

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 25 July 2018

Time: 7.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: The Mayor Margaret Notley, Doug Bainbridge, Sandra Barr, Philip Bibby CC, Lloyd Briscoe, Rob Broom, Jim Brown, Howard Burrell, Laurie Chester, Michael Downing, James Fraser, John Gardner, Jody Hanafin, Liz Harrington, Roni Hearn, Richard Henry, Jackie Hollywell, Matthew Hurst, Lizzy Kelly, Mrs Joan Lloyd, John Lloyd, Andy McGuinness, Maureen McKay, John Mead, Sarah Mead, Adam Mitchell CC, Robin Parker CC, Sarah-Jane Potter, Ralph Raynor, Simon Speller, Sharon Taylor OBE CC, Jeannette Thomas, Ann Webb JP and Tom Wren.

Start / End Time: Start Time: 7.00pm
End Time: 10.25pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Cullen, M Gardner, G Lawrence, L. Martin-Haugh and G. Snell.

Councillor S-J Potter made a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in respect of Items 4 – Main Debate and 9 – Notice of Motions, as she worked for Virgin Trains and was a Member of TSSA (the railway union) and her husband worked for Govia Thameslink Railways.

2 MINUTES - ANNUAL COUNCIL - 23 MAY 2018

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Council meeting of 23 May 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor, subject to the correction of a typographical error in Item 2 – Minutes – second paragraph, third line, which should read “Mayor” instead of “Councillor Pam Stuart”.

3 MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Mayor announced that sadly Rev Michael Banks, a former Director of Leisure Services and Chief Executive of the Council had passed away earlier this month. The Mayor was sure that all Members that knew him would wish to join her in sending condolences to his family.

At the Mayor's request, the Portfolio Holder for Communities, Community Safety and Equalities was delighted to inform the Council that the Stevenage Against Domestic

Abuse (SADA) Forum were announced National Winners from Community Action at the Tenant Participation Advisory Awards held on 12 July 2018. The Mayor presented the Award to Team Members Sarah Pateman and Tania Stokes.

The Mayor informed the meeting that since the last meeting, the Mayoral Team had attended 48 engagements, and she referred to a number of highlights, including the Town Twinning visit to Autun, Stevenage Day, the Cycle Race and a Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace.

The Mayor reminded Members that she would be holding her first Charities fund raising event, a Garden Party in the Stevenage Scout Hut Garden in The Poplars on Sunday, 2 September 2018. She hoped as many Members as possible would be able to attend.

The Mayor wished to highlight the work of her three chosen Charities. The Council received presentations from Michelle Stokes (Carers in Hertfordshire), Mervyn Terrett (TRACKS Autism) and Amber Hunter and Dean Vaughan (Stevenage Scouts).

4 MAIN DEBATE - "CONNECTED STEVENAGE" - AN INTEGRATED TRANSPORT STRATEGY

In accordance with her Disclosable Pecuniary Interest made at the commencement of the meeting, Councillor S-J Potter withdrew from the meeting for the duration of this item.

The Council received a presentation from the Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport (Councillor Ralph Raynor), County Councillor Derrick Ashley (HCC Executive Member for Growth, Infrastructure, Planning & the Economy) and Rebecca Cox (Living Streets) on "Connected Stevenage – An Integrated Transport Strategy".

The Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport advised that the Council was committed to working with residents, businesses and other partners to enhance Stevenage and provide opportunities for residents. Providing effective and sustainable transport options could help address many social issues and inequalities, connect people to employment, open, space, education, facilities and shops. Both strategic and local infrastructure investment was needed to achieve this aim, which could only be achieved through working closely and co-operatively with partners, crucially Hertfordshire County Council.

County Councillor Derek Ashley referred to Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4), which advocated a systematic approach to sustainable transport across the county, including the influencing of local land use plans to encourage councils, community organisations and developers towards policies which made it easier for people to use alternatives to the car. Future planning applications would be assessed against the provisions of LTP4. Major schemes would include Sustainable Travel Towns; Hertford Bypass and A414 junction upgrades; Bus Rapid Transit East-West; New M1 Junction 8A; Passenger Transport Hub-Coachways; and Cycling Infrastructure Improvement Towns.

