

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 29 January 2020

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, Lizzy Kelly, Graham Lawrence, John Lloyd, Mrs Joan Lloyd, Lin Martin-Haugh, Sarah-Jane McDonough, Andy McGuinness, Maureen McKay, John Mead, Sarah Mead, Adam Mitchell CC, Margaret Notley, Robin Parker CC, Claire Parris, Loraine Rossati, Graham Snell, Sharon Taylor OBE CC, Jeannette Thomas and Tom Wren

Start / End Start Time: 7.00pm
Time: End Time: 11.15pm

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

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Dave Cullen and Liz Harrington.

At this juncture, the Mayor apologised to Councillor Robin Parker for the comments made to him at the end of the last Council meeting. Councillor Parker accepted the apology.

The Mayor then advised that he had accepted as urgent a late Motion concerning smart motorways, which had been circulated around the Council Chamber. Additionally the Mayor agreed to vary the order of business to bring forward Item 11, the Scrutiny Chairs' Updates to be taken immediately after item 7.

2 **MINUTES - 16 OCTOBER 2019**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 16 October 2020 are approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

3 **MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS**

The Mayor was proud to introduce two award winners from the Herts Business Awards – Supporting Young People Category - Jill Eaton from Sporting Futures and Tom and Rebecca from Bambuu Brush – New Business of the Year. Both winners gave a short presentation on the work they were doing within their organisations.

The Mayor then provided updates on engagements since the last Council meeting and upcoming events, highlighting the following:

- Christmas morning visit to the Lister Hospital;
- Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) Event held on 27 January 2020. The Mayor particularly thanked Terry and Gillian Wolfe from the Stevenage Liberal Synagogue for their involvement in the event. The Leader of the Council, Councillor Sharon Taylor also referred to the moving contributions made by Lesley Urbach and Stuart Nagler MBE JP DL. Councillor Taylor then suggested that the Council could facilitate with the help of the Youth Council and the Youth Mayor, an additional HMD event next year primarily for young people.
- A Charity Concert at the Gordon Craig Theatre had been arranged for 11 March 2020;
- 75th anniversary of Day – the Mayor encouraged local councillors and communities to take part in activities to commemorate the anniversary.

4 **MAIN DEBATE - COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING**

Paul Cheeseman, the Council's Lead Officer on Community Wealth Building (CWB) and Professor Michael Brookes of the Hertfordshire Business School gave a presentation on CWB.

In presenting the item, Mr Cheeseman and Professor Brookes made reference to the National and International Context, some recent examples of CWB work around the UK and CWB in the local context.

The Council was informed of the foundations of CWB in Stevenage including:

- Procurement and social value;
- Training and Skills;
- Co-operative and Social Economy Growth;
- Tackling Climate Change.

The Mayor thanked Mr Cheeseman and Professor Brookes for their informative presentation.

A full debate ensued. Points raised included:

- The CWB agenda had typically been adopted by unitary authorities however, it was agreed that the agenda was closely linked to the work being undertaken in Stevenage by the Council;
- The collaborative working undertaken by the Council would enable more funding to be drawn into Stevenage;
- In Stevenage the issue was more about inclusive growth than unemployment which had been the focus for other local authorities;
- For CWB to be successful the whole of the county should be involved;
- Contracts should be procured locally where possible;
- In response to a question, Members were advised that local businesses

would be encouraged to bid for contracts through the procurement strategy and events such as 'Meet the Buyer'.

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

“That this Council understands the benefits of community wealth building, drawing from learning both nationally and internationally, and believes that further opportunities can be unlocked for the local economy and our residents through work with partners in the town around;

- procurement and social value
- training and skills
- growing the social economy growth
- effectively tackling climate change

and that this Council commits to developing an inclusive Economy Charter based on these foundations to build community wealth, to ensure that future regeneration and growth in Stevenage works for everyone.”

5 **PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS**

None received.

6 **QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL**

None received.

7 **QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

None received.

At this juncture, as indicated by the Mayor, the Council heard the Scrutiny Chairs' updates – see Item 11.

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

The Leader of the Opposition asked the Leader of the Council if it was time to revisit the new homes target in the Local Plan following announcements from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) reducing the required numbers of new houses and there being the possibility that more windfall sites would be coming forward.

