

# STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

## COUNCIL MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 19 July 2023

Time: 7.30pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

**Present:** Councillors: Myla Arceno (Mayor), Jim Brown (Deputy Mayor) Sandra Barr, Philip Bibby CC, Stephen Booth, Lloyd Briscoe, Rob Broom, Forhad Chowdhury, Nazmin Chowdhury, Michael Downing, John Duncan, Bret Facey, Alex Farquharson, Richard Henry, Jackie Hollywell, Chris Howells, Mason Humberstone, Wendy Kerby, Mrs Joan Lloyd, Conor McGrath, Andy McGuinness, Maureen McKay, Sarah Mead, Adam Mitchell CC, Margaret Notley, Robin Parker CC, Claire Parris, Ellie Plater, Loraine Rossati, Graham Snell, Simon Speller, Jeannette Thomas, Carolina Veres, Anne Wells and Tom Wren.

**Start / End** Start Time: 7.30pm  
**Time:** End Time: 10.18pm

### 1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Mayor invited those present to observe a moment's silence.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Julie Ashley-Wren, Graham Lawrence CC, Lin Martin-Haugh and Baroness Taylor of Stevenage OBE, and from the Youth Mayor and Deputy Youth Mayor.

- (1) Councillor Tom Wren declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in respect of Item 11 (3) – Notice of Motions: Mayor of London's Ultra-Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) Expansion, as he was employed by Transport for London. He stated that he would withdraw from the meeting for the duration of that item.
- (2) Councillor Bret Facey declared an interest in respect of Item 11 (3) – Notice of Motions: Mayor of London's Ultra-Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) Expansion, as he was employed by Harrow Council, referenced in the motion as being involved in the legal challenge against the ULEZ expansion, although his job was not related to that challenge. He would therefore be remaining in the meeting and participating in the debate and vote on that item.

### 2 MINUTES - ANNUAL MEETING - 24 MAY 2023

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Annual Council Meeting held on 24 May 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

### **3 MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS**

The Mayor announced that she had accepted an urgent motion for consideration at the meeting concerning the proposed closure of almost all staffed railway ticket offices in England, including Stevenage. This has been circulated to Members on a supplementary agenda and would be considered as the first item under Agenda Item 11 – Notice of Motions. The time taken to debate this urgent motion would not affect the 90-minute slot for consideration of the three motions previously submitted.

The Mayor stated that she was aware that there was no provision for the consideration of urgent motions in the Council's Constitution, but she was exercising my discretion to allow this motion to be debated tonight. Officers would look to incorporate such a provision as part of the Constitutional Review recognising, of course, that there must be sufficient grounds as to why such a motion was urgent and could not wait until the next Council meeting.

The Mayor then presented Long Service Awards to Councillors Jackie Hollywell (25 years' service), Graham Snell (25 years' service) and Jeannette Thomas (20 years' service).

The Mayor announced that it was an honour and a privilege for her to be in the role for 2023/24. She had attended over 45 events in her first seven weeks, as well as newspaper coverage and an interview on international television. She thanked those councillors who had given her advice and wisdom, as well as those who had supported her at events, and those who had accompanied her on some of her engagements when her Consort had been unavailable. She also thanked the Deputy Mayor for stepping in and attending events when she herself had been unavailable.

### **4 COMMUNITY PRESENTATIONS**

There were no community presentations.

### **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 CC, asked the following question:

“The Labour Party candidate for the next Parliamentary Election for the Stevenage Constituency had been invited to and had attended many recent Civic Events. The Conservative Party had recently selected its candidate. If he were to be invited to such functions, would he be as welcome as the Labour candidate had been?”

The Leader of the Council replied that the Conservative candidate would be welcome to attend future Civic events. This would also apply to the Liberal Democrat candidate when selected.

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

- Sycamore House;
- Co-operative Neighbourhoods Engagement;
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund Communities and Place Allocation;
- Recognition of SBC’s investment to supporting the most vulnerable in our community;
- Digital Lettings Project for Garages;
- Equalities, Diversity & Inclusion Action Plan;
- APSE Awards Finalist: Best Public/Private Partnership Working initiative;
- New Leisure Operator; and
- Information Technology: Future Councils Grant Funding;

In respect of the Sycamore House update, Councillor Phil Bibby CC commented that it was pleasing to see so many life sciences buildings being constructed in the Borough. He asked if that was attracting related businesses, supply chains etc. which would benefit the town and its residents economically?

