

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL**COUNCIL
MINUTES****Date: Wednesday 14 July 2010****Time: 7.00 p.m.****Place: Council Chamber**

Present: The Mayor (Councillor M Downing) , the Deputy Mayor (Councillor C Latif), Councillors S Batson MBE DL, P Bibby CC, H Burrell, M Cherney-Craw, D Clark, G Clark, R Clark, D Cullen, J Fraser CC, J Gardner, M Hearn, R Henry, J Hollywell, C Hurst, M Hurst CC, B Jackson, D Kissane, J Lloyd CC, Mrs J Lloyd, J Mead, M Notley, R Parker CC, J Pickersgill, R Raynor, L Strange, P Stuart, S Taylor CC, V Warwick and M Yarnold-Forrester.

In Attendance: Rachel Culley (Youth Council)
Becky Brown (Youth Council)
Martin Cooke (Youth Connexions)
Andy Manson (Youth Connexions)

Start/End Time: Start Time: 7.00pm
End Time: 9.55pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence had been received on behalf of Councillors L Chester, L Harrington, L Martin-Haugh, M Patston, G Snell, S Speller, B Underwood and A Webb and also on behalf of Nick Parry, Chief Executive. The Deputy Chief Executive took his place for the duration of the meeting.

Councillor C Hurst declared a Personal Interest in Item 8 as an employee of Barnwell School.

Councillor J Hollywell declared a Personal Interest in Item 8 as a parent of children at the John Henry Newman School.

Councillor R Henry declared a Personal Interest in Item 8 as a parent of children at the John Henry Newman School.

Councillor M Hurst declared a Personal Interest in Item 8 as a Governor of Barnwell School.

Councillor J Pickersgill declared a Personal Interest in Item 8 as a Governor of Barclay and Barnwell Schools.

2. MINUTES – ANNUAL COUNCIL – WEDNESDAY 26 MAY 2010

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of Annual Council held on Wednesday 26 May 2010 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor subject to the following amendments:

Item 13

The membership of the St Nicholas and Martins Wood Action Team should show Councillor 'R Raynor' – not J Raynor as quoted.

The membership of the Bedwell and Pin Green Action Team should show Councillor 'D Cullen' - not D Cullen CC as quoted.

The membership of the Broadwater Action Team should show Councillor 'S Batson MBE DL' – not S Batson MBE DL CC as quoted.

The membership of Old Town, Symonds Green and Woodfield Action Team should show Councillor 'M Downing' – not M Downing CC as quoted.

Item 14

The second paragraph, second sentence should read 'The previous representation for Manor Ward, ...' – not The previous representation for Manor Wood as quoted.

3. MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Mayor informed the Council that he had accepted as urgent a late Motion at item 8 concerning the recent Building Schools for the Future announcement, a copy of which had been circulated. He said that the announcement had a great impact on the schools in Stevenage and it needed urgent consideration. Therefore he had agreed that it should be considered at the meeting as it could not wait until the meeting in October. A copy of the motion had been circulated around the Chamber.

The Mayor further informed the Council that he had accepted as urgent a late Part II report that had been circulated for Councillors only. He reminded Council that for the Part II report it would be necessary to pass a Motion for the exclusion of public and press at the appropriate time.

The Mayor reported the sad news of the deaths of Penny Mortimer and former Councillor Will Sheaff and advised that he would take this opportunity to pay tribute to them.

Penny Mortimer had been a resident of the Old Town in Stevenage and had been an active fund raiser for charities. It was reported that she had personally raised

over £200,000 and had made an outstanding contribution to the town. The Mayor extended his condolences to her family.

Will Sheaff had also made a big contribution to life in Stevenage as a Borough Councillor, a County Councillor, a teacher and as a lay preacher at the Methodist Church. He had chaired the Local Advisory Committee and, together with his wife, had founded Drugline. He had retired to Cornwall where he continued as a lay preacher.

A Member remembered Will Sheaff as a formidable opponent who had always spoken up for the town.

The Council then stood in one minute's silence in remembrance of Penny Mortimer and Will Sheaff.

