

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL MINUTES

Agenda Item

Date: Wednesday 7 December 2011

Time: 7.00 pm

Place: Council Chamber

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

Also Present: Ali Pritchard and Ashleigh Wilson (Youth Council)
Paul Hewson, (RAF Benevolent Fund)
Lt Col David Dawber, (Army)

Start/End Time: Start Time: 7.00 p.m.
End Time: 9.25 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R Clark, L Harrington, M Hearn, R Henry, M Hurst CC and L Strange and the Chief Executive, N Parry.

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES – WEDNESDAY 12 OCTOBER 2011

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of Council held on Wednesday 12 October 2011 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

3. MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Mayor informed Council that since the October meeting she had attended approximately 65 events and had enjoyed them all.

The Mayor said that she had welcomed a group of men to the Council officers who were some of the original builders of the town and had been given a picture which contained photographs from the time when Stevenage really was a New Town. The Mayor then presented the picture

to the Deputy Mayor, Councillor John Lloyd CC, to accept on behalf of the Council.

The Mayor also spoke of the large crowds that had attended both the annual firework display and the switching on of the Christmas lights.

The Mayor informed Council that a Green Flag had been awarded to both the Town Centre Gardens and Fairlands Valley Park.

The Mayor concluded by wishing those present a Merry Christmas and a peaceful New Year.

4. MAIN DEBATE – “SUPPORTING OUR ARMED FORCES” – THE HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COVENANT

Council had before it an Officer report which recommended that the Hertfordshire Community Covenant with the Armed Forces be signed by Stevenage Borough Council.

Council then received two presentations.

Paul Hewson from the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund gave a presentation on the work of the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund which covered the following points:

- RAF Benevolent Fund formed in 1919
- Objectives:
 - ‘The relief and assistance by all available means of those who are in need by reason of poverty, disability, sickness, infirmity or otherwise.’
 - ‘Enhancing the morale and wellbeing of serving members of the RAF.’
- Provides ‘A spectrum of care’ from cradle to grave, including:
 - Childcare
 - Youth Activities
 - Family support
 - Retirement
- Supports other charities that provide specialist support which the Fund cannot, such as Combat Stress, Relate and the Citizens Advice Bureau
- Estimated 2 million members of the RAF ‘family.’
- Help was needed to identify those in most need of assistance as veterans were often too proud to come forward for help.

Lt Col David Dawber from the Army gave a presentation on the Community Covenant which covered the following points.

- Covenants were tri-service
- Total number of service veterans in Hertfordshire unknown.

- The Armed Forces Covenant was published in May 2011 and received Royal Assent in November.
- The Community Covenant had four aims which covered support, understanding, recognition and integration of the Armed Forces Community within the wider community.
- There is a £30m grant fund to 2014/2015
- Grants can cover a wide possibility of uses that meet the given criteria
- Successful projects include:
 - A replacement Scout and Guide HQ
 - Activity days at Armed Forces bases
 - 'Go Ape' children's assault courses
 - English language training for Gurkas
- Lines of development in Hertfordshire included:
 - Housing , schooling and family support
 - Access to health services, leisure facilities and public transport
- Three challenges:
 - Redundancy – 20,000 personnel to leave the services
 - Growth of reserves – Territorial force to expand by 30k
 - Rebasing – 20,000 service personnel to return to the UK from Germany.

In moving the recommendation in the report Councillor John Lloyd CC thanked Mr Hewson and Lt Col Dawber for their presentations and added that whilst the Government was keen to see the Covenants set up it must be remembered that it was not a 'one size fits all' solution and would require some care to ensure that local circumstances were taken into account. It was also reiterated that the Community Covenant would be with the people of Hertfordshire, not Hertfordshire County Council.

Council was advised that the Community Covenant would be signed at County Hall on the 13 December. It had already been provisionally agreed that a bid for monies from the Grant Fund would be made by the County for a 'Welcome to Hertfordshire Pack' and to set up a Help for Herts Heroes website.