The Portfolio Holder for Economy & Transport replied that, as an example, the town centre economy was benefitting from the presence of the occupants of the new Autolus building. He acknowledged that some of the scientists and support staff would be employed from outside the Borough, but he was keen that skills and training opportunities would be available, particularly for the younger generation, to enable them to progress careers in the life sciences sector. The Leader of the Council added that SBC was working with North Herts College and developers to look at opportunities for young people in Stevenage, and he referred to the excellent SITEC facility operated by the College to provide Stevenage residents with the necessary skills to commence careers in the STEM sector and associated businesses and supply chains.

## **9 UPDATE FROM SCRUTINY CHAIRS**

In the absence of the Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, the Chair of the Community Select Committee (who was also a Member of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee) advised that, at its meeting held on 20 June 2023, it had scrutinised items such as the implementation of the Building Safety Act 2022 and DLUHC Future Councils Grant Award. The Committee had also agreed its Work programme for 2023/24, which would include a performance reviews of ICT; an analysis of the 2021 Census data; and reviewing 2024/25 Making Your Money Count options.

The Chair of the Community Select Committee advised that, at its meeting held on 27 June 2023, the Committee had agreed its Work programme for 2023/24, which would include a Repairs Review; the usual scrutiny of Crime & Disorder and Public Health; and a review of the Cultural Strategy. The Committee had also received feedback on its 2022/23 review of Voids and was pleased to note that the Portfolio Holder for Housing & Housing Development had accepted the Committee's recommendations.

The Chair of the Environment & Economy Select Committee advised that the Committee had commenced its 2023/24 review of Bus Services, and commented that Arriva, the Bus Users Group and County Council representatives would be invited to future meetings to be questioned on the subject. The Committee would also be monitoring cost of living issues, as well as receiving progress reports in November 2023 and March 2024 regarding the Council's progress on its Climate Change Strategy.

## 10 SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23

In the absence of the Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, the Vice-Chair (Councillor Phil Bibby CC) moved that the Annual Scrutiny Report for 2022/23 be noted.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Sarah Mead thanked all Members who had contributed to scrutiny work during 2022/23.

It was **RESOLVED** that the work undertaken by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees during 2022/23, as set out in the report, be noted.

## 11 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

### Urgent Motion – Save Our Local Rail Ticket Offices

Councillor Lloyd Briscoe moved and Councillor Sandra Barr seconded the following motion:

“That Council notes with dismay the news that the Department for Transport and the 13 train operating companies it manages have announced plans to close almost all staffed ticket offices in England, totalling nearly 1,000, following changes to the Government's guidance relating to ticket office opening hours and operation. Statutory Consultations began on 5th July and will close on 26th July.

Council believes that our ticket office provides a vital service to residents in Stevenage and support passenger safety, security and accessibility. Having a central place in the station for people requiring advice and assistance provides certainty and confidence for customers who may struggle to otherwise locate station staff and also acts as a point of safety for passengers. At many stations, access to facilities such as toilets and waiting rooms is reliant on ticket office staff.

Not all residents are able to use ticket vending machines or online ticketing platforms. Many journeys require human assistance to ensure customers purchase

the most appropriate and cheapest tickets, and do not incur penalties from mis-booked tickets. Ticket office staff have a wealth of knowledge which ensures that customers get appropriate advice for their whole journey.

Council is concerned the closure of ticket offices will disproportionately affect disabled, Deaf and older residents in Stevenage – as well as those with poor literacy and IT skills or on lower incomes. Council also notes the possible implications for current station staff and believes that the closure of ticket offices could lead to a de-staffing of rail stations.

Council therefore resolves to:

- Instruct the Chief Executive to write to the Secretary of State for Transport, expressing Council's opposition to the possible closure of staffed rail ticket offices – and in particular the office/s at Stevenage Railway Station;
- Instruct the Chief Executive to write to Network Rail expressing the Council's opposition to any plans to close the staffed ticket office/s at Stevenage Railway Station; and
- Request that all councillors respond to the consultations before 26th July to confirm their support for ticket offices remaining open and for properly staffed rail stations."

Following debate, and upon being put to the vote, the motion was carried.

(1) Education provision in Hertfordshire

Councillor Sandra Barr moved and Councillor Maureen McKay seconded the following motion:

"In view of the difficulties being experienced by schools in Hertfordshire due to reductions in education funding, including:

- That Hertfordshire schools are running at a combined deficit of £1.8 million;
- That the equivalent of one in 22 (4.6 per cent) LA-maintained schools in Herts are now spending more than their income;
- That with the lack of Pupil Premium Grant since 2020, Hertfordshire schools are missing out on £1.9million of vital funding;
- That Hertfordshire's education department are glossing over the 800 children already awaiting special school's provision and cutting mainstream budgets to prop up special school places; and
- The worrying rate of teachers leaving the state sector for reasons other than retirement, which grew to a record high last year,

We as a Council have a duty of care to put pressure on the government to properly

fund our state education system.

