

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL MINUTES

Date: Wednesday 20 July 2011

Time: 7.00 pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: The Mayor (Cllr C Latif) and Councillors
S Batson MBE DL, P Bibby CC, H Burrell,
M Cherney-Craw, L Chester, B Clark, D Clark, G Clark,
D Cullen, J Fraser CC, J Gardner, L Harrington,
M Hearn, R Henry, J Hollywell, C Hurst,
L Martin- Haugh, M Hurst CC, PD Kissane,
Mrs J Lloyd, J Lloyd CC, J Mead, M Notley,
R Parker CC, J Pickersgill, R Raynor, G Snell,
P Stuart, S Taylor CC, H Tessier, J Thomas,
B Underwood, S Walker, V Warwick, A Webb and
M Yarnold-Forrester.

Start/End Time: Start Time: 7.00 p.m.
End Time: 9.00 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S Speller and L Strange.

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES – WEDNESDAY 23 FEBRUARY 2011

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Annual Council held on Wednesday 25 May 2011 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor subject to an amendment of a typographical error. Item 7.1, the membership of the Audit Committee should read '4 Labour Group Members, 2 Conservative Group and 1 non-elected independent.'

3. MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Mayor informed the Council that she had agreed to vary the order of business as the question submitted by Mrs Griffiths, shown at item 7 on the agenda, related to the topic of the Main Debate. It would therefore be dealt with towards the end of the Main Debate at item 4.

Thanks were extended to Darren Nicholson who had stood down from his role as Macebearer after 16 years.

Congratulations were offered to TRACKS, which runs a nursery for children who are autistic, who had received an outstanding Ofsted report.

The Mayor displayed to Council a Lawn Tennis Beacon status award that had been achieved by Stevenage Tennis Club for their tennis programme at Shephalbury Park Tennis Courts which was run in partnership with Stevenage Borough Council.

The Mayor also drew attention to the display in the foyer setting the scene for the Main Debate and thanked the children from the Leapfrog Day Nursery, the Play Schemes at S Nicholas, Bandle Hill and Pin Green and the Children's Centres for their work in its production.

4. MAIN DEBATE – “PLEASE KEEP ME SAFE” – SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN IN STEVENAGE

Maria Barnett from the Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (HSCB) gave a presentation covering the following points:

- Safeguarding children is everyone's business
- Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 places a responsibility on district councils to ensure that, in discharging their functions, they have regard to the need to safeguard
- The composition, purpose and activities of the HSCB
- A review of serious cases in Hertfordshire
- The role of the Borough Council in Safeguarding Children
- What the Borough Council should be able to demonstrate at a policy level to support Safeguarding Children
- Section 11 Audit findings and the work carried out by SBC to ensure compliance.
- The Munro Review of child protection practice in England.

In moving the Motion Councillor Burrell thanked Ms Barnett for her presentation and added that preventing child abuse was included in the definition of Safeguarding. According to the NSPCC approximately 1 in 5 children could experience maltreatment. That meant in Stevenage alone up to 4,000 children could be at risk. As a result of the HSCB audit the Council had produced a report and associated action plan, with dedicated resource to ensure implementation. Thanks were extended to the Children's Services and Safeguarding Manager, Alex Hepton, for the 'Please Keep Me Safe' Policy which formed the basis for the Council's actions and to Children's Services Manager Graeme Buck.

The motion was seconded by Councillor Pickersgill, who said the children have a contribution to make and should be listened to. Everybody was duty bound to ensure that every child had the chance to grow up to become a responsible citizen.

A full debate then ensued with input from the public gallery. The main points raised were as follows:

- Concerns were expressed over the CRB check regime.
- SBC should work with the appropriate authorities to get the CRB process streamlined
- There are perceptions that CRB checks are only proof that somebody had not been caught
- The work of the NSPCC is vital
- It can be difficult to be a good parent, especially in the face of adversity brought about by inadequate housing, reduced benefits or job insecurity.
- Poor schooling, typified by issues with the Building Schools for the Future programme and NHS cutbacks could be contributory factors
- Need to tackle the underlying issues such as overcrowding, meeting the decent homes standard and unemployment.
- Schemes involving the long term unemployed must make people feel that there are part of society and able to meet the norms of social behaviour
- There could be a need for parents from other cultures to be educated as to what is acceptable in our society.
- Parents are responsible for their children up to the age of 18.
- SBC was thanked for the activities it organised through school holiday play schemes.

During the debate the question raised by Mrs Griffiths, as detailed at item 7 on the agenda, was considered. A summary of the Portfolio Holder's reply is outlined at item 7 to these minutes.

In summing up Councillor Burrell thanked the contributors to the debate and added that the implementation of the action plan would be crucial. He again expressed thanks to the lead officers of the report.

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

That this Council believes that all children are unique and have natural capabilities and competencies to adapt to the world we live in. We support children's rights as defined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989; these rights must be realised for children to develop their full potential, free from hunger and want, neglect and abuse.

Child abuse is never acceptable in any circumstance; every child has the right to be safe. Working in partnership with community and Safeguarding authorities, this Council aims to make sure that children using its services are protected from abuse.

We will ensure that children are consulted and listened to on issues that affect them in the future and will continue to value their contributions to our community.

5. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

None received.

6. QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL

None received.

7. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

This item was taken with item 4.

In reply to Mrs Griffith's question the Portfolio Holder raised the following points:

- Other factors can be significant, such as extended family adults, adult family friends or school peers.
- Even where there are strong ties between parents and the child children may be unable to tell their parents that something is wrong.
- Different cultures have divergent ideas about what might be good parenting.
- A child is not just a child in the family but also a child in the community.

8. 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 asked that as there were to be no Neighbourhood Forum meetings would there be officer support for the Resident's Meetings and what would be the timescale for the implementation of individual councillor Local Community Budgets.

In reply Council was advised that locality budgets and guidelines for their use should be available within two weeks. Officer support would be available for Resident's Meetings, but it would not be at the same level as had been provided for the Neighbourhood Forums. Specialised officer support could be arranged if required, but it was expected that residents would run their own meetings. The Council would publicise dates of meetings in the Chronicle providing that publishing deadlines were met.

The Leader then invited the Portfolio Holders to speak on her behalf.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration advised Council of the following:

- The low carbon housing scheme at Peartree Way and Cotney Croft had achieved a Green Apple silver award. The award was presented to the Mayor.

- The Town Centre Gardens had been successfully reopened following refurbishment.
- The Wild Stevenage project (aka Urban Meadows) was underway to encourage a wildlife habitat in the wider grass verges. Council was advised that Six Hills Common was a good example of the scheme. It was confirmed that the areas of verges closest to the road would continue to be cut.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing advised Council of the following:

- The low carbon housing scheme at Cotney Croft and Peartree Way had also been shortlisted in two categories in the Sustainable Housing Awards 2011:
 - Sustainable Smaller Housing Project of the Year, and
 - Low Energy Social Housing Project of the Year.
- A letter had been received from Grant Shapps MP reminding the Council of its statutory homelessness duty to help former armed services personnel. Council was advised that the service offered by SBC more than met the minimum requirements of this duty.

The Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport advised Council of the following:

- The Young Persons Enterprise Charter had been signed on 25 May at County Hall. The Charter was designed to help equip young people with the necessary skills to enter the workplace and would be presented at Westminster in November.
- The Inward Investment initiative had been launched at the Business Technology Centre on 19 July detailing incentives for new businesses to locate in Stevenage via a website portal. The tagline for the initiative is “Stevenage – where imagination takes hold.” Members were encouraged to visit the website (www.investinstevenage.co.uk)

The Portfolio Holder Community, Health and Older People advised Council of the existence the Network for Health General Interest Groups which had been set up to feed into the Health Watch Local Involvement Network (LINK) to comment on proposed changes to the NHS. A General Interest Group (GIG) had not yet been established by LINK in Stevenage. A meeting of interested parties (including partners and residents) was held on 19 July to establish whether such a group was viable.

9. NOTICE OF MOTIONS

None received.

10. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRS / PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

None received.

11. MATTER REFERRED FROM THE AUDIT COMMITTEE – ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2010/2011

The Council had before it a copy of the officer report which had been considered by the Audit Committee on 15 June 2011 that outlined the Council's Annual Governance Statement 2010/2011.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the Annual Governance Statement 2010/2011 be approved.

12. MATTER REFERRED FROM EXECUTIVE – STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL: MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The Council had before it a copy of the officer report which had been considered by the Executive on 11 July 2011 that detailed the Council's draft Annual Report 2011.

Details of the decision of the Executive regarding this item had been circulated around the chamber.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the content of the Council's Annual Report 2011, performance measure targets for 2011/12, and arrangements for publication be agreed.

13. SCRUTINY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE 2010/2011 ANNUAL REPORT – COMPLETED SCRUTINY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE TOPIC GROUP REVIEWS AND SCRUTINY ACTIVITY DURING 2010/2011 MUNICIPAL YEAR

Council considered a report on the work undertaken by the Scrutiny and Overview Committee and the Scrutiny Topic Groups during the 2010/2011 Municipal Year.

The outgoing Chairman of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee for 2010/2011 thanked The Strategic Director (Resources), Scott Crudgington, for his support during the year and the Scrutiny Officer, Stephen Weaver, for his exemplary work in moving the scrutiny process forward.

The Leader took the opportunity to thank Councillor David Cullen for his service as Chair of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee for the previous 5 years.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the work undertaken by the Scrutiny Overview Committee and its Scrutiny Topic Groups during 2010/2011 be noted.

14. OFFICER REPORT – CONTRACT STANDING ORDERS – PROPOSED REVISIONS

Council considered a report that set out proposed revisions to the Council's Contract Standing Orders.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the revised Contract Standing Orders be approved.

15. AUDIT COMMITTEE – MINUTES 17 FEBRUARY, 7 MARCH 2011 AND DRAFT MINUTES 15 JUNE 2011

The Council had before it the Minutes from the Audit Committees held on 17 February 2011 and 7 March 2011, together with the draft Minutes from the meeting of 15 June 2011.

The Leader of the Minority Opposition Group requested further clarification from the minutes of the June meeting regarding the External Auditor's fee and actions that the Council could take to reduce its risk rating and the Strategic Director (Resources) undertook to provide the information required.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Audit Committees held on 17 February, 7 March and 15 June 2011 be noted.

Mayor