

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL
MINUTES**Date: Wednesday 5 December 2012****Time: 7.00 pm****Place: Council Chamber**

- Present:** The Mayor (John Lloyd CC) and Councillors
S Batson MBE DL, L Bell, P Bibby CC, J Brown,
H Burrell, M Cherney-Craw, L Chester, B Clark,
G Clark, J Gardner, M Gardner, L Harrington,
L Martin-Haugh, M Hearn, R Henry, J Hollywell,
C Hurst, PD Kissane, C Latif, Mrs J Lloyd, M McKay,
J Mead, M Notley, R Parker CC, J Pickersgill,
R Raynor, G Snell, S Speller, P Stuart, S Taylor CC,
H Tessier, J Thomas, B Underwood, S Walker,
A Webb and M Yarnold-Forrester.
- Also present:** A Merrin (Keepmoat)
- Start/End Time:** Start Time: 7.00 p.m.
End Time: 8.42 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Cullen and V Warwick, A Danaher, Youth Mayor, and A Wilson, Youth Council.

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES – COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY 10 OCTOBER 2012

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on Wednesday 10 October 2012 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

3. MAYOR'S COMMUNICATION

The Mayor informed the meeting that he had agreed to accept item 15, circulated on the Supplementary Agenda as an urgent Part II item.

The Mayor detailed a number of events that he had attended, which included his first ever professional football match, between MK Dons and Stevenage, as a guest of the Mayor of Milton Keynes.

Additionally the Mayor had attended the Remembrance Day Service and Parade; a morning at Stevenage Fire Station, where he had cut up

a car with a hydraulic cutter; and a visit to Property Repairs at Cavendish Road.

The Mayor thanked those Councillors who had hosted a table at the Community Reception, and asked that his thanks for the staff concerned in organising the event and the catering and management staff at Stevenage Leisure Limited be recorded

Finally the Mayor spoke about the apprenticeships arising from the Decent Homes Contract and said that he was proud that the Council was able to offer such opportunities to young people.

4. MAIN DEBATE – ‘FEELING THE HEAT – HOW THIS COUNCIL WILL WORK PARTNERS AND THE COMMUNITY TO TACKLE THE EFFECTS OF RISING ENERGY COSTS’

The Mayor introduced Andy Merrin, Head of Sustainability for Keepmoat, who gave a presentation detailing actions that could be taken to tackle the causes and effects of fuel poverty and of the ‘Green Deal Scheme’.

Mr Merrin informed the Council of definitions of fuel poverty and added that projections indicated that the number of households in fuel poverty would increase dramatically by 2016. He then outlined the Keepmoat approach which included bespoke home improvements, energy advice and identifying sources of funding through ECO opportunities and the ‘Green Deal’.

He concluded by saying that there would be a focus on solid wall, non-traditionally built and hard to treat properties, with consideration being given to other factors such as windows and roofs dependent on funding.

In proposing the Motion Councillor J Gardner drew Council’s attention to an information pack that had been laid before Members. The pack illustrated the extent of the problem of fuel poverty. He said that the Council wished to share the objectives of the Green Deal and to improve the energy efficiency of housing within the town. He added that fuel poverty was most likely to be felt by those in private rented accommodation and by those over the age of 65.

Councillor Gardner concluded by saying that he awaited the Government’s forthcoming Energy Bill.

The motion was formally seconded by Councillor M Cherney-Craw who said that the Council had considered aerial photo imaging to identify poorly insulated properties and added that she was interested to hear suggestions as to how the Council could help local people reduce energy use.

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

- The inability of a family to heat a house sufficiently could lead to an increase in health problems for children.
- Low income families were faced with the 'eat or heat' dilemma
- The Council could consider a door to door campaign to encourage town wide switching [to a lower priced energy supplier] to achieve bulk buying discounts for residents.
- The Council had previously been invited to join in a bulk buying scheme led by Peterborough Council but had declined to take part because of the scheme's profit sharing arrangements.
- Oldham Council had launched a 'Toasty Oldham' campaign which offered residents of privately rented properties or house owners free lost and cavity wall insulation. The Council could look to run a similar scheme.
- Social landlords would need to be incentivised to improve the SAT rating of their properties to lower energy consumption for their tenants.
- There was a need for detailed data for the Council to identify possible pockets of hardship within the town in order to effectively target its use of resources.
- Concerns were expressed over higher rates paid for energy by those using pre-payment cards.
- Fuel prices were not expected to fall as energy suppliers would increase prices to maintain profit levels should overall consumption be reduced.
- A Member asked a number of detailed questions about the information pack provided as background data to the debate.
- Would trials be undertaken with solar panels on council houses?
- When will a lagging scheme for solid wall council houses be undertaken?

In summing up Councillor Gardner noted the support for the motion and said that written replies would be provided in respect of the detailed questions asked about the information pack. The bulk-buy scheme promoted by Peterborough Council would be reviewed, but the Council would wish to ensure that any such scheme would realise maximum benefits for residents.

In reply to the question concerning a possible trial of solar panels, Council was informed that the change of rules to feed-in tariffs made the use of such panels less financially attractive than it had been. However, Officers were awaiting the launch of the Government's Green Deal initiatives and would take advantage of technologies such as solar panels should there be any benefit to be gained from their use.

In reply to the question about lagging solid walled homes Council was informed that Officers were currently liaising with utility companies, and

the Decent Homes Contractor Keepmoat, with a view to commencing a programme of External Wall Insulation in the near future.

The Mayor then thanked Andy Merrin and the contributors to the debate.

