

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**COUNCIL
MINUTES**

Date: Wednesday 26 February 2014

Time: 7.00 pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: The Mayor (J Pickersgill MA MSC) and Councillors
S Batson MBE DL CC, L Bell, P Bibby, J Brown, H Burrell,
M Cherney-Craw, L Chester, G Clark, D Cullen, J Gardner,
M Gardner, L Harrington, M Hearn, R Henry CC,
J Hollywell, PD Kissane, C Latif, J Lloyd CC, Mrs J Lloyd,
M McKay, L Martin-Haugh, J Mead, M Notley, R Parker CC,
R Raynor, G Snell, S Speller, P Stuart, S Taylor OBE CC,
H Tessier, J Thomas, V Warwick , A Webb and
M Yarnold-Forrester.

Also present: ABK Mboho (Youth Mayor) and J Barnes (Youth Council)

Start/End Time: Start Time: 7.00 p.m.
End Time: 9.00 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R Clark, C Hurst,
B Underwood and S Walker.

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES – WEDNESDAY 4 DECEMBER 2013

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on
Wednesday 4 December 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the
Mayor.

3. MINUTES – WEDNESDAY 29 JANUARY 2014

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Special meeting of Council held on
Wednesday 29 January 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the
Mayor.

4. MAYOR'S COMMUNICATION

The Mayor informed the meeting that since the last Council meeting he had

attended a number of engagements in town including the Hertfordshire School's 'Rock Challenge' at which Barnwell school had been amongst the prize winners; the Holocaust Exhibition at the library which had been followed by a community event at the Council's offices; an event with Autistic Children in Chells and a Burns Night celebration at the Novotel.

Finally the Mayor informed Council that the food bank had received a cheque for £250 from a local organisation to support its activities.

5. MAIN DEBATE – 2014/2015 COUNCIL TAX AND GENERAL FUND AND CAPITAL BUDGETS

The Main Debate related to items 5A and 5B on the agenda.

The Chief Executive informed the meeting that since these matters were considered by the Executive, the Council had been notified of the precepts to be levied by the County Council and the Police Authority and these decisions were reflected in the proposed motion which had been circulated.

The Mayor called upon the Leader of the Council, Councillor S Taylor CC OBE to move the Motion on the Council Tax Setting 2014/2015, General Fund and Capital budgets which was circulated around the chamber.

In her speech Councillor Taylor spoke of the challenges facing the Council in continuing to provide services for the townspeople as the economic situation continued to have a detrimental effect on finances at both a corporate and personal level.

She then spoke about a number of positive aspects of life in the town over the last year, including the Green Flag awards for Fairlands Valley Park and the Town Centre Gardens and she thanked the Green Space Volunteers for the time they had given. She also noted falling crime rates and paid tribute to Hertfordshire Constabulary for working with the Council to address areas of concern raised by residents.

Following a review of activities that the Council had undertaken during the year and informing the Council that the 'Living Wage' would be introduced for lower paid employees the Leader announced that Council Tax would be frozen for the fifth year running and with funding received through the New Homes Bonus, which had been earned through the delivery of new housing in the town, that the following initiatives would be supported:

- A town wide spring clean following the difficulties faced during the extreme weather experienced this winter. A sum of £20,000 would be made available.
- A skate park at King George V. Subject to a feasibility and consultation exercise with Skate Stevenage and Sport Stevenage a sum of £125,000 would be allocated.
- A further apprenticeship cohort of 4 apprenticeships for which £121,000 would be allocated.

- Town Centre regeneration fund. To bring forward a first phase of new build development £800,000 would be made available.

She thanked the Executive, especially Councillor Mrs Joan Lloyd for her support, the Scrutiny Members led by Councillor Jeanette Thomas, the Leader's Services Priority Group (LSPG), the staff involved in the Café Choice consultation and other Councillors and officers, particularly Scott Crudgington and Clare Fletcher for their work in the development of the Priority Based Budgeting approach.

Finally the Leader paid tribute to the Council's staff and acknowledged that it had been a difficult and unsettling year for them.

The Motion was formally seconded by Councillor Mrs J Lloyd who informed Council that the budget setting process had been beset by the introduction of new Government regulations and guidance, much of it at short notice. She said that she was very pleased to see the introduction of the Living Wage and urged other employers in the town to follow suit.

Council's attention was drawn to the comprehensive set of Equality Impact Assessments and Councillor Mrs Lloyd stressed that the Council had ensured that no one group would be discriminated against as a result of the cuts that it had been forced to make.

Finally Councillor Mrs Lloyd thanked her fellow Members and officers for the work that they had put into preparing the budget.

The Mayor invited the Leader of the Opposition, Councillor G Clark to address the meeting.

