

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 13 October 2021

Time: 7.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

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

Start / End Start Time: 7.00pm
Time: End Time: 10.24pm

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

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Julie Ashley-Wren, Matt Creasey, Liz Harrington, Lizzy Kelly, Adam Mitchell CC and Tom Wren.

2 **MINUTES - 26 MAY 2021 (ANNUAL), 21 JULY 2021 (SPECIAL) AND 21 JULY 2021**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Annual Council Meeting held on 26 May 2021, and the Special and Ordinary Council meetings held on 21 July 2021, be approved as correct records and signed by the Mayor.

3 **MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS**

The Mayor announced that she had accepted an urgent motion for consideration at the meeting concerning Violence against Women and Girls.

The Mayor summarised the activities that she and her consort had been involved with since the previous Council meeting in July 2021. These included:

- Visiting the Lister Hospital to celebrate the Butterfly Rooms award, presented by the Princess Royal;
- Opening the 200th park run Fairlands Valley Park;
- Stevenage Football Club Foundation 20 to 24 launch;
- The topping out ceremony at the Stevenage Bus Interchange;
- Attending the Slimming World Woman of the Year ceremony at St. Nicholas Community Centre;

- Representing the Council at Civic Garden Parties hosted by the Mayors of Bishop's Stortford and Broxbourne;
- Cutting the ribbon at the North Road housing development event;
- Attending a fundraising event hosted by Councillor Jackie Hollywell to raise awareness and money for Breast Cancer Now;
- Attending the SB-organised Basketball Festival held in local parks;
- Launching the post-Covid lockdown re-opening of the Cycle Hub;
- Opening the Co-Space facility in the Town Centre;
- Hosting (with the Deputy Mayor) the Mayor's Garden Party, at which over £942 was raised for her nominated charities. She thanked all councillors who had attended the event;
- Making a film about the 999 Day;
- Attending the Greenside Special School prom to present pupils with their yearbooks;
- Awarding a special Mayor's trophy at the first Stevenage Dance Festival;
- Attending the Thin Blue Paws Awards at Knebworth Barns, a charity set up to recognise and reward outstanding Police service dogs;
- Joining the Health Action Day and Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre;
- Opening the Fun Run at Hampson Park organised by Stevenage Striders;
- Accompanied by Councillor Jackie Hollywell, attending the HACRO annual achievement awards at the University of Hertfordshire;
- Opening the new library at Larwood Special School, dedicated to the late Bill Pilgrim;
- Accompanied by the Deputy Mayor, attending the Irish Network AGM;
- Attending ex-Mayor Hugh Tessier's curiosities show at Stevenage Museum;
- Accompanied by Councillor Claire Parris, learning to enjoy curry for the first time at a Curry Night fundraiser hosted by the Mayor of Dacorum;
- Attending the Mayor of Hertsmere's Civic Service at St. Paul's Church in Bushey;
- Accompanied by the Youth Mayor and Lady Mayoress, opening the new library at Woolenwick Junior School;
- At the Stevenage Museum, launching the new book by Paul Fry entitled "Town's got talent";
- Joining the Stevenage Arts Festival to watch Parnassus; and
- As part of the New Town's 75th anniversary, joining others in walks and talks across the Borough organised by Councillor Simon Speller.

4 MAIN DEBATE

There was no Main Debate.

5 PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

There were no Petitions and Deputations.

6 QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL

The Council received three questions from the Youth Council. The responses to the three questions had been published in the supplementary agenda for the meeting.

No supplementary questions were asked by the Youth Mayor.

The Executive Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People, Leisure & Culture thanked the Youth Council for their questions and hoped they would continue to ask questions at future Council meetings, and also ask questions of Hertfordshire County Council regarding the services provided by that Council.

7 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no Questions from the public.

8 LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S UPDATE

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

“How many SBC owned commercial properties in the town were currently unoccupied?”

The Leader of the Council undertook to provide a written answer to Councillor Bibby regarding this matter, which would be copied to all other Members.

The Leader of the Council, supported by the Executive Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise & Transport, congratulated officers for their role in organising the successful recent Old Town Live Music event.

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

- Itrinerger;
- Stevenage in the rankings;
- Railways;
- Paperless working on Committees;
- Woman of the Year Award and Housing Heroes Award;
- New Homes to be built and derelict land transformed;
- Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse (SADA) nominated for Municipal Journal Award; and
- COP26.

