

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Agenda Item No.

COUNCIL MINUTES

2

Date: Wednesday 12 October 2011

Time: 7.00 pm

Place: Council Chamber

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

Start/End Time: Start Time: 7.00 p.m.
End Time: 9.10 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L Chester, L Harrington, M Hearn, G Snell, S Speller, L Strange and J Thomas

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES – WEDNESDAY 20 JULY 2011

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on Wednesday 20 July 2011 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

3. MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Mayor informed the Council that she had agreed to vary the order of business as the question submitted by Mr Howard, shown at item 7 on the agenda, related to the topic of the Main Debate at item 4 it would be considered during that debate.

The Mayor also informed the meeting that she had agreed to accept item 12, circulated on the Supplementary Agenda as an urgent item.

The Mayor congratulated the Chief Executive's team for winning the cricket match against the Mayor's team and presented the Michael Downing Cup to the Chief Executive. She also expressed her thanks to the

Stevenage Cricket Club, Councillor H Burrell and Officers for organising a successful event.

The Mayor informed the meeting that one of recent highlights of the last month was the Macmillan Coffee Day which had been so well supported across the Town. In addition to attending six AGM's and visiting Wembley Stadium she had also visited several schools in the Town, including Marriotts where she had taken her first teaching job in Stevenage.

Another favourite event had been organised by the Royal British Legion in the Town Square as it was particularly memorable having had her photograph taken astride a large motorbike.

4. MAIN DEBATE – “ON THE BEAT ” – CHALLENGES FACING POLICING IN STEVENAGE

Chief Inspector Richard Liversidge of Hertfordshire Constabulary gave a presentation starting with a short film. He spoke about the recent rioting seen in many parts of the country, the downward trend of all types of crime in the County, the future challenges facing the Police and the activities of SoSafe.

CI Liversidge informed the meeting that due to effective policing and improved communication between the different forces, there were no incidents of rioting and looting within the County, but a number of Police Officers from Hertfordshire had to be deployed supporting colleagues in London.

He also welcomed the lower levels of crime across the County and attributed this trend to the additional police resources allocated to tackling incidents and the deterrent of custodial sentences. Also, the work of the SoSafe Partnership was instrumental in reducing a range of criminal activity.

As regards the present challenges facing the Police, CI Liversidge acknowledged that in light of the present economic climate and political changes, a 2010/15 change programme had been initiated by Constabulary to review its services and activities.

He concluded his presentation by praising the valuable work of SoSafe and commended to Council the Action Plan that had been produced to implement projects within the community.

A Motion was moved and seconded.

An amendment to the Motion deleting the last 3 paragraphs of the Motion i.e. that section opposed the introduction of directly elected Police and Crime Commissioners, was then moved and seconded.

On being put to vote the amendment was defeated.

A full debate then ensued with input from the Youth Council and the public gallery.

The main points raised in favour of the motion were as follows:

- The costs of directly elected Police and Crime Commissioners would lead to cuts in direct policing
- The introduction of directly elected Police and Crime Commissioners would result in political interference in policing priorities and the day to day running of services
- Those elected were unlikely to have the necessary experience in running a policing service
- Identification of local needs and priorities in policing could be lost
- The opportunity for working in partnership at a local level, an approach that has proved successful, would diminish
- Those individuals who held the position would always have an eye to next election
- A great deal of power would be in the hands of one individual
- Changes should be made to the way individuals were appointed to the Police Authority but directly elected Police and Crime Commissioners were not the answer.

