

# STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

## COUNCIL MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 18 December 2018

Time: 7.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

**Present:** Councillors: Margaret Notley (Mayor), Doug Bainbridge, Sandra Barr, Philip Bibby CC, Rob Broom, Jim Brown, Howard Burrell, Laurie Chester, Michael Downing, James Fraser, John Gardner, Michelle Gardner, Jody Hanafin, Roni Hearn, Richard Henry, Jackie Hollywell, Lizzy Kelly, Graham Lawrence, John Lloyd, Mrs Joan Lloyd, Lin Martin-Haugh, Andy McGuinness, Maureen McKay, John Mead, Sarah Mead, Adam Mitchell CC, Robin Parker CC, Sarah-Jane Potter, Ralph Raynor, Graham Snell, Sharon Taylor OBE CC, Jeannette Thomas, Ann Webb JP and Tom Wren.

**Start / End Time:** Start Time: 7.00pm  
End Time: 10.50pm

### 1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Lloyd Briscoe, Matthew Hurst and Simon Speller.

There were no declarations of interest.

### 2 **MINUTES - 17 OCTOBER 2018**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 17 October 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

### 3 **MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS**

The Mayor announced that the Council had recently been awarded the Silver Award in the Ministry of Defence's Employer Recognition Scheme. The Scheme recognised employer organisations that had pledged, demonstrated or advocated support to the defence and armed forces community, and had aligned their views with the Armed Forces Covenant. The Mayor presented Councillor John Lloyd with Award, and the Leader of the Council congratulated him on this achievement.

The Mayor further announced that following a submission for accreditation the Council had received the White Ribbon Award. White Ribbon UK was founded in 2005 to stop Male violence towards women, by working co-operatively to change society by promoting a message of respect and tolerance, and leading by example. Public sector organisations, large and small, could achieve so much more than

individuals could alone.

It was noted that White Ribbon UK provided a comprehensive action plan for organisations to effectively marshal their resources and personnel to challenge male violence against women and make a genuine difference. The action plan was concise and wide-ranging and offered achievable goals for organisations to reach. Once an organisation was able to demonstrate a commitment to this plan, it became eligible for the White Ribbon Award.

The Mayor presented Sarah Pateman (Community Safety Manager) with the Award, and the Leader of the Council congratulated her and her Team on this achievement.

The Mayor informed the Council that since the last meeting the Mayoral Team had attended 80 engagements. Highlights had included:

- Various award presentations, exhibitions, craft fairs, dinners, afternoon teas, opening and starting events, and watching Stevenage FC win 3-2 against Milton Keynes Dons;
- Judging the Garden House Hospice Fundraising Strictly Come Dancing event;
- Film and theatres shows, including the ever popular Celebrate, instigated by the late Sherma Batson;
- Starting the countdown at the Stevenage Fireworks display on 5 November and starting off the festive season with the Christmas Lights switch-on in the Town Centre;
- Laying the wreath on Remembrance Sunday, especially in this centenary year;
- Hosting an afternoon tea for all of the Pride of Stevenage Awards nominees, including the presentation of certificates; and
- Various concerts, religious and carol services, including the one she had hosted on Sunday, 2 December.

The Mayor hoped that all those who had attended her Christmas social event on 17 December had enjoyed themselves, and on that note wished everyone a very Happy Christmas and 2019.

#### 4 **MAIN DEBATE - POLICING STEVENAGE: A PRESENTATION BY THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR HERTFORDSHIRE**

The Council received a presentation from Mr David Lloyd (Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner) on Policing Stevenage. In introducing the item, Mr Lloyd made reference to the forthcoming introduction of commissions for each of the Hertfordshire Districts/Boroughs to gain a fuller understanding of policing in each of these areas in order to identify where changes could be made. He then handed over to Chief Inspector Alicia Shaw (Hertfordshire Constabulary) who gave the presentation.

The Mayor thanked Mr Lloyd and C.I. Shaw for their informative presentation.

A full debate ensued. Points raised included:

- Need to tackle crime and work with other agencies to address social issues

- that drive crime
- Visibility of police and police staffing levels
- Police funding
- Public perception of crime and policing
- The commendable work of Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse (SADA)
- Crime prevention initiatives including the proposed mentoring programme for young people
- Street Meets and other forms of community engagement

The Leader of the Opposition and Councillor Robin Parker CC expressed concerns that the Opposition Members did not receive the Main Debate Motion before the meeting. The Leader of the Council apologised for what had been an administrative oversight, and undertook to ensure that this would not happen again.

After the conclusion of the debate, it was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** “That Council regrets that the opportunity of consulting with the Council and councillors concerning the scope of the “Policing Stevenage Review” was missed. Council notes the Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC) commitment to tackling local priorities to reduce crime & anti-social behaviour set out within the key aims outlined within review but wishes to receive further assurance that adequate resources will be made available to tackle those priorities.

