

# **STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **COUNCIL MINUTES**

**Date: Wednesday 11 October 2017**

**Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage**

**Present:** The Mayor P Stuart and Councillors L Briscoe, R Broom, J Brown, H Burrell, L Chester, E Connolly, M Downing, A Farquharson, J Fraser, J Gardner, M Gardner, E Harrington, S Hearn, R Henry, J Hollywell, M Hurst, C Latif, G Lawrence, Mrs J Lloyd, J Lloyd, A McGuinness, M McKay, J Mead, S Mead, A Mitchell CC, M Notley, R Parker CC, R Raynor, G Snell, S Speller, S Taylor OBE CC and J Thomas

**In Attendance:** Santino de Freitas - Stevenage Youth Mayor  
Kevin Fiorelli – Chair Stevenage Youth Council

**Start/End Time:** 7:00 pm  
10:10 pm

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Bainbridge, P Bibby CC, D Cullen, L Martin-Haugh, C Saunders and A Webb.

Councillor S Taylor OBE CC declared an interest at item 9 as a member of the National Joint Negotiating Committee.

Councillor J Hollywell declared an interest at item 9 as a public sector employee.

At this juncture the Mayor informed Council that, for personal reasons, Councillor A Webb had stood down from her role as Deputy Mayor (2017/2018).

Councillor J Lloyd then spoke to thank Councillor Webb for her time as Deputy Mayor.

Council then considered a report, which was tabled at the meeting, seeking the appointment of a Deputy Mayor for the remainder of 2017/2018.

The Mayor informed Council that she was satisfied that the report should be considered as a matter of urgency under s100B(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 as the next ordinary meeting of the Council was not until 6 December 2017 during which time the role of Deputy Mayor would be required to fulfil civic commitments.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that Councillor M Notley be appointed as Deputy Mayor for the remainder of the 2017/18 Municipal Year.

Councillor Notley then made the statutory declaration of acceptance of office.

The Deputy Mayor thanked those that had supported her nomination and announced that Valerie Ashley would be her consort for the 2017/18 Municipal Year.

## **2. MINUTES – ANNUAL COUNCIL – 17 MAY 2017**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Council meeting of 11 July are approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor subject to the correction of a typographical error in line 1 of the second paragraph of item 3 ‘Mayor’s Communications.’

The line should read ‘Councillor Taylor spoke about Peter Metcalfe’s wisdom, intelligence and’ and not ‘Councillor Taylor spoke about Peter Metcalf’s wisdom, intelligence and’ as printed.

## **3. MAYOR’S COMMUNICATION**

The Mayor informed the Council of the sad death of Hertfordshire County Council Leader Robert Gordon.

Councillor Taylor then spoke in tribute to Councillor Gordon and those tributes were echoed by the Leaders of the Opposition Groups.

Council stood and observed a minute’s silence in remembrance.

The Mayor then informed the meeting that since the last meeting, the Mayoral Team had undertaken a number of engagements in the town and referred to a number of highlights including:

- the award of a Green Flag to Fairlands Valley Park, Town Centre Gardens and Hampson Park,
- visits to three of the Council’s play centres and
- a visit to the High Sheriff of Hertfordshire.

## **4. MAIN DEBATE - PREPARING FOR CHANGE - THE HOMELESS REDUCTION ACT**

The Mayor welcomed Council Officers Matt Ewan and Theo Addai to the meeting.

Council then received a presentation from the Officers on the Homelessness Reduction Act which covered the focus on homelessness prevention; a new ‘Duty to Refer’ on statutory agencies; the likely impact of the Act and its effect on funding; actions being taken by other authorities in

Hertfordshire; actions taken so far by the Council and the Northgate IT Project.

The Mayor thanked the Officers for their presentation.

In moving the Motion Councillor Thomas spoke of the difficulties facing the Council in meeting the demand for housing from local people and the need for councils to have access to resources to permit the building of more social housing.

In seconding the Motion Councillor S Mead said that she believed the Act did not adequately address the problems faced by both the Homeless and councils dealing with lack of resources.

A full debate ensued. Points raised included:

- Central Government could assist councils by taking a number of actions:
  - Lifting the borrowing cap that restricts the amount that councils can raise to fund house building
  - Allowing councils to set rent levels
  - Allowing councils to retain 100% of 'Right to Buy' receipts
  - Halting the introduction of Universal Credit and the withdrawal of direct payments to landlords
- The proximity of the Town to London distorts the housing market locally
- There is a misconception about the security of tenure for tenants in private rented accommodation with more than 50% of evictions actually made from social housing.
- Concern for the impact on children in care
- More attention needs to be paid to the underlying causes of homelessness
- Provision of more social housing is essential.
- Councils should have the ability to raise and retain funds to provide social housing.
- People need security of tenure in their homes
- There are many hidden homeless which disguise the real extent of the problem.

