

**ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Tuesday, 16 January 2024

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: Rob Broom (Chair) (Chair), Adam Mitchell CC (Vice-Chair) (Vice Chair), Jim Brown, Bret Facey, Conor McGrath, Sarah Mead, Claire Parris, Ellie Plater and Baroness Dr Sharon Taylor of Stevenage, OBE

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 6.45pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors McGuinness and Snell.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 12 DECEMBER 2023

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee held on 12 December 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE BUS SCRUTINY REVIEW

The Committee received the report and recommendations of the Environment and Economy Select Committee Scrutiny Review into local Bus Services following the collapse of the ZEBRA Electric Bus Scheme for Stevenage.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that the proposed recommendations would be presented to the Executive Portfolio Holder for Economy and Transport, Councillor Lloyd Briscoe and with partners at HCC Highways Unit and Arriva Bus Company with a response to be provided within two months of the publishing of the report.

The following comments and responses were made at the meeting:

- Recommendation 9 (i) – in respect of the pedestrian access from the Bus Station through to the shops, it was agreed that the route across the front of the Leisure Centre was clear although additional signage could help people to use this route rather than to the side of Daneshill House/Registry Office. It was suggested that the perception that the Daneshill House route being the quicker route should be challenged;

- Recommendation 9 (iii) – in relation to the location of Shopmobility, it was noted that it was the decision of Shopmobility and not the Council that they locate in the Indoor market rather than the bus station as they wanted to link in with Age Concern and their presence in the market;
- Recommendation 9 (iv) – in relation to the additional seating, it was noted that there was both seating in the indoor and outdoor areas of the new bus station, along the walking route both in front of the Leisure Centre and on the section from the end of the Station ramp towards PaddyPower. Additional seating was also available in Event Island and then in the Town Centre itself. The alternative route alongside Swingate had no place for seating and should not be encouraged as it was a busy road with traffic fumes.
- A Member raised the issue of the proposed circular bus route between Roaring Meg, Leisure Park, Old Town and the Town Centre. Similar schemes operated in many places and the Council should not lose sight of this. The Council should be looking to identify any funding opportunities for this and it should be included in the recommendations of the Review;
- The consideration of a spine route was also mentioned going from one side of the Town to another rather than all routes terminating in the Town Centre;
- Concern was expressed regarding the opening hours of the Bus Station and that the Council needed to ensure a safe and comfortable user experience;
- Recommendation 8 – it was suggested that speed humps should be included in the list of traffic calming measures and that as well as reviewing past planning applications, Planning Officers and Planning and Development Committee Members should also inform the planning process with regard to traffic calming measures and the impact they have on buses.

It was **RESOLVED**

1. that the Scrutiny Officer, in consultation with the Chair of the Environment and Economy Committee produce amended recommendations based on the bullet points listed above and circulate to members of the Committee for their agreement to the changes;
2. That the amended recommendations be presented to the Executive Portfolio Holder for Economy and Transport, Councillor Lloyd Briscoe and partners at HCC Highways Unit and Arriva Bus Company with a response to be provided within two months of the publishing of the report.

4 **DRAFT REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COST-OF-LIVING SCRUTINY REVIEW**

The Committee considered the draft report and recommendations of the Committee's Cost of Living review.

The Committee was presented with the review findings and conclusions which would be presented to the Executive Portfolio Holders including the Leader of the Council, Resources and Transformation, Co-operative Councils and Neighbourhoods and Economy and Transport who would liaise with partners including:

- Stevenage CAB;
- Childrens Centres;
- Homestart;
- Wenta BTC; and
- Unison and Unite Trades Unions;

and that a response be provided within two months of the report being published.

Members agreed that although some areas had improved since the review had been undertaken, the impact of the cost of living crisis was still being felt by the community although much of the solution was not in the gift of Stevenage Borough Council.

Members also agreed the importance of the Council to continue to lobby the Government to take the issue of Local Government funding more seriously particularly when Councils were taking on additional responsibilities such as those during the Covid-19 pandemic or the responsibility to provide accommodation for asylum seekers. The Chair agreed to make an extra recommendation regarding lobbying central government on this issue.

In relation to Recommendation 1 – Signposting, Members stressed the importance of teams going out into the community and not just waiting for the community to reach out for help. It was agreed that this way forward should form part of the recommendation.

The Chair thanked the Committee for their thorough and valuable work on the Review.

It was **RESOLVED** that the recommendations 1 – 7 be approved with the addition to recommendation 1 as referred to above and the addition of an extra recommendation on lobbying central government regarding local government funding.

5 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

6 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

7 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR