

Daneshill House
Danestrete
Stevenage
Hertfordshire

6 December 2022

Dear Sir/Madam

Notice is hereby given that a meeting of the Stevenage Borough Council will be held in the Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage on Wednesday, 14 December 2022 at 7.00pm and you are summoned to attend to transact the following business.

Yours faithfully



Matthew Partridge
Chief Executive

AGENDA

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2. MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS

To receive any communications that the Mayor may wish to put before the Council.

3. MINUTES - 19 OCTOBER 2022

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 19 October 2022 for signature by the Mayor.

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4. COMMUNITY PRESENTATIONS

None received.

5. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

None received.

6. NEW LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S TERM OF OFFICE

To recommend to Council a revised term of office for the new Leader of the Council (to take effect from 1 January 2023).

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7. APPOINTMENT OF NEW LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

To appoint a new Leader of the Council, to take up the position with effect from 1 January 2023.

8. QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL

None received.

9. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

A written answer to the question below will be published on a supplementary agenda.

Question from Mr Jim Borchers

“It is now over six months since Stevenage Borough Council published the report from Mutual Gain “Thinking about Stevenage High Street”.

What progress has been made on the suggestions for change listed in the report?”

10. LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S UPDATE

In accordance with the Council’s Standing Orders, the Leader of the Opposition shall be given the opportunity to raise one matter relevant to the Borough that has arisen since the last meeting of the Council. The Leader of the Council shall then have the opportunity to advise the Council of matters relevant to the Borough that have arisen since the last meeting.

11. UPDATE FROM SCRUTINY CHAIRS

To receive updates from the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees on the recent activities of those Committees.

12. NOTICE OF MOTIONS

In accordance with Standing Orders, the following motions have been received for consideration:

- (i) Government Use of Hotels as Hostels

To be moved by the Labour Group.

“We are proud of our town, how we support one another in our community, and support those who are vulnerable and in need. We have played our part in welcoming and supporting refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and Ukraine in recent years, but the current actions of the Home Office, placing large numbers of asylum seekers in a Stevenage hotel against the advice of all local partners is unacceptable. It puts extraordinary pressures on local resources and is a completely unsuitable location for vulnerable individuals leading to real humanitarian issues.

We recognise that there is a national challenge for the Home Office, which all parts of our country need to tackle alongside international partners. But having failed to deal with this issue for 12 years, it is absolutely vital that Government recognise they must work together with local partners and communities rather than against local advice and often with little or no notice to the areas concerned.

We have made clear to the Home Office that using the Novotel as accommodation to temporarily house asylum seekers is not appropriate and that we could not support this location being used. It is isolated and with poor transport links, impacts on our local economy by losing space for business visitors, impacts on the events and activities in Knebworth House and Gardens, has disrupted local peoples wedding & event plans in addition to creating great pressure on public services.

Local services, from the hospital to healthcare, to Council and police services are already under great strain. Having a large-scale facility brought into use in Stevenage in short order makes these challenges even more difficult for our community.

Along with all Councils in Hertfordshire, we have written to the Minister given our deep concerns over the lack of consultation on the Home Office use of hotels across the county, choice of highly unsuitable sites, and pressures on vital services and our communities. We have asked for an urgent meeting with the Home Secretary to make the strength of local views absolutely clear. Locally we have requested that the Home Secretary or her representative visit the Novotel with us to see how unsuitable it is to be used for this purpose.

That this Council calls upon the government to:

1. Carry out an urgent review of the policy of using hotels to accommodate asylum seekers and refugees
2. Introduce a formal process of consultation with local partners on the suitability or unsuitability of accommodation which is being considered locally by the Home Office contractors
3. Ensure that consultation is carried out in good time for responses to be carefully considered and for local concerns to be taken into account
4. Work with local government to develop more sustainable options for housing asylum seekers and refugees including the use of MOD land, modular buildings and develop these along with support packages for the needs of asylum seekers and refugees
5. Ensure that local infrastructure is available to support the needs of asylum seekers and refugees before accommodation is designated
6. Carry out an urgent review of the asylum seeker application process so that applicants are not kept waiting for decisions.
7. That government respond to the concerns of local authorities recognising that the use of hotels as hostels is incurring expenses for local tax payers where Councils are seeking to challenge the change of use under planning law.”

(ii) Police and Community Safety in Hertfordshire

To be moved by Councillor Phil Bibby CC and seconded by Councillor Bret Facey.

“Stevenage Borough Council notes the recent reforms and improvements to the police across England and Wales since 2019. This Council is grateful for the 184 more police officers in Hertfordshire, as a part of the over 15,300 more police officers in England and Wales recruited since 2019 and calls on the government to continue its drive to have recruited an extra 20,000 police officers by 2023.