In response, the Leader of the Council advised that officers would provide the Leader of the Opposition with a detailed response on this issue but noted that the ONS number was only lower for a one year period. The need for new homes was still urgent and the Council was keen to do all it could to help to provide the homes that local people needed.

The Leader reported on a meeting she and the Chief Executive had attended with Nick Carver, Chief Executive East and North Herts NHS Trust at the Lister Hospital and that during the meeting he had indicated that over 250 people could have been

discharged if adequate care arrangements had been in place. The Leader stressed the importance of everyone doing what they could to continue to lobby the Government on this issue.

The Council then received updates on the following:

- Homelessness and Rough Sleeping;
- Major Refurbishment Contract;
- Housing Programme On-site;
- Kenilworth Close;
- Sale of former Kodak Site;
- Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst - one of six new Life Science Opportunity Zones in UK;
- SG1;
- People's Orchards;
- Arts Council Award for Stevenage Day.

The Leader agreed to circulate the written updates to Members following the meeting.

9 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

(i) Luton Airport Expansion

Councillor Robin Parker moved and Councillor Stephen Booth seconded a motion as set out in the Agenda.

An amendment was moved by Councillor Lloyd Briscoe and seconded by Councillor John Gardner. Members raised the following issues during the debate:

- The noise and pollution from the aircraft flying in and out of Luton Airport had been a long standing problem for people in Stevenage;
- Additional flights would add to the climate change emergency;
- It was noted that London Luton Airport (LLA) were reliant on the introduction of more efficient aircraft but they were responsible for the expansion of the Airport;
- One of the problems was the cost of flying was far cheaper than the public transport alternative;
- The public transport provision between Stevenage and the Airport was inadequate;
- It was suggested that the Airport was not currently complying with current air quality standards;
- The intention of the amendment was to clarify the original motion and make much more of an impact.

It was then **RESOLVED** that the amendment be approved.

Following further debate, the substantive motion was then put to the vote and it was **RESOLVED**:

“That in view of our recent declaration of a climate emergency, the considerable detrimental impact on Stevenage resulting from over-flying and also taking into account the opportunities that Luton Airport provides, this Council opposes further expansion of Luton Airport unless sufficient mitigation is secured and that expansion can be proved to have a net zero carbon impact. The assessment of this impact must include a complete assessment of the additional traffic generated both by passengers and users of the airport itself and the travel to work of staff employed at the airport.

This Council also requires reassurance from Luton Airport on the emergency procedures relating to ‘fuel dumping’ which arise from the recent incident in Los Angeles.

This Council will continue to raise concerns about noise, environmental impact, aviation carbon levels in the South East, and transport connectivity in our representations on the forthcoming Planning Application to be considered by the Planning Inspector.”

(ii) Animal Welfare

Councillor Jackie Hollywell moved and Councillor Sharon Taylor seconded a revised motion which had been circulated around the Chamber.

Following discussion, Councillor Hollywell agreed to accept a further revision to the motion to replace ‘silent fireworks’ with ‘low noise fireworks’.

During further debate, the following issues were raised:

- Thanks were given to the public and to the RSPCA for their contributions and commitment and dedication to this issue;
- Fireworks caused distress to domestic pets as well as wildlife and farm animals;
- Individuals could not be stopped from having fireworks but the Council should be leading the way in terms of low noise displays.

The revised motion was then put to the vote and it was **RESOLVED**:

“That Stevenage Borough Council takes animal welfare seriously and pledges to work with partners to ensure that we do all we can within our Borough to protect animals from harm and to encourage the highest standards of animal welfare.

The Council notes the campaign to ban the release of sky lanterns and balloons supported by the RSPCA, the Marine Conservation Society, National Farmers Union and other national wildlife bodies, as both have been shown to be unsafe for animals and the environment and can cause injury, suffering and death by ingestion, entanglement and entrapment.

The Council also acknowledges that extensive use of high decibel fireworks can cause distress to both residents and their animals. A number of councils across the UK are seeking consultation from citizens on proposals from the RSPCA to further limit the permitted sales days and for all public firework displays to be licensed.

The Council also notes and welcomes the enactment of the Wild Animals in Circuses Act which bans the use of Wild Animals in Circuses in England, and came into force at the start of this month (January 2020).

