

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 16 October 2019

Time: 7.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Simon Speller (Mayor), Doug Bainbridge, Sandra Barr, Philip Bibby CC, Stephen Booth, Lloyd Briscoe, Rob Broom, Adrian Brown, Jim Brown, Teresa Callaghan, Laurie Chester, Michael Downing, Alex Farquharson, John Gardner, Michelle Gardner, Jody Hanafin, Richard Henry, Jackie Hollywell, Graham Lawrence, Mrs Joan Lloyd, John Lloyd, Andy McGuinness, Maureen McKay, Lin Martin-Haugh, John Mead, Sarah Mead, Adam Mitchell CC, Margaret Notley, Robin Parker CC, Claire Parris, Loraine Rossati, Sharon Taylor OBE CC, Jeannette Thomas and Tom Wren

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

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

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Dave Cullen, Liz Harrington, Lizzy Kelly, Sarah-Jane McDonough and Graham Snell.

Councillor Sharon Taylor declared a personal interest in Item 8 as a Member of the Local Enterprise Partnership.

2 **MINUTES - 24 JULY AND 11 SEPTEMBER 2019**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 24 July 2019, the Special Meeting of the Council held on 24 July 2019 and the Special Meeting of the Council held on 11 September 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

3 **MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS**

The Mayor introduced a short film featuring Woolenwick Junior School art project. It was noted that the film was particularly relevant in view of the main debate topic of arts and culture. At the end of the film, the Councillor S Taylor OBE CC informed Council that pupils from the school had created hundreds of clay models ("Terracotta warriors"). Members were informed that there was a story behind each one. The models were featured as part of Hertfordshire Week of Culture and efforts were underway to find a permanent exhibition space for the models. The Leader of the Council thanked Symonds Green Councillors for supporting the project.

The Mayor then provided updates on engagements since the last Council meeting

and upcoming events. The Mayor congratulated the Youth Council for being awarded the Abel Smith Commendation at the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) awards on 15 October 2019. The Mayor had attended a Coptic New Year event that was hosted by the Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London. The Schools Parliament met in the Council Chamber on 1 October 2019 for the launch of an environment awareness campaign. The Mayor also referred to events at Stevenage Museum, Flare Awards - University of Hertfordshire's competition to help students and alumni launch new businesses or come up with an innovative idea – and Inclusive Dance UK's British Open Inclusive Dance Festival. The international dance event involves people with and without disabilities. The Mayor announced that the multicultural performance arts event (Celebrate!!!) was scheduled for 19 October 2019 at the Gordon Craig Theatre.

4 **MAIN DEBATE - STEVENAGE RE-IMAGINED: A TEN YEAR ARTS AND HERITAGE (CULTURAL) STRATEGY**

Council received presentations from SBC Arts and Cultural Development Officer, South East Area Director (Arts Council England) and Associate Director (Mace Developments). The Arts and Cultural Development Officer provided an update on the Council's Arts and Heritage Strategy (2018 – 2028). The update included strategic aims, co-operative working, funding, key projects, art and heritage installations and Hertfordshire Year of Culture 2020. Members were also shown a short video highlighting the Town's key events such as Stevenage Day 2020, Cycling Festival 2019 and Battle of the Bands. It was indicated that Stevenage had an excellent cycling network that was worth celebrating. The Arts and Cultural Development Officer also highlighted arts and culture initiative linked to the regeneration programme.

In his introduction, the South East Area Director (Arts Council England) praised Council for recognising the huge value of arts and culture to society. The Arts Council presentation covered the history and role of the organisation, support for local authorities including Stevenage, the benefits of public and private investment in art and culture and "holistic benefits" to society. Arts Council England commended Stevenage's imaginative use of resources, strong partnerships and innovative inspirational thinking. The Council was encouraged to submit new and competitive bids for Arts Council England funding.

In line with the arts and culture theme, the Portfolio Holder (Children, Young People and Leisure) moved the motion in rhyming speech. He highlighted the Borough's remarkable talent, heritage and arts, integral cycle network and the modern Mondrian style pedestrianised town centre and partnership with organisations such as Stevenage Arts Guild Arts and Heritage Forum. The Portfolio Holder cited events at Stevenage Music Centre, Fairlands Valley Park, Town Centre and the Gordon Craig Theatre.