Councillor Clark thanked Officers and the LSPG for their work in preparing the Budget. He commented that it was essential for the Council to maintain its effective finance management.

The Leader of the Minority Group, Councillor R Parker CC, said that although he was pleased to see recommendations 1a, b and c he was disappointed that they had not been circulated before Members. He then indicated that he would support the proposals and thanked officers for their work in its preparation.

A full debate then ensued with input from the public gallery. The main points raised included the following:

- The Council was applauded for not reducing the Youth Mayor's Local Community Budget allowance and for the announcement about the skate park.
- The Council for the Council Tax freeze whilst maintaining services was welcomed.
- No one group had been discriminated against as a result of the cuts
- The negative impact of any job cuts within the Council's workforce
- The importance of the New Homes Bonus monies
- The need to grow the economy within the town.

The Motion was then put to vote and it was **RESOLVED:**

2014/2015 COUNCIL TAX AND BUDGET (Report 5A)

1. That the Budget summarised at Appendix A to report, be the Council's General Fund Budget for 2013/14 and 2014/15 with the following amendments:
 - a. No increase in the Council Tax for 2014/2015 funded by a reduction in General Fund net expenditure of £56,000 for the freeze grant and a reduction in the contribution to balances in 2014/15 of £32,866.
 - b. That funding for Community Centres and Douglas Drive Day Centre be set at £93,970 (an increase in the General Fund budget as shown at Appendix A of £24,830 for one year and a corresponding reduction in the contribution to balances). An in-year Review of Community Centres to take place during 2014 and Douglas Drive Day Centre to produce a business plan showing a move to self-sustaining funding.
 - c. Local Community Budgets be set at £2,500 per Member and the Youth Mayor's Community Budget at £3,300 for 2014/2015, an increase in the General Fund Budget as shown in Appendix A of £20,800 for one year with a corresponding reduction in the contribution to balances. The system for administering and awarding LCB's will be revised for the coming year.
- 2 That the following be approved:
 - a. the revised working revenue estimates for the year 2013/14 amounting to £10,547,490 and the revenue estimates for 2014/15 amounting to £9,705,670;
 - b. the contribution from balances totalling £278,863 in 2013/14;
 - c. the contribution to balances totalling £71,100 in 2014/15.
- 3 That it be noted that at its meeting on 21 January 2014 the Executive calculated the amount of 24,822.9 Band D equivalent properties as its council tax base for the year 2014/15 in accordance with Regulation 3 of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992 made under Section 31B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as amended by Section 74 of the Localism Act 2011.
- 4 That the following amounts be calculated by the Council for the year 2014/15 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as amended by Section 74 of the Localism Act 2011:
 - a. £83,787,120 Being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2)(a) to (f) of the Act, less the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3)(a) to (d)

- b. £79,107,507 Being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3)(a) to (d) of the Act.
- c. £4,679,613 Being the amount by which the aggregate at 3a above exceeds the aggregate at 3b above, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act as its Council Tax requirement for the year.
- d. £188.52 Being the amount at 3c divided by the amount at 2 above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B (1) of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year
- e. Valuation Bands
- | | |
|---|----------|
| A | £ 125.68 |
| B | £ 146.63 |
| C | £ 167.57 |
| D | £ 188.52 |
| E | £ 230.41 |
| F | £ 272.31 |
| G | £ 314.20 |
| H | £ 377.04 |

Being the amounts given by multiplying the amount at 3d. above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation D, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 36(1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands.

5. a. That it be noted that for the year 2014/15 Hertfordshire County Council have stated the following amounts in precepts issued to the Council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, for each of the categories of the dwellings shown below:

Valuation Bands

A	£ 745.89
B	£ 870.20
C	£ 994.52
D	£ 1,118.83

E	£ 1,367.46
F	£ 1,616.09
G	£ 1,864.72
H	£ 2,237.66

- b. That it be noted that for the year 2014/15 Hertfordshire Police Authority have stated the following amounts in precepts issued to the Council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and amended by Section 27 of the Police and Magistrates' Court Act 1994, for each of the categories of the dwellings shown below:

Valuation Bands

A	£ 98.55
B	£ 114.97
C	£ 131.40
D	£ 147.82
E	£ 180.67
F	£ 213.52
G	£ 246.37
H	£ 295.64

6. That, having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at 3e. and 4a. and b. above, the Council in accordance with Section 30(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the following amounts as the amounts for council tax for the year 2014/15 for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

