

**STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL****COUNCIL  
MINUTES****Date: Wednesday 17 July 2013****Time: 7.00 pm****Place: Council Chamber**

**Present:** The Mayor (J Pickersgill MA, MSc) and Councillors  
S Batson MBE DL CC, L Bell, P Bibby, J Brown,  
M Cherney-Craw, G Clark, R Clark, J Gardner, M Gardner,  
L Harrington, M Hearn, R Henry CC, J Hollywell, C Hurst,  
PD Kissane, C Latif, J Lloyd CC, Mrs J Lloyd, M McKay,  
L Martin-Haugh, J Mead, M Notley, R Parker CC, R Raynor,  
G Snell, P Stuart, S Taylor OBE CC, H Tessier, J Thomas,  
B Underwood, S Walker, A Webb and M Yarnold-Forrester.

**Also present:** ABK Mboho (Youth Mayor) and J Barnes (Youth Council).  
Hannah Rignell, HCC Community Wellbeing Team  
Sue Reeve, Carers in Herts  
Geoff Brown, Crossroads Care and Health Watch  
Hertfordshire

**Start/End Time:** Start Time: 7.00 p.m.  
End Time: 9.20 p.m.

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors H Burrell, L Chester, D Cullen, S Speller, V Warwick and N Parry, Chief Executive.

There were no declarations of interest.

**2. MINUTES – ANNUAL COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY 22 MAY 2013**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of Annual Council held on Wednesday 22 May 2013 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

**3. MINUTES – SPECIAL COUNCIL – WEDNESDAY 22 MAY 2013**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of Special Council held on Wednesday 22 May 2013 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

#### **4. MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS**

The Mayor informed Council that since his election at Annual Council he had, along with his wife, the Mayoress, attended a number of events in the town. Of particular note were the awarding of the Freedom of the Borough to Dr Gerhard, Stevenage Day in June, the Sunset Ceremony at RAF Henlow, a Garden Party at Buckingham Palace and meeting children from Kazakhstan, all of which he found stimulating and encouraging.

He said that he also found meeting with autistic children at the church in Hydean Way to be very rewarding.

The Mayor concluded by saying that Stevenage had a fine record of serving the community and that there is a rich and vibrant stream of community spirit throughout the town. Everybody should be proud of that heritage.

#### **5. MAIN DEBATE – STEVENAGE – A TOWN THAT CARES - OUR COMMITMENT TO BEING A CARER FRIENDLY COUNCIL**

As an introduction to the main debate the Mayor welcomed Hannah Rignell from the HCC Community Wellbeing Team, Sue Reeve from Carers in Hertfordshire and Geoff Brown from Crossroads Care who gave presentations which covered the range of activities and support for carers provided by their agencies in the town.

Hannah Rignell advised Council that the definition of a carer was a person of any age who provided unpaid support to family or friends who could not manage without that help. Census data suggested that there were 110,000 carers in Hertfordshire, with Stevenage having the highest levels of caring within the county. It was estimated that a significant tipping point would be reached by 2017 when there would be more people requiring care than would be able to provide it.

Sue Reeve informed Council that Carers in Hertfordshire had been operating in Stevenage since 1998 working with local organisations to create a 'Carer Friendly Community' and offering support to Carers. The organisation supported over a thousand carers in the town and had made a commitment to double that number by 2016.

Geoff Brown explained that Crossroads Care (Hertfordshire North) was a network partner of a national Carers Trust charity with over 150 branches. He thanked the Council for their commitment to the local branch of Crossroads Care and said that he believed the organisation had a special affinity with Stevenage, where, amongst a raft of support activities, they provided short breaks for carers and ran the Carers Café where carers and former carers could meet and share experiences.

In proposing the Motion, Councillor S Batson MBE DL CC spoke about the long history of community involvement in the town. She said that there were over 8500 people in the town that had declared themselves to be unpaid carers at the last census and that organisations such as Carers in Hertfordshire and Crossroads Care gave these people support and, importantly, a voice.

Councillor Batson called on government to do more to support carers, adding that they 'saved' the County Council approximately £2.1 billion a year. She said that the Council would encourage other businesses and organisations to consider what they could do to help carers, especially those hit by welfare reforms.

The Motion was seconded by Councillor S Walker who said that she applauded the actions of the carers groups and looked forward to the Council helping others that needed support.