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

The stated aim of the Homelessness Reduction Act is to ensure that housing departments across the country actively work with all clients who are threatened with homelessness at a much earlier stage and deliver realistic solutions to their housing issues.

The Act outlines major changes to support that must be provided to all persons presenting as homeless or threatened with homelessness including those who are not deemed to be vulnerable or in priority need. It also doubles the period of time that any temporary accommodation may need to be provided.

This Council will continue to do all it can to prepare for this change in legislation which is likely to come into effect from April 2018 and will ensure that support and guidance is provided to all those who are deemed to be within the scope of the Act. We will also monitor the impacts of the Act from thereon and consider changes to the support provided when necessary to do so. We believe that Council housing must be at the forefront of meeting the current housing emergency and it would seem the Prime Minister agrees with that with a recent announcement at Conservative Party Conference, a welcome change from the previous government's housing policy.

However the announcement follows in a long line of policy decisions and announcements since 2010 that make the situation worse rather than better. Without proper funding, the Homelessness Reduction Act will just become another example.

This Council calls on the Government to give Councils the fair funding to deliver not just a large-scale housing programme but also the range of vital services communities rely on.

We call on Government to take decisive action to tackle the chronic lack of affordable homes by taking the following action:

1. Ditch the planned ban on long-term council tenancies to give council tenants security in their home.
2. Drop your legislation to force the sale of council homes through their high value levy.
3. Clarify the law to make sure that councils can offer homes to local people first without facing challenge in the courts.
4. Lift the Housing Revenue Account borrowing cap.
5. Suspend right-to-buy, allowing councils to reinstate it only if they can prove a plan to replace homes sold one-for-one and like-for-like.
6. Scrap the punitive bedroom tax, which indiscriminately punishes social tenants for not downsizing even when there are no smaller properties available to move to.
7. Recycle housing benefit savings from the affordable housing programme into helping tackle the causes of the housing crisis, rather than relying on higher housing benefit spending to deal with its effects.
8. Build new homes for 'living rent' over the Parliament, with rents capped at a third of local incomes to give private renters the breathing room to save for a deposit on a first home.

9. Build 100 000 new affordable homes to rent and buy a year by the end of the parliament including at least 100,000 FirstBuy Homes where mortgage costs do not exceed a third of average local incomes.
10. Restore funding for the Decent Homes programme to help bring more council and housing association homes up to a decent standard, just as the last Labour government did during which time over a million more council and housing association homes were made warm, safe and dry.

It was requested that a copy of the Motion be forward to the Government.

## **5. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS**

None.

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

None.

## **7. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

None.

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

The Leader of the Opposition enquired about the Quarter 1 Housing Performance Report and stated that of the 38 measures only 37% were on track. Of stage 1 & 2 complaints 56% and 57% respectively were upheld. He added that given the length of time that had elapsed since the housing service had moved back under the control of the Council he asked what actions the Executive were undertaking to improve the service.

In response, the Leader of the Council advised that the Executive were aware of the issues and the action that is being taken to improve performance. A number of steps were being taken including the recruitment of a new permanent housing management team to ensure the desired service standards are achieved, however a more detailed written reply to the question would be provided.

Council then received updates on the following:

- Public Realm Improvements;
- Opening of Debenhams;
- Park Place;
- Small Business Saturday;
- SME Herts Business Awards;
- British Aerospace;
- Neighbourhood Engagement and Development Fund;
- ARCH Community Champion Award;

- King Pin Square event;
- Twin Foxes;
- Celebrating 50 Years of Play;
- The 2017 Cycling Festival;
- Developing a Cultural Strategy for Stevenage;
- Successful PCC bids;
- Tackling Hate Crime in Stevenage.

The Leader thanked Members for their updates and informed Council that the Police and Crime Commissioner held a road safety fund and a successful bid had been made by the Council for road safety improvements in Scarborough Avenue.

## **9. NOTICE OF MOTIONS**

### **Motion moved by Councillor Mrs Lloyd**

Councillor S Taylor OBE CC declared an interest as a member of the National Joint Negotiating Committee.

Councillor J Hollywell declared an interest as a public sector employee.

In moving the Motion the Portfolio Holder for Resources spoke of the difficulties facing both employees and employers as a result of the 1% pay cap. It was acknowledged that the Government had recently announced a relaxation of the cap for certain public sector workers however any pay increases would have to be funded from existing budgets. No relaxation of the cap had been offered for Local Government employees.

In seconding the motion the Portfolio Holder for Communities, Community Safety and Equalities stressed the need for more funding to be made available to properly reward those working in the public sector.