The Leader of the Opposition asked what the plans were for the Council's Member Climate Change Working Group, which had not met for a number of months?

The Leader of the Council replied that there was a Climate Change update report being submitted to the Executive on 20 October 2021, part of which was to consider a way forward, including engagement with the Environment & Economy Select Committee and Climate Change Citizens' Panel. The outcome would be reported back to Members, including the future role of the Member Working Group.

9 UPDATE FROM SCRUTINY CHAIRS

The Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee advised that, since the previous Council meeting, the Committee had met on a number of occasions to consider the Executive's decisions. One of these related to the Town Deal, and an interesting discussion had ensued, as summarised on page 33 of the agenda as part of the report to Council regarding this matter.

The Chair of the Community Select Committee stated that the Committee had met to scope out work in relation to pre-scrutiny of the proposed Heritage Centre, and visits were planned to similar facilities in Colchester and Milton Keynes to glean best quality advice and information. The Committee would be inviting to a future meeting the new Manager whose responsibilities would include addressing damp and mould issues in SBC-owned housing properties.

The Chair of the Environment & Economy Select Committee had met on a number of occasions recently, and had interviewed internal and external witnesses prior to agreeing the scrutiny report on the Council's response to the Covid crisis for onward submission to the Executive. The Committee's next major area of work would be to scrutinise the implementation of the Council's Climate Change Strategy, which would commence with a presentation from the Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration.

10 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

Urgent Motion – Violence Against Women and Girls

Councillor Jackie Hollywell moved and Councillor Teresa Callaghan seconded the following urgent motion:

“That this Council acknowledges and deeply regrets the murders of Sarah Everard, Sabina Nessa, Nicole Smallman, and Bibaa Henry and would like to send our heartfelt condolences to all the families of these women and girls who have lost their lives as a result of violence.

The appalling murder of Sarah Everard last March was particularly shocking as her recently convicted murderer was a serving Police Officer. This horrendous crime has not only made women and girls more concerned about their safety, but it has sadly led to questions about the security and reassurance of the presence of Police Officers in our communities.

We would also welcome the announcement by the Home Secretary of an enquiry to look into the circumstances of this particular crime and perpetrator, as well as the wider societal implications for the safety of women and girls. However, we call on the Government to make this a formal public enquiry so that it can be as transparent and wide-reaching as possible. All the issues need to be properly examined as Violence Against Women and Girls can only be eradicated by a focus on the root causes and requires a cultural shift in attitudes and behaviours underpinned by education and legal improvements.

Therefore that Council resolves:

1. To write to the Home Secretary to call for the enquiry into the murder of Sarah Everard to be made a formal public enquiry;
2. To call on the Government to legally recognise Misogyny as a Hate Crime and for the Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner to ensure that any incidences of violence against women and girls are recorded accordingly; and
3. To also call on the Chief Constable of Hertfordshire and The Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire to urgently review the conduct of their Officers and Staff in order to reassure the people of Stevenage that they have confidence in their Police.”

The following amendment was moved by Councillor Phil Bibby and seconded by Councillor Wendy Kerby:

Deletion of points 2. and 3., and make a new 2., as follows:

"To also call on the Chief Constable of Hertfordshire and the Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire to share the processes they have in place to ensure that police candidates are robustly vetted, and that their conduct continues to remain appropriate."

Following debate, and upon being put to the vote, this amendment was lost.

Following further debate on the substantive motion, and upon this being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED**:

“That this Council acknowledges and deeply regrets the murders of Sarah Everard, Sabina Nessa, Nicole Smallman, and Bibaa Henry and would like to send our heartfelt condolences to all the families of these women and girls who have lost their lives as a result of violence.

The appalling murder of Sarah Everard last March was particularly shocking as her recently convicted murderer was a serving Police Officer. This horrendous crime has not only made women and girls more concerned about their safety, but it has sadly led to questions about the security and reassurance of the presence of Police Officers in our communities.