In seconding the motion, Councillor S Mead highlighted the intrinsic value of culture. She narrated the challenges she faced growing up in Stevenage and having to commute outside the Borough to receive music training. She highlighted the benefits that arts and culture brought to communities.

A full debate ensued. Points raised included:

- Arts and culture can aid mental health recovery and promote community cohesion
- Some local authorities such as Cambridgeshire support the prescription of music and visual arts if recommended by health professionals
- The introduction of robots and artificial intelligence to work places and households will enable some people to spend more time with friends and family or pursue creative pursuits
- There is scope for greater private sector funding in arts and culture in Stevenage
- The location of Stevenage Museum was challenging and there was room to improve its online presence
- Council and partners in Stevenage should consider using iconic products such as the Vincent motorcycle, Mars Rover and the Woolenwick School terracotta models to promote arts and culture and to market the Borough
- The historic Fairlands Valley Farmhouse had the potential to contribute to arts and culture in Stevenage if restored to a reasonable standard
- The education system should embrace all forms of music, give pupils more opportunities to play music instruments and assist people with an interest in arts and culture but could not afford to enrol or travel to events
- Community engagement was key to boosting attendance at local events such the biennial Arts Festival
- There was a drive to approach Arts Council England regarding the setting up of a New Towns Museum in Stevenage

In response to a question, the Arts and Cultural Development Officer informed Council that Core Group partners were involved in seeking ways to increase music provision in the Borough. The Council had started allowing arts and culture groups to have short-term use of temporarily empty buildings such as shops until they can be brought back into commercial use.

In his reply, the Portfolio Holder thanked Arts Council England and Mace Developments for supporting the Council's arts and culture agenda. He indicated that Council would submit competitive bids to the Arts Council. He stated that officers would provide an update on plans for Fairlands Valley Farmhouse.

After a full debate, it was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED:**

“That this Council recognises the positive contribution culture makes to Stevenage through health, wellbeing, education, skills and the economy. That this Council will continue to commit to the ambitions of the Stevenage Re-imagined Arts and Heritage Strategy working with our partners such as Arts Council England and MACE to embed heritage and the arts as part of our ongoing place-shaping ambitions to regenerate our town centre and our neighbourhoods and align our strategic investments accordingly”

5 **PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS**

None.

6 **QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL**

None.

7 **QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

None.

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

The Leader of the Opposition welcomed the Bragbury End Housing Development. He stated that residents in the area had expressed concerns about sporadic communication regarding the development.

In response, the Leader of the Council informed Council that there had been wide-ranging consultations with local residents. She indicated that officers would provide the Leader of the Opposition with details of communications to affected residents and the consultation timetable. The Leader of the Council emphasised the importance of cross-party support to meet Stevenage's housing needs. It was stated that the development will provide houses and apartments for sale, affordable rent and social rent, new state of the art independent living accommodation, a café, roof garden and retail facilities.

The Leader of the Council then informed Members that officers were revising the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan in line with the recently announced 1% Public Works Loans Board (PWLB) rate rise. The Council had demonstrated a strong commitment to Brexit preparations by setting up a Brexit Working Group. The Leader of the Council paid tribute to this year's Pride of Stevenage Award winners.

The Council then received updates on the following:

- Car Cruising Injunction
- Delivering New Council Homes
- Rough Sleeper Initiative
- Private Sector Landlord Engagement
- Healthy Stevenage
- Local Industrial Strategy
- Localism Commission
- Regeneration

The Leader of the Council reported that Stevenage's position as global leader in ground-breaking medical research was acknowledged at the 2019 Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) conference. Despite local partners submitting the job description for the Independent Chair of the LEP, as instructed by the Secretary of State, the Council was still awaiting the release of £19m funding

secured under the Hertfordshire LEP Growth 3 deal. March 2021 was the deadline to spend the Hertfordshire LEP funds. She concluded by announcing that a new Post Office would soon be opening in Bedwell Ward. This Post Office was not a replacement for the Old Town High Street Post Office that was due to close at the end of October.

9

NOTICE OF MOTIONS

(i) Council considered a motion submitted by Councillor R Parker CC in respect of wild flowers/highway verges. Councillor Parker reminded Members that the motion had been deferred from the July Council meeting. He acknowledged that the Council had taken steps to plant wild flowers and maintain road verges. However, there was still room to improve biodiversity.