The Leader publically thanked those organisations that supported carers, adding that funding gaps in the public sector needed to be addressed in order to enable local people to deliver preventative solutions and reinforce support of carers.

A number of Members then spoke in support of the motion and commented that the work undertaken by the organisations represented in the chamber was essential in helping carers and providing them with breaks from their caring responsibilities.

A member of the public asked a number of questions regarding safeguarding for vulnerable tenants and the monitoring of services which were answered by Councillor Batson.

In summing up Councillor Batson informed Council that the statutory duty to provide social services fell to the County Council and that those services provided by the Borough were done so by choice where budgets permitted. To provide additional support for townspeople the Council also provided resources for voluntary agencies, such as Crossroads Care.

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

That this Council is aware of the vital role carers play in Stevenage by providing selfless support for family and friends, filling the gap not served by our health and social care system.

In acknowledgement and subject to consideration by the Community Select Committee and approval by Executive, this Council agrees to make a public commitment to carers, along the lines of the attached draft\*, which states what we can offer to Carers, both through our services and as an employer. This will enable Carers to know what we will do to support their invaluable contribution to the town.

Through this commitment, the Council pledges to ensure Carers are recognised as important people in our local community.

The Mayor thanked the presenters for their attendance and contributions to the meeting.

\* Draft attached at the end of these Minutes.

## 6. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

None.

## **7. QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL**

None.

## **8. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

A question concerning the impact of the Welfare Reform Act on Housing Benefit and the collection of rent arrears was put to the Council by a local resident, Mr Trevor Palmer.

In reply the Leader highlighted a number of initiatives that the Council had undertaken to mitigate the effects of the Welfare Reform Act, which included:

- The development of an 'Under Occupancy' Policy
- A review of mutual exchange arrangements
- An event scheduled for 18<sup>th</sup> September with key housing partners
- Extra resources for the Council's Housing team
- Contracts with the Citizens Advice Bureau

Additionally she said that nationally a number of Labour Councillors were working on a Motion to present at the Labour Party Conference and locally Council Officers had established a Welfare Reform Group to coordinate an efficient and effective corporate response to the Act which would be developed from an understanding of how residents and the Council would be impacted by the changes.

With regards to the collection of rent arrears the meeting was informed that the Council acted promptly when a tenant went into arrears to prevent the level of debt from rising to an amount that would be more difficult to manage and it was understood that fewer than 10 households were in difficulty paying their rent as a result of the 'Bedroom tax'.

In reply to a comment from the public gallery the Leader undertook to investigate the text of letters sent by the Council to tenants finding themselves in rent arrears.

## **9. LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S UPDATE**

The Leader of the Opposition enquired about the cost of the recent tripartite event and asked if it represented good value for money.

In reply Council was informed that Stevenage hosted the event every three years and that budget provision had been made for the event over that period. Council was also informed that some funding for the event came from the Stevenage, Ingelheim, Autun Association. It was acknowledged that future events might not be carried out in the same way as the process was subject to continuous review.

Council then received updates on the following:

- Concerns over the role of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC),

- An event held in April designed to facilitate housing transfers between tenants
- New council homes at Hertford Road,
- New affordable homes at Wedgewood Way
- A World of Work / Apprenticeship Event held at the Business Technology Centre
- The Jobs 250 Programme
- The consultation for the 'New Plan for Stevenage'
- New occupants for the Westgate Centre

In reply the Leader of the Opposition commented that he was pleased that job opportunities were available and said that any progress on the town centre was to be welcomed. He did, however, express concern about the PCC and asked for further details which the Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities undertook to provide.

In summary the Leader said that she would like to see the PCC attend an open forum session at Stevenage Borough Council and to hold sessions at County Hall.

**10. NOTICE OF MOTIONS**

None.

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

None.

**12. MATTER REFERRED FROM THE EXECUTIVE – NEW HOMES BONUS – 2013/14 SCHEME ALLOCATIONS.**

Council had before it a report that had been considered by the Executive at its meeting on 28 May 2013.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the request to increase the General Fund Revenue Account Contingency Sum held by the Executive by £357,000 in order to maintain the sum at £400,000 as previously agreed be approved.

**13. MATTER REFERRED FROM THE EXECUTIVE – SOSTEVENAGE COMMUNITY STRATEGY**

Council had before it a report that had been considered by the Executive at its meeting on 25 June 2013.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that subject to minor amendments for updating and/or accuracy the SoStevenage Community Strategy be approved.

