

**STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL****COUNCIL  
MINUTES****Date: Wednesday 4 December 2013****Time: 7.00 pm****Place: Council Chamber**

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

**Also present:** J Barnes (Youth Council).

**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 P Bibby, R Clark, D Cullen, L Harrington, M Hearn, C Hurst, G Snell and B Underwood and ABK Mboho (Youth Mayor)

There were no declarations of interest.

**2. MINUTES - COUNCIL – WEDNESDAY 9 OCTOBER 2013**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of Council held on Wednesday 9 October 2013 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

**3. MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS**

The meeting observed a minute's silence in remembrance of Mr Mick Palmer who had served as a Councillor with the Mayor fifty years ago.

The Mayor then informed Council of a number of events that he had attended since the last Council meeting. These events included a night hike with the scouts, a trip to the rugby club to see schools' tag rugby and the opening of an outdoor gym at Shephalbury Park.

The Mayor further informed Council that he had attended a charity event in London

organised by MBDA which had raised over £40,000 for the Armed Forces and the Alzheimer's Society. In addition the curry night had raised £500 for the Mayor's charities.

The Mayor concluded by that he had attended over 200 engagements so far and had thoroughly enjoyed the first six months of his term of office.

#### **4. MAIN DEBATE – STEVENAGE - ON THE ROAD**

Councillor S Taylor OBE CC introduced the main debate and informed Council that County Councillor Terry Douris, the Portfolio Holder with highways responsibilities, had declined two invitations to attend the meeting. However, given the perceived level of concern within the town over highways issues it had been decided to go ahead with the debate.

In moving the motion she highlighted a number of highways issues that had given cause for concern, which included the road closure in Six Hills Way, road safety outside the Thomas Alleyne Academy and other schools, traffic management signs and speeding traffic in Mobbsbury Way.

She explained that she wished to hear residents' concerns about highways issues in the town which would then be collated and forwarded to the County Council.

The Motion was seconded by Councillor R Raynor.

There then followed a full debate which included input from the public gallery. Issues raised included:

##### **Safety**

- The lack of flexibility in part-night lighting arrangements
- Winter gritting failed to cover some essential routes around schools
- A need for a 20 mph limit in some areas
- Speeding was a problem in the Old Town High Street
- S106 monies that had been allocated by the Council for a flashing speed limit sign on Hertford Road had been spent on a pedestrian underpass in the Old Town.
- The Thomas Alleyne Academy required a safety audit and roadside barriers
- There was a belief that the County Council would only take action on a stretch of road following a serious injury or fatality, but no action had been taken following the fatality in Monkswood Way.

##### **Communications**

- It was believed that poor communications were the root cause of many of the issues giving concern
- Local residents said that they were not advised of impending road works and road closures
- The closure of Shephall Way had led to problems for shopkeepers at the Hyde
- The Council was not informed of the closure of Six Hills Way

- Signs advising of forthcoming road closures were displayed with inaccurate or missing information. For example the sign at the gyratory end of the Old North Road did not show a commencement date for the overnight road closures in October.
- The Council was unaware of the erection of the Traffic Management Signs that had been installed at a cost of over £200,000. One of the signs had had to be repositioned and it was noted that the information displayed tended to be advisory, for example 'is your vehicle ready for winter' rather than useful, for example when the town was in gridlock following an incident on the southbound carriageway of the A1M the signs were not in use.
- It was also commented that the money spent on the Traffic Management Signs could have had a much more positive impact if spent elsewhere, for example on safety improvements outside schools.

#### Old Town Gyratory / Hitchin Road

- This subject generated many comments
- Concern was expressed at the high number, and severity of, accidents in the Hitchin Road
- Concerns were also expressed at the lack of a verge between the carriageway and the footpath alongside the Hitchin Road
- Three separate groups were lobbying the County Council for action in this area
- Desired actions in the area included:
  - Improved signage, especially for speed awareness
  - Raised kerbs, and
  - Reinforced roadside barriers

#### Road Works / Road Closures

- Action on pot holes was slow and it had taken three articles in local newspapers before any action was taken.
- The pot holes on the Old North Road were reforming having only just been repaired
- The works on Turpin Road were completed to a poor standard
- The work at Six Hills Way commenced at the start of the school holidays thus denying access to the park from that direction
- The diversions in place at the Six Hills Way encouraged drivers to 'rat run' through unsuitable residential roads.
- Severe delays had been experienced in completing works, especially those at Six Hills Way
- A failure to repair roads was identified at two locations:
  - The mini roundabout at Fairlands Way / Chells Way
  - The widening Mobbsbury Way at the junction with Fairlands Way
- It was acknowledged that some projects were completed well, for example the pedestrian crossing at Fairlands Valley Road

#### Other

- The traffic lights at the Tesco junction on the London Road are confusing. Evidently Tesco have offered to fund an amendment to the scheme but the work had yet to be undertaken.

