

# STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

## COUNCIL MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 14 December 2022

Time: 7.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

**Present:** Councillors: Margaret Notley (Mayor), Myla Arceno (Deputy Mayor), Julie Ashley-Wren, Sandra Barr, Philip Bibby CC, Stephen Booth, Lloyd Briscoe, Rob Broom, Jim Brown, Teresa Callaghan, Nazmin Chowdhury, Michael Downing, John Duncan, Bret Facey, Alex Farquharson, John Gardner, Richard Henry, Jackie Hollywell, Chris Howells, Wendy Kerby, Graham Lawrence CC, Mrs Joan Lloyd, Lin Martin-Haugh, Andy McGuinness, Maureen McKay, Sarah Mead, Adam Mitchell CC, Robin Parker CC, Claire Parris, Loraine Rossati, Graham Snell, Simon Speller, Baroness Taylor of Stevenage, OBE and Jeannette Thomas.

**Start / End** Start Time: 7.00pm  
**Time:** End Time: 10.35pm

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Rob Broom, Liz Harrington, Graham Snell, Anne Wells, Tom Wren and from the Youth Mayor Paige Abrey.

There were no declarations of interest.

### 2 **MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS**

The Mayor announced that this would be Baroness Taylor's final Council Meeting as Leader of the Council after over 16 years in the role and gave Members an opportunity to offer their own personal tributes.

Councillor Barr thanked Baroness Taylor for not only introducing her to a new way of serving the community as a local councillor, but for being a mentor and a dear friend.

Councillor Phil Bibby CC, Leader of the Opposition wished Baroness Taylor every success for her new role in the House of Lords.

Councillor Downing reflected on Baroness Taylor's deep commitment to Stevenage and her passion for social justice. He said that it had been a privilege to work with the Baroness over a number of years as a fellow Symonds Green Ward Councillor.

Councillor Robin Parker, Leader of the Lib Dem Group thanked the Baroness on behalf of his Group for her leadership of the Council and always having the best interests of Stevenage in her heart.

Councillor Speller thanked Baroness Taylor for her hard work both publicly and behind the scenes and for the wonderful things she had done to make Stevenage the loud and proud Town it was. He thanked the Baroness for the privilege of serving the Town alongside her.

Councillor Mrs Lloyd wished the Baroness good luck and thanked her for her trust in making her the Resources Portfolio Holder for the Council as well as the Labour Group Secretary.

Cllr Arceno spoke of the Baroness as a true inspiration and thanked her for her advice and guidance as a relatively new Councillor.

Councillor Taylor thanked Members for their comments and advised that she would be championing Stevenage and local government generally in her work in the House of Lords. She paid thanks to a number of people including Officers of the Council, Partners, political friends and allies, Uniform Services, private sector partners and to the people of Stevenage for their support over the years she had been Leader of the Council.

The Mayor then presented Councillor Taylor with a bouquet of flowers.

A list of recent Mayoral events had been circulated to all Members. The Mayor then summarised the activities that she and her consort had been involved with since the October 2022 Council meeting which had included:

- Performance by the Stevenage Lytton Players of Young Frankenstein at the Gordon Craig Theatre;
- Stevenage Pride Awards and subsequent Tea Party for all nominees;
- Launch of Event Island, Stevenage, including the opening of the ice skating rink;
- Visit by Knebworth School Parliament;
- Annual Firework Display at Fairlands Valley Park;
- Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day;
- The Old Town Lights Switch on;
- Scouts Christingle Service;
- Mayor's Christmas Celebration Service at the Holy Trinity Church; and
- The Irish Network Stevenage Christmas Lunch at the Holiday Inn.

### 3 **MINUTES - 19 OCTOBER 2022**

It was **RESOLVED:**

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 19 October 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor subject to the following amendments:

- 7 – QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC – Question A the word 'ben. Be replaced by 'been'; and
- 11 – QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS – Question F should read 'various

reports’.

#### 4 **COMMUNITY PRESENTATIONS**

There was no community presentation.

#### 5 **PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS**

There were no petitions or deputations.

#### 6 **NEW LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S TERM OF OFFICE**

The Council considered a report in respect of a revised term of office for the new Leader of the Council (to take effect from 1 January 2023).

In moving the report, Baroness Taylor advised that this was an important step to take to ensure continuity for the Council and would enable commitment to the leadership role.

It was then seconded by Councillor Mrs Joan Lloyd, that the Recommendation in the report be approved.

Upon the motion being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED** that subject to the postholder being re-elected as a councillor or being removed from office, the new Leader of the Council be appointed to take up office on 1 January 2023 until the Annual Council meeting in May 2026 (a term of approximately 3 years and 6 months), and that thereafter the four year term of office for the Leader be recommenced as set out in the Council’s Constitution.

