

# STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

## COUNCIL MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 20 July 2022

Time: 7.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

**Present:** Councillors: Margaret Notley (Mayor), Myla Arceno (Deputy Mayor), Julie Ashley-Wren, Sandra Barr, Philip Bibby CC, Stephen Booth, Lloyd Briscoe, Rob Broom, Adrian Brown, Jim Brown, Teresa Callaghan, Nazmin Chowdhury, Matt Creasey, Michael Downing, Bret Facey, Alex Farquharson, John Gardner, Jackie Hollywell, Wendy Kerby, Mrs Joan Lloyd, Lin Martin-Haugh, Andy McGuinness, Maureen McKay, Sarah Mead, Adam Mitchell CC, Robin Parker CC, Claire Parris, Loraine Rossati, Graham Snell, Sharon Taylor OBE CC, Jeannette Thomas, Anne Wells and Tom Wren.

**Start / End** Start Time: 7.00pm  
**Time:** End Time: 9.49pm

### 1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors John Duncan, Richard Henry, Liz Harrington, Chris Howells, Graham Lawrence and Simon Speller.

Councillor Phil Bibby declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of Item 11 Notice of Motion – Homelessness Policies in view of his role as a landlord although the properties he owned were outside of Stevenage.

At this juncture, the Mayor announced a number of recent bereavements including Alderman Ann Webb, Alex Lang – a former officer of the Council who had significant involvement with the Stevenage Community Trust and Stevenage Rotary Club and also David Lytton Cobbold.

Tributes were paid to Alderman Ann Webb for her many years of service to Stevenage Borough Council, in particular the Shephall area and also as a passionate believer in social housing. Councillor Sharon Taylor, Leader of the Council spoke of Mrs Webb's love of housing. She also spoke of her time as a County Councillor and for a while the Chair of the Social Services Committee. A number of Members then spoke in tribute to Mrs Webb, recognising her tireless work for the community particularly the Shephall Ward, in championing the provision of social housing in the Town.

Members then spoke about Alex Lang and the significant work he did in the Town, particularly with the Rotary Club, Stevenage Community Trust and his commitment to making Stevenage a Fairtrade Town.

Tributes to David Lytton Cobbold were given by a number of Members in particular relating to his achievements in the restoration and improvements to Knebworth House and enabling the estate to host the huge events of recent years.

The Council then stood to observe a minutes silence.

## 2 **MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS**

A list of recent Mayoral events had been circulated to all Members. The Mayor then summarised the activities that she and her consort had been involved with since the previous Council meeting in May 2022 which had included:

- The lighting of the Queen's Beacon and Fireworks at the Joyride;
- Queen's Luncheon at Fairlands Valley Park;
- Art in the Park Exhibition at Hampson Park;
- The first in person Stevenage Day since 2019;
- Stevenage Arts Festival – a mini version of the festival held in preparation for the full one next year;
- Stevenage Campus Partnership Launch at GSK;
- Biz4Biz Awards Gala Evening at Tewin Bury Farm;
- Town Twinning Tripartite Visit to Ingelheim. The first since 2019 due to the Pandemic;
- The official opening of the Stevenage Bus Interchange.

The Mayor then announced her upcoming raffle in aid of her charities and Garden Party on Sunday 11 September 2022.

## 3 **MINUTES - 25 MAY 2022 (ANNUAL MEETING)**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Annual Council Meeting held on 25 May 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

## 4 **COMMUNITY PRESENTATIONS**

There was no community presentation.

## 5 **PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS**

There were no petitions or deputations.

## 6 **QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL**

There were no questions from the Youth Council.

## 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:

“Are the Executive aware that £1.75billion was being allocated by the Government for the Social Housing De-carbonisation Scheme alongside Home Upgrade Grants of £1.425 billion with the aim of reducing emissions from public sector buildings by 75% by 2037 and if so what plans does the Council have to capitalise on this Government funding.”

The Leader of the Council replied that the Council had already successfully applied for £1million from the decarbonisation fund and she hoped that the new Prime Minister when in place would continue with this programme. She assured Councillor Bibby that she welcomed any funding for decarbonisation and would bid for any funding available although this would unfortunately not be enough to carry out the works required.

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

- Airbus Economic Impact Survey;
- Glaxo Smith Kline (GSK) Stevenage Campus Partnership Launch;
- Co-operative Neighbourhoods and Digital Enhancement Funding Award;
- Stevenage Day 2022;
- Helston House Visit;
- Gibbs and Dandy opening;
- Launch of SADA Charity;
- Visioning exercise for Gunnels Wood Road;
- The first tranche of the Towns Fund had been received and projects were now underway.

The Leader of the Opposition stressed the importance of jobs being available for local people and maximising Section 106 monies from developers for infrastructure improvement to the Town.

## 9 UPDATE FROM SCRUTINY CHAIRS

The Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee advised that the Committee had met on 4 occasions in recent months, considering items such as Corporate Performance, Budget monitoring and the Towns Fund Business Cases.