In recognition of the above stated points, this Council instructs the Portfolio Holder for Co-operative Council and Neighbourhood Communities to write to the Secretary of State for Education and Hertfordshire County Council to ask the Government to properly fund the state education system, and to challenge the County Council to cease formulating budgets that attempted to camouflage what is, in reality, an educational crisis.”

The following amendment was moved by Councillor Bret Facey and seconded by Councillor Alex Farquharson (additions and omissions in bold):

~~“In view of~~ The financial difficulties being experienced by schools in Hertfordshire due to ~~reductions in pressures on~~ education funding **have been caused by the ongoing economic fallout from the Covid pandemic as well as the worldwide inflationary problems caused by Putin’s war in Ukraine. These pressures mean including:**

- That Hertfordshire schools are running at a combined deficit of £1.8 million;
- That the equivalent of one in 22 (4.6 per cent) LA-maintained schools in Herts are now spending more than their income;
- That with the lack of Pupil Premium Grant since 2020, Hertfordshire schools are missing out on £1.9million of vital funding;
- That Hertfordshire’s education department are **struggling to find SEND provision for glossing over the 800 children already awaiting special school’s provision and balancing cutting mainstream budgets to support prop-up SEND special school** places; and
- The worrying rate of teachers leaving the state sector for reasons other than retirement grew to a record high last year.

**Notwithstanding these challenges, there has been positive news for education in Stevenage. The Thomas Alleyne Academy, Fairlands Primary School and Camps Hill Primary School all benefited from the government’s £450 million investment fund to upgrade facilities. This investment is welcome.**

**This Council also acknowledges that the County Council has just agreed to invest an additional and ongoing £5million to significantly improve SEND provision in Hertfordshire.**

We as a Council have a duty of care to ~~lobby put pressure on~~ the government to **properly increase** funding for our ~~schools state education system~~. In recognition of the above stated points, this Council instructs the Portfolio Holder for Co-operative Council and Neighbourhood Communities to write to the Secretary of State for Education and Hertfordshire County Council to ask the Government to **increase**

**properly funding for Stevenage schools the state education system, and to challenge work with the County Council to support SEND children in Stevenage to prevent cease formulating budgets that attempted to camouflage what is, in reality, an educational crisis from happening.”**

Following debate, and upon being put to the vote, the amendment was lost.

Following further debate, and upon being put to the vote, the original motion was carried.

(2) Consultation on planning applications

Councillor Stephen Booth moved and Councillor Robin Parker CC seconded the following motion:

“That Council requests a report on the widening of the number of properties consulted over planning applications, including consulting with ward councillors when planning applications are received involving green space unspecified in the 2018 Local Development Plan.”

Following debate, and upon being put to the vote, the motion was carried.

(3) Mayor of London’s Ultra-Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) Expansion

Councillor Graham Lawrence CC moved and Councillor Bret Facey seconded the following motion:

“That this Council notes that:

- On 4 March 2022 the Mayor Khan announced his plan to expand the Ultra-Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) from its current boundary to cover all of outer London. The expansion is due to come into force by 29 August 2023.
- The expansion will mean that those with non-compliant vehicles will pay £12.50 per day to drive within the ULEZ each day.
- Stevenage is a commuter town, with a significant number of residents travelling into outer London for work via public transport, but in their own vehicles also.
- Many Stevenage residents also have family connections to outer London and so need to visit outer London to see relatives.
- The less well-off will be disproportionately penalised by this expansion, as such residents will be reliant on their cars and are unable to replace them with more modern (compliant) vehicles.
- The Mayor of London has set aside almost £400 million towards expanding the ULEZ and related projects.
- 5 Councils (Bexley, Bromley, Harrow, Hillingdon and Surrey Councils) have joined together to oppose the Mayor’s decision to expand the ULEZ and have successfully taken the issue to the High Court for Judicial Review.

That this Council resolves to:

- Condemn this expansion which will push up the cost of living for some of our

poorest residents, who rely on their cars and trades vehicles to commute to outer London, by imposing this de facto tax on motorists.

- Call on the Mayor of London to withdraw his unworkable and discriminatory ULEZ expansion.
- Publicly express solidarity with, and support for, the local authorities involved in the 'Coalition Against ULEZ Expansion' legal challenge against the Mayor of London's flawed decision."