Rebecca Cox advised that Living Streets was a national charity aimed at encouraging walking, cycling and use of more sustainable travel modes. Initiatives included Local Sustainable Travel Fund Outreach projects; Sustainable Transition Funding; walking projects; Transport Delivery Excellence Programme (working with the Local Enterprise Partnership); and local Walking & Cycling Infrastructure Plan projects. Levels of intervention to reduce reliance on cars included Home Zone (street level) and Area Wide/Neighbourhood schemes.

A full debate, including input from the public gallery. Points raised included:

- The importance of a rail/bus interchange for Stevenage.
- The widening of the A1M and the possibility of an improved east-west route through the county were considered to be important elements of LTP4.
- The potential introduction of Living Streets Home Zone schemes at local (ie. street) level was supported, in order to reduce the dominance of cars.
- Any improvements to the town's cycle network through the Local Transport Plan would be welcomed.
- Public transport needed to be cheaper and more accessible in order for individuals to reduce reliance on their cars.

In response to an issue raised by a Member, the Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport undertook to provide a written response on the idea of extending the Old Town High Street into the New Town.

The Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport concluded by commenting that officers had prepared an initial structure for an integrated transport strategy, including sections covering Challenges and Opportunities; Policy context; the Vision; Strategic Objectives; Action Plans; and Monitoring and Review process.

After the debate, it was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED:**

That Stevenage Borough Council work with residents, businesses and partners to develop and agree a sustainable transport vision for Stevenage leading to the preparation of an Integrated Transport Strategy, connecting residents and businesses with a range of opportunities, and working cooperatively with communities across all neighbourhoods to create living streets that local people can enjoy. Stevenage has a proud history, and the creation of the New Town incorporated sustainable infrastructure in the form of dedicated cycle tracks, a network of local bus routes, streets and squares for residents to enjoy. We will work together with partners to make the most of the outstanding connectivity that has been so important to the success of the town. This Vision will be supported by an action plan and funding strategy, to attract external funding to benefit the economy of the town and bring real benefits to Stevenage people.

5 PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

None received.

6 QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL

None received.

7 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None received.

8 LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S UPDATE

The Leader of the Opposition referred to what he considered to be the baffling process for the distribution of Section 106 monies. At a time when funds for public amenity improvement schemes were limited, he failed to understand why the use of Section 106 monies were subject to such restrictions and were held by the authority rather than spent.

In response, the Leader of the Council agreed that the Section 106 process could be confusing, and felt that the Council should be more specific in its intent for the use of Section 106 monies. The Planning Team would therefore be requested to provide a response to the issue in writing to all Members of the Council.

The Council then received updates on the following:

- Town Twinning Visit
- Stevenage Works
- Shared Anti-Fraud Service
- The Cycle Tour Series
- Stevenage Day
- Excellence in Public Health Award
- HRA Borrowing Cap
- Social Housing Green Paper
- Town Centre Regeneration
- Stevenage Local Plan
- Green Flag Awards

9 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

Motion moved by Councillor S Taylor OBE CC

In accordance with her Disclosable Pecuniary Interest made at the commencement of the meeting, Councillor S-J Potter withdrew from the meeting for the duration of this item.

The Leader of the Council drew attention to an amended motion, which was tabled at the meeting. The amended motion added Network Rail to the list of those the Council wished would meet immediately and take urgent steps to resolve the rail crisis.

In moving the motion, the Leader of the Council berated Govia Thameslink Railways (GTR), Network Rail and the Secretary of State for Transport for what she considered to be a the shambolic situation in relation to the new rail timetables. In spite of a newly introduced timetable, problems had persisted, which had contributed to severely adverse effects on the work life balance of commuters, as well as the total inadequate compensation scheme for disrupted journeys. She felt that it had reached the point where rail franchises should be withdrawn and the service re-nationalised.