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 3. To also call on the Chief Constable of Hertfordshire and The Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire to urgently review the conduct of their Officers and Staff in order to reassure the people of Stevenage that they have confidence in their Police.”
- (i) Councillors to be made aware of upcoming announcements to press and public

Councillor Robin Parker moved and Councillor Stephen Booth seconded the following motion:

“That Council calls for a weekly bulletin to be circulated to all councillors by the start of each week outlining all known events, public announcements, statements, news releases and other information planned for publication by the Council during the coming week.”

The following amendment was moved by Councillor Sharon Taylor and seconded by Councillor Claire Parris:

Deletion of all word after “That Council...” and their replacement with “...agrees for the details of SBC organised events to be shared with all councillors in advance of them taking place.”

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

Following further debate on the substantive motion, and upon this being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED**:

“That Council agrees for the details of SBC organised events to be shared with all councillors in advance of them taking place.”

- (i) Managing the IT System

Councillor Stephen Booth moved and Councillor Andy McGuinness seconded the following motion:

“That Council notes the serious financial consequences of the recurrent series of IT failures experienced in recent years and those to date during 2021 by SBC. These failures have caused widespread disruption to Council services to residents, to staff working practices and to the e-mail system on at least four separate occasions.

We therefore call upon the Overview and Scrutiny Committee urgently to investigate

and review the management and operation of the Council's IT systems and specifically:

- speedily to appoint independent consultants to analyse and identify the key problems;
- quickly to resolve these problems with the minimum of disruption to council services and working arrangements;
- to appoint senior staff including at least one at director level to manage the IT system;
- to develop a strategy and plan for the IT system and submit it to Council for approval;
- to suspend the introduction of all new devices, apps and systems until such time as the above has been achieved; and
- to introduce measures to ensure that future failures and outages are costed and reported to Council."

The following amendment was moved by Councillor Rob Broom and seconded by Councillor Jeannette Thomas:

"Deletion of all word 'financial' in the first paragraph;

Addition of a paragraph following the first paragraph stating "That Council notes the significant work that is being undertaken to upgrade the Council's IT system and implement the ICT Strategy agreed in 2019.";

Deletion of the words "...call upon the Overview and Scrutiny Committee urgently to investigate and review..." in the second paragraph and their replacement with "...ask the Executive to receive a report on the delivery of the ICT Strategy, the current operations, its management, and to inform the future strategy. To inform this report a Portfolio Holder Advisory Group will be convened and, following Executive, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee will be invited to review the Executive's decision(s) regarding Management of the Council's IT system in the usual manner."; and

Deletion of all the bullet points in the final paragraph."

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

Following further debate on the substantive motion, and upon this being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED:**

"That Council notes the serious consequences of the recurrent series of IT failures experienced in recent years and those to date during 2021 by SBC. These failures have caused widespread disruption to Council services to residents, to staff working practices and to the e-mail system on at least four separate occasions.

That Council notes the significant work that is being undertaken to upgrade the Council's IT system and implement the ICT Strategy agreed in 2019.

We therefore ask the Executive to receive a report on the delivery of the ICT Strategy, the current operations, its management, and to inform the future strategy.

To inform this report a Portfolio Holder Advisory Group will be convened and, following Executive, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee will be invited to review the Executive's decision(s) regarding Management of the Council's IT system in the usual manner."

(ii) Lives animals as prizes

Councillor Robin Parker moved and Councillor Andy McGuinness seconded the following motion:

"That Council asks for an officer report on the feasibility of not allowing the giving of live animals as prizes or rewards:

- (a) at any SBC event;
- (b) on SBC controlled premises; and
- (c) in the Borough of Stevenage."

The following amendment was moved by Councillor Phil Bibby and seconded by Councillor Graham Lawrence:

"Deletion of the words 'asks for an officer report on the feasibility of not allowing the giving of', and replace with 'condemns the practice of giving'.

Deletion of the bullet points (a), (b), and (c), and replace with 'Under current legislation (Animal Welfare Act 2006), the only relevant offence is to give away an animal as a prize if the recipient is under 16 and not accompanied by an adult. With animal welfare in mind, Council should write to Government, asking for a review of this legislation, which is outdated. In the meantime, Council should liaise with HCC Trading Standards officers, to ensure current legislation is enforced.'

The revised Motion reads:

"That Council condemns the practice of giving live animals as prizes or rewards. Under current legislation (Animal Welfare Act 2006), the only relevant offence is to give away an animal as a prize if the recipient is under 16 and not accompanied by an adult. With animal welfare in mind, Council should write to Government, asking for a review of this legislation, which is outdated. In the meantime, Council should liaise with HCC Trading Standards officers, to ensure current legislation is enforced."