In seconding the motion Councillor Ann Webb said that Stevenage was proud of the Armed Forces and that housing policies had made special provision for returning service personnel long before the Council had been mandated to do so.

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

- Stevenage Borough Council had a good working relationship with the Royal British Legion (RBL).
- Executive Members were encouraged to identify possible initiatives within their Portfolio areas that could meet the aims and objectives of the Community Covenant.

- Work was needed to identify ex services personnel residing in the Town.
- It was confirmed that an application for Council housing from a member of the Armed Forces who was due to leave the service would be backdated to the date of entry to the Forces.
- Often cases of hardship went unreported. It was necessary for the varying agencies to share information to prevent this from happening.
- It was essential that local doctors played their part in identifying any potential issues with ex service personnel

The Motion was then put to the vote and it was **RESOLVED** that Stevenage Borough Council signs the Hertfordshire Community Covenant with the Armed Forces.

5. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

None received.

6. QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL

None received.

7. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None received.

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.

The Leader of the Opposition asked that given the High Court's recent decision that meant that the proposed development west of Stevenage would not be delivered, how much Civic money had been spent on this project and the related legal challenges.

In reply the Leader advised that a detailed response was not available for the meeting but would be circulated. She indicated that the delays to the development were largely the result of objections raised by neighbouring authorities.

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

The Portfolio Holder for Community Health and Older People advised Council of the following:

- The development of a Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy which was currently out for consultation and would be presented for endorsement by the Executive in January 2012.

- The Stevenage Community Network had been launched on 26 November.

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People, Culture, Sport and Leisure advised Council of the following:

- Construction work to the High Ropes course in Fairlands Valley Park was due to commence in week commencing 19 December, with a scheduled opening date of 21 March 2012. Members were invited to volunteer to test the course to enable the training of Stevenage Leisure Limited staff that would run the facility.
- Stevenage had accepted the offer of lighting a beacon in celebration of the Diamond Jubilee of the Queen. The beacon would be located in Fairlands Valley and would be lit between the hours of 10 p.m. and 10:30 p.m. on the night of 4th June 2012.

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

- On 2nd December the draft Core Strategy for Stevenage was ruled to be 'unsound' in the High Court.
- The Stevenage Town Centre Gardens were the winners of the Landscape Institute Awards Conservation and Heritage category in 2011.
- The Council had submitted bids to the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise (LEP) for £14.4m to enable three infrastructure projects to get started in the borough. The LEP Board was due to meet on 13 December to consider the bids.

The Portfolio Holder Resources for advised Council of the following:

- As a result of an increasing number of empty stall in the indoor market the Council had decided to take action and a number of initiatives had been developed to encourage existing traders to take on new stalls and for new traders to take on stalls on a temporary or permanent basis.
- The Council had received a gold award from the National Land and Property Gazetteer (NLPG) in recognition of the quality and consistency of the information the Council provided to the NLPG. The award was one of only five awarded in the East of England.

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

- The Council was actively supporting initiatives, such as the jobs and skills fair, the North Herts students brand campaign and the Prince's Trust, to support young unemployed people.
- The Stevenage Business Directory, providing the latest business information for local businesses, was now available on CD ROM and online. Officers were thanked for producing the guide.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing advised Council of the following:

- In week commencing 28 November the Government had released the provisional allocations for the New Homes Bonus for 2012/2013. In reply to a question Council was advised that this bonus should amount to approximately £500,000 and although no decisions had yet been taken it was expected that it would be reinvested in housing projects.
- The housing service, through Stevenage Homes, had achieved a Customer Service Excellence accreditation.
- The Cotney Croft and Peartree Way projects had won the 'Outstanding commitment to adapting to climate change' category at the Hertfordshire Building Futures Awards.

9. NOTICE OF MOTIONS

The Mayor referred Council to the Motion within the order of business. She informed the meeting that in the absence of Councillors R Henry and L Harrington the Motion would be moved and seconded by Councillors J Gardner and S Taylor CC respectively.

