



## ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE

Date: Tuesday, 3 September 2019

Time: 6.00pm,

Location: Shimkent Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Contact: Fungai Nyamukapa

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Members: Councillors: M Downing (Chair), A Mitchell CC (Vice-Chair), D Bainbridge, S Barr, S Booth, A Brown, J Brown, T Callaghan, D Cullen, J Hanafin and L Rossati

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### AGENDA

#### **PART 1**

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

**2. MINUTES - 29 JULY 2019**

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Environment & Economy Select Committee meeting held on Monday 29 July 2019

Pages 3 – 8

**3. REVIEW OF LOCAL POST OFFICE SERVICES IN STEVENAGE**

To discuss the current provision of Post Offices in Stevenage and consider their ongoing viability in co-located retail stores

Pages 9 – 10

**4. REVIEW OF LOCAL POST OFFICE SERVICES IN STEVENAGE - SCOPING DOCUMENT**

To consider a scoping document for the Select Committee's review of Post Office Services in Stevenage

Pages 11 – 14

**5. URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

To consider any Part 1 business accepted by the Chair as urgent

## **6. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

To consider the following motions –

1. That under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1 – 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as amended by Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

2. That Members consider the reasons for the following reports being in Part II and determine whether or not maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

## **7. URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

To consider any Part II business accepted by the Chair as urgent

## STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

### ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Monday, 29 July 2019

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Autun Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete

**Present:** Councillors: Michael Downing (Chair), Adam Mitchell CC (Vice-Chair) ,  
Doug Bainbridge, Adrian Brown, Teresa Callaghan, Jody Hanafin and  
Lorraine Rossati.

**Also Present:** Councillor Lloyd Briscoe (Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise &  
Transport)  
Mr Phil Daniels (Turnback Project Manager, Network Rail)  
Mr Paul Codd (Stakeholder Manager, Govia Thameslink Railway)  
Mr Trevor Mason (Principal Engineer – Transport & Policy, Hertfordshire  
County Council)

**Start / End** Start Time: 6.00pm  
**Time:** End Time: 6.57pm

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Stephen Booth and Jim Brown.

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 2 MINUTES - 25 JUNE 2019

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Environment & Economy Select Committee meeting held on 25 June 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Chair drew Members' attention to the provisional date of 3 September 2019 for the Select Committee's next meeting, at which it was hoped that consideration would be given to the provision of Post Office services in the Borough. He asked Members to pencil in this date in their diaries/calendars.

#### 3 STEVENAGE RAIL STATION UPDATE

The Network Rail (NR) and Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) representatives gave presentations which provided updates on the Stevenage Turnback (5<sup>th</sup> Platform) project, the Govia Thameslink Spring 2019 timetable and the wider works along the East Coast Main Line (ECML) in support of the King's Cross remodelling project.

The Network Rail (NR) representative advised that the Stevenage Turnback (5th Platform) project would provide a new bi-directional running line (2km) running parallel with the existing ECML into the new platform where services would terminate, also enabling passengers to interchange. Major works were planned as part of the upcoming engineering work on the ECML in August 2019, Christmas 2019 and February 2020. Access to the new platform would be via a new footbridge, with stairs and a lift down to platform level.

The NR representative showed a series of slides regarding the proposed new layout and some photographs of the work that had already been completed on site. He also introduced some design images of the north end of the new Platform 5, looking from various directions.

In terms of the current status and progress of works, the NR representative advised that planning permission had been obtained; there were ongoing land negotiations with the Council and land had been acquired from Legal & General; operational readiness discussions were ongoing with the Department of Transport and Govia Thameslink Railway; re-grading works were ongoing at the south end of the site; sheet piling was underway at north and south ends of the site; overhead line piling and track excavation had been completed in the north and central areas; and the changeover of a telecommunications mast and removal of the old mast had been completed.

In respect of future works, the Committee was informed that overhead line works were planned for the August 2019 Bank Holiday weekend, detailed design for the remaining works was continuing and integration would take place with other projects, such as the King's Cross Track Improvement scheme.

The Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) representative referred to the major incidents that had occurred on 25 July 2019 due to the extremely hot weather. Three areas of track lost overhead power cables. One of these, the Midland Main Line just north of St. Pancras, was still to be fully repaired, and had been operating on a reduced service. It was hoped that normal service would resume on 30 July 2019.

The GTR representative stated that, for the period 22 June – 20 July 2019, 73.2% of overall GTR services had been on time (ie. all stations called within 59 seconds of arrival time) and only 4.1% of services had been cancelled. For Stevenage, 72.5% of Thameslink trains had been on time and 5.3% had been cancelled. Between 2010 and 2019 there had been a 38% increase in the number of departures per day; a 92% increase in the number of seats available per day; and a 231% increase in passenger capacity.

In relation to the new 5<sup>th</sup> Platform, the GTR representative explained that the new 717 class trains were gradually replacing the old 313 class trains. It was hoped that the 717 trains would be fully operational on the Hertford North line by the summer of 2020. Whilst the 5<sup>th</sup> Platform works were taking place, there were two temporary bus services per hour to Hertford North (130-200 passengers per day) and one service per hour to Watton-at-Stone (30-40 passengers per day). Prior to May 2019, a maximum of 350 passengers used the service per day. As an example, he added that, inclusive of the temporary bus service, a journey from Stevenage to Cuffley would take 56 minutes in peak hours and 42 minutes off peak.

With regard to the East Coast Main Line upgrade, the GTR representative advised that, once completed, this significant investment would enable an additional two long-distance services an hour into and out of London and would improve train service reliability for all operators, including GTR. This would include the remodelling of King's Cross (track not station), the Stevenage Turnback and power supply upgrades. In respect of the King's Cross remodelling, the track infrastructure had life expired. The remodelling would result in six tracks into King's Cross, with signalling control being moved to York. 148 new signals would be created, as would 6km of new track, 31 switches/crossings and 15km of overhead line replacement.

The GTR representative referred to wider ECML upgrades, including seven months of intensive overnight and weekend maintenance from Winter 2019 to Summer 2020 on the Northern City Line, points replacement at Newark, and the Werrington Grade Separation. Disruption on the network would take place at the August Bank Holiday weekend and over Christmas in 2019; a series of weekend closures during 2020; and reduced King's Cross availability during 2021 (50% capacity, whilst the other 50% was being remodelled, with possible greater use of St. Pancras).

In respect of the August 2019 Bank Holiday (24-25 August) weekend, the GTR representative explained that a "Do not travel" message had been promoted. There would be 130 miles of line closures, including service to and from King's Cross/St. Pancras and Moorgate. It was accepted that it was essential for some passengers to travel, and bus services would be provided between 5.00am and 11.00pm on these days, in order to transport passengers to stations on the Bedford to St. Pancras line and Greater Anglia line. These changes would be communicated to passengers through a variety of methods. Feedback from the weekend closure would be evaluated and used in the modelling of similar weekend closures over the coming year.

During the course of the presentations, the following matters were raised:

- The NR representative confirmed that the Stevenage Turnback works were on schedule for completion in time for implementation within the Summer 2020 timetable;
- A Member who was a regular commuter raised the safety issue of Platform 1 at Stevenage Railway Station, which she felt was dangerous due to its narrow width in places, especially during the crowded peak periods and with the additional trains to St. Pancras. The GTR representative undertook to look into this issue;