- Cycle route 12 required an upgrade
- There was no footpath to the new hotel development at Bragbury End
- There were issues with outsourcing and a Member commented that the scale of charges for miscellaneous works appeared to be high.
- The road layout at the A1M junction and entrance to the Science Park was confusing
- Overall there appeared to be a lack of a cohesive approach to road works within the town.

In summing up Councillor Taylor undertook to collate the concerns raised and forward them to Councillor Douris and the relevant officers at County Hall. The contributors to the debate were thanked for taking part.

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

‘That the Council notes the serious concerns of Stevenage residents about many issues relating to highway maintenance and management in the town and agrees to forward details of all these concerns to the relevant Portfolio Holder and officers at Hertfordshire County Council, urging them to take urgent action on these concerns and improve communication and consultation with local residents on all highways matters.’

## **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 Leader of the Opposition said that he had perceived an increase of begging in the town and asked what actions the Council was intending to take to address the issue. He also asked if there was any truth in the rumour that certain individuals were commuting by train into Stevenage to beg.

In reply the Leader informed Council that instances of begging had increased in the town and that the Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities, along with the Chief Executive, were liaising with Hertfordshire Constabulary with a view to taking longer term actions to address the problem. The issue was being addressed as a matter of urgency as the beggars presented a poor image of the town.

Council was also advised that support was available from a number of sources, both from within and without the Council, for local people who had to resort to begging.

It was understood that certain individuals did commute into the town to beg and those individuals were moved on by the police.

Council then received updates on the following:

- Preparations for remembrance events and associated activities in the town for the outbreak of the First World War.
- The opening of two new outdoor gyms - in Shephalbury Park and the Town Centre Gardens - after CDA Herts, working in partnership with Stevenage Borough Council, was awarded almost £50,000 from Biffa Award to install the fitness equipment.
- Councillor Batson, the Mayor, Councillor Pickersgill and the Mayoress had showed their support for National HIV Testing Week by getting tested at the YMCA Space in the town centre. The event was part of a series of weeklong events run by HertsAid.
- The Stevenage Interfaith Forum held its second annual event on Thursday 21 November. The event celebrated different faiths within the community and was held at the Cromwell Hotel in Stevenage High Street. Members of the community were invited for the special presentations and buffet.
- Two events held during the national alcohol awareness week. The events, with the tag line 'don't turn a night out into a crime scene', were supported by local bars, pubs and clubs and recreated an assault and a car crash crime scene to demonstrate the potential consequences of drinking to excess. The events took place on Thursday 21 November at Stevenage Leisure Park and on Saturday 23 November in the Old Town High Street.
- The strengthening of the Stevenage neighbourhood policing team after a decline in its numbers.
- A second Café Choice event to inform the budget setting process in the Town Centre was scheduled to be held from 10am to 1pm on Saturday 7 December.
- The first Small Business Saturday event to celebrate and support small businesses was due to be held on Saturday 7 December.
- From Monday 9 December work would commence at the railway station to install modern platform lifts that can be used by passengers on their own. The lifts would be Disability Discrimination Act compliant.
- A second Building Futures event was run in conjunction with Decent Homes contractor Wates. All 11 participants completed the course and 3 had been successful in gaining full time employment with Wates.
- 150 tenants had been assisted in moving to a smaller property as a result of the Council's Mutual Exchanges and Downsizing activities. Another 'Housing Matters' type event will be held in 2014.
- A performance review of Stevenage Leisure Limited had resulted in a positive result
- A Children's Centres Ofsted review had identified some minor improvement opportunities and the Council will work with the County Council to ensure that the issues are addressed.
- The Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People, Culture, Sport and Leisure and the Portfolio Holder for Resources undertook a visit to a sports and leisure centre at Swiss Cottage with a view to benchmarking their operation for Bowes

Lyon House and the Swim Centre.

In reply the Leader of the Opposition commented that he was impressed with the arrangements for the WW1 remembrance activities.

## **9. NOTICE OF MOTIONS**

The Leader, Councillor S Taylor OBE CC moved the Motion and called for Council to support the Charter to Stop the Payday Loan Rip-Off and to clarify the Council's position as regards pay day lenders.

She said that there were substantial financial pressures on local families and that record numbers were using the Council's food bank. Referring to a leaflet produced by the Money Advice Unit at the County Council she detailed statistics that indicated that families were becoming entangled in a spiral of debt that was not helped by resorting to pay day loan companies.

In conclusion the Leader detailed actions that the Council had taken to help local residents, which included the recruitment of a debt advice officer and changes to the tenancy sign-up arrangements that included a session with a financial advisor.

Councillor Mrs J Lloyd formally seconded the motion and informed Council of the internet research that she had carried out. She said that there were many pay day loan companies willing to lend money often at annual interest rates that ran into thousands of percentage points. The companies presented a friendly face and it appeared to be all too easy for those in financial difficulties to borrow money that they would struggle to repay.

