

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**COUNCIL
MINUTES**

Date: Wednesday, 18 October 2023

Time: 7.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: (Chair), (Vice Chair), Myla Arceno, Julie Ashley-Wren, Sandra Barr, Philip Bibby CC, Stephen Booth, Lloyd Briscoe, Rob Broom, Jim Brown, Forhad Chowdhury, Nazmin Chowdhury, Michael Downing, John Duncan, Bret Facey, Alex Farquharson, Richard Henry, Jackie Hollywell, Mason Humberstone, Wendy Kerby, Graham Lawrence CC, Conor McGrath, Andy McGuinness, Maureen McKay, Sarah Mead, Adam Mitchell CC, Margaret Notley, Claire Parris, Ellie Plater, Loraine Rossati, Graham Snell, Simon Speller, Baroness Taylor of Stevenage, OBE, Carolina Veres, Anne Wells and Tom Wren

Start / End Start Time: 7.00pm
Time: End Time: 10.10pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Chris Howells, Mrs Joan Lloyd, Lin Martin-Haugh, Robin Parker CC and Jeannette Thomas.

- (1) Councillor Tom Wren declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in respect of Item 10 (2) – Notice of Motions: London Day Travelcard, as he was employed by Transport for London. He stated that he would withdraw from the meeting for the duration of that item.
- (2) Baroness Sharon Taylor also declared an interest in respect of Item 10 (2) – Notice of Motions: London Day Travelcard, as she was the Shadow Spokesperson for Transport in the House of Lords. She would be remaining in the meeting and participating in the debate and vote on that item.

2 MINUTES - SPECIAL COUNCIL AND SCHEDULED COUNCIL - 19 JULY 2023

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Special Council Meeting and the Scheduled Council Meeting held on 19 July 2023 be approved as correct records and signed by the Mayor.

3 MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Mayor was saddened to hear of the recent passing of former Councillor and Mayor Lilian Strange, who had served as an SBC Member for the Martins Wood and Bandley Hill Wards between 1991 and May 2013, including a year as Mayor in 2003/04. The Mayor advised that Lilian's funeral would take place on Wednesday

25 October 2023 at Weston Road Cemetery followed by a reception at the Shephall Centre, Shephall Green. A number of other Members spoke in tribute to former Councillor Strange.

The Leader of the Council advised that Lilian had been a passionate community Councillor, very much involved in sport with the Sports Council being one of her Mayoral charities.

Councillor Simon Speller spoke of Lilian and her husband's love for sport which showed in her Mayoral Year. She loved travel and spending time with her family and his thoughts were with her family at this sad time.

Baroness Taylor spoke of her memories of Lilian and that she had chosen engineering for her career at a time when this was not a common profession for women and that she was a role model to other women in this field. Lilian had made a fantastic career for herself despite a number of challenges in her life including the untimely death of her son post which she set up a charity. Baroness Taylor thanked Lilian for her contribution to Stevenage and advised that her thoughts and sincere condolences were with her family.

Councillor Phil Bibby CC on behalf of the Conservative Group sent condolences to Lilian's family.

Councillor Stephen Booth on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Groups also spoke of the achievement of Lilian within the Engineering Sector where very few women worked at that time. He thanked Lilian for her service to Stevenage.

A number of other Members paid tribute to Lilian. The Council then stood to observe a minute's silence.

At this juncture, the Mayor advised that she had accepted an urgent cross-party motion for consideration at the meeting concerning the sad and tragic situation in Israel and Gaza and that she would be varying the order of business so that the motion would be considered immediately after Agenda Item 7.

The Mayor then advised Council that since she had become Mayor in May 2023 she had attended 150 events and thanked Councillor Jim Brown, Deputy Mayor for attending many events also. The Mayor's highlights included her recent afternoon tea party and thanked all those who had supported her and helped to raise money for her charities. The Mayor reminded Council that her theme and main aim was to get Stevenage recognised as a dementia friendly Town. The work towards this aim would hopefully culminate in an announcement soon and she would advise the Council as soon as this happened.

4 **COMMUNITY PRESENTATIONS**

There were no community presentations.

5 **PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS**

There were no petitions or deputations.

6 QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL

There were no questions from the Youth Council.

7 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

Question 1 from Mr Jim Borchers

The Council noted that a response to the question submitted by Mr Borchers regarding the new residential development at Kenilworth Close had been published in the supplementary agenda for the meeting.