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

The following further amendment (to the text of the new substantive motion) was moved by Councillor Lou Rossati and seconded by Jackie Hollywell:

"Retention of the first paragraph, up to the words '...not accompanied by an adult'; and

A re-working of the sentence commencing 'With animal welfare in mind...', including

the additional wording ‘...this Council will...’ in place of ‘Council should...’, and the breaking up the remainder of the paragraph into (a), (b) and (c), including an additional (a) to ‘prohibit any hirer from giving live animals of any kind as prizes or gifts on any land owned or managed by SBC.’”

Following debate, and upon being put to the vote, this further amendment was carried.

Following further debate on the substantive motion, and upon this being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED**:

"That Council condemns the practice of giving live animals as prizes or rewards. Under current legislation (Animal Welfare Act 2006), the only relevant offence is to give away an animal as a prize if the recipient is under 16 and not accompanied by an adult.

With animal welfare in mind, this Council will:

- (a) prohibit any hirer from giving live animals of any kind as prizes or gifts on any land owned or managed by SBC;
- (b) write to Government, asking for a review of this legislation, which is outdated; and
- (c) liaise with HCC Trading Standards officers, to ensure current legislation is enforced.”

11 **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRS / PORTFOLIO HOLDERS**

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

- (A) Question from Councillor Margaret Notley re: substitutes on committees

No supplementary question was asked.

- (B) Question from Councillor Nick Leech re: derelict oil container at Waverley Close

Supplementary question – “Would the Executive Portfolio Holder for Resources commit to a meeting with him and Councillor Chris Howells to investigate resolving the issues for one and all?”

The Executive Portfolio Holder for Resources replied that the oil container was situated on private land, and that she was unaware of any previous complaints regarding the matter. She would await a legal view on the issue, including advice as to whether or not the container breached environmental and/or planning legislation, and she undertook to come back to Councillor Leech following receipt of this

information.

(C) Question from Councillor Adam Mitchell re: hedgerow trimming

No supplementary question was asked.

(D) Question from Councillor Chris Howells re: cyclists, e-scooters and skateboarders in the town centre

Supplementary question – “How can the Council hope to attract more visitors to the Borough both before and after Town Centre Regeneration with the current high level of cyclists, e-scooters and skateboarders using the pedestrianised areas of the town centre?”

The Executive Portfolio Holder for Communities, Community Safety & Equalities replied that the Council had a very proactive Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Team who were tackling the issues raised in the question, in association with Hertfordshire Constabulary. She asked Councillor Howells to contact her and/or ASB Team officers should he experience further examples of this type of anti-social behaviour.

(E) Question from Councillor Julie Ashley-Wren re: refurbishment works to leaseholders of SBC owned flats

In the absence of Councillor Ashley-Wren, Councillor Robin Parker asked the following Supplementary question – “Can the SBC Leaseholders be written to now to be advised of the Council’s plans and reasons for the delay, and have any of them opted for an independent check of their final accounts?”

The Executive Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People replied that a letter would be going out to the first tranche of Leaseholders with their bills and explaining the reasons for delay. The bills had yet to be sent out, and the costs had been capped, with the majority of bills below the estimated costs. As the bills had not yet been sent out, it was not possible to give an indication as to how many Leaseholders had opted for independent checks.

(F) Question from Councillor Stephen Booth re: “Your Say” system

Supplementary question – “Would the Council consider improving this service by allowing councillors to engage more directly with Assistant Director level officers (or their senior assistants) on “Your Say” issues?”

The Executive Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods & Co-operative Council replied that he accepted that there had been an increase in enquiries through the “Your Say” system during Covid lockdown and afterwards. He would be meeting officers in the near future to look at improvements to the system for all Members, including an enhanced digital offer.

(G) Question from Councillor Andy McGuinness re: Covid-19 Cobra snake

Supplementary question – “Can the Portfolio Holder confirm that the final location of

the Covid-19 Cobra snake would be in the underpass at the junction of Grace Way and Vardon Road, the preferred location following a residents' survey and fundraising exercise carried out in 2020?"