It was noted that two amendments had been tabled. In accordance with Section 19 (b) of Part 4 of the Council's Constitution, the Mayor allowed two amendments to be discussed with the motion to help business to be dealt with more efficiently. It was acknowledged that the amendments moved by Councillors J Gardner and P Bibby CC would broadly complement the motion. The amendments were accepted by Councillor Parker.

After a full debate, it was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED:**

“That it is noted that Stevenage Borough Council has taken a leading role in supporting biodiversity, sustainability and a thriving local environment. We have Biodiversity Action Plan (2017 – 2022), developed through a partnership of Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, with great support of our network of green space volunteers helping to deliver key elements of this Plan.

Through this Biodiversity Action Plan and our Open Spaces Strategy, the Council has a dozen locations which are actively managed as meadow and wildflower sites, and with a number of verges and banks across the town where grasses and vegetation are subject to careful management and twice yearly cutting to support diversity and pollinators.

That Council notes that:

- (a) A number of other local authorities have adopted the policy of planting or encouraging wild flowers, and other alternative methods of managing highway verges, which improve biodiversity without increasing the cost of highway verge maintenance
- (b) Growing concern about the possible health impacts and effect on biodiversity by the widespread use of glyphosate weed killers

Council also notes that the current Biodiversity Action Plan commits to a grasslands plan, including consideration of possible sites and ways to expand wildflower planting of verges. This work is being undertaken in the current year. Council requests that a progress report is provided to the Environment and Economy Select Committee on this topic. This will provide assessment of benefits to Stevenage, in terms of habitat, environment benefits and whether there are particular costs or

savings associated with this.

The Council will work with the County Council under its agency agreement to ensure that any resultant Pollinator Action Plan is implemented.”

(ii) A motion seeking support for a smart motorway between junctions 6 and 8 of the A1 (M) was moved by Councillor A Mitchell CC and seconded by Councillor P Bibby CC. Councillor Mitchell reminded Members that the benefits of smart motorways had been acknowledged in the Climate Change Emergency motion that was passed at the June 2019 meeting of Council.

Members raised the following issues during the debate:

- Smart motorways were cost effective compared to the preferred option of widening the motorway
- Stevenage and its partners in the regional joint A1M Committee had for a number of years lobbied for an additional lane on the relevant stretch of the A1M
- Smart motorways were likely to promote the use of private vehicles and this was contrary to the objective to reduce carbon emissions
- A recent Department for Transport report indicated an increase in fatalities on motorways. There appeared to be a link between the increase in fatalities and the wider introduction of smart motorways, especially all-lane running (ALR) routes with no hard shoulders
- Hertfordshire County Council had so far not supported improvements at the GlaxoSmithKline junction (located just off junction 7 (Stevenage South) of the A1(M))

After a full debate and a vote, this motion was lost.

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

Council received five questions. The responses to the five questions were circulated at the Meeting and are appended.

(A) Question from Councillor Robin Parker, CC
In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Parker, the Mayor reiterated that one of the parliamentary candidates for Stevenage was invited purely for her links with Cycling UK Stevenage and Sport Stevenage. The Mayor indicated that he was happy for the list of invitees to be shared.

(B) Question from Councillor Tom Wren
In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Wren, the Portfolio Holder (Environment and Regeneration) indicated that the Council was in consultation local authorities such as Oxford and Camden that had adopted the Citizens' Panel and People's Assembly model. Councillor J Gardner stated officers would provide a written reply on funding arrangements for the engagement approach.

(C) Question from Councillor Stephen Booth

Councillor Booth indicated that he was not satisfied with the response to the original question. He had received representations from local businesses that had lost revenue as a result of the Charter Fair. He suggested that the Council considers negotiating for amendments to the Charter or relocating the Fair to Fairlands Valley Showgrounds. Cllr L Briscoe highlighted the responsibilities of Hertfordshire County Council on highway matters. The Portfolio Holder indicated that the Council would continue to liaise with HCC regarding health and safety arrangements during the Stevenage Charter Fair.

(D) Question from Councillor Andy McGuinness

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Parker, Cllr Taylor informed Members that the Council had not received any representations from local businesses on “No Deal” Brexit scenario planning.