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

‘That this Council is aware of the anxiety faced by many people in our community at the ever increasing cost of energy for our homes. The Council is committed to addressing the issue of fuel poverty and reduced carbon emissions by working with partners to continue to increase the energy efficiency for all homes in Stevenage.

In addition, dependent on the actual impact of the proposed energy bill on domestic tariffs, we will continue as a matter of urgency to seek opportunities to promote a Bulk Buy Scheme for Stevenage residents either on our own or in conjunction with other local authority partners. The Council will also prepare an action plan covering all service areas detailing fuel poverty and currently planned energy / carbon reduction activities.’

5. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

None

6. QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL

None

7. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC.

None

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 gave details whereby a tenant had received an invoice from the Council for damage caused to a property eleven months after the property had been vacated. He asked if this was an exceptional case and questioned whether the delay could have been the result of the reintegration of Stevenage Homes to the Council.

The Leader requested full details of the case and advised that the Housing Portfolio Holder would investigate the process by which such cases were handled.

The Leader then spoke briefly about the Chancellor's Autumn Statement and then thanked Councillors J Mead, S Walker and M McKay for the work that they had undertaken in establishing the Stevenage Community Food Bank which was scheduled to become operational in week commencing 10 December.

The Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport, informed Council of a Small Business Summit that had been held in partnership with the Federation of Small Businesses at the Business and Technology Centre. Representatives from nearly 60 businesses had attended to hear the key note speaker, local marketing expert John Kettly. In addition there had been a presentation on the support available to businesses for apprenticeships.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration informed Council that as a result of a survey carried out by volunteers from the Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust the County Wildlife Sites Partnership had ratified the Whomerley Wood verge and the Shackedell Grassland Extension as County Wildlife Sites. The verge at Ashtree Wood had also been surveyed, and had met the necessary requirements, but had been deemed too small to be considered a County Wildlife Site.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources advised Council that up to the point of launch of the Local Authority Mortgage Scheme there had been 54 expressions of interest registered on the website. Everybody who had registered had been notified that the scheme had been launched and who the qualifying lenders were. Additionally Council was advised that the Customer Centre Services Team had been awarded a Gold Star Runner-up award in the GovMetric System of the Year Awards

The Portfolio Holder for Housing informed the meeting that Council's Income Team had been awarded an accreditation by the Housing Quality Network, thus becoming the first Local Authority to receive an industry recognised award. The Portfolio Holder thanked all of those who had taken part in the award.

The Portfolio Holder for Community, Health and Older People informed Council that Pod 53, formerly known as Marymead Community Centre, would be reopened by the Mayor on 11 December 2012. Pod 53 would be run as a community enterprise by young people. The Portfolio Holder thanked those Members that had supported the centre with monies from their Local Community Budgets.

The Leader of the Opposition indicated that he too would be willing to support Pod 53 from his Local Community Budget should he be approached to do so.

9. NOTICE OF MOTIONS

None

10. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRS/PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

None

11. MATTER REFERRED FROM THE EXECUTIVE – GAMBLING ACT 2005 – STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES REVIEW

Council had before it a report recommending a Council Statement of Principles as required by the Gambling Act 2005.

Council was advised that it was a statutory requirement to renew the statement every three years and that over 40 organisations had been consulted before the drafting of the document.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the proposed Stevenage Borough Council Statement of Principles 2013-2016, as set out at Appendix A to the report, drafted in accordance with the Gambling Act 2005, be approved.

12. MATTER REFERRED FROM THE EXECUTIVE AND THE AUDIT COMMITTEE – TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT AND ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY – MID YEAR REVIEW REPORT 2012/2013.

The Council had before it a report that had previously been considered by the Executive on 20 November 2012 and the recommendation from the Executive was set out in the order of business.

The Chief Executive advised Council that the Audit Committee had also considered the report at its meeting on 4 December and had endorsed the recommendations made by the Executive.

In reply to a question Council was advised that maximum use was being made of Triple A rated Money Market Funds to the limits agreed at the Treasury Management Member group meeting on 24 October.

Council was further advised that all Members would be informed of the outcome of the announcement of Revenue Support Grants scheduled for 21 December 2012.

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

1. That the 2012/2013 Mid-year Treasury Management Strategy and Annual Investment Strategy Review be approved.
2. That the amendments made by Council on 10 October 2012 to the Treasury Management Strategy ahead of the implementation of the Local Authority Mortgage Scheme be noted, together with the updated authorised investments.
3. That the amended strategy for Urgent Decisions on (i) the safe haven status of the Government's Debt Management Office, and that unlimited funds may be placed with them; and (ii) the use of Money Market Funds up to a limit of 25% of total investments and limited to a maximum of £5 million in any one Money Market Fund, be noted.
4. 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:
 - Additional approvals to borrowing limits included in the September Capital Strategy; and
 - Amending the variable rate investment limit from £25 million to £35 million, reflecting a higher level of balances and the risk associated with fixing investments in the current market.

13. OFFICER REPORT – PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY BOUNDARY CHANGES

Council has before it an officer report that advised on the Boundary Commission's consultation on revised boundaries for the Stevenage Parliamentary Constituency.

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

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the Chief Executive be requested to respond to the consultation issued by the Boundary Commission for England as set out in paragraph 4.4 of the report.

14. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was moved, seconded and **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 item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure

of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1-7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by SI 2006 no 88.

2. That Members, having considered the reasons for the report being in Part II, determined that the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

15. PURCHASE OF RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES

This report had not been circulated to Members 5 clear days before the meeting. The Mayor determined however that given the reason for urgency set out in the report it be considered on this occasion.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the recommendations contained within the report be approved.

Mayor