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People, Leisure & Culture replied that the final location was being discussed with Dawn Parnell and her family, and no decision had been made. SBC Officers were working with Hertfordshire County Council colleagues to determine the final resting place for the Covid-19 Cobra snake,

(H) Question from Councillor Robin Parker re: Chairs of Scrutiny functions

Supplementary question – "In view of the fact that the original question was not answered, why are opposition parties not allowed to Chair any of the Councils Scrutiny functions?"

The Leader of the Council replied that the first paragraph of the original answer was to explain the efficacy of the work carried out by the Council's scrutiny bodies. The second paragraph confirmed that the appointment to Chairs of Committees (including scrutiny committees) takes place at the Annual Council Meeting in May of each year. The Chairs of Committees are decided upon by the Majority Group, and come before the Annual Council for approval. The Vice-Chair positions on scrutiny committees were handed to the opposition for appointment. The above provisions would continue whilst the current Majority Group was in political control of the Council.

(I) Question from Councillor Graham Snell re: tenancy evictions for anti-social behaviour

Supplementary question – "Can I have more detail about what has been done successfully in resolving the problems associated with difficult neighbours?"

The Executive Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People undertook to provide a written answer to the supplementary question.

(J) Question from Councillor Alex Farquharson re: Leader's stance on GSK's £400M investment in Stevenage

Councillor Farquharson was pleased with the Leader of the Council's response and had no supplementary question.

The Leader of the Council reiterated her support for GSK's investment in Stevenage and hoped that the next phase would be a successful Towns Fund scheme for alterations and improvements to the Gunnels Wood Road/GSK roundabout area, in order to unlock the potential for the growth of the GSK/Catalyst Bioscience Park campus.

12 TRANSFORMING OUR TOWN CENTRE PROGRAMME UPDATE AND TOWNS FUND DECISION MAKING

The Council considered a report in respect of an update on the Transforming our

Town Centre Programme and seeking approval of the Towns Fund decision-making process.

It was moved by Councillor John Gardner, and seconded by Councillor Sharon Taylor, that the recommendations in the report be approved.

In response to Member questions regarding the number of new high rise flats contained in the Towns Fund proposals in the light of likely different working patterns following the Covid pandemic, the Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration commented that one of the objectives was to provide homes to house residents as well as those attracted into the area to take up jobs associated with the growing Stevenage business sector, especially the pharmaceutical and STEM Gene and Cell Therapy units comprising the GlaxoSmithKline and Bioscience Catalyst campus.

Upon the motion being put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED:

1. That the progress of the regeneration programme be noted.
2. That the progress of Towns Fund programme to date, including the obligations of the Council as the Accountable Body for the Towns Fund, be noted.
3. That the creation of an Officer Panel to support the discharge of the Council's obligations as Accountable Body be noted and approved.
4. That the review and approval of Towns Fund Business Cases be delegated to the Executive.
5. That it be noted that there will be future decision points for a number of Council-sponsored projects, in accordance with the Council's Constitution, following approval of the Towns Fund Business Cases and release of funding by the MHCLG.
6. That the inclusion of the £37.5 million within the Council's Capital Strategy be noted, and it be further noted that this is aligned with the Heads of Terms agreement with MHCLG, and that authorisation for Council match-funding will be reserved until the relevant Business Case is approved.

13 ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY REVIEW 2020/21 INCLUDING PRUDENTIAL CODE

The Council considered a report in respect of the Annual Treasury Management Review 2020/21, including the Prudential Code. It was noted that the report had been endorsed by both the Audit Committee and the Executive.

It was moved by Councillor Mrs Joan Lloyd, and seconded by Councillor Sharon Taylor, that Recommendations 2.3 and 2.4 in the report be approved.

In reply to a Member question regarding the status of Aberdeen MMF, one of the money market funds invested in by the Council during the year, the Strategic Director (CF) undertook to investigate and supply an e-mail response to the Member.

Upon the motion being put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED:

1. That the 2020/21 Annual Treasury Management Review be approved.
2. That the wording in Appendix C, Table 1 of the report (Specified Investments Criteria) be amended as set out in Paragraph 4.2.6.5 of the report, in order to allow the use of Enhanced Cash Funds included in Table 3 (Treasury Limits).

14 AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 8 September 2021 were received.

MAYOR