The Mayor spoke in praise of Celia Twomey who had recently retired. He said that she had become the first woman to achieve the post of Strategic Director and that she would be missed.

The Mayor reported that he had enjoyed Stevenage Day and that he was pleased that the Council had stepped in when the organising committee had had problems. He had been particularly pleased to see the Amnesty International stall at the event.

The Mayor concluded by informing Council that the Mayor's Cricket Challenge would take place on Sunday 19 September at Stevenage Cricket Club.

4. MAIN DEBATE – 'AM I BOTHERED'?

Councillor H Burrell introduced the main debate. He said that the Council had always been keen to support young people as it wanted them to stay in the Town as adult residents. He added that over £171,000 had been provided by the Council for youth activities since 2006 and that Anti Social Behaviour Orders issued to young people had fallen by 6.15% over the last year. A mini-moto club established in 2009 had resulted in a fall of 25% in 'improper use of a motor vehicle' offences and the establishment of a volunteer police cadet force had resulted in no repeat offences from those that had become involved.

Councillor Burrell then invited Rachel Culley and Becky Brown from the Youth Council to make their presentation.

Rachel and Becky spoke about the facilities that were provided in the Town for young people. Their concerns focused on the location of these facilities, transport arrangements and the public perception of groups of young people. It was believed that groups of young people either walking home or congregating in public parks were seen as a threat by older people. The presentation also highlighted 'After Dark', a live music initiative that had been started by the Youth Council and the on-line questionnaire which had led to a 'Bring Back Ice Skating to Stevenage' campaign.

Councillor Burrell thanked Rachel and Becky for their presentation and then invited Martin Cooke from Youth Connexions, Hertfordshire County Council, to make a second presentation.

Martin Cooke spoke about the role of the County Council, the resources available and the number of projects ongoing. An evaluation of the projects showed year on year improvements with 2010/11 forecast to exceed targets. However a survey in 2009 showed that 93% of young people rated the service they received from Youth Connexions as 'excellent' or 'good' compared with 94% the previous year, although return rates were up 100% on 2008. Issues for further discussion included transport within and around Stevenage, a topic that had been raised by the Youth Council in their presentation.

Councillor Burrell thanked Mr Cooke for his presentation

Councillor H Burrell then opened the debate by moving a motion which was seconded by Councillor J Hollywell. A full debate then ensued with input from the public gallery. The main points raised were as follows:

- Ideas to keep young people occupied during the summer would be welcomed by youth agencies.
- The closure of the Timebridge Youth Club had led to problems with young people in the area.
- The County would wish to support a skate park proposal.
- Young adults (aged 19+) should not be overlooked as changes to Government training initiatives could discriminate against this age group.
- The Digswell Arts Trust was looking to organise mural painting in public places, such as underpasses, to combat graffiti and other forms of vandalism.
- There was a lack of understanding of young people by those in higher age groups.
- Youth activities were required seven days a week
- It was unrealistic to focus all youth activities on the Bowes Lyon House due to accessibility issues
- A need to strengthen links between service providers was identified and it was suggested that a young persons' conference be held in the autumn to bring together the various agencies to create an overarching action plan to provide youth activities in the Town.
- The Council was advised that the high ropes project in Fairlands Park had been successful in its bid for funding from the Performance Reward Grant scheme, whilst the Youth Café proposal had been unsuccessful and alternative funding needed to be sought.
- Community transport facilities should incorporate the aspirations of youth.
- More young people were to be encouraged to get involved with the Youth Council and a film was being made, to premiere in November, to be shown in schools to promote its work.
- HCC should treat young people as adults and listen to their concerns.

Councillor Burrell thanked the contributors and observed that the comments reflected the need for a conference in the autumn as there were lots of activities going on that appeared to be uncoordinated. He concluded by saying that he would like to see the decision regarding Youth Café revisited as he had a desire to see the project implemented.

