

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**COUNCIL
MINUTES**

Date: Wednesday 10 October 2012

Time: 7.00 pm

Place: Council Chamber

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

Also present: Amy Danaher, Youth Mayor, and Ash Wilson (Youth Council)
Katie Lane (Citizen's Advice Bureau)

Start/End Time: Start Time: 7.00 p.m.
End Time: 9.45 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P Bibby CC, M Hearn, R Raynor and J Thomas.

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES – COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY 18 JULY 2012

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on Wednesday 18 July 2012 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

3. There was no item 3.

4. MAYOR'S COMMUNICATION

At the invitation of the Mayor Councillor H Burrell, the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People, Culture, Sport and Leisure introduced the 'Just Sing!' Choir who entertained the meeting with renditions of Sally Gardens and Banuwa.

The Mayor thanked the choir for their performance.

The Mayor detailed a number of events that he had attended. The most recent had been on the morning of Council when he had welcomed the Duke of Edinburgh to the My Incubator facility at the Business and Technology Centre.

Additionally the Mayor had attended, amongst other events, the opening of the regenerated Hyde and Glebe Shopping Centres, the Institute of Engineering and Technology, the Olympic Medal Ceremony at Silkin Court.

He had also attended the Officers' Mess at Kendrew Barracks, current home of the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Anglian Regiment and the Mayor informed Council that there would be a meeting on 23 October with the Regimental Secretary of the Regiment to discuss the presentation of the Right of Entry to Stevenage that had been agreed by Council in May.

Finally the Mayor also informed Council of the Civic Reception to be held on Saturday 13 October. The event would include the SoStevenage Awards, for which a large number of people had been put forward for awards.

5. MAIN DEBATE – 'WELFARE REFORMS – WHAT WILL IT MEAN TO STEVENAGE RESIDENTS'

The Mayor introduced Katie Lane, Head of Welfare Policy, from the Citizen's Advice Bureau who gave a presentation detailing the implications for claimants, local authorities and their partners as a consequence of the raft of changes to be implemented as part of the Government's Welfare Reform Policy.

Katie Lane informed the Council that the changes proposed would impact on virtually all working age claimants and some pensioners. She explained the likely consequences of cuts to Housing Benefits, changes in support for disabled people, the impact of the introduction of Universal Credit and the Localisation of Council Tax Benefit. Of particular concern was the availability of crisis loans as local authorities would not be mandated to help people through the provision of cash support. It was feared that the more vulnerable could be forced into dependence on high cost lenders. Also of concern was the expected increase in workload on the support agencies, including the CAB itself.

A Member requested a copy of the presentation and the Strategic Director (Resources) undertook to provide a copy to all Members.

In proposing the Motion Councillor Mrs Lloyd spoke of the effect that the changes would have on benefit recipients within the town. She dismissed the myth that 'those on benefits don't work' by stating that

many people in the town were reliant on benefits because of low paid jobs. She also noted claimants would have to use computers to access the new benefits and questioned whether I.T. systems would be reliable.

The motion was formally seconded by Councillor Burrell who said that many in the town would not be in a good position once the policy had been implemented.

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

- The Council should consider setting up a food bank to help those most in need;
- Companies paying low wages whilst making large profits were effectively being subsidised by the taxpayer;
- Those with mental health issues could fare particularly badly as they might be assessed as physically able to work;
- Reducing benefits could be just deferring expenditure as reduced incomes might lead to future problems for many resulting in increased costs for the NHS;
- Benefit claimants did not cause the 2008 recession or the subsequent 'double dip'. The government should consider a social building programme and the implementation of a 'living wage' as an alternative to the Welfare Reform Programme as austerity did not appear to be working;
- There could be a knock on effect on the town as benefit recipients tended to spend their money locally and any reduction in benefits would mean less spent in the town;
- Anybody opposing cuts in benefits should be able to identify where the money to pay for them will come from;
- The Government was creating a 'lost generation' through its policy of forcing down wages and reducing disposable income which in turn affected the high street;
- Poor people were being penalised and needed stronger representation;
- Young people were the future and money should be invested in them;
- Benefit claim forms were overly long and complicated and people would be denied access to them if claims had to be made on-line;
- Action should be taken to prevent residents becoming dependant on loan sharks.

In summing up Councillor Mrs Lloyd noted the support for the motion and said that the Council would help people to get the benefits to which they were entitled and that it was sad to have to talk in terms of providing a food bank.