In seconding the motion, the Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport stated that he had great sympathy for rail users for a totally unacceptable service and inadequate compensation package.

A full debate ensued. Points raised included:

- The rail unions, passenger groups and groups of local authorities on the affected routes should be involved in the way forward.
- A short-term solution may have to be to revert to the pre-20 May timetable for the time being.
- Passengers need a proper compensation scheme which should be funded by the failed companies, not by the taxpayer.
- GTR had let users down. Following the precedence of GNER they should not receive any more public money and should have the franchise withdrawn. The GTR franchise was huge and should be broken up.
- The unacceptable effect on railway staff, who were often provided with limited information by GTR for passing on to passengers.
- At the earliest opportunity, the Government should support the public's calls for public ownership of Britain's railways.

After the debate, it was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED:**

That this Council notes with increasing dismay the complete chaos and confusion caused to rail commuters by the failure to plan for, or implement properly, the new rail timetable.

Stevenage railway station is crucial to the town and local economy, with nearly 5m visits per year. By Govia Thameslink Railways (GTR's) own admission, nearly 20% of services have been cancelled since the new timetable came into effect. No improvement has been achieved since the start of this episode, for example, for peak trains to London on Monday, 38% of trains were late or cancelled.

The terrible impact this has had on people's well-being, jobs, home life and child care/career arrangements cannot be overestimated. Nor can the impact on the frontline staff on our railways who have had to deal with the brunt of commuters confusion and stress when they bear no responsibility for the management failure that has caused them.

We now have yet another new timetable (15 July), across the GTR & Northern services but with no reassurance that this will resolve the issues we have been enduring.

We call on our MP, the Rail Operating companies, Network Rail and the Secretary of State for Transport to meet immediately and take urgent steps to resolve this rail crisis.

10 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRS/PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

Council received four questions. Details of the responses given to the questions are summarised below.

A. Question from Councillor A McGuinness

In response to a question regarding the Council's plans to address the significant backlog in parking and yellow line requests, the Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport advised that the starting point was that the Council had a programme of parking enforcement schemes to be carried out in different neighbourhoods, to provide an efficient and sensible way to look at requests for restrictions. To increase the Council's capacity and speed of bringing forward these parking schemes, a post of Parking Management Officer had been created and recruited to in June 2018. This additional capacity would help deliver the priority programme but also would look at options for smaller interim schemes across the town. The new Officer would offer to meet Ward Councillors to understand their priorities and would no doubt support the important work as the Council took forward the Living Streets idea within the sustainable transport strategy.

In response to a supplementary question regarding the employment of more Parking Enforcement Officers, the Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport advised that consideration would be given in the near future to a new contract for parking enforcement and that Members would be advised once a new contract was let.

B. Question from R Parker CC

In response to a question regarding grass cutting problems earlier in the spring/summer, the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration advised that the extended period of wet and warm weather experienced in Spring this year resulted in high levels of grass growth. The parks cutting programme experienced a one and a half week delay due to wet and soft ground conditions at the start of the cutting season. The Council's tractors were unable to operate at that time due to the risk of churning up the grass surfaces. The team would be reviewing and testing its plan and resourcing arrangements in advance of the cutting season, incorporating intelligence from weather forecasts, so that any operational issues could be proactively identified and mitigated.

In response to a supplementary question as to action on the cases of junctions that had become dangerous due to difficulty with sight lines due to overgrown grass verges that had been reported but had not been addressed,

the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration stated that he would arrange for the Assistant Director (Stevenage Direct Services) to provide a written reply on this matter.