Mr Borchers was present at the meeting and asked the following supplementary question: no current information regarding the Kenilworth development was available either on the Council's Website or in the local newsletters for the area; the link to receive the newsletter publicised in the Chronicle or available on the Website did not work either. What improvements will Stevenage Borough Council make to its Website and digital and paper communications to ensure better communication with its residents?

The Leader of the Council advised that the points raised by Mr Borchers would be considered as part of the review and future changes to the website and associated communications activities.

Question 2 from Jennifer Huygen

The Council noted that a response to the question submitted by Jennifer Huygen regarding lighting in Fairlands Valley Park had been published in the supplementary agenda for the meeting.

Jennifer Huygen was present at the meeting and asked the following supplementary question: Could the Council give a timeline of when a review of its parks will take place and within that review when a decision would be made on more lighting in Fairlands Valley Park, particularly on the North to South route through the park?

Councillor Simon Speller, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Performance, advised that he would be happy to meet with Ms Huygen to look at the specifics of her concern in relation to the lighting and would welcome her input into the future design regarding safety through the park.

Question 3 from Mr Teun van Leeuwen

The Council noted that a response to the question submitted by Mr Teun van Leeuwen regarding cycling policy audits had been published in the supplementary agenda for the meeting.

Mr Teun van Leeuwen was present at the meeting and asked the following supplementary question: Will the Council commit to commencing a bike plan audit within the next 12 months to help achieve our shared vision of increased cycling participation if not what are the Council's reservations for not doing so?

Councillor Briscoe, Portfolio Holder for Economy and Transport advised that he would discuss the request with the relevant officers and reiterated the suggestion of working with Cycle UK and Sustrans.

8 **LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S UPDATE**

The Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Phil Bibby CC, asked the following question:

“In relation to the Towns Fund monies, could the Leader advise on the progress of the Heritage Trail which is to be funded through this budget?”

The Leader of the Council advised that some of the rules had been relaxed for the use of the Towns Fund monies. In terms of the Heritage Trail, there was an ongoing project timeline and the Leader advised he would get the details to Councillor Bibby following the meeting.

The Council then received updates from the relevant Executive Portfolio Holders on the following matters:

- Sustainable X;
- Stevenage Cycle Hire – Business Engagement Event;
- Solar Panels on Refuse Lorries;
- Arts and Culture for Social Cohesion: CCIN Policy Lab;
- Pioneering Young STEM Futures Programme;
- Helston House, Scarborough Avenue;
- Chilham House, Kenilworth Close;
- Customer Services Relocation;
- Leisure Contract: Capital Investment Update;
- Information Technology;

- Safer Streets Fund;
- Award Winning Station Multi-Storey Car Park;
- Growing the Global Life Sciences Cluster in Stevenage.

Councillor Phil Bibby asked if Everyone Active would be bringing anything in to encourage the public to support the Gordon Craig Theatre.

The Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure and IT advised that she would follow this up with the Team at Everyone Active.

9 **UPDATE FROM SCRUTINY CHAIRS**

In the absence of the Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, the Chair of the Environment and Economy Select Committee (who was also a Member of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee) advised that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's focus has been on holding the Executive to account and that Members had considered a range of issues as well as pre-scrutiny work on the Council Tax Support Scheme. Work was also underway in preparation for an item at the Committee's meeting in November which would focus on the analysis of the 2021 Census data and how the Council uses this data to inform service design.

The Chair of the Community Select Committee advised that, at its recent meetings, the Committee had continued its work on Housing Repairs including a morning with the Housing Repairs Team attending site visits; some pre-scrutiny work on the Housing Allocations Policy; and a presentation from the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure and IT, the Cultural Development Officer and the Curator of the Museum on the Town's cultural offer.

The Chair of the Environment & Economy Select Committee then advised that the Committee had continued its work on the review of Bus Services, and commented that a report would be forthcoming and he thanked all those who had contributed to the review.

The Leader of the Council thanked the Chairs for their updates which demonstrated the constructive cross-party work that many Councillors were doing.

10 **NOTICE OF MOTIONS**

1. Urgent Motion – Israel/Gaza (considered immediately after item7)

Councillor Richard Henry moved and Councillors Phil Bibby and Stephen Booth jointly seconded the following motion:

“This Council is united in expressing our deep shock and sadness at the act of terrorism perpetrated by Hamas on Israel on 7th October. Our thoughts and deepest sympathies are with all the innocent people in Israel and Gaza now caught up in the escalating violence.

We also recognise that there may be Stevenage residents who have family, friends or loved ones facing danger and we offer our heartfelt support and solidarity to our residents during these troubling times.