Following debate, and upon being put to the vote, the motion was lost.

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

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

- (A) Question from Councillor Graham Lawrence CC re: maintenance of children's play areas across the Borough

No supplementary question was asked.

- (B) Question from Councillor Phil Bibby CC re: road sweeping and parked vehicles

Supplementary question – "Could a system be introduced for the hot-spotting of certain roads for sweeping, so that residents could be pre-advised?"

The Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment & Performance acknowledged the issue and stated that it may be helpful to have a meeting with officers at the Cavendish Road Depot to discuss a possible way forward.

- (C) Question from Councillor Bret Facey re: the recently refurbished Shephalbury Park tennis courts

Supplementary question – "When identical tennis court refurbishment schemes to the Shephalbury Park project were proposed in Barnet, Harrow and Gloucester the Labour Group Leaders on those councils denounced them as privatisation of the parks and a slap in the face to less well-off tennis players. Who is right, Councillor Henry or the Leaders in Barnet, Harrow and Gloucester?"

The Executive Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure & IT replied that Councillor Henry was right. For whatever reason those other councils made their decisions was a matter for them. In Stevenage, the Council supported tennis and local people, especially youth involvement, and Councillor Henry had been instrumental in making that happen.

- (D) Question from Councillor Chris Howells re: pedestrian safety in the Town Centre.

Supplementary question – "Can the Town Centre Neighbourhood Wardens be given

some powers to address cycling, skateboarding and the use of e-scooters in the pedestrianised town centre?”

The Executive Portfolio Holder for Community Safety & Equalities answered that, by law, the Town Centre Wardens had very limited powers, and commented that it was a Police matter. She was aware that the Police patrolled the area on a periodic basis, but also that they had other priorities. She suggested that the matter be raised at the forthcoming Police Priorities Meeting.

(E) Question from Councillor Stephen Booth re: consultation with Ward Councillors ahead of Council sales of green space or other land for development

No supplementary question was asked.

(F) Question from Councillor Andy McGuinness re: the Council’s 2030 decarbonisation target

Supplementary question – “Will Members be given a cast-iron guarantee that work will be done to baseline the Council’s carbon footprint, in order that progress can be measured on an annual basis towards the 2030 decarbonisation target?”

The Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment & Performance agreed that the Council could not at the moment be precise about status against its 2030 target, although the answer to the original question referred to the Climate Change tracker. The Council’s responsibilities mainly concerned the decarbonisation of its housing and the vehicle fleet. He added that the annual Climate Change update report would be submitted to the Executive in October 2023, and he agreed that in order to performance manage the process the Council would need to know the current position, the direction of travel, and the constraints/obstacles in the way. In October the tracker would also be presented to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Environment & Economy Select Committee.

(G) Question from Councillor Robin Parker re: the legalities of the use of electric scooters

Supplementary question – “Could the Council publish information about the illegality of electric scooters in the Chronicle Magazine, via posters on noticeboards and community centres, and on the SBC website?”

The Executive Portfolio Holder for Community Safety & Equalities replied that the Council would publish this information.

(H) Question from Councillor Graham Snell re: the long-term plans for the former car park area to the north of the new Multi-Storey Car Park.

Supplementary question – “Could I be out in touch with an officer in the Regeneration Team to discuss the future proposals for this area of land?”

The Executive Portfolio Holder for Economy & Transport replied that Councillor Snell was welcome to contact any officers in the Regeneration Team to discuss the matter.

- (I) Question from Councillor Tom Wren re: a suggestion from an electric bike scheme.

There was no supplementary question, but Councillor Wren welcomed the fact that electric bikes were to be included in the cycle hire scheme being investigated by the Council.

### **13 AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meetings of the Audit Committee held on 27 March 2023 and 6 June 2023 were received.

### **14 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That under Section 100A 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 involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraphs 1 – 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as amended by Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.
2. That the reasons for the following reports being in Part II were accepted, and that the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

### **15 REGENERATION PROGRAMME UPDATE AND SG1 PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION**

The Council considered a Part II report in respect of an update on the Regeneration Programme and implementation of the SG1 report.

In response to comments made by Members regarding the financing of the proposed Joint Venture for development of Plot A (former Swingate Car Park) of the SG1 scheme, and associated risk mitigation measures, it was agreed that a presentation on this matter would be given in the Part II element of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting to be held on 24 July 2023. If required, an All-Member presentation regarding the matter could also be provided.

It was **RESOLVED** that, subject to consideration by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, the recommendations set out in the report be approved.

**MAYOR**