She concluded by saying that Government action to cap the high interest rates charged by these companies was needed as a matter of urgency and added that the Council had facilitated membership of the Stevenage Credit Union, which made loans available at far more favourable rates, for all residents should they wish to join.

There then followed a full debate. Issues raised included:

- A Member praised the role played by Stella Creasy MP in forcing the Government to address the issue of payday lenders.
- Arrears of loan repayments could debar a mortgage application.
- Personal debt had never been properly regulated in the UK.
- Borrowers were advised to read the small print before entering into any loan agreement.
- Members expressed the view that Credit Unions provided an excellent service at much lower interest rates and residents were encouraged to join.
- The possibility of discouraging payday lenders from the town centre was suggested; however Council was advised that local planning rules did not allow for payday loan companies to be refused an outlet in the town centre.
- A Member informed Council that research had showed that 60% of loans were taken to cover essential household bills. 10% went hungry to pay bills and,

according to the CAB, 75% had difficulty repaying loans whilst 62% of loans were made without credit checks being undertaken.

- The effects of austerity could be seen at the food bank on a weekly basis.
- Payday loans, as operated in the UK, were illegal in much of Europe.

The Leader thanked all of the contributors to the debate and urged everybody present at the meeting to support the Charter by signing the petition as detailed in the motion.

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

'That this Council:

- A) Notes that payday lenders are trapping many people in Stevenage into a spiral of debt.
- B) Believes that the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA)'s new proposals for regulating payday lenders are a step in the right direction, but do not go far enough.
- C) Further believes:
  - i. that the FCA's proposals would not prevent payday lenders from drip-feeding new loans to people who already have payday debts and are struggling to pay them back
  - ii. that the FCA's proposals would not prevent people from being hit with escalating penalty fees
  - iii. that the FCA's proposals would not stop payday lenders from raiding people's bank accounts without telling them.
- D) Welcomes that some of Britain's biggest debt, consumer and anti-poverty organisations – including Which?, Citizens Advice, StepChange Debt Charity, Church Action on Poverty and the Centre for Responsible Credit – and MPs from every Party represented at Westminster have come together to support the Charter to Stop the Payday Loan Rip-Off.

And accordingly resolves to:

- i. endorse the Charter to Stop the Payday Loan Rip-Off which calls on the FCA to introduce tougher regulation of payday lenders.
- ii. encourage residents of Stevenage to support the Charter by signing the online petition at <http://www.change.org/paydayloancharter>
- iii. promote and support the development of local credit unions and more affordable lending.

iv. work with partners on campaigns against increasing levels of personal debt.

F) Agrees to send a copy of this motion to Martin Wheatley, Chief Executive of the Financial Conduct Authority and to the local Member of Parliament.'

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

None.

**11. MATTER REFERRED FROM THE EXECUTIVE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE – TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY MID YEAR REVIEW**

Council had before it a report that had been considered by the Executive at its meeting on 4 November 2013 and the Audit Committee at its meeting on 18 November 2013.

Council was advised that there had been no technical breaches of prudential indicators for the first six months of the year.

Council was further advised that for the first six months of the year a return of 0.56% on its investments had been achieved against the 7 day LIBOR benchmark rate of 0.49%.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the 2013/14 Mid-year Treasury Management Strategy and Annual Investment Strategy Review be approved.

**12. MATTER REFERRED FROM THE EXECUTIVE – LICENSING ACT 2003 – LICENSING POLICY REVIEW**

Council had before it a report that had been considered by the Executive at its meeting on 4 November 2013.

Council was advised that the report constituted an update to an existing policy and that the statutory level of consultation had been carried out.

Thanks were extended to Councillor Kissane and the General Purposes Committee for their work in scrutinising the revised policy.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the proposed Stevenage Borough Council Licensing Policy, as shown at Appendix A to the report, drafted in accordance with the Licensing Act 2003 be approved.

**13. MATTER REFERRED FROM THE EXECUTIVE – CONVICTIONS POLICY: HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE LICENSING**

Council had before it a report that had been considered by the Executive at its meeting on 4 November 2013.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the proposed Stevenage Borough Council Convictions Policy for the licensing of Hackney Carriage and Private Hire drivers and Private Hire operators, as set out at Appendix A to the report, be approved.



**14. STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE MINUTES – 25 SEPTEMBER 2013**

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the draft Minutes of the Statement of Accounts Committee held on 25 September 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

**15. AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES - 25 SEPTEMBER 2013**

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Audit Committee held on 25 September 2013 be noted.

**16. AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES – 18 NOVEMBER 2013**

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the draft Minutes of the Audit Committee held on 18 November 2013 be noted.

**17. URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

**18. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Not required.

**19. PART II MINUTES – COUNCIL – WEDNESDAY 9 OCTOBER 2013**

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the meeting of Council on 9 October 2013 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

**20. URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

**MAYOR**