#### 7 **APPOINTMENT OF NEW LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

The Council considered the appointment of a new Leader of the Council to take up the position from 1 January 2023 for a period of 3 years and 5 months up until Annual Council in May 2026.

In moving the nomination of Councillor Richard Henry, Baroness Taylor advised the Council that Cllr Henry was a friend and colleague who had held many roles with great distinction on the Council since his election in 1995. His most recent role was as Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People, Leisure and Culture responsible for many things including the recently awarded complex Leisure Contract. She advised that this nomination was reward for his work in supporting colleagues locally, regionally and nationally. She advised that she was greatly reassured that Stevenage would be in such great hands.

Councillor Mrs Lloyd seconded the nomination and advised that she looked forward to working with Councillor Henry in his new role.

Upon the nomination being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED** that Councillor Richard Henry be appointed the new leader of the Council with effect from 1 January 2023, for a period of 3 years and 5 months up until Annual Council in May 2026.

At this juncture, Councillor Henry thanked colleagues who had elected him and advised that he was proud to be taking on the role as only the 3<sup>rd</sup> Leader in the history of Stevenage Borough Council. He also congratulated Councillor Jeannette Thomas who was to become Deputy Leader of the Council.

8 **QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL**

There were no questions from the Youth Council.

9 **QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

Question from Mr Jim Borchers

The Council noted that a response to the question submitted by Mr Borchers regarding the report from Mutual Gain “Thinking about Stevenage High Street” had been published in the supplementary agenda for the meeting.

Mr Borchers was present at the meeting and he asked the following supplementary question: there was general public support for the green cycle parking on the High Street. The cycle parking had been removed in May 2022 and had yet to be replaced. Could Councillor Briscoe advise when replacement cycle parking would be installed?

Councillor Briscoe, the Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport, advised that one of the green cycle racks had been damaged and the other two relocated. New cycle racks for the High Street were currently being considered and would be installed in due course.

10 **LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S UPDATE**

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

“The current compliance rules and guidelines for mould in rented properties were being tightened. Is Stevenage Borough Council up to speed with the requirements and could confirm that any inspections due in this regard would be satisfactory?”

The Leader of the Council advised that she had received a detailed letter from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities which had been reviewed and that the Council had looked very closely at the Coroner’s report following the tragic incident in Rochdale. The Community Select Committee had been tasked to review the letter to consider if there were any lessons to be learned. It was a complex issue and a lot of work had been done in Stevenage but there was more to be done. Particularly in New Towns most properties had been built at the same time and repairs were needed at the same time. Members would be kept informed throughout the process.

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

- Small Business Saturday;
- Garages Digital Letting;
- Operational Efficiency Award;
- Community Tree Planting;
- Warm Spaces Initiative;
- Co-operative Councils;
- Stirling Close Visit;
- Aids and Adaptations Awards.

## 11 **UPDATE FROM SCRUTINY CHAIRS**

The Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee advised that the Committee had met twice since the last Council meeting, looking in depth at the Cost of Living crisis including the financial position of the Council.

The Chair of the Community Select Committee stated that the Committee was continuing its work on Housing Voids and had received detailed answers from the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Housing Development in response to questions on this subject . A presentation had also been received from the Housing Operations Manager.

The Vice-Chair of the Environment & Economy Select Committee, in the absence of the Chair, advised that a meeting would be held later this week to consider the Council's aim to achieve net zero. The meeting had also included a discussion with the Youth Council.

## 12 **NOTICE OF MOTIONS**

### Government Use of Hotels as Hostels

Councillor Sharon Taylor moved and Councillor Sandra Barr seconded the following motion:

We are proud of our town, how we support one another in our community, and support those who are vulnerable and in need. We have played our part in welcoming and supporting refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and Ukraine in recent years, but the current actions of the Home Office, placing large numbers of asylum seekers in a Stevenage hotel against the advice of all local partners is unacceptable. It puts extraordinary pressures on local resources and is a completely unsuitable location for vulnerable individuals leading to real humanitarian issues.

We recognise that there is a national challenge for the Home Office, which all parts of our country need to tackle alongside international partners. But having failed to deal with this issue for 12 years, it is absolutely vital that Government recognise they must work together with local partners and communities rather than against local advice and often with little or no notice to the areas concerned.

We have made clear to the Home Office that using the Novotel as accommodation to temporarily house asylum seekers is not appropriate and that we could not support this location being used. It is isolated and with poor transport links, impacts

on our local economy by losing space for business visitors, impacts on the events and activities in Knebworth House and Gardens, has disrupted local peoples wedding & event plans in addition to creating great pressure on public services.

Local services, from the hospital to healthcare, to Council and police services are already under great strain. Having a large-scale facility brought into use in Stevenage in short order makes these challenges even more difficult for our community.