The main points raised contrary to the motion were as follows:

- A national survey identified that 60-70% of the public did not know how to hold the Police accountable.
- 68% of the public agreed that there should be a person elected by the local community to hold police accountable
- That directly elected commissioners would be a good way of democratising the police service
- Although the issue of governance of policing was by nature political in practice, day to day policing operations would remain non political.
- Elected commissioners would make Police Chiefs truly accountable, public would welcome these changes and the changes would be noticeable.
- The costs quoted for the introduction of directly elected Police and Crime Commissioners were inflated

Other points raised during the debate included :

- The increase in partnership working at local level with organisations such as Dog Watch had proved very effective in reducing crime and the fear of crime and detecting criminals
- What could Councillors do to help the police?
- A fear that specialist teams and initiatives such as the Domestic Violence Unit and Safeguarding Adults From Abuse (SAFA) would face cuts due to the savings being made

- Congratulations to the Police for their response to the potential civil unrest in August
- The successful use of social media by the police as a means of communication
- Delay in responses to e-mails and telephone calls to the police
- It was hoped that any cuts made in policing would be taken from bureaucracy not front line policing
- The effects to police morale of the cuts and changes
- Crime prevention is aided greatly by the local Police Community Support Officers
- The SoSafe Community Plan 2011-2014 would be going to Executive on 18 October 2011

During the debate the Mayor asked the Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities, Councillor R Henry, to respond to the question submitted by Mr Howard, as detailed at item 7 on the agenda (Mr. Howard was not present at the meeting).

Councillor Henry stated that he understood that the County Council had scheduled the part night lighting scheme to be introduced in Stevenage in June 2012. There were many concerns for personal safety and local Councillors would be gathering views from people in Stevenage to respond to the consultation being undertaken by HCC.

The meeting was informed that a Motion would be brought to the December meeting of the Council for debate. Councillors, the Youth Council and the public gallery then gave their views on the HCC proposals. Comments made included:

- Perhaps only every other light should be turned off
- Crime was not the only issue, personal accidents were likely to increase
- Individuals would feel very vulnerable without street lighting
- Whilst the proposal might be reasonable for rural areas it was not acceptable for urban areas
- Individuals fear of crime would increase
- The lack of lighting might limit social activities for all age groups
- In areas where this initiative had been piloted there had been an increase in car crime
- Many peoples' jobs require that they come and go throughout the night
- Cyclists would be less safe

At the end of the Main Debate the Mayor gave CI Liversidge the opportunity to respond to issues raised. He responded that he hoped Councillors could assist the police with a two-way flow information; concerning delays in responding to e-mails and telephone calls, the Constabulary's policy was to respond within 24 hours but they had been suffering from technical problems of late; SAFA, child protection and Domestic Violence work were viewed as front line services and he was not

aware of any reductions in these services as they were highly valued; whilst there had been no recruitment for two years there had recently been 3 intakes of police officers funded by the back office efficiencies; and concerning the part night lighting scheme, improvements to lighting was a recognised crime prevention technique but the impact of the reduction was unknown and although he was aware of the car crime issues in the pilot areas it was not known whether this would be reflected across the County.

The Mayor thanked Cl Liversidge and all the contributors to the Debate.

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

‘That this Council has confidence in Hertfordshire Constabulary for keeping our town safe in these challenging times. Crime in Stevenage has fallen in the last three years by 29%. SoSafe, the Stevenage Community Safety Partnership plays a significant part in making an even safer Stevenage for all those who live, shop, work in and visit the town. In particular, we commend Hertfordshire Constabulary for their successful efforts in keeping the peace in Stevenage during the period of national unrest surrounding the riots in August this year. It is through their dedication, vigilance, visibility and community engagement that any potential riot incidents were avoided.

We will ensure that we continue to work in close partnership with the Constabulary to tackle crime and antisocial behaviour in the community. We commit through our new SoSafe Community Safety Plan 2011-2014 to achieving our vision for empowered, involved and supported communities that are safer, feel safer, and work with local agencies to improve community safety in their neighbourhoods.

We view with concern the Home Secretary’s plans for introduction in this country of 41 directly-elected Police and Crime Commissioners, at a reported annual salary of £122,000 each; at an elections cost of £50 million every 4 years ; with annual running costs of salaries and administration of £80 million per year, in addition to £5 million for pay and benefits of Commissioners. This at a time when Government is to cut its spending on policing by 20% or more over the next four years, inevitably leading to huge cuts in officer numbers, seriously threatening front-line policing and the fight against crime. We believe there is also a significant danger that the introduction of Police Commissioners could confuse real policing priorities with political priorities.