In supporting the motion the Leader stated that the financial crisis of 2008 had not impacted on the banking sector that had caused the crash and that the Government should do more to recognise the contribution of those working in the public sector.

Following a point of clarification on the Motion the Mover and Seconder agreed a revision to the wording, the Motion then to read as follows:

‘This Council recognises and values the work of its employees and those across the public sector.

It acknowledges that the Government’s imposition of many years of a pay freeze and public sector pay cap of 1% has resulted in wages in the public sector falling behind both price inflation and the rise in earnings in the private sector. This has caused difficulties in recruitment and made public sector employees feel undervalued.

The Council urges the Government to scrap the public sector pay cap. We also urge the Government to adequately fund councils to pay their staff a decent pay rise in line with the cost of living.'

A full debate ensued. Points raised included:

- Pay restraint, even pay cuts, were not restricted to the public sector with many in the private sector also affected.
- Pay restraint had led to recruitment problems across the public sector
- Higher pay would lead to higher levels of taxation
- Public sector workers felt undervalued
- Austerity could be seen as a political weapon to divide the workforce

In reply the Portfolio Holder for Resources requested that a copy of the motion, if agreed, should be forwarded to both the Government and public sector unions.

Council was advised that as Stevenage Borough was a member of the National Pay Bargaining Board it would be impossible to independently grant higher pay awards to its employees even if it had the funds to do so.

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

This Council recognises and values the work of its employees and those across the public sector.

It acknowledges that the Government's imposition over many years of pay freeze and public sector pay cap of 1% has resulted in wages in the public sector falling behind both price inflation and the rise in earnings in the private sector. This has caused difficulties in recruitment and made public sector employees feel undervalued.

The Council urges the Government to scrap the public sector pay cap. We also urge the Government to adequately fund councils to pay their staff a decent pay rise in line with the cost of living.

## **10. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRS/PORTFOLIO HOLDERS**

Council received three questions.

### **A. Question from Councillor R Parker CC**

In response to a question from Councillor Parker regarding the proposed Gresley Park development and the site for Travelling Show People the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration advised that the Council had formally objected to elements of the proposed plan to ensure that there would be sufficient infrastructure to meet both the needs of the site and local people in Manor ward.

The Portfolio Holder then responded to a supplementary question relating to the proposal to build 600 homes to the eastern edge of the town and the proposal to build a site for Travelling Show People. He replied that the Council would not object to a properly planned development on the Borough's borders and that the site for Travelling Show People would be managed by the developers; however the concerns raised would be highlighted.

**B. Question from Councillor G Snell**

In response to a question from Councillor Snell regarding the public realm improvements in the Town Centre the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration advised that the majority of the hard landscaping works to the public squares took place from the end of May through to early September. In addition the surfaces had been jet washed and sealed prior to handover.

The Portfolio Holder responded to a supplementary question concerning the removal of litter and the nuisance caused by pigeons in the town centre. He replied that measures taken to discourage pigeons at specific locations appeared to be effective and that revised litter cleaning arrangements had been implemented.

**C. Question from Councillor A McGuinness**

In response to a question from Councillor McGuinness regarding the ICT outage of the August Bank Holiday weekend and its subsequent impact on the Council's IT infrastructure the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Cooperative Council advised the problem had been caused after an external contractor severed the underground cable between the Daneshill and Cavendish Road data centres. A compensation claim process was underway with that contractor.

The Portfolio Holder responded to a supplementary question relating to ICT issues facing the Council. In reply he advised Council that a full report would be made to the Executive and that the Member concerned would be invited to discuss the issues with Council Officers.

**11. ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW OF 2016/2017 INCLUDING PRUDENTIAL CODE**

Council considered a report which had previously been presented to both the Executive and the Audit Committee who had recommended that the 2016/2017 Annual Treasury Management Review be approved.

In reply to a question concerning The Bank's forecasts for the UK economy and the impact of interest rate rises on the Capital and Revenue Programmes an undertaking to provide a written reply was given to Members.



It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the Annual Treasury Management Review is approved.

**12. AUDIT COMMITTEE – DRAFT MINUTES**

It was moved seconded and **RESOLVED** that the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 6 September 2017 are noted.

**13. URGENT DECISION TAKEN OUTSIDE BUDGET AND PLICY FRAMEWORK**

Council considered a report submitted in accordance with the Council's Constitution concerning an urgent decision, relating to changes to the Council's Capital Expenditure Outturn, taken by the Executive that was outside the Budget and Policy Framework.

It was moved seconded and **RESOLVED** that the urgent decision taken outside of the Budget and Policy Framework is noted.

**CHAIR**