

Public Document Pack



COUNCIL

16 DECEMBER 2020

SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA

PART I

6. QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL

The answers to the questions submitted by the Youth Council are set out in the attached document.

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11. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRS/PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

The answers to the questions submitted by Members to Committee Chairs/Portfolio Holders are set out in the attached document.

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COUNCIL – 16 DECEMBER 2020**QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL****(A) How did you support Homeless people during lockdown 1 & 2?**

Answer (Councillor Jeannette Thomas):

In the week prior to the Covid-19 National restrictions (16th March 2020), there were 121 households in Council owned Emergency and Temporary Accommodation, (EA/TA) including 19 in bed and breakfast accommodation. During June 2020 (after first National restrictions period) this figure had risen by 66% to 181 cases in Council owned Emergency and Temporary Accommodation and a 27% placement increase to 69 cases in bed and breakfast accommodation. This level of demand placed a significant strain on already stretched resources to cater for this vulnerable client group. At the start of September 2020 the Council had 153 households accommodated in temporary accommodation and 47 cases in bed and breakfast which was at an all-time high. The teams have been working at pace to bring forward the actions detailed in the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy to achieve the 4 priorities which are vital in addressing the additional demands placed on the Council due to COVID.

Since the “Everyone In” directive was put in place on 26 March 2020 the Council has had 126 cases that were rough sleeping or an imminent risk of rough sleeping that have been placed in accommodation that had been sleeping rough or at imminent risk of rough sleeping. There are 26 cases currently accommodated and of these there are 16 clients in nightly let accommodation and 10 of these cases within the Council’s own Temporary Accommodation stock.

Following the second national restrictions introduced in early November 2020 Local Authorities have been directed to follow the “Protect programme” to ensure rough sleepers have the opportunity to isolate in the same way they did during the first national restrictions. In the two weeks following these restrictions the Council had 26 rough sleepers accommodated with 8 out of the 14 cases known to the teams to be rough sleeping after the first national restrictions who are not currently engaging and accommodated. The Council must therefore be prepared for at least these 8 cases to make a further approach.

The Council has 3 Rough Sleeper Co-ordinators following a successful bid for funding who offer support to these households as well as using the No More service and working with colleagues in the Police, Voluntary sector and the Haven.

During the national restrictions all rough sleepers placed were provided with a mobile phone and food and the teams worked with the individuals to identify areas of support needed.

During the national restrictions SBC provided hotel accommodation with support and we continue to work with cases.

Detailed information on all of the work completed during this period can be found in our Housing First Executive report heard on 9th December 2020.

(B) What are your plans to support Homeless people over the Christmas period?

Answer (Councillor Jeannette Thomas):

We are currently working to convert suitable properties for rough sleeper use, these 15 rooms expected in December 2020 will be utilised for cold Weather emergency placements. By utilising these units as they become available we hope not to have to make use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for Cold Weather provision.

Cold Weather provision is invoked when the temperature drops below 0 degrees for three consecutive nights.

The length of any provision will in part be determined by the National approach being adopted to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is likely in response to the national approach, that provision will need to be made for a longer period than in previous years.

Attempts are made to attend all public reports of rough sleeping in order to give advice and assistance to the person in need. This includes notifications via external agencies (such as StreetLink), as well as those made directly to SBC. Visits will be made by staff across Stevenage Borough Council and The Haven.

The team operate a duty rota and provide a 24/7 service. Number of who to contact are available on our website.

When the first national restrictions were put into place SBC were 1 of 3 Hertfordshire LA's that set up the Hertfordshire Accommodation cell which is a multi-agency group that met weekly and now two weekly to share good practice and approaches to assisting the rough sleeper cohort. There has been a lot of joint working that has come from this cell including the Hertfordshire Tracker that captured details of all rough sleepers accommodated during the national restrictions and the support needs that each individual has. From this tracker we have Multi-Disciplinary meetings between each local Authority, primary and secondary health care services,

and various local support agencies. This ongoing work is being completed in order to ensure individuals are supported in all aspects of their need.

(C) Are you doing anything about environmental projects that we can be involved in?