Along with all Councils in Hertfordshire, we have written to the Minister given our deep concerns over the lack of consultation on the Home Office use of hotels across the county, choice of highly unsuitable sites, and pressures on vital services and our communities. We have asked for an urgent meeting with the Home Secretary to make the strength of local views absolutely clear. Locally we have requested that the Home Secretary or her representative visit the Novotel with us to see how unsuitable it is to be used for this purpose.

That this Council calls upon the government to:

1. Carry out an urgent review of the policy of using hotels to accommodate asylum seekers and refugees
2. Introduce a formal process of consultation with local partners on the suitability or unsuitability of accommodation which is being considered locally by the Home Office contractors
3. Ensure that consultation is carried out in good time for responses to be carefully considered and for local concerns to be taken into account
4. Work with local government to develop more sustainable options for housing asylum seekers and refugees including the use of MOD land, modular buildings and develop these along with support packages for the needs of asylum seekers and refugees
5. Ensure that local infrastructure is available to support the needs of asylum seekers and refugees before accommodation is designated
6. Carry out an urgent review of the asylum seeker application process so that applicants are not kept waiting for decisions.
7. That government respond to the concerns of local authorities recognising that the use of hotels as hostels is incurring expenses for local tax payers where Councils are seeking to challenge the change of use under planning law.

The following comments were made during the debate on the Motion:

- Reference was made to the dreadful accident in the Channel earlier that day when 4 people lost their lives, and the danger that people were being put in as a result of their desperation and through the acts of criminal gangs;
- Although the Government had responded on this issue, the statement from the Prime Minister did not fully answer the points raised and although there were some positive steps, was too little and too late to avoid taking the steps outlined in the motion;
- Hotels did not and could not address the issues experienced by refugees and their families;
- Both the nominated hotels in Stevenage were poor choices in terms of

- support and location;
- The unacceptable length of time taken to process applications for asylum;
- An example of an unsupported and desperate refugee family in the Town was told to the meeting.

Following further debate and upon being put to the vote, the motion was unanimously carried.

### Police and Community Safety in Hertfordshire

Councillor Phil Bibby CC moved and Councillor Bret Facey seconded the following motion:

Stevenage Borough Council notes the recent reforms and improvements to the police across England and Wales since 2019. This Council is grateful for the 184 more police officers in Hertfordshire, as a part of the over 15,300 more police officers in England and Wales recruited since 2019 and calls on the government to continue its drive to have recruited an extra 20,000 police officers by 2023.

This Council notes:

- The change to national policy that will see every report of home burglary having a police visit, ensuring that every victim of such an invasive crime will be given the attention they deserve
- Resident's concern about the impact that illegal and disruptive protests have had on our country in recent years
- That the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act has strengthened the power that police have tackling such action
- The further positive impacts of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act on dealing with sexual offences, including extending the scope of the offences in the Sexual Offences Act 2003, providing greater powers for the management of sex offenders and toughening around child sex offences
- The substantial increase of police funding to £16.9 billion, part of which will be used to give every police officer a £1,900 uplift in their salary this year

This Council resolves to:

- Co-operate with the government on future funding for our local police service
- Support officers new to Stevenage through providing forums for them to meet with residents
- Provide resources for residents to assist with keeping in contact with new police officers in our neighbourhoods

The following comments were made during the debate on the Motion:

- Although there had been some progress made in replacing some of the lost 21,000 police officers at a national level, much experience had been lost leaving the Police in a more vulnerable position with many new and keen but inexperienced recruits;

- A lot of time was spent by the police looking after mental health patients rather than focussing on reducing crime.

Following further debate and upon being put to the vote, the motion was lost.

### BBC Local Radio Services

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

That this Council notes with great concern the proposed funding cuts and consequent re-organisation of BBC local radio services.

We believe that the changes will impact very badly upon:

- local democracy;
- the accountability of councils and others;
- local information and support for residents.

The detrimental effects on Stevenage and more widely will not be compensated by any tiny savings made.

That this Council therefore resolves to:

- Hereby publicly assert our opposition to the cuts.
- Send a copy of this motion to:  
Tim Davie CBE, BBC Director General  
Jason Horton, Acting Director for BBC Local  
The Stevenage MP  
The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport  
The Prime Minister and the leaders of the other parliamentary parties  
and ask for their support in stopping this destruction of our BBC local radio services.

The following comments were made during the debate on the Motion:

- Local radio was important for considering those issues not big enough to make the national programmes;
- Although not as independent a service as it could be, it was important to preserve local broadcasting outlets.

Following further debate, and upon being put to the vote, the motion was unanimously carried.

## 13 **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRS / PORTFOLIO HOLDERS**

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

(A) Question from Councillor Bret Facey re: fuel poverty in the South of Stevenage

Supplementary question – Only 1 session out of the 28 provided for warm spaces would be located in the South of Stevenage. Please can the provision of warm spaces in the south of the Town be considered?