Council now seeks assurance from the PCC that he will act decisively to address the very serious concerns of our Stevenage residents regarding violent and knife related crime, issues arising from county lines drug dealing, Modern Slavery, domestic abuse and the other crime classifications by implementing the “Policing Stevenage” recommendations as swiftly as possible.

Whilst the Council recognises the ongoing funding challenges for policing and community safety across Hertfordshire and the rest of the UK due to the considerable cuts in funding imposed by the current government, it calls upon the PCC to ensure that the resources deployed in Stevenage are sufficient to reflect the unique facilities and services which are located in the town including:

- Stevenage Leisure Park
- Stevenage Train Station
- The Lister Hospital
- Stevenage Police Station
- Cygnet Hospital
- A1M and other road links
- Night Time Economy – particularly in High Street and the Leisure Park
- Children’s Homes
- The Magistrates Court”

## 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 asked whether the Council wanted to continue seeking to develop an association with Lewis Hamilton in view of the racing driver's unfortunate remark about Stevenage at the 2018 BBC Sports Personality of the Year event.

In response, the Leader of the Council stated that it was disappointing that Lewis Hamilton had referred to Stevenage as 'the slums' at such a high-profile event. People from the Stevenage had been left "very offended" by the five-time Formula 1 champion's remark. The Leader of the Council praised England para-badminton player Gobi Ranganathan for publicly stating that he was "proud to fly the flag for Stevenage". Cllr Taylor also highlighted the positive social media responses of Stevenage residents following the racing driver's remark. The Leader of the Council further commented that Lewis Hamilton should continue to use his status to inspire young people and that he should strive to be an ambassador for the town.

The Leader of the Council congratulated Councillor Adam Mitchell CC on his recent promotion to Deputy Executive Member for Education, Libraries and Localism at Hertfordshire County Council.

The Council then received updates from Executive Members on the following:

- Major Refurbishment Contract (MRC)
- Severe Weather Plan for Independent Living Services
- Recycling Sack Pilot
- Volunteers
- Regeneration
- Stevenage Local Plan
- Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse Secures Future Funding
- Co-operative working in Local Neighbourhoods
- Stevenage Business Grant

Members were informed that the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive were due to meet government officials concerning the continued delay regarding adoption of the emerging Stevenage Local Plan. The Leader also informed Council that Hertfordshire had been included in the Business Rates Pilot under the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2019/2020.

## NOTICE OF MOTIONS

### Universal Credits – Stop and Reverse

In moving the motion, Councillor Lizzie Kelly highlighted the plight of residents affected by the introduction of Universal Credit (UC). She indicated that the introduction of UC appeared to have been driven by ideological reasons and she felt it was unfortunate that the Government had not published the Impact Assessment on UC. Councillor Kelly mentioned that the government had ignored warnings of the potential of UC and that UC was having a negative impact on claimants. Councillor Kelly stated that the government should consider scrapping UC instead of trying to fix the system.

In seconding the motion, Councillor John Gardner indicated that UC was likely to increase inequality and could potentially destroy the welfare system. Councillor Gardner stated that UC was driving claimants into poverty and this could force some people to turn to crime.

The Leader of Council pointed out that after conducting pilots for UC, the Local Government Association (LGA) had submitted a report highlighting the following flaws of the system:

- Delays in initial payments were likely to lead to rent arrears
- Some claimants would not prioritise rent paying
- Online only application arrangements were not feasible in view of limited internet access, for some claimants
- Daily reporting would be costly – particularly for those relying on public transport
- The punitive UC sanctions regime
- Constant reporting of change of circumstances could result in payment discrepancies

The Leader of the Opposition acknowledged that the system was beset with problems. However, Opposition Members agreed with UC in principle because it was aimed at encouraging people to work rather than relying on benefits. The Leader of the Opposition was not prepared to support the motion, due to what he considered to be inflammatory language used in parts of the motion.

Other points raised in the debate included:

- It was a fallacy that UC was a good idea in principle
- Single-parent families were in the majority of those affected by UC
- UC affected more female claimants than males

- UC was driving a lot of families to rely on food bank donations
- UC was not fully funded and fully resourced as envisaged in the Dynamic Benefit Report
- UC appeared to have been designed to fit into the Government's austerity agenda

An amendment was moved by Councillor Robin Parker CC and seconded by Councillor Andy McGuinness as follows:

- Deletion of the third and fourth sentences of the first paragraph of the motion, from the words "that underpinning the Act ..." to "... welfare since the 1930s";
- Deletion of the first and second bullet points under "Council believes"; and
- Deletion in the third bullet point under "Council believes" of the words "an entirely new" and their replacement with "a review of the ..."

Upon being put to the vote, this amendment was lost.

