 report being in Part II were accepted, and that the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

16 REPORT ON URGENT PART II DECISION MADE BY THE EXECUTIVE ON 9 JUNE 2021 - DANESTRETE ROUNDABOUT SITE DISPOSAL

In accordance with Paragraph 12 of the Access to Information Rules contained in its Constitution, the Council considered a Part II report in respect of an Urgent Part II decision made by the Executive at its meeting held on 9 June 2021 with regard to the Danestrete Roundabout site disposal.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the Urgent Part II decision made by the Executive at its meeting held on 9 June 2021 regarding the Danestrete Roundabout site disposal, as set out in Paragraph 3.4 of the report, be noted.

MAYOR