

**COUNCIL
MINUTES**

2

Date: Wednesday 9 December 2009

Time: 7.00 p.m.

Place: Council Chamber

Present: The Mayor (Councillor S Myson) (Chair), the Deputy Mayor (Councillor J Lloyd CC) (Vice Chair), Councillors S Batson MBE DL, H Burrell, M Cherney-Craw, L Chester, B Clark, G Clark, D Clark, D Cullen, M Downing, J Fraser CC, P Gallagher, J Gardner, L Harrington, R Henry, J Hollywell, B Jackson, D Kissane, L Knight, C Latif, Mrs J Lloyd, L Martin-Haugh, M Notley, R Parker CC, M Patston, R Raynor, G Snell, S Speller, P Stuart, S Taylor CC, J Thomas, B Underwood, V Warwick and A Webb

In Attendance: Rachel Culley and Ufi Ani of the Youth Council

Start/End Time: Start Time: 7.00pm
End Time: 9.10pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence had been received on behalf of Councillors M Hurst, M Mason, J Pickersgill and L Strange and also on behalf of Nick Parry, Chief Executive. The Deputy Chief Executive took his place for the duration of the meeting.

The Mayor sent her best wishes to Councillor M Hurst, who was in hospital and the Council joined the Mayor in wishing him a speedy recovery.

Councillor R Raynor declared a prejudicial interest at agenda item 8, Notice of Motions as he was employed by the Land Registry and left the Chamber when this item was discussed.

There were no other declarations of interest made at this juncture, however, Councillor D Kissane declared a prejudicial interest at agenda item number 5, Petitions and Deputations as his son was an employee of Elmes and left the Chamber for the duration of that discussion.

2 MINUTES - 7 OCTOBER 2009

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on Wednesday 7 October 2009 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Deputy Mayor, subject to the addition of a request for a response to the Leader of the Opposition regarding the issue of recycled and/or degradable liners for the kitchen caddies and contamination of the waste by cooked meats.

3 MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Mayor reported the sad news of the death of Joyce Marson and advised that she would take this opportunity to pay tribute to her.

The Mayor spoke about the many voluntary groups that Joyce had been involved with over the last 40 years and how, as a Council employee, she had played a key role in establishing Silkin Court Sheltered Housing Development. Joyce had also been a representative of Stevenage Borough Council Community Services to 'Old Peoples Welfare Committee', later renamed Age Concern and later went on to become a full member and trustee. The Mayor stated that Joyce would be sorely missed by not only her family and friends but many other people in Stevenage.

The Mayor spoke about her decision to introduce a Mayor's Award to recognise those in the community who had given something of themselves to make life better for people in Stevenage and announced that the first recipient of the award was Joyce. She added that she and Councillor D Clark had visited Joyce in Lister Hospital and presented her with the certificate.

The Council then stood for one minute's silence in remembrance of Joyce Marson.

The Mayor advised that as she had another appointment, she would hand over the Chair to the Deputy Mayor and wished everyone present a merry Christmas and a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year. The Mayor then left the Chamber and the Deputy Mayor, Councillor J Lloyd CC, took the Chair for the remainder of the meeting.

4 MAIN DEBATE - STEVENAGE MEANS BUSINESS

The Deputy Mayor welcomed Neil Cuttall, the Council's Regeneration Manager, who was to give a presentation on economic development and enterprise in Stevenage. There was also to have been a presentation from Chris Pichon, Chief Executive of WENTA, but he had submitted his apologies for absence as he had been held up in traffic.

Neil provided background information about support to businesses in Stevenage, new start up initiatives and current enterprise support that was provided. He stated that Stevenage was seen as a leading light in the business world of Hertfordshire and the Council worked closely with partners to develop strategies and provide support for projects and job creation.

Neil went on to talk about the Business Technology Centre (BTC) that had been re-designated in 2000 as an Incubation Centre rather than managed office space. A new extension had been built in 2008/09 which had been re-launched in November 2009 and was able to support up to 110 businesses. The project had been funded by SBC, EEDA and Go-East and was able to offer a wide range of services.

Neil finished his presentation by talking about the way forward and priorities for Stevenage Borough Council and the development of local strategy in conjunction with partners.

The Deputy Mayor thanked Neil for the presentation and invited Councillor S Speller, as Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport to open the debate by moving a Motion, which had been circulated around the Chamber.