Upon the substantive motion being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED:**

That Council notes:

That Universal Credit, the Government's flagship social security programme, has been beset by flaws in its design and delivery. It is causing immense hardship for many people wherever it is rolled out. That Universal Credit was designed as an integral part of the Welfare Reform Act brought in by the Coalition Government following their election in 2010. That underpinning the Act has been an ideological drive to make being on Welfare Benefits as degrading and punishing as possible with the intention of forcing as many claimants off benefits as possible. Welfare Reform including the introduction of UC was accompanied with the rhetoric of benefit dependency, skivers and strivers, cheats and malingerers as a way of winning public support for pushing through the biggest changes in welfare since the 1930s. UC is just one part of these reforms which include the discredited and hated Work Capability Assessments, the change from DLA to PIP with a 20% budget reduction target and cuts to the Access to Work programme.

These changes are interconnected and form the core of the Conservatives' making work pay programme.

Council believes:

- Universal Credit is a vehicle for cuts: cuts in support for families with a disabled child; cuts in support for disabled people in work and cuts in support for lone parents bringing up children.
- That UC cannot be fixed.
- That Universal Credit should not have been rolled out in Stevenage, and that this should be reversed. That, as with the Work Capability Assessments, an

entirely new scheme needs to be created making sure that Disabled People's Organisations and other groups affected are included at the heart of how these schemes are designed.

Council resolves:

- To write to the local MP and call on him to condemn the cruelty inflicted on local UC claimants
- To write to the Secretary of State and demand they halt the roll-out in Stevenage and nationally
- To support the opposition motion to demand the government publish its analysis of the impact of UC on people's incomes and debt

That under no circumstances will tenants in rent arrears due to waiting times for receipt of Universal Credit be evicted.

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

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

### **A. Question from Councillor J Brown**

In response to a question regarding the effect of Brexit on European funded and supported projects and employment in Stevenage, the Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport advised that it is difficult to say with any certainty what is likely to be impact of Brexit on European funded projects due to the number of undecided issues relating to the type of Brexit which may occur and the timescales involved.

There are no directly European funded projects administered by SBC, but recent European funded projects in Hertfordshire, some of which will affect local residents, include Herts LEP enabled European Social Fund and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) projects.

Bids have been made for 2019 by Herts LEP in partnership with the University of Hertfordshire, Anglia Ruskin University and other bodies but these will clearly be at risk.

In response to a supplementary question regarding Brexit advice received from the government, the Strategic Director (Tom Pike) advised that the Council had received guidance from a range of organisations including the East of England Local Government Association. Officers were assessing advice received so far and a report would be presented to the January 2019 meeting of the Executive.

**B. Question from Councillor G Snell**

In response to a question regarding the number of Dentists and other health professionals operating from residential properties across Stevenage and what consideration had been given to encourage the practices to relocate into vacant business properties or community amenity space, the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration advised that information regarding the number of dentists and other health professionals is not routinely collected by SBC. Accordingly up to date information would need to be gained from NHS sources for publicly funded professional practices. Dental and medical practices fall into Use Class D1 and as such require planning permission for the part of the building which is to be used for that purpose.

A practice operating from a residential property would be required to make a planning application for the part of the house affected. No such applications have been made in SBC in the last twenty years and practices seeking planning advice would be encouraged to seek appropriate business premises rather than a residential house in most cases, depending on local circumstances.

The specific circumstances of a number of medical practices operating from residential premises in Stevenage are the result of the legacy of the development corporation which located practices throughout the neighbourhoods in the early days of the New Town. These practices now have an established use by virtue of being in existence for more than ten years.

In response to a supplementary question regarding Council initiatives to encourage dental practices to relocate to purpose-built premises, the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration stated that the location of dental surgeries was based on business decisions and local needs.

**C. Question from R Parker CC**

In response to a question regarding what are the Council doing to improve the poor sickness record of Stevenage Borough Council staff, the Portfolio Holder for Resources reported that she was pleased to report that the Council's average sickness absence figure has seen a continued downward trend for the last five months, and as at the end of October 2018, sickness absence was 8.27 days, against a target of 8 days.

In comparison to national and local trends, we are in line with the national public sector average of 8.5 days. It should also be noted that Stevenage Borough Council also provides its own operational services in-house while most of our council counterparts outsource these services. Research suggests that these types of services are likely to have higher levels of absence and therefore in-house staff would affect the figures.

While our absence rates are not the highest, there is still significant room for improvement. The council recognises the importance of early intervention and



support to staff can help to avoid the absence or reduce the length of the absence.

SLT undertook a sickness absence review during 2018 and one of several actions as a result was the introduction of Business Unit sickness absence targets which should help further reduce absence in subsequent years.

Officers are also in the process of preparing to implement a third party sickness absence provider (First Care) who will provide a nurse led sickness reporting facility for all employees. First Care advise that they are likely to reduce sickness absence by somewhere between 15-25% over a 5 year period.