The Mayor then thanked Katie Lane and the contributors to the debate.

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

‘That this Council does, and always has, recognised the need to tackle benefit fraud wherever it occurs because of the impact that such fraud has on genuine claimants.

However, this Council believes that the Tory-led Government’s welfare cuts and their welfare reform agenda will have a detrimental impact on the citizens of Stevenage. We call on the Government to recognise the difficult situations that many hard working families are already facing and concentrate instead on a coherent strategy for growth and job creation.’

6. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

None

7. QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL

None

8. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC.

None

9. 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 reminded Council that he had asked at the previous meeting when the Leisure Centre, which had been damaged by fire earlier in the year, would be fully re-opened. The Leader advised that the relevant Portfolio Holder would provide a full update at the meeting.

The Leader then, on behalf of the Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport, informed Council of the visit by the Duke of Edinburgh to the Business Technology Centre on the morning of Wednesday 10 October.

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People, Culture, Sport and Leisure provided Council with an update on the Leisure Centre. He said that Stevenage Leisure Limited had received an advance payment from the insurance company and that tenders had been invited for the necessary refurbishment work. It was expected that the contract would

be let by Friday 12 October and a completion date of 31 December 2012 was expected.

The Portfolio Holder also informed Council of the following:

- The Museum had been successful in an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for £100,000
- The activities of the Children's Services section over the summer period, and
- Stevenage Day, which was held on August 26 after the original date had been postponed due to bad weather and a waterlogged site.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration informed Council of works that had taken place as part of the Town Centre Improvements programme and of the progress of the Building Control Section in securing work as part of the Hertfordshire Primary Expansion Projects. Members were encouraged by the Portfolio Holder to ask shopkeepers to consider opening for longer hours whenever the opportunity presented itself.

In reply to concerns that the free parking experiment had not seen the desired outcomes Council was advised that an increase of 3-4% in footfall had been generated and that results suggested that convenience of location was more of a factor than cost when shoppers decided where to park.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources advised Council of the progress made in the consultation in respect of the Local Council Tax Scheme. A request to Hertfordshire County Council and the Police Authority to support a hardship fund for residents most affected by changes to the scheme had met with a negative response.

The Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities informed Council of the new approach being taken for Environmental Action Days. EADs would be replaced with Community Action Days and Partnership Action Days in order to reflect SoSafe's current vision. It was planned to hold a pilot Community Action Day in November, weather permitting.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing informed Council that a revised Allocations Policy and Tenancy Strategy would be published by April 2013.

10. NOTICE OF MOTIONS

The Mayor referred Council to the Motion within the order of business and invited Councillor John Gardner to move the Motion.

In moving the motion Councillor Gardner informed Council of that the current proposals would mean an increase in the number of passenger

movements from 12 million to 18 million a year by 2030. He said that night noise from the airport was lower than that from any other UK airport and that a night noise quota would be introduced following consultation. He was however concerned about the effect of extra traffic generated as it had been estimated that approximately 40% of the new passengers would arrive from the east of the airport. Overall he considered that expansion of the airport could be of benefit to the town.

The Mayor then called upon Councillor David Cullen to second the Motion.

Councillor Cullen said that the opportunities for growth that the expansion offered should be welcomed as long as the detrimental effects were successfully mitigated. He formally seconded the motion.

A full debate ensued and the following points were raised:

- Council should reflect the views of residents and noise nuisance must be mitigated
- A national air strategy was needed, especially with regard to expansion of airport capacity for London
- Any increase in noise pollution would be unacceptable for the residents of Chells and Manor
- No complaints regarding aircraft noise had ever been received from residents of Bedwell or the Old Town. New aircraft technology should reduce noise levels further still.

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

‘That Stevenage Borough Council values Luton Airport in terms of the direct and indirect benefits it brings to the local economies of Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire. This Council considers the current proposals to expand this airport more reasonable than earlier proposals brought forward by the operators and is supportive of them on the grounds that they will further boost the local economy and enhance the travelling experience for passengers. However this Council remains very concerned about the potential impact of any increase in noise levels arising from the proposed expansion and will be strongly presenting the case to both the applicant and the Local Authority Planning Authority (Luton Borough Council) to minimise any increase in aircraft noise over Stevenage. This Council will also seek to require the development to mitigate any adverse effects of increased passenger traffic on the A1(M) between junctions 6 & 8 and on the A505 between Hitchin and the Airport.’

