

## STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

### ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 13 January 2021

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Virtual (via Zoom)

**Present:** Councillors: Michael Downing (Chair), Adam Mitchell CC (Vice-Chair), Doug Bainbridge, Sandra Barr, Stephen Booth, Adrian Brown, Jody Hanafin, Maureen McKay, Loraine Rossati and Simon Speller.

**Start / End** Start Time: 6.00pm

**Time:** End Time: 8.30pm

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

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Dave Cullen.

Councillor Sharon Taylor declared an interest as a member of the Herts Local Enterprise Partnership.

#### 2 **MINUTES - 10 NOVEMBER 2021**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Environment & Economy Select Committee meeting held on 10 November 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### 3 **PRESENTATION FROM THE NORTH HERTS COLLEGE PRINCIPAL ON THE IMPACT OF COVID -19 PANDEMIC ON POST 16 EDUCATION**

Kit Davies, Principal at North Herts College gave a presentation to the Committee on Education and Skills, the challenges and recovery from the Pandemic and responded to a number of questions from Members on the matter:

- In relation to blended learning, the principal advised that this was a combination of class learning and on-line learning. As the technology for learning had improved greatly he believed that this would continue to be a tool to be used post the Pandemic although a balance would need to be found to ensure the college continued to be an active vibrant space for students to learn;
- In response to a request from Councillor Speller, the Principal offered his help in Cllr Speller's work to construct a process map modelling what it was like to be young in Stevenage without the access to the technology or requirements to ensure the success of home learning;
- In response to a question regarding Kickstart, Members were advised that this was an employment scheme which was a sub-group of the LEP and would be looking at data around apprenticeship numbers which were shortly

to be released;

The Chair thanked the Principal for his presentation who advised that he would be happy to be contacted by any members of the Committee in relation to their work in this area.

It was **RESOLVED** that the presentation be noted.

#### 4 **INTERVIEWS FOR THE REVIEW OF THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON STEVENAGE**

Helen Spencer – STEM Point East (Setpoint Hertfordshire) spoke about the work of STEM Point through schools and colleges and the concern that there was economic disparity between disadvantaged and better-off families.

Helen responded to a number of questions raised by members and offered support for Members in their work on process mapping those children who it was believed were getting left behind as a result of the Pandemic. Helen advised that there was a lot of work going on in terms of companies engaging with schools and that innovative ways of working were being looked at to keep the interest of the young people.

In response to a question Helen advised that STEMpoint was not so involved with special schools but did help out where requested and where they could. Other groups such as Youth Connexions, Scout Groups and the Young Enterprise Scheme at Lonsdale School had been working with STEMpoint but Helen asked that if any member had other connections that they would like her to link with to contact her directly.

Councillor Taylor, the Leader of the Council and Councillor Briscoe, Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport attended the meeting to respond to a number of questions put to them by the Committee including:

- In relation to the Council carrying on a 'business as usual' service, it was noted that resources had been secured for additional staff in Environmental Health, Regeneration of the Town Centre continued to be prioritised and that it was hoped that the Pandemic had shown what could be achieved at a local level;
- It was agreed that this was an unprecedented year and an extremely difficult economic climate. It was hoped that Stevenage had the infrastructure to cope with new investment and the SG1 development scheme put the town in a better position to cope with the downturn. The larger industries would be less affected but the Town had a great entrepreneurial spirit as shown by the number of new businesses in the Indoor Market recently;
- Stevenage was already a business friendly destination and being announced as one of the destinations for the vaccination Centres had shown this;
- In terms of those low skilled in academic qualifications but potentially highly skilled in other ways, it was agreed that in relation to the Town Centre Bid and where possible opportunities should be made available for those young people who could potentially get left behind. Work in this area was being

undertaken by a number of organisations including WENTA and at the BTC. Entrepreneurial spirit would always be encouraged by the Council.

- The effect of the pandemic on a number of groups including low socio economic backgrounds, the young, people with disabilities and BAME communities was being considered by the Community Reassurance Cell and an action plan was being drawn up;
- In terms of lessons learnt, although the Pandemic was still ongoing, the Leader advised that she was immensely proud of the way the Council had responded and that a compelling case would be made to the Government on the strength of local services in responding to an emergency such as this.

The Chair thanked Helen Spencer and Councillors Taylor and Briscoe for their contributions to the meeting.

## 5 **E&E MEMBER SUB-GROUP LOOKING AT THE ECONOMIC IMPACT ON YOUNG PEOPLE**

The Committee received an update from Councillor Speller on the work of the Environment and Economy Sub-Group which had been looking at the economic impact on young people. In particular, the Group had focussed on those young people left behind, disadvantaged or vulnerable.

The Committee agreed that it would be good to see more young people from Stevenage working for the large companies in the Town.

The Chair thanked the Group for their work on this issue.

It was **RESOLVED** that the update be noted.

## 6 **COMPOSITE DOCUMENT OF EVIDENCE COMPILED FOR THE REVIEW**

The Committee received the composite document of evidence compiled for the review. A number of officers who had contributed to the review updated the Committee on further information relating to their service areas including:

- Mena Caldbeck, Business Relationship Manager – impact on young people – Job Centre plus – YP targeted Kickstart Scheme;
- Gareth Wall , Corporate policy and Research Officer – Impact on BAME communities;
- Chris Barnes, Assistant Director Regeneration – Impact on the Town Centre Investment Plan and Stevenage Works;
- Paul Cheeseman, Community Development Officer – Co-operative Economy Charter;
- James Chettleburgh, Principal Planning Officer – Impact on private investment (planning and development activity).

The Chair then advised the Committee that due to the effects of the Pandemic on the Council and implications on staffing levels and work priorities, the next meeting of the Committee scheduled for February would not be taking place and the work of this Committee as well as the Community Select Committee was to be put on hold

until the new Municipal Year. Background work and informal meetings with the Chair and Vice-Chair could continue if members wished to carry on gathering evidence.

The Chair thanked the officers and members of the Committee for their contributions to the review.

## 7 **INTERIM REPORT & RECOMMENDATIONS OF NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES REVIEW**

The Committee considered the interim report and recommendations of the review of the Neighbourhood Centres.

The Committee agreed to sign off the report due to the current situation with regard to the Pandemic and the pause with the work of the Committee. Members were pleased with the results of the Review so far and it was **RESOLVED**:

1. That small scale timely interventions be made using what means are at the Council's disposal including its current regime of routine maintenance, cleansing, repair and using existing budgets or where appropriate the use of ward Members Local Community Budgets via funding bids as well as local County Councillors LCBs;
2. That partner authorities/partner bodies be approached to hold them to account for failure to maintain infrastructure.
3. That the Co-operative Neighbourhood Management approach to addressing local issues in the Neighbourhood Centres be monitored by the Executive Member with Portfolio responsibility for Neighbourhoods and Co-Operative Working to see if this is working (perhaps with a short report back in a year to monitor progress and see if the interventions are timely and the resources are adequate to remedy problems that are identified at the Neighbourhood Centres).
4. That each Neighbourhood Centre area establishes a friends group to help with projects and community gardens at each Centre.
5. That the Head of Estates and the Assistant Director Housing Development be invited to a future meeting of the Committee to contribute to the recommendations with regard to these plans.

## 8 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

## 9 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

It was **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.

10 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

The Committee received and noted Coronavirus statistics for certain groups.

**CHAIR**