

## STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

### COUNCIL MINUTES

**Date: Wednesday 7 October 2015**

**Time: 7.00 pm**

**Place: Council Chamber**

**Present:** The Mayor (Councillor H Burrell) and Councillors D Bainbridge, S Batson MBE DL CC, L Bell, P Bibby, L Briscoe, R Broom, J Brown, L Chester, E Connolly, D Cullen, M Downing, J Gardner, M Gardner, L Harrington, S Hearn, R Henry CC, C Latif, G Lawrence, Mrs J Lloyd, J Lloyd CC, A McGuinness, M McKay, J Mead, S Mead, M Notley, R Parker CC, R Raynor, C Saunders, S Speller, P Stuart, S Taylor OBE CC, J Thomas and A Webb.

**Also present:** Yvan Tiako (Youth Mayor) and A Thurley (Youth Council)

**Start/End Time:** Start Time: 7.00 p.m.  
End Time: 9.17 p.m.

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

Apologies for absence were received from the Councillors J Fraser, M Hurst, L Martin-Haugh, G Snell and V Warwick.

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **2. MINUTES – COUNCIL MEETING - WEDNESDAY 22 JULY 2015**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Council meeting of 22 July 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor subject to the correction of a typographical error in the penultimate paragraph of the Deputy Mayor's Communications at Minute No.3 . The '7 years' quoted in the second sentence should read '4 years'.

#### **3. MINUTES – SPECIAL COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY 22 JULY 2015**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Special meeting of Council on 22 July 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor subject to the correction of a typographical error in the top

paragraph of page 8 which refers to David Kissane's wife as 'Maureen'. This should read 'Maggie'.

#### **4. MINUTES – SPECIAL COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY 9 SEPTEMBER 2015**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Special meeting of Council held on Wednesday 9 September 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

#### **5. MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS**

The Mayor informed the meeting that former Councillor Bob Clark had recently passed away.

Members then paid tribute to former Councillor Clark and the meeting stood for a minutes' silence in his memory.

The Mayor reminded Council that after the last meeting he had undertaken to write to the Queen to congratulate her on becoming the longest serving monarch of our country. A reply had been received which the Mayor read to the meeting.

The Mayor then informed Council that he had attended and enjoyed 19 engagements since the last meeting.

#### **6. MAIN DEBATE – PRESENTATION FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL**

Council received a presentation from the Youth Council which followed on from the Debate held at Council in October 2014 on work experience.

During the presentation, which included feedback from a survey carried out by the Youth Council and various hints and tips from both young people and employers, two proposals were put to the Council:

- The Council was asked to support the Stevenage Youth Council with their initiative and for the Council to be first employer to receive a 'hints and tips guide'.
- The Council was asked to distribute the 'hints and tips guide' across the service areas within the Council, and to their external partners.

The Mayor thanked the Youth Council for their attendance and presentation.

In proposing the Motion Councillor Henry CC spoke about the value of work experience and of the value the Council placed on the youth of the town.

He said that Council was proud of its Youth Mayor, the only such post in Hertfordshire, and he concluded by stating that he hoped that one Council meeting a year would continue to be dedicated to youth related matters.

Councillor Saunders in seconding the motion spoke about the importance of work experience in assisting young people to determine the career path they wished to follow

A full debate ensued with both Councillors and members of the public taking part. Points raised included:

- Good work had been undertaken to change the perception of work experience
- The usefulness of the proposed hints and tips booklet
- Not to overlook the opportunities presented by the third sector.
- The importance of getting schools on-board
- Firms should counter the criticism that young people were not ready for the workplace by offering more work experience opportunities
- The possibility of finding work with partnership organisations and doing 'work for real' in the community
- Work experience should help young people make informed choices about potential career paths
- Disappointment that a number of organisations failed to respond to the survey

At the conclusion of the debate it was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that:

1. This Council supports Stevenage Youth Council's campaign, WE4YOU; The Vote for Work Experience. The Council will gratefully accept the Youth Council's offer to the first organisation to receive and distribute the 'hints and tips guide' for employers across our services and externally through our partners and networks.
2. This Council will continue to positively support work experience acknowledging that placements enhance a young person's CV; this Council provided ten places to students in June of this year as a result of the WE4YOU campaign and are pleased to make the same invitation to Stevenage Youth Council for next year.

## 7. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

None

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

None

## **9. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

None

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

The Leader of the Opposition referred to the announcement that the Council would accept up to 20 Syrian refugees over the next 5 years and asked what arrangements would be put in place to accommodate those refugees so that Members could advise their constituents accordingly and allay any concerns that might be expressed.