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

That this Council is bothered and wishes to place on record its support for the young people of Stevenage. It is for decision makers and service providers to listen closely to what our young people say and react accordingly. We would urge our colleagues at Hertfordshire County Council to take on board the views of this Council, the Youth Council and the 10,000 plus school age residents who are growing up in this Town and who will be directly affected by the County Council's future strategies.

5. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

None.

6. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

7. LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S UPDATE

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

Councillor Clark commented that the Council appeared to be late starting a programme of efficiency savings in comparison to the County Council who had implemented a major programme in November 2009. In reply the Leader said that the Council had saved more than £5.8 million in the past three years and had developed a reputation within the Local Government Community for dealing well with financial constraints. In addition the Council was actively seeking partnerships with other authorities to share back room services, such as the Revenues and Benefits project with East Hertfordshire District Council.

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

Councillor Taylor spoke about how the vision for the Town had been well established before then General Election but given the result of the election there would be a need for the development plans to be revisited.

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

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration, Councillor J Gardner, reported that work, funded by heritage lottery funds, had commenced on the Town

Centre Gardens on the 12 July, with a target completion date of April 2011. The first phase of the work, scheduled to be completed by November, would include desilting the pond, replacing the wooden bridge with one built from granite, replacing footpaths and introducing nesting places for wildlife.

Councillor Gardner then updated the meeting on correspondence recently received from Central Government concerning the revoking of the Regional Spatial Strategy. He said that there was a need to lobby to oppose this action as there was a need for the Town to grow and for people to be housed.

The Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport, Councillor R Raynor, reported that the rise in VAT from 17.5% to 20%, as announced in the recent budget, would fall hardest on those least able to afford it and ran counter to the Government's stated intention of intent to protect those most in need.

The Portfolio Holder for Community, Health and Older People, Councillor S Batson MBE DL, updated the meeting on the following:

- The launch of the Stevenage Senior Forum to consider issues of concern to older people in the Town.
- The Big Lunch would take place on Sunday 18 July with events in Shephallbury Park and Archer Road.
- Smoke Busters – SoStevenage had received a grant of £8,500 to facilitate the Smoke Free Homes project which encouraged people to stop smoking in their homes (and cars).
- Lister Hospital – concern was expressed over recently received communications from the Secretary of State for Health (SSH) which suggested that the previously agreed improvement programmes for the hospital would not be going ahead. Concerns were also expressed over the future of the A&E unit. Council was advised that a letter of support for the Trust had been sent to Andrew Lansley (SSH).

The Policy Holder for Resources, Councillor Mrs J Lloyd, expressed concerns at the proposed changes to the voting system which, it was alleged, would cost £80 million to implement and changes to the voting registration process which could adversely impact on the number of voters registered in the Town.

The Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities, Councillor R Henry, reported that crime figures for the first quarter had shown a reduction for all types of crime against the same period last year, examples being a reduction of 56% in reported burglaries, 16% in anti-social behaviour and 13% in criminal damage.

Councillor Henry expressed concern at the Government's decision to cut police funding which could have a serious effect on community policing. Police Community Support Officers in the Town were currently part funded by the Council and further cuts would threaten the level of support offered. It was the intention of the Council to take a positive role in any consultation process.

A Member added that as domestic violence was an issue in the town and as this could be linked to the shortage of affordable housing, a lobby was needed to ensure that the proposed building programme to the North and West of Stevenage proceeded.

The Leader said that a proposal to redress shortfalls in police funding had been considered and negotiations were taking place on the merger of the Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire Constabularies.

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People, Culture, Sport and Leisure, Councillor H Burrell, advised Council that although the Government had withdrawn funding for free swimming, the Council had agreed to fund the initiative until the end of August.

The Leader concluded by saying that whatever cuts were proposed by the Government, Stevenage Borough Council would continue to work hard for, and represent, the people of Stevenage.

8. NOTICE OF MOTIONS

The Mayor referred Council to the Motion he had accepted as urgent regarding Building Schools for the Future (BSF), details of which had been circulated around the chamber.