This Council resolves to:

1. Express solidarity with the innocent people directly affected by the ongoing situation in Israel and Gaza.
2. Encourage and support good relations between our own Stevenage communities at this time of immense international tension to maintain community cohesion.”

The Mayor welcomed Mr Terry Wolfe and Rabbi Danny Rich to the meeting and advised that Imam Mohammed Moynul Islam of the Stevenage Mosque had also been invited but was unfortunately unable to attend due to a prior commitment.

In moving the motion, the Leader of the Council thanked Rabbi Danny Rich and Terry Wolfe for their attendance at the meeting. He also thanked Imam Mohammed Moynul Islam of the Stevenage Mosque for his written commitment to actively participate in the activities and discussions on this matter.

The Leader advised that he was shocked and distressed by the horrific images and escalating violence in the Middle East with millions of Palestinian and Israeli innocent lives, men women and children, at the heart of the conflict. He also expressed concern regarding the rise of antisemitism and islamophobia around the UK. The Leader stated he was proud of the diverse and tolerant community in Stevenage and advised that the Council would continue to work with all communities to foster good relations and maintain community cohesion.

Councillor Phil Bibby CC, Leader of the Conservative Group, seconded the motion. He condemned the brutal and shocking events in Israel on 7 October. He agreed that the Council should maintain a focus on community tensions locally, recognising the sensitivities on both sides of the conflict. His thoughts were with the innocents who had lost their lives and those that had come to harm.

Councillor Stephen Booth, Deputy leader of the Liberal Democrats Group then jointly seconded the motion. Councillor Booth advised that he had long been an active supporter of the rights of Palestinians to their own state and to make peace with their Israeli neighbours despite many failures on both sides in this dispute.

Councillor Booth stated that today, Hamas, along with extreme right-wing Israeli politicians and the settler movement, had made the aspirations all but impossible for a two-state solution and following the recent events, any chance of a resolution and peace in Israel had been destroyed. He reminded Council that Hamas was a proscribed terrorist organisation in the UK and the US; Israel was a properly

constituted state with which the UK have very fulsome diplomatic relations but should act only in agreement with international law.

The Mayor then invited Rabbi Danny Rich, in his capacity as the Rabbi to the Stevenage Liberal Synagogue, to address Council.

Rabbi Rich began by speaking of the incursion of Hamas fighters into Israel and advised that this was a time of great trauma for the citizens of Israel and Gaza and that the prospects appeared, after nearly a week and a half, to be worsening. He spoke of the right of the Government of Israel to pursue the perpetrators and rescue the captives, subject only to doing its best to preserve the wellbeing and lives of innocent Palestinian civilians, the current residents of Gaza.

Rabbi Rich advised that Jews and Muslims in the United Kingdom should be able to go about their daily lives without fear, and that it remained the responsibility of His Majesty's Government, the police service and local authorities to do all in their power to protect synagogues and mosques, schools and shops so that the effects of the twin scourge of Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia did not haunt our communities.

Rabbi Rich concluded by saying that Israel and Palestine needed our prayers and our efforts to fulfil the potential of its two peoples, and that work should start now.

A number of other Members spoke in support of the motion and upon being put to the vote, was unanimously carried.

2. Maintenance of Roads in the Borough

Councillor Lloyd Briscoe moved and Councillor Simon Speller seconded the following motion:

“A Local Government Authority (LGA) analysis from March this year stated that the Government spent 31 times more per mile maintaining motorways and ‘A’ roads last year than they did on funding councils to repair crumbling local roads.

Figures from that same report show that the Government spent £192,000 per mile on maintaining strategic roads, such as motorways or major ‘A’ roads compared to just £6,000 per mile on fixing potholes on local roads.

This is despite local roads making up 180,000 miles of the UK's overall network, with strategic roads making up just 4,800 miles.

Given that there are some 3,200 miles of roadway in the county, this equates to almost two potholes for every road in Hertfordshire.

In June this year, the Herts County Council secured some £4m extra funding from the Government to address the issue of potholes in our roads. Given that there are ten authorities within the County, then evenly distributed this equates to some £400k each.

This Council calls upon the Herts County Council to recognise that Stevenage is a

priority case regarding the repair of potholes because of HCC's neglect of our local roads and cycle tracks over the years and that at least £400k of the awarded funding is 'ringfenced' for the benefit and enhancement of the people and road users of the town.

