

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 16 December 2020

Time: 7.00pm

Place: Virtual (via Zoom)

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

Start / End Start Time: 7.00pm
Time: End Time: 9.47pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Doug Bainbridge, Dave Cullen, Lizzy Kelly and John Mead.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 14 OCTOBER 2020

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 14 October 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

3 MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Mayor began by thanking all those involved in the local festive toppers on postboxes campaign, the proceeds of which would be donated to his chosen charities for the year.

The Mayor announced the winners of his Christmas Card Design competition, and thanked all of the schools who had participated.

The Mayor informed the Council of the activities and events he had been involved in over the past two months, including:

- Two further visits to schools during Local Democracy Week;
- The Haven quiz;
- Photo shoot to launch the Stevenage Heritage Map;

- The virtual Pride of Stevenage Awards ceremony;
- Sport Stevenage AGM;
- Welcoming Rev. Karen Mitchell to St. Andrew and St. George Church;
- Opening a new bakery in the Indoor Market;
- Unveiling of a plaque commemorating the 125th Anniversary of an elected Local Council for Stevenage;
- Virtual Half Marathon around Stevenage;
- Remembrance Sunday;
- Knebworth House Trustees AGM;
- Switching on of the Christmas Lights in Town Square;
- Bus User Group AGM;
- Collection of 570 presents from Glaxo Smith Klein and Bioscience Catalyst donated to the Christmas Tree Giving Appeal;
- A Christmas message / appeal for donations to the Stevenage Food Bank; and
- Shimkent 30th anniversary of Town twinning book launch.

The Mayor gave his commitment to receiving the Covid-19 vaccination when invited to do so by the Health authorities.

The Mayor concluded by urging everyone to take care over the festive period and to continue to abide by the Covid-19 guidelines. He wished everyone a Happy Christmas and a peaceful, healthy New Year.

4 MAIN DEBATE

There was no Main Debate.

5 PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

There were no petitions and deputations.

6 QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL

The Council received six questions from the Youth Council. The responses to the six questions had been published in the supplementary agenda for the meeting.

In relation to Question (A), concerning Council support given to homeless people during lockdowns 1 and 2, the Youth Mayor asked the following supplementary question:

“Was the Council accepting donations for the homeless and, if so, which donations would be appreciated?”

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People replied that the Council currently had no way of accepting such donations, but that she would discuss the matter with officers in the Housing Team and respond to the Youth Mayor in due course.

No supplementary questions were asked in respect of Questions (B) to (F).

7 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from the public.

8 LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S UPDATE

The Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Phil Bibby, asked the following question:

“How does the Council intend to deal with the dilemma of the free parking scheme to help businesses in the Old Town during and after the Covid-19 pandemic with the sustainability imperatives contained in the Sustainable Travel Town initiative of reduced car usage?”

The Leader of the Council replied that she was delighted to hear that Stevenage was being recommended as one of Hertfordshire's first Sustainable Travel Towns, which demonstrated that Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) recognised the unique challenges posed by Stevenage's historic High Street. The Council very much sympathised with the ambitions of HCC towards Sustainable Travel Towns, and was committed to supporting those principles.

In terms of the immediate future, the Leader of the Council felt that it was important that the free parking scheme in the Old Town was maintained in order to help businesses through this difficult period. She added that the Council was also committed to working with HCC to drive forward environmental transport initiatives, which could amongst other options include the installation of a number of Electric Vehicle Charging Points in the High Street to encourage the use of electric vehicles and help encourage the switch away from fossil fuel powered vehicles.

The Leader updated the Council on the latest situation with the Covid-19 pandemic; the Pride of Stevenage Awards; and the Celebrating Our People Staff Awards. She expressed her thanks to the whole officer team at SBC for their continued efforts and support during the pandemic.

The Council then received updates from relevant Executive Portfolio Holders on the following matters:

- Stevenage Works Awards;
- Housing Development;
- Stevenage Economic Task Force;
- Railways;
- Community Wealth Building;
- Community Development Team;
- SG1 Town Centre Update;
- Towns Deal;
- UK 100 Pledge Update;
- SADA – 16 Days of Action against Domestic Abuse Campaign;
- Leisure Providers' Financial Position; and
- Council Budget.