Councillor Taylor moved the Motion by stating that the Council was very concerned about the reported cancellation of BSF. The Leader maintained that the project in Stevenage was well advanced and cancellation would result in much wasted effort and money. Additionally businesses in Stevenage had identified improved skills in young people as being essential to the future success of the Town. This would be achieved through better schools, and the project to deliver this objective was now in serious jeopardy with the apparent cancellation of BSF.

The Leader then called on Councillor J Gardner to second the motion

Councillor Gardner said that Stevenage needed the linked improvement projects of increased housing provision, BSF and Town Centre regeneration. BSF had links to North Herts College and the Barclay site was to have been used for a skills centre. There was a need to consider the future and redress the problems that had arisen with the capacity and location of the current secondary schools

A full debate ensued and the Motion was then put to the vote.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That this Council notes -

With disappointment and dismay, the removal of the funding for the Building Schools for the Future project for Barclay, Barnwell, John Henry Newman,

Thomas Alleyne and Greenside schools and the reviews of Marriotts, Lonsdale and Nobel.

With regret that the opportunity this presented in terms of transformational change to the aspirations and attainment of our young people in Stevenage and elsewhere has not been recognised by the Conservative/Liberal Democrat government.

That this decision appears to have been taken with no regard to the local circumstances, the current progress of projects and with no local consultation.

With regret that the huge contribution to the project which has already been made by students, head teachers, staff, parents and governors went unrecognised during the chaotic process of the cancellation of the programme.

With regret that the huge amounts of money which have been spent on developing the Building Schools for the Future programme for Stevenage have been wasted.

With regret the significant loss of construction industry employment opportunities and the related economic benefit to the local economy due to the cancellation of this programme.

That this opportunity to close the achievement gap between young people in Stevenage and those elsewhere in the County has been cast aside.

2. That a letter be sent immediately to the Secretary of State for Education raising our concerns about the impact of the abandonment of the Building Schools for the Future on the established need for raising educational attainment and aspiration in Stevenage.
3. That our Member of Parliament be called upon to act as some other Coalition MPs have already stated they will on behalf of their constituencies, and oppose the cancellation of BSF.
4. That the Council take part in lobbying action to persuade the Secretary of State to change his mind and reinstate the BSF programme.

9. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRS/PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

None.

10. ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE SCRUTINY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE COMPLETED TOPIC GROUPS REVIEWS & SCRUTINY ACTIVITY DURING 2009/10 MUNICIPAL YEAR

Council considered a report on the work undertaken by the Scrutiny and Overview Committee and the Scrutiny Topic Groups during the 2009/10 Municipal Year.

The Chair of the Committee advised that a comprehensive work programme had been carried out and that thanks should be recorded to the Scrutiny Officer, Stephen Weaver, for his hard work and input.

Council was further advised that a comprehensive programme had been developed for 2010/11.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED:**

1. That the work undertaken by the Scrutiny Overview Committee through its Scrutiny Topic Groups during 2009/10 be noted.
2. That the additional responsibilities given to Scrutiny Overview Committee regarding the Petitions Scheme be noted.

11. AUDIT COMMITTEE – DRAFT MINUTES 14 JUNE 2010

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Audit Committee held on 14 June 2010 be noted.

12. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That, under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1-7 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the said Act as amended by SI 2006 no. 88.
2. That, having considered the reasons for the following report being in Part II, it be agreed that maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

PART II

13. SENIOR OFFICER APPOINTMENTS

The Council considered a Part II officer report seeking approval to the composition and structure of the Senior Management Board following the retirement of Celia Twomey.

The Leader advised Council that no objections to the appointment of Marcel Coiffait had been made by members of the Executive.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED:**

1. That Marcel Coiffait be appointed as interim Strategic Director from 1 August 2010 until 31 March 2011.
2. That Marcel Coiffait be appointed the Council's representative for its Membership of Stevenage Homes Limited ('SHL') with immediate effect and until 31 March 2011.
3. That Scott Crudgington be appointed sole interim Deputy Chief Executive.
4. That the Scheme of Delegation to Officers be amended in accordance with Appendix A of the report to clarify the role of the Deputy Chief Executive

Mayor