In addition, the Council extends our support to the police and local animal welfare organisations for the full enforcement of the law around animal welfare, which in Hertfordshire includes illegal hare coursing, dog fighting and other wildlife and animal crimes.

Stevenage Borough Council is keen to continue progress on issues of animal welfare and request officers to look into the feasibility of the introduction of policies relating to:

- The release of sky lanterns and helium balloons from council land and property;
- The timing and licencing of fireworks displays;
- Moving as quickly as possible to using low noise fireworks for our public fireworks display;
- Encouraging other organisations within the Stevenage Borough area organising fireworks displays to use low noise fireworks;
- Prohibiting the use of animals in circuses performing in the Stevenage Borough Council area;
- Working with our partners in the Police and animal welfare organisations to support the enforcement of the hunting ban, illegal hare coursing and dog fighting as well as other wildlife and animal crimes.

(iii) A1M Smart Motorway

Councillor Lloyd Briscoe moved and Councillor Sharon Taylor seconded an urgent motion which had been accepted by the Mayor concerning smart motorways. The following issues were raised during the debate:

- Near misses had increased dramatically on those roads where smart motorways had been introduced;
- Concern was expressed regarding the misleading information received at the all Member briefing from Highways England last year;
- No decision should be made on the introduction of the smart motorway in this area, currently due to begin in Spring, until the results of the Government review had been published later in the Summer.

Following debate and upon being put to the vote it was **RESOLVED**:

'That this Council notes with growing concern the issues being raised relating to the safety of 'Smart Motorway' systems. Most recently through a body of evidence exposed in the BBC Panorama programme screened on 27th January.

This Council now believes there can be no justification for any further introduction of 'Smart Motorway' systems anywhere on UK roads.

In the light of emerging evidence, Council demands;

1. An urgent review by the Secretary of State for Transport into the 'Smart Motorway' proposals for the A1(M) between Junctions 6 - 8.
2. That no implementation of 'Smart Motorway' on this stretch of the A1M be carried out while the urgent review takes place.
3. That alternative proposals for relieving congestion on the A1(M) be brought forward as quickly as possible.
4. That officers of the Council communicate this resolution to the Secretary of State with immediate effect.'

10

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRS / PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

Council received seven questions (all of which were detailed in the agenda). The responses to the seven questions were circulated at the Meeting and are appended. Answers to the supplementary questions are set out below:

(B) Question from Councillor Robin Parker, CC

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Parker, Councillor John Gardner advised that he was not aware of any formal request from the developer of Park Place to change the ground floor units from retail to residential.

(C) Question from Councillor McGuinness

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor McGuinness, Councillor John Gardner advised that the recycling bags had been provided in response to requests from the public to change the way recycling was collected. Councillor Gardner suggested that the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee could choose to monitor how the new arrangement was working.

(D) In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Farquharson, Councillor John Gardner advised that Members should follow the planning process for the SG1 plans and that the development would have a lower carbon impact than many other schemes.

(E) In response to Councillor Hanafin's question, the Mayor advised that he would make a personal pledge to end the provision of red meat in catering at Mayoral events.

(F) In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Mitchell, Councillor John Gardner agreed to ask officers to provide a written response explaining why since 2012 this Council had the highest or second highest rate of fly tipping across the County.

(G) In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Notley, Councillor Rob Broom advised that the roll-out of the devices for Members was planned to commence after the start of the new Municipal Year in May and would include support for Members. He also agreed that presentations received at meetings would be circulated electronically rather than in hard copy.

11 **UPDATE FROM SCRUTINY CHAIRS**

This item was taken immediately following Item 7.

The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee informed Council that in addition to the Work Plan items, the Committee was part way through a review of the Council's Scrutiny arrangements.

The Chair of the Community Select Committee informed Members that the Select Committee had concluded their review on Sports and Leisure in Stevenage. One of the findings of the review was that the majority of people visiting the Gordon Craig Theatre were Stevenage residents which was contrary to what was previously thought. The Chair also thanked the Culture, Wellbeing and Leisure Service Manager for his help on the site visits carried out by Members of the Committee.