Answer (Councillor John Gardner):

Covid-19 is unfortunately limiting the community projects we are able to undertake at the moment. However, upcoming projects include:

- *January 2021: planting an acre of trees to extend the existing Memorial Woodland in Fairlands Valley Park. We are currently putting together a schedule to ensure that we can manage numbers of people safely and in accordance with the Covid-19 guidance.*
- *September 2021: We will be supporting the Keep Britain Tidy Great British Spring Clean campaign with community events.*
- *September 2021: we will be planning an event for National Recycling Week.*
- *November / December 2021: National Tree Planting Week – there will be an event to plant tree seeds in sites to be determined.*

We welcome the opportunity to work with the Youth Council, and will keep you informed as other projects start to come on line.

(D) What are your plans to keep racial equality at the forefront of people's minds?

Answer (Councillor Jackie Hollywell):

Following the Council motion in July 2020, the Council has been working to establish an Equalities Commission. We are currently recruiting an independent chair to lead the commission. It is envisaged that the commission will establish a number of equality issues to tackle locally and it is anticipated that these will be driven during the course of 2021. Internally, the Council will also be revisiting its own Equality Objectives and will set a number of actions for the organisation to continue to improve equalities practice over the coming years.

(E) Will you be continuing the conversation about the black lives matters movement?

Answer (Councillor Jackie Hollywell):

We have been undertaking a listening exercise which was launched as part of Black History Month in October. We are absolutely clear that this is an ongoing conversation with communities across Stevenage. As we continue

our listening with local residents, businesses, faith groups, young people and community organisations. We welcome views and thoughts around this and have set up a dedicated email address listening@stevenage.gov.uk for anybody who wishes to contribute.

(F) What are your plans to educate local people about the BAME community?

Answer (Councillor Jackie Hollywell):

The Equalities Commission is likely to come up with a number of recommendations around education. We welcome the establishment of community-led groups such as BeMe to champion understanding and inclusion and look forward to working with them moving into 2021. We also welcome the involvement of the Youth Council in driving this agenda.

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MEMBERS QUESTIONS

Questions to Portfolio Holders

(A) Question from Councillor Margaret Notley -

'Research by Clean Up Britain has found that Stevenage did not issue any litter fines during 2018-19. The campaign group wants the enforcement of fines by Councils to be made compulsory. What is this Council's response to this suggestion and in the meantime will this Council now take a more proactive approach and issue fines?'

Answer (Councillor John Gardner):

Fixed Penalty Notices are one tool for the enforcement of littering and fly-tipping. The Council issued four Fixed Penalty Notices over the past six months. The Council has also utilised Community Protection Warnings and Notices, which also act as an effective form of enforcement for those caught committing enviro-crime and other forms of neighbourhood nuisance. 18 Community Protection Notices have been issued since April of this year.

Littering remains an offence, which will warrant the issuing of Fixed Penalty Notices or a Community Protection Notice if a Council officer witnessing the act or if a member of the public witnesses the offence and is willing to give a statement which can be used as evidence.

We have run a media campaign over the summer to encourage reporting and to highlight the neighbourhood issues caused as a consequence of littering and fly-tipping. We also hope that new neighbourhood teams will enable us to target and problem solve particular hot spots with local communities in local areas.

(B) Question from Councillor Stephen Booth -

'How many SBC employees have received race awareness and race bias training over the last 12 months?'

Answer (Councillor Mrs Joan Lloyd):

In terms of training, we have a range of equality and diversity learning programmes in place.

We developed a new and interactive equality and diversity programme which commenced rollout in January 2020. All of the Communities and Neighbourhoods Business Unit have completed this. However, due to the impact of the pandemic, this programme was paused and is currently being adapted to work for virtual delivery.

In addition, there are already e-learning programmes as part of our resources, and all of these programmes contain elements of race awareness and race bias training. Dignity at Work is an equality and diversity module which all staff are required to complete. There are further courses which are either role specific or optional additional learning. Completion figures are included below:

eLearning courses include:

<i>Dignity at Work</i>	<i>1311 delegates</i>
<i>Equality Act 2010</i>	<i>912 delegates</i>
<i>Equality in the Workplace \ E & D</i>	<i>415 delegates</i>

Of the above, 109 were completed during 2020.

(C) Question from Councillor Robin Parker

'In view of the minimal use of the areas of highway cleared by SBC for seating for hospitality outlets in the High Street and adverse public reaction:

- (a) exactly which businesses were consulted?*
- (b) when and how did the consultation take place?*
- (c) what did the responses show?*
- (d) why did SBC volunteer to take on this task, which is a Highways (HCC) matter?*
- (d) should some or all of the measures now be reversed?'*

Answer (Councillor Lloyd Briscoe):

- (a) exactly which businesses were consulted?*

Pretty much all of those businesses operating adjacent to the 'safe spaces' were consulted.

- (b) when and how did the consultation take place?*

SBC had to work within a very short deadline. The consultation was conducted on a single day by a Council Officer, who personally visited all of the affected businesses, following the lifting of the lockdown restrictions in the summer. Social distancing rules were strictly observed and essential PPE worn at all times.

- (c) what did the responses show?*

Our consultation indicated that all but one of the businesses who were consulted were in favour of the proposed measures being implemented.

- (d) why did SBC volunteer to take on this task, which is a Highways (HCC) matter?*

It was the intention of HCC to look at Stevenage Old Town in the later stage of their Tier 2 works. SBC would have much preferred the HCC to have delivered these safety measures as soon and as quickly as possible. As a consequence, SBC offered to do the work on their behalf.

(e) should some or all of the measures now be reversed?’

There is still the need for social distancing and the creation of safer spaces. The intention, therefore, is to maintain the safe spaces which are in place whilst keeping the matter under review, as circumstances dictate.

(D) Question from Councillor Graham Snell

When will we have a functional IT system that avoids constant drop outs and loss of email drafts?

Answer (Councillor Rob Broom):

The ICT team has been working hard to support service delivery during the pandemic, facilitating major changes in ways of working for staff, managing the business as usual service operations – some of which have increased demand linked to remote working - and implementing a complete overhaul of the IT infrastructure.

The latter programme is a core part of our IT Strategy, which was approved in late 2019 by both Stevenage and East Herts. This programme is progressing at pace and will support improved resilience and performance overall. While the service tries to prevent impacts on service delivery, there has been some intermittent disruption (including recently on 2nd December) related to work to deliver essential upgrades.

The Council’s storage servers have been upgraded and this will be followed in quarter four, 2020/2021 with a complete replacement of the core network devices, which will improve performance and security. This will be followed by a complete replacement of the councils Virtual Desktop (hosted desktop) software and hardware, upgrading all staff and members to Windows 10 and also supplying Office 365. The latter will also enable access outside of the hosted desktop to email, providing enhanced access. This will complete the second phase of the infrastructure replacement programme. The next and final stage will be replacement of Firewalls and additionally network monitoring tools.

Disconnections from the Council’s systems can be caused by many issues, but the above programme of work should remove any internal issues. With staff and Members are working remotely, there are also other potential factors outside our control, particularly the stability and speed of a user’s home broadband connection. The Service Desk team are able to provide support to help resolve any specific issues for an individual user.

(E) Question from Councillor Tom Wren

'Will the Council agree to extend the current 3 hours free parking in the Primett Road (former Waitrose) car park, from its current end date in January 2021, for another period of 6 months, to encourage business and trading in the Old Town?'

Answer (Councillor Lloyd Briscoe):

The decision to commit to this initiative was introduced in August 2020 for a period of six months. This, along with Government affording local Councils new powers to offer pavement licences for food and drink outlets, was considered complementary to aid sector recovery and enable safe movements in the Old Town.

The Council will continue to monitor the situation and will avail itself of any funding or support from Government or elsewhere for the benefit of Stevenage-based businesses. Given the fluidity of the situation, we will review the position in the New Year, and ahead of February 2021.

(F) Question from Councillor Andy McGuinness

In view of the recent announcement by Rishi Sunak of the £4 billion Levelling Up Fund for local infrastructure projects that Councils can bid for, subject to receiving support from the local MP, and deliverable before the next planned general election in 2024, how many projects, and on what items, does SBC envisage bringing forward under the Levelling Up agenda that will satisfy the Stevenage MP?

Answer (Councillor John Gardner):

The Council welcomes the opportunity to bid for funding to help deliver much-needed infrastructure improvements in the town. The strength of our regeneration programme, and the proactive role the Council has taken in prioritising town centre regeneration and housing development, should put us in a good position to bid for any funding that we may be eligible for. It is important that the Government recognises that "levelling-up" is not just about a north-south divide. Many places like Stevenage are in need of investment and regeneration, as recognised through our inclusion in the Towns Fund programme. We await further details of the specific criteria of this fund before being able to comment on the nature of any potential submissions, and we would welcome constructive involvement from the MP of Stevenage.