

Daneshill House
Danestrete
Stevenage
Hertfordshire

8 October 2024

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, 16 October 2024 at the conclusion of the Special Meeting 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. MINUTES

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 31 July 2024 and the Special Council on 2 September 2024.

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3. MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS

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

4. COMMUNITY PRESENTATIONS

None received.

5. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

None received.

6. QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL

None received.

7. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

The following questions have been submitted by members of the public. Written answers to the questions will be published on a supplementary agenda.

(A) Question from Jennifer Huygen

Could the Council please publish the response to Cllr Robin Parker's supplementary question of the July Council meeting, answering the question on the timeline for the lighting request in Fairlands Valley Park and the request for a regular progress report to Members?

(B) Question from Rebecca Watts

Have biodiversity assessments been conducted on the new development sites located in the released green belt land in Stevenage? Will assessments be conducted on future developments located in green belt/grey belt areas?

(C) Question from Teun van Leeuwen

I appreciate the regeneration of Market Square and the improvement of the streetscape for pedestrians. Despite the guidance on one-way streets in LTN (1/20) cycle infrastructure design, no cycling contraflow has been implemented. This is unfortunate, as the policy guidance in the same document states that the road width allows for this (see para 7.3.4 and 7.3.5). Please, can SBC explain how they would expect a person leaving from the cycle parking of the indoor market to safely cycle to any destinations inside and outside of the town centre that are South of the indoor market? Please consider that cycling is done by people of all ages and includes tricycles, cycles used for mobility purposes, and cargo bikes.

8. 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.

9. UPDATE FROM SCRUTINY CHAIRS

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

10. NOTICE OF MOTIONS

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

- 1 Winter Fuel Allowance

To be moved by Councillor Phil Bibby:

Council Notes:

- The Labour Government's recent decision to restrict the Winter Fuel Payment to only pensioners in receipt of means-tested benefits like Pension Credit, as announced by Chancellor Rachel Reeves.
- The estimated impact of this decision, which Age UK says will mean 2 million pensioners who badly need the money to stay warm this winter will not receive it.
- The significant role that Winter Fuel Payments play in helping older residents of Stevenage and across the UK afford heating during the coldest months, thereby preventing 'heat or eat' dilemmas and safeguarding health.
- The criticism from Age UK, the Countryside Alliance and other charities, highlighting the social injustice and potential health risks posed by this sudden policy change.
- The additional strain this decision will place on vulnerable pensioners, many of whom do not claim Pension Credit despite being eligible, further exacerbating their financial hardship.

Council believes:

- That the Winter Fuel Payment has been a lifeline for many older people across the UK and that restricting its availability solely to those on Pension Credit risks leaving many pensioners in financial hardship.
- While some pensioners currently in receipt of the Winter Fuel Payment may not require it, many thousands across Stevenage sit just above the cut-off for Pension Credit and will now lose their allowance.
- The decision to means-test Winter Fuel Payments, especially with such short notice and without adequate compensatory measures, is deeply unfair and will disproportionately affect the health and well-being of our poorest older residents.
- The government's approach fails to consider the administrative barriers and stigma that prevent eligible pensioners from claiming Pension Credit, leaving many without the support they desperately need.

Council resolves to:

- Bring forward a Council-led local awareness campaign to alert those eligible of Pension Credit which in some respects will help access to the Winter Fuel Payment for those most in need.
- Request that the Council Leader write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, urging a review of the decision to means-test the Winter Fuel Payment and asking the government to ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who do not claim Pension Credit, are protected from fuel poverty.

2. Welcoming 21st Century New Towns

To be moved by Councillor Richard Henry

In 1946 the post war Labour Government had a vision to address the housing crisis arising from the aftermath of the Second World War and subsequently Stevenage as Britain's first New Town was conceived.

In 2024 we are facing another housing crisis with many Stevenage residents on the housing waiting list. The new Labour Government has looked at that inspirational post war time house building programme to launch a New Towns Commission to plan a new generation of new towns fit for the 21st Century.