In relation to the Kenilworth Close project, the Leader of the Opposition asked about the plans for the shops and the timescale for completion of the overall scheme? The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People replied that, in respect of the shops, the intention was to provide a temporary facility for the fish and chip shop, which would also provide general necessities whilst the scheme build was taking place. She would check on the date for completion of the overall scheme and provide a written response.

9 UPDATE FROM SCRUTINY CHAIRS

The Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee reported that the Committee had met on 2 occasions since the last Council meeting. She commented that a lively debate had ensued at the most recent Committee meeting in respect of the draft Stevenage Parking Strategy for 2021 – 2031.

The Chair of the Community Select Committee reported that the Committee had met in early December to consider a health update from the HCC Director of Public Health which, unsurprisingly, was primarily focussed on the Covid-19 pandemic. The meeting also received an excellent report from the Health & Sport Strategy Manager, who had been involved in promoting a wide range of leisure and healthy initiatives for various groups throughout the pandemic

The Chair of the Environment & Economy Select Committee reported that the Committee had concluded a somewhat truncate review of Neighbourhood Centres, and that a draft report was in preparation with recommendations for some immediate improvements, together with some proposals for introduction post-pandemic. The Committee had met in November to consider items relating to the Council's response to the pandemic with regard to the local economy and businesses, and on plans for recovery. Further meetings would be held in January and February 2021 to ascertain the views of a wide range of internal officers and external contributors.

10 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

A motion from the Liberal Democrat Group had been submitted concerning a means whereby the Council could recognise the achievements of Stevenage-born Lewis Hamilton MBE, following his recent record equalling 7th Formula One World Championship success.

An amendment to the submitted motion had been received from the Labour Group. This amendment had been accepted by the mover of the motion (Councillor Stephen Booth).

Accordingly, the amended motion was moved by Councillor Stephen Booth, and seconded by Councillor Sharon Taylor. Following debate, during which a number of tributes were made to Lewis Hamilton MBE, and upon the amended motion being put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED (UNANIMOUSLY):

That Stevenage Borough Council congratulates Lewis Hamilton MBE, who lived and grew up in Stevenage, on his remarkable achievement in winning seven Formula 1 motor racing world championships, a record equalled only by one other driver in the history of the sport.

Council notes his early commitment, enthusiasm and determination to excel in entering the sport despite limited resources and recognises that he is an incredible role model to young people all across the country.

The Council further commends Lewis Hamilton on the work he is doing to raise awareness of the Black Lives Matter movement amongst his fellow drivers and teams and in persuading many of them to take a knee; and further his campaigning to eliminate all forms of racism in motor sport. The Council therefore congratulates Lewis Hamilton on his leadership in persuading his team as a mark of respect to the Black Lives Matter movement to change its colours after 90 years as “The Silver Arrows” to black for a season.

Council further commends Lewis Hamilton’s work to give something back to communities through UNICEF UK and other charitable works; to improve diversity in motorsport through the Hamilton Commission to engage young black people in science, technology, engineering and mathematics; and as an ambassador for the sport to encourage and assist more young drivers from BAME backgrounds to compete. We also note his significant contribution in lobbying the Formula One authorities to take rapid further steps towards making motor racing more sustainable by accelerating the development of electric vehicles and/or vehicles powered by energy other than fossil fuels.

Council commits to ensuring that Lewis Hamilton’s achievements are recognised by, and in, his home town and undertakes to contact him to discuss how best that might be done, especially to help him achieve his stated ambition to support the aspirations of young people. We hope he will wish to do that locally and council commits to considering options with him for recognising and promoting his extraordinary achievements to that end.

11 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRS/PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

The Council received six questions from Members to Committee Chairs/Portfolio Holders. The responses to the six questions had been published in the supplementary agenda for the meeting.

(A) Question from Councillor Margaret Notley

Supplementary question – “What response has been received to the Council’s littering and fly-tipping media campaign run over the summer?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration replied that he would provide a full written reply. He stated that the campaign had been successful, although the amount of low level littering was beginning to grow again which would be addressed. One of the main challenges would be to try to change the behaviour of individuals

who littered and fly-tipped.

(B) Question from Councillor Stephen Booth

Supplementary question – “Could a breakdown be provided of the type of race awareness and race bias training undertaken by the 109 employees who had completed such training over the past 12 months?”

The Portfolio Holder for Resources replied that she would arrange for a written answer to be provided to this supplementary question.