We therefore move that this Council requests the County Council Highways Portfolio Holder to ensure fair shares and prompt action for Stevenage residents of repairs to potholes."

The following amendment was moved by Councillor Phil Bibby CC and seconded by Councillor Bret Facey (additions and omissions in bold):

"A Local Government Authority (LGA) analysis from March this year stated that the Government spent 31 times more per mile maintaining motorways and 'A' roads last year than they did on funding councils to repair crumbling local roads.

Figures from that same report show that the Government spent £192,000 per mile on maintaining strategic roads, such as motorways or major 'A' roads compared to just £6,000 per mile on fixing potholes on local roads.

This is despite local roads making up 180,000 miles of the UK's overall network, with strategic roads making up just 4,800 miles.

Given that there are some 3,200 miles of roadway in the county, this equates to almost two potholes for every road in Hertfordshire.

In June this year, the Herts County Council secured some £4m extra funding from the Government to address the issue of potholes in our roads. Given that there are ten authorities within the County, then evenly distributed this equates to some £400k each.

This Council calls upon the Herts County Council to **ensure that Stevenage receives its fair share of this Pothole funding for the benefit of residents and road users, but based primarily on technically driven priority.** ~~recognise that Stevenage is a priority case regarding the repair of potholes because of HCC's neglect of our local roads and cycle tracks over the years and that at least £400k of the awarded funding is 'ringfenced' for the benefit and enhancement of the people and road users of the town.~~
~~We therefore move that this Council requests the County Council Highways Portfolio Holder to ensure fair shares and prompt action for Stevenage residents of repairs to potholes."~~

Following debate, and upon being put to the vote, the amendment was lost.

Following further debate, and upon being put to the vote, the original motion was carried.

3. London Day Travelcard

Councillor Phil Bibby CC moved and Councillor Bret Facey seconded the following motion:

This Council objects to the removal of the London Day Travelcard, as it would have a significant negative financial impact on Stevenage residents travelling to London.

This Council notes:

- Day Travelcards are tickets that allow local people to travel to London and then use public transport for free once they're in the capital.
- Day Travelcards are a simple and convenient way to get into and around London, removing these tickets would mean having to purchase multiple tickets to get across the city.
- Removing the Day Travelcard would deter potential rail passengers from using the train which would go against this Council's policy of encouraging sustainable transport.
- Research suggests that scrapping the Day Travelcards could cost at least an extra £9.30 per person, per visit to London.
- Unaffordable policies and mismanagement by the City Hall have left Transport for London (TfL) on the edge of bankruptcy. The proposal to remove Day Travelcards suggests that the Mayor is trying to get commuters and tourists to pick up the bill for his mistakes.

This Council resolves:

- To demonstrate its support for Stevenage commuters and tourists by calling on the Mayor of London and TfL to halt the withdrawal of the Day Travelcard.
- To request the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive write to the Mayor of London and ask that he reconsiders scrapping the Day Travelcard, as this proposal will negatively affect this Council's policy of encouraging sustainable transport.

The following amendment was moved by Councillor Jim Brown and seconded by Councillor Loraine Rossati (additions and omissions in bold):

"This Council objects to the removal of the London Day Travelcard, as it would have a significant negative financial impact on Stevenage residents travelling to London.

This Council notes:

- Day Travelcards are tickets that allow local people to travel to London and then use public transport for free once they're in the capital.
- Day Travelcards are a simple and convenient way to get into and around London, removing these tickets would mean having to purchase multiple tickets to get across the city.

- Removing the Day Travelcard would deter potential rail passengers from using the train which would go against this Council's policy of encouraging sustainable transport.
- Research suggests that scrapping the Day Travelcards could cost at least an extra £9.30 per person, per visit to London.
- **The failure of central government to properly fund Transport for London, including a failure to pay all appropriate receipts for travelcards to Transport for London.**
- ~~Unaffordable policies and mismanagement by the City Hall have left Transport for London (TfL) on the edge of bankruptcy. The proposal to remove Day Travelcards suggests that the Mayor is trying to get commuters and tourists to pick up the bill for his mistakes.~~

This Council resolves:

- To demonstrate its support for Stevenage commuters, **day visitors** and tourists by calling on the Mayor of London and TfL to halt the withdrawal of the Day Travelcard.
- To request the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive write to the Mayor of London and ask that he reconsiders scrapping the Day Travelcard, as this proposal will negatively affect this Council's policy of encouraging sustainable transport."

Following debate, and upon being put to the vote, the amendment was carried.

Following further debate, and upon being put to the vote, the substantive motion was carried.