- The same Member commented that the new carriages contained less seats which meant that passengers joining trains at Stevenage during peak hours invariably had to stand for their journey. The GTR representative explained that there were no plans for either additional trains or more trains to be of 12 carriage length, as the both the number of trains per hour and the size of the fleet were at maximum levels;
- In terms of the service on the Hertford North line once the Stevenage turnback facility had been completed, the GTR representative confirmed that there would be two trains per hour throughout the day;
- The Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise & Transport commented that he had been in discussion with County Councillor Derrick Ashley (HCC Executive Member with responsibility for Public Transport matters), who shared Members' concerns regarding the condition of Stevenage Railway Station. Business leaders also felt that the Station was a very poor gateway to the town. County Councillor Ashley would be pursuing the issue of potential improvements to the Station at a higher level;
- A Member considered that, as well as the look of the Station, there were a number of practical issues that needed addressing, including the improved availability of the toilets and lifts (both of which were frequently closed); the robustness of the entrance/exit gates, which often broke down due to the volume of commuters during busy periods; and the number of empty shop units on the concourse. The Chair commented that responsibility for maintenance of the street lift rested with the Borough Council. The GTR representative appreciated the issues raised and advised that Gregg's would shortly be opening one of those shop units;
- In response to a Member's question regarding the level of digital services on the ECML, the NR representative stated that there were currently no digital signals on the line. The use of digital signals would be piloted between Moorgate and Drayton Park stations before being rolled out to the remainder of the ECML. However, the current fleet of trains was digitally ready, and so there would be no need for a fleet upgrade once the signals had been upgraded;
- In response to a further question, the GTR representative confirmed that once the Stevenage Turnback facility had been completed and the 5<sup>th</sup> platform was operational, the journey times to and from Moorgate would not be drastically quicker, possibly a few minutes per journey;
- A number of Members commented that the GTR service had been much more reliable since the Summer timetable had been introduced.

In terms of the widespread desire to improve the appearance of Stevenage Railway Station, the HCC Principal Engineer – Transport Policy & Monitoring commented that this was an issue that could be raised as part of the process when the Thameslink franchise was renewed (currently planned for 2021).

It was **RESOLVED** that the updates on the Stevenage Turnback (5<sup>th</sup> Platform) project, the Govia Thameslink Spring 2019 timetable and the wider works along the East Coast Main Line in support of the King's Cross remodelling project be noted.

#### 4 URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

None.

**5 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

**6 URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

**CHAIR**

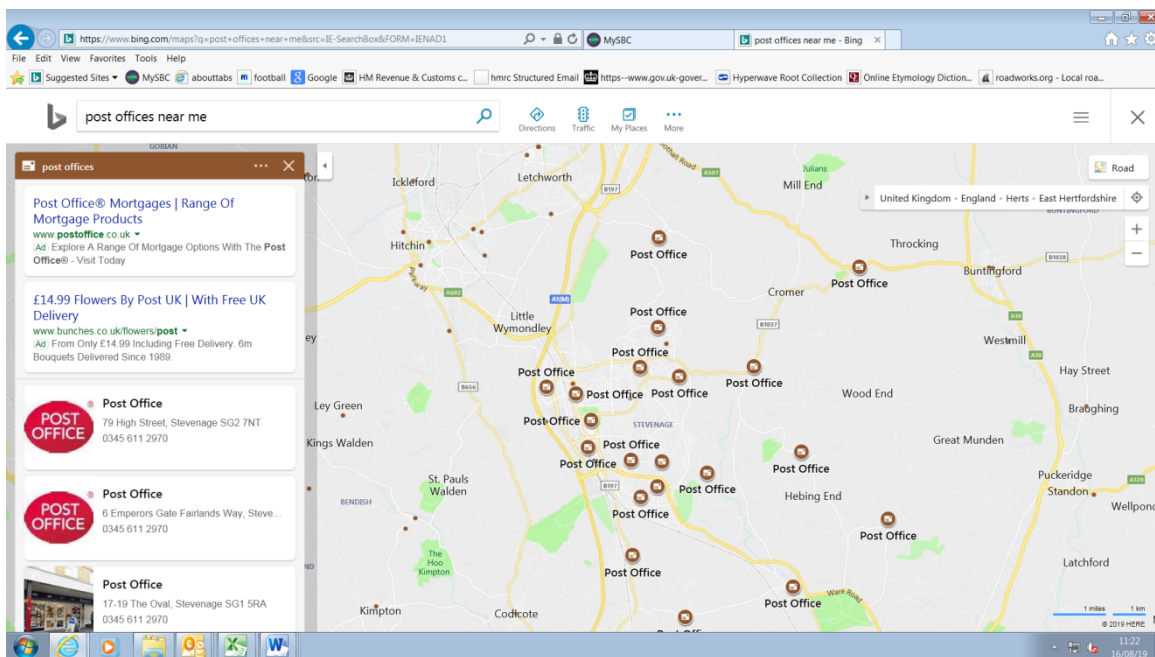
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## Background document for E&E Select Committee, local Post Office Services in Stevenage