(E) Question from Councillor Graham Snell

Cllr J Gardner stated that officers were awaiting further information from the Member regarding the original question. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that he was aware of cases of wet floor accident injuries in the Town Centre. Councillor Gardner assured Council that the engineering team would carry out investigations whenever reports of unsafe paving were received.

11 **UPDATE FROM SCRUTINY CHAIRS**

The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee informed Council that in addition to the Work Plan items, the Committee had commenced a review of the Council’s Scrutiny arrangements. The review came after the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) had published new statutory guidance on overview and scrutiny in local and combined authorities. It was reported that the Centre for Public Scrutiny would be invited to give feedback on the Committee’s final report.

The Chair of the Community Select Committee informed Members that the Select Committee was currently conducting a review on Sports and Leisure in Stevenage.

The Chair of the Environment and Economy Select Committee advised Council that there had been delays to the planned review on Post Offices in Stevenage.

It was **RESOLVED** that the updates are noted.

12 **ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW OF 2018/19 INCLUDING PRUDENTIAL CODE**

Councillor Mrs J Lloyd moved the recommendation and Councillor S Taylor seconded the recommendation. It was pointed out that the Council would continue to monitor investment options and updates would be provided whenever significant changes were made.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the Annual Treasury Management Review of 2018/19 is approved
2. That the updated Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy is approved

13

REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES 2019 - OUTCOME OF REVIEW

The Chief Executive introduced the report on the Review of Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places 2019. The report set out steps taken in the 2019 review and the outcome of that review. Members were reminded of the wide-ranging consultation that took place from 8 July to 2 September 2019. Responses to the consultation were appended to the report. Some of the comments received related to the venues used for Polling Stations which are outside the scope of this review but had been included to assist Council in its consideration of the appropriate Polling Districts and Places. The Chief Executive indicated that the proposals were before Council so that an effective Revised Register of Electors could be published on 1 December 2019. He confirmed that the review complied with relevant statutory obligations. Council were informed that the Returning Officer was responsible for selecting Polling Stations.

The Leader of the Council moved the recommendations. In moving the recommendations, the Leader of the Council stated that an alternative polling station would be preferable to the chapel at Weston Road Cemetery, but noted that no further options were currently available. This being the case, Members noted the continued use of the chapel at Weston Road Cemetery, until the Returning Officer could identify a suitable alternative location. Councillor Mrs J Lloyd called for more initiatives to encourage voters to opt for postal voting.

An amendment to the Proposals for Polling Districts and Polling Places (Appendix A of the report) was moved by Councillor Robin Parker CC and seconded by Councillor Stephen Booth as follows:

- Retain Chells Manor Community Centre as a Polling Station for Polling District CFA
- Retain Martins Wood Primary School as a double Polling Station for Polling District CEB

In accordance with Section 22 of Part 4 of the Council's Constitution, a recorded vote was held on the amendment to the recommendations.

Votes for the Amendment – Councillors S Booth, R Parker CC and T Wren

Votes against the Amendment – Councillors D Bainbridge, S Barr, P Bibby CC, L Briscoe, R Broom, A Brown, J Brown, T Callaghan, L Chester, M Downing, A Farquharson, J Gardner, M Gardner, J Hanafin, R Henry, J Hollywell, G Lawrence, Mrs J Lloyd, J Lloyd, M McKay, L Martin-Haugh, J Mead, S Mead, A Mitchell CC, M Notley, C Parris, L Rossati, S Speller, S Taylor OBE CC and J Thomas

Abstentions - Nil

The amendment was lost.

In her reply, the Leader of the Council stated that all concerns raised by Members during the consultation phase had been addressed by Officers in writing and during meetings. In respect of Timebridge Community Centre, she indicated that it was not uncommon for community centres to remain open on polling days. The Leader of the Council commended the Returning Officer, Deputy Returning Officer and other officers involved in the election process for their impartiality and professionalism.

It was **RESOLVED** that the report regarding the outcome of the Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places Review 2019 be noted.

The following voted against the proposals – Councillors S Booth, R Parker CC and T Wren.

14 **AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES**

In moving that the minutes be noted, Councillor M McKay highlighted concerns regarding commencement of the annual external audit. By way of update, she announced that the external auditor, Ernst & Young, started the Council's main audit and the Housing Benefit audit in October.

Councillor J Gardner seconded the motion.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes from the Audit Committee meetings held on 10 September 2019 be noted.

CHAIR