Councillor John Gardner moved the motion and commented that the introduction of the part night lighting scheme was contrary to the views of Local Community Safety Partnerships that encouraged the use of measures such as CCTV and lighting to drive down levels of crime, and fear of crime. He added that street lighting was good value in cost benefit terms and that consultation should be carried out and other cost reduction measures considered.

The Mayor then called on the Leader, Councillor Sharon Taylor CC, to second the Motion

Councillor Taylor CC formally seconded the Motion and reserved the right to speak later in the debate.

A full debate ensued and the following points were raised.

- There would be a perception problem, as residents would blame the decision on the Borough Council and not the County Council.
- HCC had had a full debate on the issue prior to taking the decision.
- The Borough Council should work in partnership with the County to ensure the implementation was carried out safely.
- The County Council had undertaken full liaison with relevant authorities, including the Police, and areas such as known accident hotspots, town centres and travel hubs would remain lit
- Other areas that had already moved to part-night lighting had reported no noticeable changes in crime or traffic accident rates
- Turning off lights would realise 4% of the County's target for Carbon emissions reductions

- Stevenage is a 24 hour town and there is a buoyant night time economy in the Old Town which is dependant, in part, on people feeling safe during the hours of darkness.
- To introduce a health and safety hazard is unwise and the potential cost to the HNS is high.
- People walk late at night after public transport stops running and to do so in darkness would increase the risk to these people.
- The policy takes no account of the many shift workers who live and work in the Town.
- What price safety?
- Many requests for funding through the area committees had been for improved lighting, showing what an important topic it was for the people of the town.
- Could there be a compromise arrangement with lighting retained at the weekends, or every other lamp extinguished, or use of solar powered lights or low power LEDs?
- The Council's policy of improving safety in garage compounds by improving lighting would be compromised.
- Had an equality impact assessment been carried out by the County Council? It was commented that such an assessment had not been seen by SBC.
- The County Council do not have popular support for this policy
- It will create problems in residential areas where criminals will move into darker areas.

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

'That this Council opposes the introduction of the County Council's 'Part-Night lighting Scheme in Stevenage. It is planned that our street lights will be switched off in April / May next year between midnight and 6 a.m. Our residents told us at our last full Council meeting that they feel frightened and unsafe in dark areas and we believe that the decision to go ahead with this project without considering the impact on crime and fear of crime levels is unjustified. The project is damaging to tax-payers confidence in public services. We do not believe the public have been properly consulted in the way that they deserve.'

10. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRS / PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

None received.

11. OFFICER REPORT – TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT AND ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY –MID-YEAR REVIEW REPORT 2011/2012

Council had before it a report that had previously been considered by the Audit Committee on 29 November 2011 which:

1. Reviewed the operation of the 2011/2012 Treasury Management and Investment strategy for the first six months of the year, in accordance with the CIPA Code of Practice on Treasury Management
2. Revised the 2011/2012 Treasury Management Strategy in relation to counter party limits and the requirement for the Council to prudentially borrow to fund part of its capital programme.
3. Updated Members on the changes to the Treasury Management Strategy.

In reply to a question it was confirmed that the Council's assets were held in the form of cash deposits.

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

1. That the 2011/2012 Mid-Year Treasury Management Strategy and Annual Investment Strategy review be approved.
2. That the amendments made to the Treasury Management Strategy under Urgent Decision outside of the Budget and Policy Framework be approved.
3. That the updated Treasury and Capital Prudential Indicators as shown in Section 8 and in Appendix A of the report be approved. The changes are in respect of:
 - Fixed and variable limits for borrowing and investments presented and monitored separately, and
 - Operational limit for external debt reduced from £44.565m to £30.733m, and
 - Authorised limits for external debt reduced from £49.565m to £36.855m. This reflects the resolution of risks with lease clarification.

Mayor