In addition the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed on 10th September 2018 to bring forward a scrutiny review of the Council's sickness management arrangements following encouragement from the Council's Executive. The review is live and is giving consideration to the specific factors that are or may be affecting sickness absence and the aim of the committee is to identify potential changes to the Council's Absence Management Policy and its application that may reduce absence levels.

The health and wellbeing of our staff are paramount to us and we aim to do everything possible to ensure they have everything they need and are fully supported in their roles. The Executive and the Senior Leadership Team will continue to monitor the performance and management of sickness absence and focus will be retained until there is a sustained reduction in sickness absence.

In response to a supplementary question regarding staff reporting to work while ill, the Portfolio Holder for Resources commented that in some cases, managers were not in a position to insist that officers report for work only after being certified as fit.

**D. Question from Councillor A McGuinness**

In response to a question regarding the Council's policy on subletting within its community centres, the Portfolio Holder for Communities, Community Safety and Equalities advised that the Council does not currently have a policy on subletting community centres. Stevenage's Community Centres have always been managed and operated by individual community associations as separate legal entities, who assume responsibility for room bookings and hires. Where leases exist the council will revert to provisions made within the lease to address any particular issues raised. Part of the Community Centre Review has been exploring governance and management arrangements of community centres moving forwards. The report presented at last month's Executive has recommended working with community associations through a co-operative agreement over the next 12 months to help them address governance and compliance obligations.

In response to supplementary comments made by Councillor McGuinness, the

Chief Executive clarified that all lease holding community associations were obliged to honour the terms of leases.

**E. Question from Councillor T Wren**

In response to a question regarding what negotiations had the Council undertaken concerning access to affordable properties on the future Gresley Park development, the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration advised that the Gresley Park proposed development, within the East Herts District Council area, has been the subject of initial discussions and SBC has also made representations to the EHDC Local Plan with regard to the provision of infrastructure and related matters. The EHDC Local Plan sets out a policy requirement for up to 40% affordable housing to be provided on this site.

Currently, no planning application has been submitted for Gresley Park but SBC would expect the anticipated application to be policy compliant. SBC will be consulted on the detail of the application once it is submitted in line with current practice. We will make the appropriate representations with regard to access to affordable housing.

In response to a supplementary question regarding arrangements to ensure compliance with the affordable housing provision, the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration stated that SBC was awaiting clarification on what East Herts District Council considered to be affordable housing.

11 **UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY CHAIRS**

It was **RESOLVED** that updates from the Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Community Select Committee and Environment and Economy Select Committee be deferred to the next meeting of Council.

12 **SCHEME OF DELEGATION TO OFFICERS**

The Council considered the proposed modifications to the Scheme of Delegation of Council functions to Officers.

The Chief Executive advised that the Council's current Scheme of Delegation was designed for its previous officer structure. Following the implementation of the Senior Management Review by the Council in October 2016, it had been determined that the current scheme was no longer fit for purpose.

The Chief Executive stated that the new scheme therefore reflected the new officer structure, and delegated functions not reserved to Council itself to him. He would then be able to sub-delegate to other officers as appropriate and would maintain a formal record of his sub-delegations for review and inspection.

Some examples of delegations included:

- Appointment of employees below chief officer level, in accordance with the

Council's Recruitment Policy; and

- Appointment of an Inspector, in accordance with the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974

The Chief Executive explained that a similar approach would need to be taken in relation to Executive functions, but these were in the remit of the Leader. She would be asked to agree changes to those delegations in the next few months.

The Chief Executive advised that, in essence, Members would see very little change to decision-making, but the Council would have a scheme that was now better suited to its organisational structure.

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

1. That the proposed changes to Part 3, paragraphs 4.2, 4.4 and 4.5 of the Constitution, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be approved.
2. That Background Document BD2 – Chief Executive's draft sub-delegations of Council functions dated 5 December 2018, be noted.
3. That it be noted that officers will be asking the Leader to revise the delegations of Executive functions to officers at a future date.

#### 13 **2018/19 MID YEAR TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW**

Council considered a report which had previously been presented to both the Executive and the Audit Committee, who had supported recommendations in relation to the 2018/19 Mid Year Treasury Management Review.

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

1. That the 2018/19 Treasury Management Mid Year review be approved.
2. That the latest list of approved Countries for investments, as set out in Appendix D to the report, be approved.
3. That officers be empowered to undertake treasury management functions on behalf of Council owned companies and/or Council Limited Liability Partnership (LLP), subject to authorisation from the Board of Directors (see Paragraph 4.5.12 of the report).

#### 14 **AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES**

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 20 November 2018 be noted.

In closing the meeting, the Mayor wished all present a Merry Christmas and prosperous 2019.

#### **CHAIR**