There are currently 11 Post Offices within Stevenage these are:

1. 95 Queensway, Stevenage, SG1 1EA in the WH Smith store
2. 74A High Street, Stevenage in the Waitrose Supermarket (this store is due to close in October 2019 so an alternative location in the old town High Street is being sought by the Post Office)
3. Unit 6, the Neighbourhood Centre, Whitehorse Lane, Great Ashby, Stevenage, SG1 6NH
4. 1 Filey Close, Stevenage, SG1 2JN in the Co-op supermarket
5. 17-19 The Oval, Stevenage, SG1 5RA in Martin's Newsagent store
6. 6 Emperors Gate, Fairlands Way, Stevenage, SG2 7QX
7. 1-3 The Hyde, Stevenage, SG2 9SD, Martin's Newsagent store
8. 3 Hydean Way, Stevenage, SG2 9XH, McColls Newsagent store
9. Post Office Sorting Depot, Six Barrows, London Road, Stevenage, SG1 1AA
10. 126 Oaks Cross, Stevenage, SG2 8LU, Premier store supermarket
11. 245 Broadwater Crescent, Stevenage, SG2 8ET, Co-op supermarket



This is an extract from a Times newspaper article earlier in 2019, quoting the National Federation of Sub-postmasters on the issues facing post offices.

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### **Sub-Postmasters warn of network closures**

The National Federation of Sub-Postmasters has warned that many of its 8,000 members have reported such significant drops in income that up to 2,500 sub-post offices are at risk of closure. A survey found that 22% intend to scale back or shut their branches in the next year, with those in rural locations most at risk. The findings come ahead of a meeting tomorrow with MPs, during which federation chief executive Callum Greenhow will give evidence to a Commons inquiry into the post office network. The federation wants ministers to guarantee a continuation of subsidies to branches beyond 2021, the return of some Government services to post office branches, and the development of a broader range of banking and other financial products for them to offer.

*[The Times](#) [Financial Times](#)*

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Follow the link below to a Parliamentary Select Committee from 25 June 2019 on the issues affecting post offices nationally.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/business-energy-industrial-strategy/inquiries/parliament-2017/post-office-network-17-19/>