The Motion was seconded by Councillor J Gardner. A full debate ensued and the main points raised were as follows:

- Stevenage was ideally placed as a centre for business given its excellent transport links;
- Stevenage was a good place to raise families with excellent local schools and higher education facilities, providing young people with the skills necessary for the future;
- There was a continued need for affordable housing in the Town to accommodate those working for these new enterprises;
- There was a need to promote the Town to attract new industries;
- The BTC was an excellent opportunity to support local businesses and inspire young people.

The Motion was put to the vote and it was **RESOLVED** that Stevenage Borough Council recognises and values all current business support, business development and inward investment activities undertaken by partners with the Borough Council, especially in these difficult times. The Borough Council Economic Action Plan 2010-2020, as agreed with its partners and commits itself to promoting and implementing these.

The Deputy Mayor thanked everyone for their contribution to the debate.

5 PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

At this juncture, Councillor D Kissane declared a prejudicial interest as his son was an employee of Elmes and left the Chamber for the duration of the item.

The Deputy Mayor invited Ms Yarnold-Forrester to present a petition relating to the proposal to open a Tesco store in High Street, Stevenage.

Ms Yarnold-Forrester thanked the Council for giving her the opportunity to speak and expressed the view that a Tesco store would be out of keeping with the general environment of the High Street. She was also concerned that it may harm business at the Waitrose Store, which also housed the Post Office and asked whether the Council could provide any support for opposition to the proposal.

At the Deputy Mayor's invitation, Councillor J Gardner, the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration, responded to Ms Yarnold-Forrester's comments. Councillor Gardner stated that whilst the Council had no powers in determining which retailers moved into individual shops it was very important for the Council to hear the concerns of the local residents and hoped that the views expressed by

the people who had signed the petition would be considered by both Tesco management and the vendor. He undertook to forward the petition to both parties.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor S Taylor CC advised that she had contacted the management of Tesco regarding the issue but had not received a reply. However, she advised that she would keep the lead petitioner apprised of any communication.

Councillor Gardner thanked Ms Yarnold-Forrester for the petition and for explaining the issues raised therein.

6 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None received.

7 LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S UPDATE

The Deputy Mayor called upon Councillor G Clark, Leader of the Opposition, to raise one matter relevant to the Borough.

Councillor Clark asked for clarification of the policy regarding the management of trees that grew in a tenants gardens and the Leader of the Council provided an explanation of the process and agreed to look at the specific case in question.

At the Deputy Mayor's invitation, the Leader of the Council, Councillor S Taylor CC, presented her update.

Councillor Taylor referred to the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) which was a new way of assessing local public services in England and thanked council officers for their hard work undertaken to implement the process. She reported that the overall assessment for Stevenage Borough Council was that it was performing well and went on to highlight some of the areas that had been assessed.

Councillor Taylor spoke about the Youth of Today's Local Councillor Shadowing Programme scheme that was supported by the British Youth Council. She reported that a number of Councillors had indicated that they wished to participate and it was hoped the programme would commence in January 2010.

Councillor Taylor then invited Portfolio Holders to speak on her behalf.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration, Councillor J Gardner reported that the amended Old Town Parking Improvement proposals had now been approved by the Executive and it was hoped that the scheme would be introduced in the Spring of 2010. He thanked all of those who had engaged in the consultation process.

Councillor Gardner then updated the meeting about the 10:10 Climate Change Campaign, which aimed to reduce the use of energy by a minimum of 3% by the end of 2010. A Climate Change group had been set up to drive the Council's climate change strategy forward to help meet the objective.

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People, Culture, Sport and Leisure, Councillor H Burrell spoke about the success of the Firework event, which had been attended by upwards of 20,000 people. He also spoke about the Hertfordshire Service to Sports Awards event where athletes and coaches from Stevenage were prominent among the winners.

Councillor Burrell also updated the meeting about the ongoing work of the AVC Development at the Valley School. He advised that the 3rd Generation pitch had now been completed and it was intended to start using the grass pitches from July 2010.

The Portfolio Holder for Community, Health and Older People, Councillor M Downing reported on the success of a fashion show for people in later life that the Council had helped to promote, which had been held at Marriotts School. The show was an intergenerational event and was attended by around 70 people.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources, Councillor Mrs J Lloyd updated the meeting about the Concessionary Fares Scheme for 2010/11. The scheme would continue to provide free travel for the people of Stevenage at any time across Hertfordshire and after 9.30am across the rest of England.