11 **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRS / PORTFOLIO HOLDERS**

The Council received eight questions from Members to Committee Chairs/Portfolio Holders. The responses to the eight questions had been published in the supplementary agenda for the meeting.

- (A) Question from Councillor Robin Parker CC (asked by Councillor Stephen Booth in Councillor Parker's absence re: planning applications for telecommunications masts

Supplementary question: What new procedures had been introduced to ensure the delays would not happen again and do we have to lobby Central Government as to whether more modern forms of communication other than 1st class post could be used?

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Performance agreed that the postal system had failed which affected implementation of what the Planning and Development Committee had agreed. Further consideration would be given as to how such a situation might be avoided in the future.

(B) Question from Councillor Bret Facey re: fly-tipping

Supplementary question – recent published DEFRA figures for 2021/22 showed no penalty notices being issued by SBC. Why did SBC fail to hold fly tippers to account?

The Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment & Performance acknowledged the issue of fly-tipping and welcomed a conversation with Councillor Facey and the relevant officers.

(C) Question from Councillor Adam Mitchell re: the Community Centre and shops at the Bragbury End Development

Supplementary question: can the Portfolio Holder guarantee that a community centre will be built in Bragbury End and that a better way to communicate that with local residents can be found?

The Executive Portfolio Holder for Co-operative Council and Neighbourhood Communities advised that there would be a bookable, community use building with a café. She would be happy to meet with Councillor Mitchell along with the Assistant Director (Housing Development) to discuss further.

(D) Question from Councillor Alex Farquharson re: safeguarding measures at the 108 Oaks Cross development.

Supplementary question: following multiple disturbances at the development, would SBC commit to double its efforts to ensure the residents did not form a safeguarding concern and would they ensure that residents' concerns were addressed without local Councillor intervention?

In the absence of the Executive Portfolio Holder for Housing and Housing Development, the Leader of the Council advised that one of the rooms had now been converted to a staff room. The development was built to try and meet the needs of some of the Council's homeless population. Further details would be provided regarding any safeguarding issues to Councillor Farquharson in a written response.

(E) Question from Councillor Andy McGuinness re: the impact of the Prime Minister's recent announcement to delay the UK's net zero commitments on the Council's operations.

Supplementary question: Was the Portfolio Holder aware of the Leader of the Labour Party, Sir Keir Starmer's views on the announcements?

The Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment & Performance replied that, in

his opinion, the announcement from the Prime Minister had been made for short term political gain at the expense of our children and grandchildren and that he was of the opinion that an incoming Labour Government would definitely honour its pledges on climate change.

- (F) Question from Councillor Tom Wren re: tenancy fraud and the sub-letting of Council properties

Supplementary question: a long term case of tenancy fraud had been reported to the Council a number of times without resolution. Does the Council think that if additional funding was put into identifying these fraud cases more homes could be delivered to those that needed them?

In the absence of the Executive Portfolio Holder for Housing and Housing Development, the Leader of the Council advised that he would ask officers to look into the specific case. In terms of the figures, the Shared Anti-Fraud Service (SAFS) was detecting an increasing number of fraud cases but this would not necessarily correlate with an increase in the number of houses built.

- (G) Question from Councillor Stephen Booth re: the progress on recent motions passed at Council meetings during the past year.

Supplementary question: why has the vaping motion not been passed to another Committee for consideration and what response did we get back from the Minister on this issue?

The Leader of the Council advised that no response had been received from the Government Minister. The issue of vaping would also be considered by the General Purposes Committee in November.

- (H) Question from Councillor Graham Snell re: Swingate/Lytton Way traffic flow

Supplementary question: are the temporary changes to become permanent and when will this along with the Station Gateway Development take place?

The Executive Portfolio Holder for Economy and Transport advised that HCC was the Lead Authority concerning traffic management in this area. A final decision may not be forthcoming this side of Christmas but he would continue to track the progress made. In relation to the Gateway this was currently out for consultation, the results of which would be reported to Members at the appropriate time.

12 **ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW 2022/23 AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS**

The Council considered a report in respect of the Annual Treasury Management Review 2022/23, including the Prudential Code. It was noted that the report had been endorsed by both the Audit Committee and the Executive.

It was moved by Councillor Jackie Hollywell, and seconded by Councillor Sandra

Barr, that the Recommendations in the report be approved.

Upon the motion being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED** that the 2022/23 Annual Treasury Management Review be approved.

13 **AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 6 September 2023 were received.

CHAIR