The Executive Portfolio Holder for Communities, Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Council advised that an interim community space was in the process of being developed in the central hub of the new Kenilworth building. In the meantime, officers were currently in negotiation with St Peter's Church, SPRUSE at Marymead and the Four Seasons Café at the Roebuck for the provision of warm spaces in the area.

(B) Question from Councillor Chris Howells re: housing repairs

Supplementary question – “although in the minority, there was a percentage of residents dissatisfied with repairs. What mechanisms were there to ensure the minority of these cases do not slip through the net?”

The Executive Portfolio Holder for Housing and Housing Development agreed that sometimes responses to residents were not as they should be exacerbated by a high turnover of staff and vacancy levels. The Portfolio Holder advised that this was continually under review.

(C) Question from Councillor Alex Farquharson re: standards in public office

Supplementary question – the recently selected labour Parliamentary candidate for Stevenage was until recently a London Councillor with no links to Stevenage. Can the Leader of the Council guarantee that the Parliamentary Candidate would hold up the highest standards of honesty, trust and transparency?

The Leader of the Council advised that the parliamentary candidate was now permanently based in Stevenage, was passionate about the Town, had attended many more community events this year than the current MP for Stevenage and was the best person to represent Stevenage at the next General Election.

(D) Question from Councillor Julie Ashley-Wren re: Town Centre proposed primary school.

There was no supplementary question.

(E) Question from Councillor Stephen Booth re: IT failures

Supplementary question – when would Councillors be consulted regarding their IT needs?

The Executive Portfolio Holder for Resources, Transformation and Information Technology advised that there had been many IT meetings recently that Councillor Booth could have attended and any questions could have been sent via her in this

regard. The system was complex and recent failures had been dealt with as soon as they could be.

(F) Question from Councillor Andy McGuinness re: potential outsourcing opportunities

Supplementary question – Could Councillor Mrs Lloyd provide more detail on the improvements mentioned in regard to the waste and recycling services. Also could confirmation be given that no services would be off the table in terms of outsourcing other services?

The Executive Portfolio Holder for Resources, Transformation and Information Technology replied that all services had been looked at in trying to get the budget ready and for the Council to receive best value for money. The consultation on waste and recycling will be circulated to members as and when it was ready.

(G) Question from Councillor Robin Parker re: potential outsourcing opportunities CSC response times

Supplementary question – Could the refuse/recycling calendar for the whole year be made available online?

The Executive Portfolio Holder for Resources, Transformation and Information Technology advised she would look at this and respond to Councillor Parker.

(H) Question from Councillor Graham Snell re: Planning Enforcement

Supplementary question – asked by Councillor Parker in Cllr Snell's absence. Why were there repeated complaints about the delayed planning development in Magellan Close?

The Executive Member for Environment and Climate Change advised that he would ask officers to respond to Cllr Parker as this was a site specific issue. He agreed more resources would be useful in the Planning Enforcement area.

(I) Question from Councillor Tom Wren re: planning applications

Supplementary question – asked by Councillor Parker in Cllr Wren's absence. Members still received complaints regarding a lack of consultation on small planning developments. Will the Portfolio Holder look to update the Statement of Community Involvement?

The Executive Member for Environment and Climate Change advised that the update was already included in the upcoming review of the Local Plan.

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## **MID YEAR TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2022/23 AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS**

The Council considered a report in respect of the 2022/23 Mid Year Treasury Management Review and Prudential Indicators.

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

Upon the motion being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED** that the 2022/23 Mid Year Treasury Management Review and Prudential Indicators be approved.

15 **MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES SCHEME 2022/23**

The Council considered a report in respect of the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2022 – 23.

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

Upon the motion being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED** that the Members Allowances Scheme for 2022 -23, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be approved.

16 **CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MEMBERS**

The Council considered a report presenting a revised Code of Conduct for Members.

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

Upon the motion being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the comments of the Standards Committee set out at paragraph 4.5 of the report be noted;
2. That the draft Code of Conduct for Members, attached at Appendix A to the report, be approved for immediate implementation

17 **ELECTORAL REVIEW OF THE BOROUGH OF STEVENAGE - FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND**

The Council considered a report relating to the Electoral Review of the Borough of Stevenage – Final Recommendations of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

In moving the report, Baroness Taylor thanked all those involved in the Boundary Review including officers from Stevenage Borough Council and the LG BCE, councillors from all three parties in the Council and those members of the public who had contributed their views.

The report was then seconded by Councillor Thomas who reiterated thanks to all those who had been involved in the Review.

Upon the motion being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED** that it be noted that that a Polling District and Polling Places review would be undertaken in the summer of 2023.

18 **AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 9 November 2022 were noted.

**CHAIR**