11. **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRS/PORTFOLIO HOLDERS**

None

12. MATTER REFERRED FROM THE AUDIT COMMITTEE AND THE EXECUTIVE – TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW 2011/2012

The Council had before it a report that had previously been considered by the Audit Committee on 10 September and by the Executive on 11 September 2012 and the recommendations from the Executive were set out in the order of business.

The Resources Portfolio Holder paid tribute to the Treasury Management Team for their work during the year.

Following a comment made by a Member concerning the wording of paragraph 4.9.4 of the report the Chief Executive amended the wording of the second sentence to read 'Key to retaining this rating will be a return to strong economic growth in order to reduce the national *deficit* burden...'

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the 2011 / 2012 prudential and treasury indicators within the report be approved.

13. MATTER REFERRED FROM THE EXECUTIVE – 'FIRST STEP' COUNCIL MORTGAGE SCHEME.

The Council had before it a report that had previously been considered by the Executive on 1 September 2012 and the recommendations from the Executive were set out in the order of business.

The Chief Executive advised Council that an Equalities Impact Assessment for the scheme had been produced and had been circulated in the Chamber for Members to consider.

In reply to a question it was confirmed that the scheme applied to all properties in Stevenage although the residents of 55 properties would have to apply to the County Council's own scheme as their individual postcodes crossed district boundaries.

In reply to a further question Council was advised that approximately 39 applications could be accommodated within the funding available.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED**

1. That it be agreed in principle to adopt the Local Authority Mortgage Scheme (LAMS) in accordance with the outline provided within the report and that the following be approved:

- a. A total indemnity value of £500,000 for Stevenage Borough Council;

- b. To note that Hertfordshire County Council is proposing to provide a total indemnity value of £1,000,000 which will be 'pass ported' from the County Council to the district. A funding Service Level Agreement between the County Council and the District Council setting out the relationship and the relevant share of risk/return in respect of the £1,000,000 from the County Council will be agreed;
 - c. A total indemnity of £1,500,000 will be placed with the selected lenders;
 - d. A maximum loan size for the Stevenage scheme of £180,500 (based on a 95% loan on a house valued at £190,000 and an individual with a 5% deposit);
 - e. The Scheme to apply to all post code areas within Stevenage, to be provided to the lender(s) in a schedule to the indemnity need;
 - f. Subject to satisfactory resolution of the wording of the Option Letter referred to in the legal implications that the Council will confirm the Provision of appropriate indemnities to the Council's Chief Legal Officer (Monitoring Officer) and Strategic Director (Resources) (Chief Financial Officer), in accordance with the relevant legislation and lenders' requirements;
 - g. Delegate authority to the Strategic Director (Resources), in consultation with the Borough Solicitor and Executive Members for Resourcing and Housing, to agree the detailed financial and contractual arrangements and sign the necessary contracts, agreements and indemnities.
2. That a capital scheme to a maximum value of £500,000 be included in the Council's Capital Programme for 2012/2013, funded from the New Homes Bonus Reserve (£250,000); and sale of General Fund maisonettes (£250,000).
3. That the Treasury Management Strategy be amended as required to accommodate the accounting treatment required for the LAMS.

14. MATTER REFERRED FROM THE EXECUTIVE – RENT AND ANNUAL SERVICE CHARGE SETTING POLICY

The Council had before it a report that had previously been considered by the Executive on 11 September 2012 and the recommendation from the Executive was set out in the order of business.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the Annual Rent and Service Charge Setting Policy, as attached to the report as Appendix 1,

be approved.

15. STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE – MINUTES – 24 SEPTEMBER 2012

The Council had before it the draft minutes from the Statement of Accounts Committee held on 24 September 2012.

The Portfolio Holder Resources moved the motion and requested for it to be placed on record that Clare Fletcher, Anita Thomas and the team be thanked for ‘the best set of accounts ever.’

In seconding the motion the Leader echoed the thanks to Officers and thanked the Audit Committee, the Resources Policy Development and Scrutiny Committees and the Resources Portfolio Holder for their part in the process.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Statement of Accounts Committee held on 24 September 2012 be approved as a correct record.

16. AUDIT COMMITTEE – DRAFT MINUTES – 10 SEPTEMBER AND 24 SEPTEMBER 2012

The Council had before it the draft minutes from the meetings of the Audit Committee held on 10 September and 24 September 2012.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the draft minutes from the Audit Committee meetings held on 10 and 24 September 2012 be noted.

Mayor