The Chair of the Environment and Economy Select Committee advised Council that the review on Post Offices in Stevenage had been completed. The review of the Neighbourhood Centres would commence in the next couple of weeks. He also suggested that the CWB presentation, which the Council had received earlier during this meeting, could help inform future scrutiny reviews.

12 **REPORT REFERRED FROM THE EXECUTIVE - HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT FINAL BUDGET PROPOSALS 2020/2021 AND RENT SETTING**

Council considered a report, which updated Members on the final proposals on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budgets and rent-setting for 2020/2021.

Prior to the debate, the Mayor referred to the Supplementary Agenda, which set out the Executive's recommendations to Council following consideration of this matter at its meeting held on 22 January 2020.

In moving the Motion, Councillor Thomas advised that the 2020/21 budget included a rent increase for all council homes for the first time in four years. She also referred to the new build programme and the estimated 2,433 new Council homes over a 30 year period; the major refurbishment contract of all flat blocks in the Town, retro fitting of sprinklers in high rise blocks and the development at Kenilworth Close.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Mrs Joan Lloyd informed Council that the

balances at the end of the year would help us to finance the borrowing to continue to invest in our homes and to build new ones.

It was then **RESOLVED**:

1. That HRA dwellings be increased, week commencing 1 April 2020, by 2.7% an average increase of £2.56 for social rents £4.17 for affordable rents and £3.16 for Low Start Shared Ownership homes per week. This has been calculated using the rent formula, CPI +1% in line with the Government's rent policy as set out in Paragraph 4.1.1. of the report.
2. That the rent policy update to reflect the rent increase guidance of CPI+1%, (revised from a minus 1% rent reduction excluding LSSO properties) agreed at the December 2020 Executive, is confirmed.
3. That the 2020/21 HRA budget, as set out in Appendix A to the report is approved.
4. That the revised 2019/20 HRA budget, as set out in Appendix A to the report, is approved.
5. That the HRA Fees and Charges, as outlined in Appendix C to the report are approved.
6. That the 2020/21 service charges are approved.
7. That the minimum level of reserves for 2020/21, as shown in Appendix E to the report is approved.
8. That the contingency sum of £250,000 within which the Executive can approve supplementary estimates, be approved for 2020/21 (unchanged from 2019/20).
9. That the comments from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as set out in the report are noted.
10. That officers write to the Secretary of State (MHCLG) to request that new build right to buy receipts that are projected to be returned in the last quarter of 2019/20 (estimated at £790,000) are not returned to the Government, but used to increase funding for the Council's ambitious house building programme, such as Kenilworth or other pipeline programmes.

13 **OFFICER REPORT - COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY (CIL)**

Council considered a report that informed Members of the key outcomes of the public examination of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Draft Charging Schedule (DCS); provided a summary of the Examiner's report and sought approval of the charging schedule.

It was moved by Councillor John Gardner, seconded by Councillor Lloyd Briscoe and **RESOLVED**:

1. That the outcomes of the independent examination are noted.
2. That the content of the Examiner's Report are noted.
3. That the Examiner's modifications and recommendation to approve the Charging Schedule, and supporting Instalments Policy and Payments in Kind Policy, attached at Appendices B-D to the report are accepted;
4. That the Charging Schedule, and supporting Instalments Policy and Payments in Kind Policy, to be brought into effect on 01 April 2020 is approved;
5. That the setup of an allocated financial reserve to draw down on for the CIL Officer post with an annual review is approved.

14 **REPORT REFERRED FROM THE EXECUTIVE - 2019/20 MID YEAR TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW**

Members received a report that provided an update on the Treasury Management activities in 2019/20 and review effectiveness of the 2019/20 Treasury Management and Investment Strategy including the 2019/20 prudential and treasury indicators.

It was moved by Councillor Mrs Joan Lloyd, seconded by Councillor Maureen McKay and **RESOLVED**:

1. That the 2019/20 Treasury Management Mid-Year review is approved.
2. That the latest approved Countries for investments are approved (Appendix D).
3. That the updated authorised and operational borrowing limits are approved (paragraph 4.4.7).
4. That the updated MRP policy is approved (paragraph 4.4.10 and Appendix E).

15 **AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES**

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes from the Audit Committee meetings held on 12 and 27 November 2019 are noted.

CHAIR