C. Question from G. Snell

In response to a question regarding the potential cost and benefits of introducing co-mingled dry household recycling, the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration advised that Council officers had undertaken an initial feasibility assessment for introducing a co-mingled recycling solution for residents and had discussed it with senior management and appropriate Executive Members. This assessment considered the pros and cons of this approach and concluded that the timing for implementing such a solution was not right for Stevenage. The costs associated with the implementation of this option would total an amount that would require a Council Tax uplift this year of approximately 10% (in addition to the 2.99% increase approved in February) or a reduction of the Council's establishment by at least 14 full time employees (assuming average salaries).

In response to a supplementary question in respect of whether or not the Council had ever asked residents if they preferred co-mingled or separate waste bin collections, the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration commented that the Council complied with Waste Management Regulations which currently required local authorities to ensure that collections of waste paper, plastic, metal or glass were by way of separate collection arrangements.

The Portfolio Holder agreed to provide the questioner with a copy of the initial feasibility assessment for introducing a co-mingled recycling solution for residents.

D. Question from Councillor T Wren

In response to a question regarding the value of the Neighbourhood Warden Scheme, the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Working advised that the Neighbourhood Wardens had been invaluable in tackling enviro-crime across the town, as evidenced by the fact that instances of fly tipping had decreased from 3,043 in 2015/16 to 2,468 in 2016/17. The Warden Team had also worked on a number of community-led projects to drive community involvement in making local neighbourhoods better. The Wardens attend Resident Groups as required and were seen as a valuable resource by many of those with whom they engaged.

In response to a supplementary question regarding whether or not there were any plans to extend the Neighbourhood Wardens scheme across the town, the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Working advised that a fourth Warden would shortly be commencing employment with the Council and that it was a continued aspiration to extend the scheme to cover the whole town.

11 UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY CHAIRS

The Chair of the Community Select Committee (Councillor S Mead) updated Council on the recent work of the Select Committee, and advised that the three recent meeting of the Committee had scrutinised the Resident Engagement review, the Stevenage Leisure Limited contract and the Voluntary and Community Sector review.

The Chair of the Environment and Economy Select Committee (Councillor M Downing) updated Council on the recent work of the Select Committee. He commented that, whilst the work of the Committee in 2017/18 had been dominated by the scrutiny of the Indoor Market, the Work Programme for 2018/19 was more varied, and would continue with consideration of the Market Row toilets and public conveniences across the town.

12 APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT PERSON TO SERVE ON THE AUDIT COMMITTEE

Council considered a report recommending the appointment of an Independent Person, in accordance with CIPFA best practice for the Audit Committee.

The Chair of the Audit Committee advised that satisfactory references had been received for the recommended appointee.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that Mr Geoff Gibbs be appointed as the Council's Independent Person for a term of four years.

13 COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGY 2018-21

Council considered a report which had previously been presented to the Executive recommending that the 2018-2021 Community Safety Strategy be approved.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the 2018-2021 Community Safety Strategy, as appended to the report, be approved.

14 ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT - 2017/2018

The Council considered the Annual Scrutiny report which summarised the work undertaken throughout 2017/18 by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees, and which outlined the Work Programme for the three committees for 2018/19.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the work undertaken by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Select Committees during 2017/18 be noted.

15 MINUTES - AUDIT COMMITTEE

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Audit Committee meetings held on 26 March 2018 and 12 June 2018 be noted.

16 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED**:

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 involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1 to 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by SI 2006 No. 88.
2. That having considered the reasons for the following item being in Part II, it be determined that maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

17 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS - RETROFITTING FIRE SUPPRESSANT SPRINKLER SYSTEMS TO RESIDENTIAL TOWER BLOCKS - PROGRAMME PROPOSAL

Council considered a Part II report which had previously been presented to the Executive in respect of a programme for the retrofitting of fire suppressant sprinkler systems to residential tower blocks.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that recommendations 2.2 and 2.3 in the report are approved.

18 AWARD OF CONTRACT FOR THE REFURBISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF LIFTS (2018-2023)

Council considered a Part II report which had previously been presented to the Executive in respect of the award of contract for the refurbishment and maintenance of lifts (2018-2023).

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that recommendation 2.1 in the report is approved.

MAYOR