That this Council notes:

- The change to national policy that will see every report of home burglary having a police visit, ensuring that every victim of such an invasive crime will be given the attention they deserve
- Resident’s concern about the impact that illegal and disruptive protests have had on our country in recent years
- That the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act has strengthened the power that police have tackling such action
- The further positive impacts of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act on dealing with sexual offences, including extending the scope of the offences in the Sexual Offences Act 2003, providing greater powers for the management of sex offenders and toughening around child sex offences
- The substantial increase of police funding to £16.9 billion, part of which will be used to give every police officer a £1,900 uplift in their salary this year

That this Council resolves to:

- Co-operate with the government on future funding for our local police service
- Support officers new to Stevenage through providing forums for them to meet with residents
- Provide resources for residents to assist with keeping in contact with new police officers in our neighbourhoods”

(iii) BBC Local Radio Services

To be moved by the Liberal Democrat Group.

“That this Council notes with great concern the proposed funding cuts and consequent re-organisation of BBC local radio services.

We believe that the changes will impact very badly upon:

- local democracy;
- the accountability of councils and others;
- local information and support for residents.

The detrimental effects on Stevenage and more widely will not be compensated by any tiny savings made.

That this Council therefore resolves to:

- (a) Hereby publicly assert our opposition to the cuts.
- (b) Send a copy of this motion to:
Tim Davie CBE, BBC Director General
Jason Horton, Acting Director for BBC Local
The Stevenage MP
The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport
The Prime Minister and the leaders of the other parliamentary parties
and ask for their support in stopping this destruction of our BBC local radio services.”

13. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRS / PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

In accordance with Standing Orders, written answers to the following questions will be circulated on a supplementary agenda.

(A) Question from Councillor Bret Facey

“Does the Council consider the warmth residents suffering from fuel poverty in the south of Stevenage as equally important as those residents living in the north and centre of the town?”

(B) Question from Councillor Chris Howells

“There are ongoing issues with a lack of response to residents on housing repairs. They are then contacting Councillors, and this is no doubt creating more work for Officers. How can the Council improve communications with residents, so they stop feeling ignored?”

(C) Question from Councillor Alex Farquharson

“Does the Leader of the Council believe that all politicians aspiring for public office in Stevenage should uphold the highest standards of honesty, trust and transparency?”

(D) Question from Councillor Julie Ashley-Wren

“Are other options for the inappropriate location for the proposed primary school in the Town Centre being considered?”

(E) Question from Councillor Stephen Booth

“IT failures at SBC have continued since this Group last raised the issue. In the last year:

- (a) how many major failures have occurred?
- (b) how many (estimated) work hours have been lost or disrupted?
- (c) what has been the (estimated) cost to council tax payers?”

(F) Question from Councillor Andy McGuinness

“Given the significant financial pressures the Council will find itself in the future, what assessment has been or will be undertaken to establish any possible efficiency savings from either outsourcing or pooling current council services with other neighbouring authorities?”

(G) Question from Councillor Robin Parker

“Response and answering times for telephone contacts at the SBC Customer Service Centre have been appalling for several years and local social media continues to be full of complaints about this. Recognising that we have also repeatedly raised this issue and that not all customers either can go online for their particular query, or may not want to do so:

- (a) what plans have SBC management got to address this issue by deploying additional resources?
- (b) will you undertake to rectify this gross failing by June 2023?”

(H) Question from Councillor Graham Snell

“SBC is sometimes slow and unresponsive over dealing with perceived breaches of planning conditions. Will a dedicated Planning Enforcement Officer now be appointed?”

(I) Question from Councillor Tom Wren

“SBC consults only with immediate neighbours on planning applications. Will SBC widen the scope of such consultations, so that, for example, those with a clear view of the proposed development are also consulted?”

14. MID YEAR TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2022/23 AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS

The report circulated at Item 14 was considered by the Executive on 16 November 2022 when the following recommendation to Council was agreed:

“That the 2022/23 Mid Year Treasury Management Review and Prudential Indicators be recommended to Council for approval”.

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15. MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES SCHEME 2022/23

To consider a proposed Members' Allowances Scheme for 2022/23.

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16. CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MEMBERS

To consider and approve a revised Members' Code of Conduct.

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17. ELECTORAL REVIEW OF THE BOROUGH OF STEVENAGE - FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

To consider a report in respect of the Stevenage Local Government Boundary Review.

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18. AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES

To note the Minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 9 November 2022.

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