The Chair of the Community Select Committee stated that the recent work of the Committee had been to finalise its work programme. The main item for scrutiny for the year focussed on the Housing Service specifically the issue of voids but also looking at the repairs service. Work would also be undertaken on performance improvement and they would be receiving updates on service charges. Alongside this would be the statutory scrutiny meetings to consider Crime and Disorder and Public Health.

The Chair of the Environment & Economy Select Committee advised that the Committee's work had continued to focus on scrutiny of the Council's Climate Emergency plans and monitoring the work of other agencies within the community. The Committee's work had included interviews with the Leader of the Council and relevant Portfolio Holders.

## 10 **SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22**

The Council considered the Scrutiny Annual Report for 2021/22.

Members expressed their thanks to the Scrutiny Officer, Stephen Weaver for his work in supporting the scrutiny process. The Leader also thanked all Scrutiny Committee members for their work on the three committees throughout the past year.

It was then moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the work undertaken by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees during 2021/22, as set out in the report, be noted.

## 11 **NOTICE OF MOTIONS**

### 1. Cost of Living Crisis

Councillor Sharon Taylor moved and Councillor Mrs Joan Lloyd seconded the following motion in respect of the Cost of Living Crisis.

"The cost of living crisis is affecting every family across Stevenage, and many are facing dreadful decisions about what they can and cannot afford to do at the most basic levels some having to choose between heating, eating or transport to work.

The Chancellor's Spring Statement was a lost opportunity to ensure real and substantial help to those families and once again local government is left picking up the pieces of hunger, homelessness and poverty and the effects these have on everyone suffering.

In Stevenage we have now set up a Cost of Living Task Force which will work with the Stevenage Together Partnership to identify the support needed in our community and ensure we have actions in place to address the needs identified.

In Stevenage we can and must take the following urgent actions:

- We declare this to be a Cost of Living emergency and pledge to take all the action in our powers to help our community and to mitigate its impact wherever possible.
- Work through our Cost of Living Task Force to identify actions and policies to support our community and the council through the crisis.
- Call upon our MP to lobby his Chancellor of the Exchequer to take urgent measures to support individuals, communities and families through this

crisis.

- Call on Hertfordshire County Council to make permanent and enduring commitment to providing holiday food to children entitled to Free School Meals.
- Work with the retail sector in Stevenage to reduce food waste, donate surpluses to food banks and ensure that affordable food is available to all.
- Ensure that all our schools have established and responsive systems for identifying and supporting those children who are struggling through food and fuel poverty
- Call upon the government to scrap the National Insurance increase, continue to impose a windfall tax on oil and gas companies while it is necessary to remove a substantial sum from citizens energy bills and immediately restore the triple lock for pensions.
- Call upon Government to restore the additional Universal Credit payment made during the Covid crisis.
- Write to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to point out the critical situation facing our community and the financial impact the cost of living crisis will have on council finances.

Members noted the establishment of the Cost of Living Action Group which would be meeting to consider what could be done locally to ease the crisis.

Following further debate, and upon being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED** that the motion be carried.

## 2. Homelessness Policies

Councillor Phil Bibby moved and Councillor Wendy Kerby seconded the following motion with regard to Homelessness Policies:

“In April of this year, there was a concerning report in the Comet newspaper under the headline ‘Couple unable to return to rented home’, describing that the landlords rented their retirement home on a short-term basis, and hoped to move back in just before Christmas last year but, two days before the tenant was due to vacate the property, having been given proper notice, she was told by the Council’s housing department to remain in the property, against the threat of being seen as making herself intentionally homeless.

Whilst it is understood that the Council and tenants acted lawfully, and this situation has now been resolved, with the couple back in their property and the tenant re-housed, the Council’s policies and practices should protect lawful landlords, who are an important source of much needed housing, with the same vigour as tenants.

We accept that the Council will always respect tenancy and homelessness legislation and guidance, but we call on it to make timely assessments of tenants facing lawful eviction and possible homelessness, being on the guard against ‘voluntary homelessness’, and make proper provision in the HRA to have an adequate supply of suitable accommodation, in case of need.

Following debate and upon being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED** that the Motion be lost.

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

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

(A) Question from Councillor Claire Parris re: Proposed hospital radiotherapy facility

Supplementary question – “When Stephen McPartland was elected as MP for Stevenage in 2010, he promised the residents of Stevenage that they would have a radiotherapy unit. This has not come to fruition in 12 years therefore could the Council write to the MP to ask if he was involved in the decision to locate the facility at Watford General Hospital and will he champion a satellite unit located in Stevenage?”

The Portfolio Holder advised that a number of major decisions had been made by the NHS without proper knowledge of local views. She agreed to write to the MP to ask him to fight for the people of Stevenage and their need to have a radiotherapy facility in the Town.