We fail to see how the Home Secretary believes these expensive and complex proposals ‘ will replace bureaucratic accountability with democratic accountability ‘, when one Police and Crime Commissioner is elected and responsible to over 1 million people in the whole of Hertfordshire.

We therefore continue to oppose these confusing, conflicting and costly proposals – and urge our local MP to have urgent discussions with the Home Secretary to ask her to reconsider whether the introduction of Police

Commissioners is in the best interest of policing and the best interest of our communities.'

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.

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 if the Council would be reintroducing the weekly refuse collection in light of the additional funding recently announced by the Secretary of State. In reply the Leader of the Council informed the meeting that this would not be the case. The increase in recycling under the new arrangements had resulted in a 42% recycling rate and it was considered that any such additional funding coming forward should be used to promote other forms of recycling.

The Leader of the Council announced that Stevenage Borough Council had been awarded the Gov Metric Council of the Year Award which was in recognition of its consistently high levels of customer satisfaction delivered face to face in the Customer Service Centre, on the telephone and via the Council website. The Leader then invited the Portfolio Holders to speak on her behalf and the following items were raised :

- An update on the introduction of Local Community Budgets and the launch of the new leaflet
- The reduction in staff sickness levels
- The Government's removal of the concessionary discount scheme for coach travel
- Meetings with local employers and businesses
- Judicial Review on 1 November of the Planning Inspectors' finding that the draft Core Strategy is 'unsound'
- The Wind Band Concert to be held on 22 October featuring 40 young musicians from Ingelheim

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
TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW 2010/2011**

The Council had before it a copy of the officer report which had been considered by the Audit Committee on 6 September 2011 that reviewed the treasury management activities including the 2010/2011 prudential and treasury indicators.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the 2010/11 Treasury Management Review be agreed

**12. OFFICER REPORT – REVIEW OF POLLING STATIONS AND POLLING
DISTRICTS**

The Council had before it a copy of the officer report concerning the recent review of Polling Districts and Polling Places in the Borough.

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

1. That a new Polling Districts and Polling Places Schedule be made, to come into operation on 1 December 2011 the new Schedule based on the existing Order with the following revisions -

2. Chells Ward

That the Polling Districts CHA and CHB be divided into three new Districts, CHA, CHB and CHC (see Appendix C for street index).

3. Martins Wood

3.1. That Polling Districts CEA and CED be amalgamated to become known as CEA (see Appendix D for street index).

3.2. That Polling Districts CEB and CEC be amalgamated to become known as CEB (see Appendix E for street index).

4. St Nicholas

That Polling District CDA be divided into three new Districts, CDA, CDB and CDC (see Appendix F for street index).

5. Woodfield

5.1. That Polling Districts CCA and CCB be amalgamated to become known as CCA (see Appendix G for street index).

- 5.2. That Polling Districts CCC and CCD be amalgamated to become known as CCB (see Appendix H for street index)
- 5.3. That the 'Polling Place' for each identified Polling District be the Polling District itself and the Polling Districts adjoining, hence allowing, where necessary, polling stations to be located cross- border.
- 5.4. That the Polling Stations, as detailed in Appendix I, identified by the Returning Officer for each for the Polling Districts, be noted.

13. STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS – DRAFT MINUTES – 19 SEPTEMBER 2011

The Council had before it the draft Minutes from the Statement of Accounts Committee held on 19 September 2011.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Statement of Accounts be agreed subject to the inclusion of apologies received from Councillors D Clark and G Clark.

14. AUDIT COMMITTEE – DRAFT MINUTES – 6 SEPTEMBER AND 19 SEPTEMBER 2011

The Council had before it the draft Minutes from the Audit Committee meetings held on 6 September and 19 September 2011.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Audit Committees held on 6 September and 19 September 2011 be noted.

Mayor