# DRAFT

## Template Scoping Document

<b><u>Environment &amp; Economy Select Committee</u></b>	
<b><u>Scrutiny Review Title:</u></b>	<b>Post Office services in Stevenage</b>
<b><u>Background issues</u></b> to review – rationale for scrutinising this issue:	Members raised the issue of reviewing the Post Office service offer in Stevenage when the committee agreed items for the work programme in March 2019.
Is this issue covered by the <b>Future Town Future Council Programme</b> ?	(i) <u>Co-operative Neighbourhood Management</u> - “Work with our communities to improve our neighbourhoods” – “Better understand our communities’ needs and priorities” to “Work with our residents to design and deliver services” This priority is not directly linked to an external service provider like the post office, but there is an indirect link regarding understanding our communities needs and more broadly acting as community advocates to safeguard an important community service
Is this issue one that raises interest with the public via <b>complaints</b> or Members’ surgeries or with Officers?:	The status of local Post Offices is not a matter of direct control for the Council. However, when the Post Office moved from the Westgate Shopping Centre to WH Smith shop this raised concern with local residents. In a similar way the town centre regeneration of Queensway could have an impact on access to the store and post office.
<b><u>Focus of the review:</u></b> (State what the review focus will be)	The one off meeting should establish: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <u>how well served the town is currently with post offices?</u></li><li>• <u>Identify what the pressures are on maintaining the current number of post offices including the sub-post offices in WH Smith and Waitrose and in the neighbourhood centres?</u></li><li>• <u>Provide some context including economic viability of post offices and switch to online services for many services such as applying for vehicle taxation etc.</u></li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Establish with the post office providers how well used their facilities are?</u></li> <li>• <u>To understand ways that local people can be encouraged to use their post offices to safeguard their future provision.</u></li> <li>• <u>Attempt to find out what users think about the current service?</u></li> </ul>
<p><b>Timing issues:</b> Are there any timing constraints to when the review can be carried out?</p>	Officers will advise at the meeting if there are any timing issues to consider. The review will have to fit in with the timing of the other Select Committee review work programme items.
<p>The Committee will meet on (provide <b>dates</b> if known):</p>	<p>Dates: Day/Month/Time/Venue Date of the one-off session to be agreed.</p>
<p><b>SBC Leads</b> (list the Executive Portfolio Holders and SD's Heads of Service who should appear as witnesses):</p>	<p><i>Officers have suggested the following people:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Executive Portfolio Holder(s) for Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Working, Cllr Rob Broom &amp; Economy, Enterprise &amp; Transport, Cllr Lloyd Briscoe</i></li> <li>• <i>Assistant Director Planning &amp; Regulatory, Zayd Al Jawad/Chris Berry</i></li> <li>• <i>Assistant Director Communities &amp; Neighbourhoods, Rob Gregory</i></li> </ul>
<p>Any <b>other witnesses</b> (external persons/critical friend)?:</p>	<p>To be identified by the Committee at the scoping meeting. <i>Possible options identified by officers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Peter Hall, National Federation of Sub Post Offices</i></li> <li>• <i>Chris Newbitt, Manager Symonds Green Co-op sub-post office</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Allocation of lead Members</b> on specific individual issues/questions:</p>	<p>To be identified by the Committee at the scoping meeting.</p> <p>Members will ask questions on the following areas (list the issues to address during the interviews):</p> <p><i>Depending on what major strands are identified in the scope these can be allocated to lead Members.</i></p>

Any other Questions Members wish to cover:	
<b><u>Site visits and evidence gathering in the Community</u></b>	Members may wish to visit their local sub-post offices and talk to residents about the local service.
<b><u>Equalities and Diversity issues:</u></b> The review will consider what the relevant equalities and diversity issues are regarding the Scrutiny subject that is being scrutinised	To be identified by the lead Member – Cllr ?  <u>Equalities &amp; Diversity Issues</u> – Are there any E&D issues to consider in this review? –  Access to local post office services for residents is desirable especially older people with mobility issues who may not wish or be able to access services on-line.
<b><u>Constraints</u></b> (Issues that have been highlighted at the scoping stage but are too broad/detailed to be covered by the review):	<i>To be identified by the Committee at the scoping meeting 25 June 2019 (These issues can be captured and dealt with via other means – Briefings/email/officer action etc)</i>
<b><u>Background Documents/data</u></b> that can be provided to the review	<i>As identified by the Committee at the draft scoping meeting 25 June 2019:</i> Evidence requested: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Scrutiny Officer has invited responses from the public via the Council’s social media accounts and is canvassing some older people’s groups in the town to try to gather views.</li> </ul>
<b><u>Agreed Milestones and review sign off</u></b> -To be agreed by Members and officers	<i>Formal response from Executive Portfolio Holder (Executives have a Statutory requirement to respond to Scrutiny review recommendations two months after receiving a final report and recommendations of a review: <b>Date Executive Portfolio responses are expected</b> (dependent on the final report &amp; executive portfolio response template publishing date): <b>DD MM YY</b></i> <b>Date for monitoring implementation of recommendations – final sign off (typically one year from completion of the review): <b>DD MM YY</b></b> (Close to this date the Select Committee will receive a report at a Committee meeting to agree the final sign off of the review recommendations)

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