In response the Leader informed the meeting that the Council had made an offer to accept 20 refugees from those currently housed in camps in Syria, Jordan and the Lebanon. It was anticipated that the refugees allocated to the town would be in families. It was expected that the refugees would be housed in the Private Rented Sector.

The Leader then gave an outline of the support offered by Central Government and added that she was pleased with the response of partnership organisations within the town.

The Leader concluded by saying that a dedicated page on the Council's website, including a 'Frequently Asked Questions' section would be available and that Councillor Michelle Gardner and the Interim Assistant Director Housing have the lead roles for the Council in this issue.

Council then received updates on the following:

- Hampson Park Skatepark
- Summer Holiday Playschemes
- Stevenage Museum
- BMO Fleet Livery
- Gas Servicing Contracts savings
- 'Housemark' Accreditation
- Tenancy Fraud Shared Service
- Housing Enforcers
- Town Centre Public Realm Improvements
- Co-operative Councils Innovation Network
- Beat The Street
- Interfaith Week
- Safer Communities and Equalities

In reply to questions concerning the relaying of the floor in the Leisure Centre Walkway Council was advised that the work would cost in the region of £25,000 and would take place within the next four weeks. The extent by which the floor level would be raised was unknown and the Portfolio Holder undertook to advise the relevant Member after the meeting.

## **11. NOTICE OF MOTIONS**

None.

## **12. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRS/PORTFOLIO HOLDERS**

Council received three questions.

- A. The Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities and Equalities responded to a question relating to planning regulations regarding Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO).

The positions with regards to Housing, Environmental Health/Licensing and Planning perspectives were highlighted. It was noted that the tests for an Article 4 Direction application to be imposed were difficult to fulfil.

In response to the final point Council was advised that further information relating to HMOs could be made available to the public and Officers were asked to investigate the possibility of posting relevant information to a dedicated page on the Council's website.

The Portfolio Holder then responded to a supplementary question relating to the use of Article 4 Directions.

The meeting was advised that although a number of houses in Stevenage had covenants on their land title restricting occupation to one family the Council had no legal duty to enforce such covenants.

In reply to a specific question the Portfolio Holder offered to meet with the Member concerned and asked Officers to investigate the queries raised.

- B. The Portfolio Holder Economy, Enterprise and Transport responded to a question relating to retail units in the Town Centre.

The meeting was advised that the Council was working with partners through the Stevenage First partnership to support and encourage companies to locate in the town centre.

Some progress had already been made with the conversion of redundant office space and the granting of outline planning permission for a mixed retail / residential development on the Matalan site.

Additionally the Council had invested in improving the quality of the public realm within the town centre.

The Leader then responded to a supplementary question relating to the Government's recent announcement that local authorities would be allowed to retain Business Rates and how this could be used to encourage businesses to either remain or locate in the town.

Council was advised that actions the Council could consider would become clearer as full details of the proposal emerged.

- C. The Portfolio Holder Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Council responded to a question relating to the volume of calls to the Customer Service Centre (CSC).

Council was advised that new call management arrangements had recently been introduced into the CSC which had resulted in a 56% reduction in the level of manual messaging between July and September.

The Portfolio Holder then responded to a supplementary question relating to staffing levels in the Customer Service Centre and offered to undertake a site visit with the Member concerned to observe the issues at first hand.

### **13. ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW OF 2014/2015**

The Council considered a report seeking approval for the 2014/2015 Annual Treasury Management Review.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the 2014/2015 Annual Treasury Management Review be approved.

### **14. CHANGES TO CONTRACT STANDING ORDERS**

The Council considered a report seeking approval for revisions to the Council's Contract Standing Orders.

Council was advised that the revisions centred on the changes to the senior management structure.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the changes to the Contract Standing Orders be approved.

**15. CHANGES TO FINANCIAL REGULATIONS**

The Council considered a report seeking approval for revisions to the Council's Financial Regulations.

Council was advised that the Financial Regulations had last been updated in 2012.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the changes to the Financial Regulations be approved.

**16. URGENT KEY DECISIONS**

Council had before it a report detailing the Key Decisions taken under urgency provisions in the period May 2014 to May 2015.

Council was informed that the report was part of a move towards greater transparency in decision making and would be a regular yearly report.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

**17. DRAFT AUDIT COMMITTEE – MINUTES 1 SEPTEMBER 2015**

The Council had before it the draft minutes from the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 1 September 2015.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the draft minutes from the Audit Committee meeting held on 1 September 2015 be noted.

Mayor