Valuation Bands

A	£ 970.12
B	£1,131.80
C	£1,293.49
D	£1,455.17

E	£1,778.54
F	£2,101.92
G	£2,425.29
H	£2,910.34

7. To determine in accordance with Section 52ZB Local Government Finance Act 1992 that the Council's basic amount of Council Tax for 2013/14 is not excessive in accordance with principles approved by the Secretary of State under Section 52ZC having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at 3e.
8. That approval be given to a General Fund Revenue Account Contingency Sum in the Budget and Policy Framework for 2014/15 of £400,000.
9. That the advice of the Assistant Director (Finance) on the robustness of the draft budget and the adequacy of reserves (Appendix C) be noted.
10. That the Fees and Charges increases (Appendix F) be noted.
11. That the contribution from the Collection Fund (Council Tax) for 2014/15 of £124,616 be noted.
12. That the cost falling on the General Fund below the safety net calculation (Non Domestic Rates) for 2013/14 of £152,039 and the levy payment for 2014/15 of £184,339 falling due in 2014/15 be noted.
13. That the transfer of £172,000 to an earmarked reserve to cover the General Fund against loss of Business Rate income be approved.
14. That it be noted that the General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy remains largely unchanged from that reported to the meeting of the Executive held on 21 January 2014 and continues to meet the financial objectives set by the Chief Finance Officer.

CAPITAL FORWARD PLAN AND 5 YEAR CAPITAL STRATEGY (Report 5B)

1. That the revised 2013/14 and the final 2014/15 General Fund Capital programme, as detailed in Appendix A and Appendix B of the report be approved,
2. That the revised 2013/14 and the final 2014/15 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Programme as detailed in Appendix A and Appendix B of the report be approved,.
3. That only General Fund essential works will be undertaken in 2014/15 until such time that the programme is fully funded.

- 4 That the updated forecast of resources as summarised in Appendix A of the report be approved.
- 5 That it be noted that the Leader's Services Priority Group (LSPG) is to be reconvened to review and challenge the General Fund Capital Strategy and 15 Year Investment Plan.

6. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

None

7. QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL

None

8. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC.

Council considered the question from Mr Mark Pickersgill as set out in the order of business.

In reply Mr Pickersgill was advised that his proposal would result in the Council exceeding its spending limit and would therefore be ultra vires, i.e. illegal.

In reply to Mr Pickersgill's supplementary question the Leader advised that as the majority of homes in the town were built to Peter Morris Standards it would be almost impossible to redesignate the number of bedrooms in each dwelling so that the under occupancy charge did not apply.

9. LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S UPDATE

The Leader of the Opposition raised an issue regarding customer satisfaction surveys following housing repairs and asked what process was to be followed if problems with repairs arose once the survey had been completed and the tenant wished to reappraise the work.

In reply the Portfolio Holder for Housing informed Council that provision was made for a follow up meeting with the tenant if required and that the original survey form could be withdrawn and a new one issued. She undertook to provide a more detailed answer to the question in writing after the meeting.

Council was informed that a planning application had been received from Debenhams and the Roaring Meg for the development of a two-storey department store on the site.

10. NOTICE OF MOTIONS

None

11. QUESTIONS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRS/EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

None

**12. REPORT REFERRED FROM EXECUTIVE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE—
PRUDENTIAL CODE INDICATORS AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT
STRATEGY 2014/2015**

The Council considered officer report that had been before the Audit Committee on 3 February 2014 and the Executive on 11 February 2014 which recommended that Council adopt the 2014/2015 Treasury Management Strategy and the Prudential Code Indicators.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the Treasury Management Strategy, as detailed in Appendix A to the report, and the Prudential Code Indicators, as detailed in Appendix A, attachment 6 to the report, be adopted.

**13. REPORT REFERRED FROM THE AUDIT COMMITTEE – REVISION TO
CONTRACT STANDING ORDERS 2013/2014**

The Council had before it an officer report that had been considered by the Audit Committee on 4 February 2014.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the revised Contract Standing Orders be approved.

14. OFFICER REPORT – MEMBERS’ ALLOWANCES SCHEME 2014-2015

The Council had before it an Officer report which recommended a Members’ Allowances Scheme for 2014/2015.

In reply to a question concerning the payment rate for child care the Leader undertook to raise the issue with the Independent Remuneration Panel the next time it was convened.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that a Member’s Allowances Scheme be agreed for 2014/2015 as set out in Appendix A of the report.

15. OFFICER REPORT - PAY POLICY STATEMENT

The Council had before it an Officer report which recommended that Council approve the pay policy statement for the financial year 2014/15.

Council was informed that the Pay Policy Statement would be published in the Chronicle to ensure its delivery to every household in the Borough.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED:**

1. That the Pay Policy Statement set out in accordance with the Localism Act, 2011 as Appendix One to this report be approved.
2. That the pay policy is placed on the Council's web site and that a notice of the policy is published in the next edition of Chronicle.

Mayor