Councillor Mrs Lloyd also announced details of the provisional finance settlement for Stevenage for the 2010/11 financial year, which was relatively good news as the Government had been able to honour the grant increases promised in the current Comprehensive Spending Review.

Councillor Mrs Lloyd then announced that the new Capita Benefits, Council Tax and Business Rates system was now in place and had been used by staff from 23 November. Additional resources had been brought in to clear outstanding work as quickly as possible to help minimise the impact on residents.

The Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities, Councillor R Henry provided a summary of the work of the Street Pastors who had been active in Stevenage since October 2009. The Street Pastors had proved to have been a valuable part of the night time economy, working closely with the Police, whilst providing a confidential service to vulnerable people. As this work was undertaken on voluntary basis the Leader requested that the Council's thanks to the volunteers be recorded in the Minutes.

On a seasonal note the Leader then recommended an article that had recently appeared in the Comet newspaper on cost cutting measures to assist with the expense faced by households at Christmas.

8 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

At this juncture, Councillor R Raynor, having previously declared a prejudicial interest, left the Chamber for the duration of the item.

The Deputy Mayor referred Council to a Motion regarding the Land Registry, details of which had been included in the agenda order of business.

Councillor Taylor moved the Motion by stating that the Council was very concerned about the proposal to close the Stevenage office as every job lost was a personal tragedy. She added that the staff at the Stevenage Land Registry possessed high levels of skills and experience and had always been very efficient and helpful and the Council would lend their support to the campaign to keep the office open.

The Deputy Mayor then called on the Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport, Councillor S Speller to second the Motion.

Councillor Speller said that he hoped that the proposal was up for genuine consultation and that all options would be considered. He added that the business case for closing the office should be looked at carefully as there were many other locations in Stevenage that could be used to accommodate the service.

A full debate ensued, with contributions from the public and the main points raised were as follows:

- The Land Registry was a long established office in the Town offering much needed civil service jobs;
- Scaling back the operation at this time could be a false economy as when the housing market recovered, skilled staff would have been lost and new, inexperienced staff would have to be recruited;
- The vast majority of staff lived in Stevenage, so it would be a real blow to the Community.

In reply, Councillor Taylor thanked everyone for their input and congratulated the organisers of the campaign for their continued hard work. She stated that it was vital to help keep the 300 jobs in Stevenage and to keep major employers in the Town. She added that the Motion and the comments of Stevenage Borough Council will be sent to Jack Straw personally and she hoped that they would be taken into account when the decision was taken.

The Motion was then put to the vote and it was **RESOLVED** that:

This Council regrets the proposal of the Ministry of Justice to close its land Registry office in Stevenage as part of an asset management programme. Stevenage Land Registry staff have consistently delivered a service that achieves high levels of productivity. Locating jobs and developing high skills levels in areas like Stevenage should be a key priority of any government office and we would strongly urge that this proposal is reconsidered before depriving the town of 300 civil service posts in the midst of a recession. This has been a devastating blow for the staff at the Land Registry and their families. A number of the staff have worked in the Registry for many years and they have shown their commitment and made their homes here.

9 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRS/PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

None.

**10 MATTER REFERRED FROM EXECUTIVE - GAMBLING ACT 2005 :
DRAFT STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES**

The Council considered a draft of the Council's Gambling Act 2005 (GA05) Statement of Principles - 2010 to 2013 (Appendix 1) which had been recommended for approval by the Executive at its meeting on 18 November 2009.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the draft GA05 Statement of principles, as appended to the report, be approved and adopted.

**11 MATTER REFERRED FROM EXECUTIVE - HOUSING STRATEGY
2009-12**

The Council considered a report and Appendix which set out the new Stevenage Borough Council Housing Strategy 2009-12 which had been recommended for adoption by the Executive at its meeting on 18 November 2009.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the Housing Strategy 2009-12, as shown at Appendix A of the report, be adopted;

12 AUDIT COMMITTEE DRAFT MINUTES - 22 SEPTEMBER 2009

Council considered the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Audit committee held on Tuesday 22 September 2009.

It was **RESOLVED** that the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on Tuesday 22 September 2009 be noted.