(B) Question from Councillor Andy McGuinness re: an assessment consequences of the recent resignation of the Prime Minister

Supplementary question – “Would Councillor Taylor invite Councillor Bibby as Leader of the Opposition to apologise for the conduct of his Leader”

The Leader of the Council agreed that the current situation at Westminster would not help to address the crisis happening in the country and the Government would not be in place until at least the end of September. She suggested that a General Election would be the best way forward.

(C) Question from Councillor Stephen Booth re: Empty properties in Tabor Close

Councillor Thomas provided additional information in relation to the question. She advised that the works had been programmed to happen between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> August close to the junction at Ferrier Road and Bernhardt Crescent. The works could not be undertaken any sooner due to the Highways Authority having to carry out the works during the summer break due to the close proximity to a local school.

Supplementary question – “Why do the required highways works prevent people from moving in to the properties”

The Portfolio Holder replied that the houses belonged to Origin Housing Association and although the delay had been frustrating, the Council had to work with the Housing Association’s and the Highways Agency’s requirements. Tenants on the list

for these properties had been given the choice to bid for alternative properties if they wished to.

(D) Question from Councillor Robin Parker re: traffic issues at the exit from Swingate onto Lytton Way

Supplementary question – “What response had been received from Herts County Council to the questions asked?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport replied that he would provide a written answer to Councillor Parker regarding this matter.

(E) Question from Councillor Alex Farquharson re: a Community Centre at the Hertford Road/Kenilworth Close shops

Supplementary question – “Is there a guarantee that the Community Centre will be built and what are the timescales?”

The Portfolio Holder for Communities, Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Council replied that the Council would fulfil its duty to replace the Community Centre and would consult the officers and provide a written answer to Councillor Farquharson regarding the timescales.

(F) Question from Councillor Bret Facey re: plans for the Indoor Market

Supplementary question – “Would the Executive Member ask the officers responsible for the market to be clearer in their advice and information for traders to save a lot of stress and worry?”

The Portfolio Holder for Resources and Information Technology replied that she believed that the officers were clear with regards to their advice in this regard but would follow up noting that the Council had no intention of closing the market down and was working hard to increase the number of units within the market.

(G) Question from Councillor Tom Wren re: waiting times for residents’ phone calls

Supplementary question – “When residents do get through to the CSC they are not often able to speak to a particular officer or Team. Are there any plans to put in place systems to enable residents to speak to those officers working remotely?”

The Portfolio Holder for Resources and Information Technology replied that staff working at home should be available by phone unless there was a reason why the number was not publicly available. The recent covid outbreak had unfortunately affected staff within the Centre and not surprisingly the response times. An ongoing recruitment process was underway to try to recruit new advisors and additional funding had been made available following the Executive recently considering the Quarter 4 Performance Report.

13 **PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2022/23 - ADDENDUM**

The Council considered a report in respect of Pay Policy Statement 2022/23 – Addendum. It was noted that since the approval of the original Statement in March 2022, a requirement to apply recruitment and retention premium to some Assistant Director roles had arisen due to the changing employment market.

In response to a question, Councillor Mrs Lloyd agreed to provide to Councillors Booth and Parker a written response relating to the monthly allowance paid to the Chief Executive and Strategic Directors of £24.95

It was then moved by Councillor Mrs Joan Lloyd, seconded by Councillor Sharon Taylor, and upon being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED** that the amended Pay Policy Statement set out in accordance with the Localism Act 2011 and the Local Government Transparency Code 2015, as attached at Appendix 1 to the report be approved.

14 **MEMBER SUBSTITUTION SCHEME FOR REGULATORY COMMITTEES**

The Council considered a report in respect of appointing named Councillors as substitute Members for the Council’s Regulatory Committees (Licensing, General Purposes and Planning and Development Committees) as required by the Council’s Constitution.

It was moved by Councillor Sharon Taylor, seconded by Mrs Joan Lloyd, and following debate and upon being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED** that the following Councillors be appointed as substitute Members (“Named Substitutes”) for the Council’s Regulatory Committees (Licensing, General Purposes and Planning and Development Committees) as required by the Substitution Scheme as set out in the Council’s Constitution:

**Licensing and General Purposes Committees**

- Labour Group – Councillors Adrian Brown, Sandra Barr, Teresa Callaghan and Sharon Taylor OBE CC;
- Conservative Group – Councillors Phil Bibby CC and Wendy Kerby;
- Liberal Democrat Group – Councillors Stephen Booth and Tom Wren

**Planning and Development Committee**

- Labour Group – Councillors Myla Arceno, Rob Broom, Jim Brown and Nazmin Chowdhury;
- Conservative Group – Councillors Phil Bibby CC and Alex Farquharson;
- Liberal Democrat Group – Councillors Andy McGuinness and Tom Wren.



15      **AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meetings of the Audit Committee held on 28 February 2022, 28 March 2022 and 7 June 2022 were received and noted.

**CHAIR**