(C) Question from Councillor Robin Parker

Supplementary question – “Why doesn’t the Council remove the barriers in the High Street relating to outside seating areas during the winter months, when customers are less likely to sit outside?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise & Transport replied that he would consult officers on this suggestion and provide a written response to the supplementary question.

(D) Question from Councillor Graham Snell

Supplementary question – “Could Members have more regular updates on the performance of Council IT systems?”

The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods & Co-operative Council replied that he would arrange for a regular bulletin to be sent to Members providing an update on SBC’s IT systems.

(E) Question from Councillor Tom Wren

Supplementary question – “Will the Council retain the free parking scheme in Primett Road Car Park until at least the spaces lost in the High Street due to the Covid-19 restrictions are re-instated?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise & Transport replied that the position regarding the Primett Road free parking scheme would be reviewed early in the New Year.

(F) Question from Councillor Andy McGuinness

Supplementary question – “Given the historic strained relationship between the Stevenage MP and the Council, would the assistance of the Leader of the Opposition in “extending an olive branch” to the MP to help improve this relationship be welcomed?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration replied that he would welcome anyone attempting to properly engage with the MP. He added that the MP had been invited to all meetings of Stevenage First and its successor, the Stevenage

Development Board, but had only chosen to attend the very first of the Stevenage First meetings.

12 HERTFORDSHIRE GROWTH BOARD - GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

The Council considered a report in respect of governance arrangements for the Hertfordshire Growth Board.

The Chief Executive reminded Members that this item had been the subject of an all Member Briefing on 2 November 2020, year prior to it being presented at the November Executive meeting (noting also related discussions at the subsequent Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting). He added that nine of the Hertfordshire Local Authorities had already signed up to new governance arrangements for the Hertfordshire Growth Board, with both SBC and East Hertfordshire District Council taking their decisions this evening. If agreement was secured, the first meeting of the new formally constituted Growth Board Committee would take place on 26 January 2021.

It was moved by Councillor Sharon Taylor, seconded by Councillor John Gardner, and following debate and upon being put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED:

1. That the establishment of the Hertfordshire Growth Board Joint Committee and Hertfordshire Growth Board Scrutiny Committee as Joint Committees (inaugural meetings being planned to take place in January / February 2021) be agreed.
2. That the Hertfordshire Growth Board Integrated Governance Framework be adopted and incorporated into the Council's Constitution.
3. That it be noted that the Leader of the Council is nominated as the Council's representative on the Hertfordshire Growth Board Joint Committee, with delegated authority to appoint a substitute representative as required.
4. That authority be delegated to the Leader of the Council, in consultation with the Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, to nominate a Councillor and a substitute as its representative on the Hertfordshire Growth Board Scrutiny Committee (nominees must not be a Member of the Executive).

13 MID YEAR REVIEW OF THE 2020/21 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Council considered a report on the Mid Year Review of the 2020/21 Treasury Management Strategy.

The Strategic Director (CF) answered a number of Members' questions regarding the report.

It was moved by Councillor Mrs Joan Lloyd, seconded by Councillor Teresa Callaghan, and following debate and upon being put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED:

1. That the 2020/21 Treasury Management Mid-Year review be approved.
2. That the latest approved Countries for investments (set out in Appendix D to the report) be approved.
3. That the updated authorised and operational borrowing limits (set out in Paragraph 4.4.7 of the report) be approved.

14 2ND QUARTER GENERAL FUND CAPITAL MONITORING REPORT 2020/21

The Council considered a report on the Second Quarter General Fund Capital Monitoring report 2020/21, as the budget increase required exceeded the Executive's delegated limit.

It was moved by Councillor Mrs Joan Lloyd, seconded by Councillor Sharon Taylor, and upon being put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED that the budget increase to the 2020/21 General Fund capital programme, arising from the additional funding of £7.4Million received from Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG), as identified in Paragraph 4.1.4 of the report, be approved, as this exceeds the Executive's delegated limit. The net increase in 2020/21 expenditure is £6.4Million, as summarised in table one, Paragraph 4.1.1 of the report.

15 AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 17 November 2020 were received and noted.

Before closing the meeting, the Mayor thanked staff in the Constitutional Services Team for their support during the Covid-19 pandemic and for maintaining the democratic process via the use of virtual technology.

In closing the meeting, the Mayor wished everyone a Merry Christmas and hoped for a better 2021.

MAYOR