We were delighted that Stevenage was chosen as the launch place for the New Towns Commission.

These towns will be “well-connected, well-designed, sustainable and attractive places where people want to live, as well as having the infrastructure, amenities and services necessary to sustain thriving communities.”

As Britain's first New Town we welcome this initiative and call on the Government to learn from our lived experience of nearly 80 years and still growing.

We ask the Housing cabinet member and the Leader to write to Sir Michael Lyons to offer support for the development of the commission particularly from the learning of the building of the UK's first new town.

3. Winter Fuel Allowance

To be moved by Councillor McGuinness:

In July, ahead of the October Budget, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced her decision to end universal Winter Fuel Payments and restrict eligibility to only those in receipt of Pension Credits and other benefits. This was implemented through a Statutory Instrument which came into force on 16th September 2024.

Whilst many agree that universal Winter Fuel Payments are not necessary for some, Council is deeply concerned that many pensioners on lower and middle incomes will now not receive the payments. Across England and Wales the number of people eligible for Winter Fuel Payments will fall by 10 million, from 11.4 million to only 1.5 million.

In Stevenage the number of pensioners affected by the change totals over 11,000. This means around 86% of local pensioners currently eligible for Winter Fuel Payments in Stevenage will no longer be able to claim this much needed support, at a time when fuel bills are still high. This not only risks leaving many vulnerable pensioners across the town in financial hardship but will disproportionately affect the health and well-being of our poorest older residents.

Council understand that no public consultation has taken place, despite Age UK

estimating that 2 million pensioners who badly need the money to stay warm this winter will now not receive it.

Council believes that the Labour Government has set the threshold at which pensioners do not qualify for Winter Fuel Payments far too low. Only those receiving a pension of less than £218.15 a week (or £332.95 a week for couples) are eligible for pension credits. This is significantly lower than the living wage rate.

Council is also concerned by the low take up of pension credit with only 63% of those eligible nationwide receiving them – and over 880,000 pensioners not doing so. Council recognises the role we have to play to increase awareness of benefits such as Pension Credit to ensure people are aware of the support they are entitled to.

Council welcomes the recent motion passed at Labour Conference on 25th September calling on the Government to reverse this damaging policy.

Council further notes that the Energy Price Cap is due to rise by 10% in October, which combined by the removal of Winter Fuel Payments will push thousands of local pensioners into fuel poverty.

Council resolves to:

- Instruct the Chief Executive to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer calling for the policy on linking Winter Fuel Payments to Pension Credit receipt to be immediately paused and introduce a new threshold to determine eligibility for Winter Fuel Payments. Council further requests the Chief Executive write to the local MP Kevin Bonavia asking him to give his formal support to halting the changes to the Winter Fuel Payment eligibility.
- Request all group leaders within Stevenage sign a joint letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer calling for the new Winter Fuel Payment policy to be suspended and reviewed.
- Urgently commence a significant awareness campaign to maximise uptake of pension credits. This will include use of Council noticeboards, social media, promotion in local press and also targeted letters to those who may be eligible.

11. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO 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 Phil Bibby

How important does the Cabinet member believe defence industries based in Gunnels Wood Road are to Stevenage's economic prosperity?

(B) Question from Councillor Andy McGuinness

Why has progress on Town Centre Regeneration stalled and what reassurances can be provided to concerned residents?

(C) Question from Councillor Robin Parker

How is the UK Shared Prosperity Fund allocated between wards, by whom and on what basis?

(D) Question from Councillor Tom Wren

How many enquiries/complaints has the council received regarding garage block cleaning charges and how many charges have not been paid by residents?

(E) Question from Councillor Stephen Booth

What efforts are being made by the Council to address the numerous flooding hotspots on roads across the Town in conjunction with the Highways Authority?

(F) Question from Councillor Graham Snell

Why has the Garage Improvement Programme only delivered around a quarter of the planned refurbished garages target despite almost the entire allocated budget being spent already?

12. ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW OF 2023/24 INCLUDING PRUDENTIAL CODE

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13. AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES

To note the Minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 4 September 2024.

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