**14. OFFICER REPORT – STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL CORPORATE PLAN – SHARING THE DIVIDENDS 2013-2018**

Council had before it the first draft of the Council's Corporate Plan for consideration.

The meeting was advised that that the plan set out the aims and objectives of the council and included the budget setting process. The Equalities Impact Assessment contained within the plan would be used to assist the decisions process.

In reply to a question from the public gallery concerning the resident involvement structure and the ability of certain groups to attend meetings the Leader replied that following the abolition of FOSTA (Federation of Stevenage Tenants Association) the way that the Council consulted with its tenants and residents was under review. Regarding the Shephall Residents Group it was understood that certain groups, including Borough and County Councillors, were excluded although it was the desire of the Council to see all interested people involved with the meetings.

A Member clarified that everybody was welcomed to Shephall Residents Group meetings on condition that they signed a behavioural contract. The Leader stated that there was no need to sign any other document and they should be able to attend the meetings as Members of the Council had already signed the Council's Code of Conduct which laid down standards for public behaviour.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the draft document, known as Sharing the Dividends 2013 – 2018, as attached at Appendix 1 to the report, be approved.

#### **15. OFFICER REPORT – ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT 2012 - 2013**

Council considered a report detailing the work undertaken by the Development and Scrutiny Committees during the year 2012/2013.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the work undertaken by the Development and Scrutiny Committees during 2012/2013 be noted.

#### **16. OFFICER REPORT – SHARED SERVICES**

Council had before it an officer report detailing the potential for a shared service agreement with East Herts Council.

Council was reminded that Stevenage had already entered into successful partnerships and that the savings for the proposed arrangement should be in the region of £400,000 which would be split 50/50 with East Herts. Staff would be located in Stevenage.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that, subject to the decisions taken by the Executives of Stevenage Borough Council and East Herts Council on 23 July regarding the creation of a shared service arrangement be confirmed and approved for the East Herts Council's ICT, Business Improvement and Print and Design service functions to be provided through Stevenage Borough Council.

#### **17. AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES – 26 MARCH AND 29 MAY 2013**

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Audit Committees held on 26 March and 29 May 2013 be noted.

**18. APPOINTMENT COMMITTEE MINUTES – 18 JUNE 2013**

The Leader took this opportunity to thank Tim Mills. Interim Strategic Director - Community for the work that he had done for the Council.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Appointments Committee held on 18 June 2013 be approved as a correct record.

**19. CAPITAL BUDGET 2013-2014 - VIREMENT**

This report had not been circulated to Members five clear working days before the meeting nor had it been made available for public inspection during that time. The Mayor determined however that given the requirement under financial regulations for budget virements to capital schemes over £250,000 to be approved by Council and the need for the works to be completed before the winter, it be considered on this occasion.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that a virement of £1,000,000 from the Decent Homes Roofing capital budget to the Decent Homes capital heating budget to facilitate the upgrade of heating and water systems in two sheltered housing schemes be approved.

**MAYOR**

# DRAFT

## **Our Commitment to Carers**

We deliver a range of services to the 84,000+ residents of Stevenage. Around 8,550 of our residents are carers, the largest number of any town in the county. The majority of carers will come into contact with us at some point and we aim to signpost them to appropriate information and support. Many of our employees are carers and we offer flexible conditions to help them balance their caring role with their working lives. We are committed to ensuring carers are recognised as an important part of our local community.

## **Our Commitment**

We will:

- Provide in-kind support, information, advice and guidance to local carers groups through our Community Development and External Funding support
- Promote carers' groups across the town
- Ensure carers have a voice in the development of our strategic plans, policies and strategies
- Improve information about services and facilities for carers in Stevenage
- Support our carer employees to balance work and caring to improve their quality of life.
- Carry out Equality Impact Assessments which include consideration of carers when planning or reviewing services.

To achieve this, we need to work on:

- Delivery of carer awareness training to key members of staff
- Creating a webpage for carers on the council website to signpost and provide information
- A review of our flexible working policies and workforce strategy
- Developing a communications campaign to promote employee support
- Promoting the carers' agenda to our statutory, business and voluntary and community sector partners
- Supporting managers to complete robust Equality Impact Assessments, considering the needs of carers.

## **Measuring Our Commitment**

We will measure:

- The number of carers the council consults and engages to ensure our services reflect their needs
- The number of hits on our caring pages on the Stevenage Borough Council website
- The number of our caring employees