

**STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL****SPECIAL COUNCIL  
MINUTES****Date: Tuesday 31 January 2017****Time: 7.00 pm****Place: Council Chamber**

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

**In Attendance:** Emma Chapman - Stevenage Youth Mayor

**Start/End Time:** Start Time: 7.00 p.m.  
End Time: 8.10 p.m.

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P Bibby, D Cullen, L Martin-Haugh, M Hurst and A Webb.

There were no declarations of interest.

**2. TRIBUTES – COUNCILLOR SHERMA BATSON MBE DL CC**

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that time limit for speeches for this item be waived.

The Mayor called upon the Leader of the Council to lead the tributes. The Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Minority Group also spoke.

Tributes were then taken from Councillors and the public gallery.

Speakers shared their personal memories of Councillor Batson whose work in the Community had been recognised by the award of an MBE. She had been inspirational to many with her drive and determination and had been instrumental in establishing both the Stevenage Furniture Recycling Scheme and the World Forum and annual 'Celebrate' event.

She had stood as the Labour Party candidate in the first Police & Crime Commissioner Elections and in her Mayoral year, with her husband

Howard Rooke as Consort, Councillor Batson had been a great ambassador for the Town who had worked tirelessly in the community and with her nominated charities.

She excelled in representing the Stevenage community on both the Hertfordshire County Council and Stevenage Borough Council and this had led to her serving on National and European bodies. She had always campaigned against injustice and served as a great friend and mentor to her colleagues.

The Council's condolences were extended to Councillor Batson's family, particularly her husband Howard, daughter Ahisha, grandson Malakai and mother Yvonne.

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

### **3. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) FINAL BUDGET PROPOSALS 2017/2018 RENT SETTING**

Council had before it an officer report concerning the 2017/2018 rent setting and HRA Budget. This matter had been considered by the Executive on 24 January 2017.

The Chief Executive advised the meeting of a typographical error in the first line of paragraph 4.3.1 of the report, that the years quoted in the brackets should read '2016/2017'- and not '2015/2016'. Additionally with regards to recommendation 2 in the supplementary agenda, it should read 'other than those outlined in 1 above' and not '2.1' as quoted.

In moving the 2017/18 HRA Budget and Rent proposals, Councillor Jeanette Thomas informed the meeting that housing remained a top priority and that Council would continue to strive to improve the quality of the housing stock and drive forward the acquisitions and new build programmes.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Mrs Lloyd advised Council that the Council's HRA business plan was being stretched due to government interventions in areas such as imposing mandatory rent reductions, high value voids levy etc. Councillor Mrs J Lloyd informed Council that in addition to scrutiny by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Executive, proposals in the budget had also been before the Leader's Services Priority Group.

Following debate it was **RESOLVED:**

1. That HRA dwelling rents not subject to the 1% rent reduction (currently Low Start Shared Ownership LSSO's) be increased, week commencing 3 April 2017 by 2% i.e. £2.13 per week which

has been calculated using the existing rent formula, CPI +1% in line with the 2016 Rent and Service Charge Policy be approved.

2. That HRA dwelling rents (other than those outlined in 1 above) are subject to the 1% rent reduction from week commencing 3 April 2017 or £0.97 and £1.70 per week for social and affordable rents respectively, as outlined in the Government's Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 be noted.
3. That the final 2017/18 HRA, as set out in Appendix A be approved.
4. That the proposed fees and charges as shown in Appendix B be approved.
5. That the proposed 2017/18 savings options as outlined in Appendix C be approved.
6. That the proposed 2017/18 growth options as outlined in Appendix D be approved.
7. That the 2017/18 service charges be approved.
8. That the minimum level of reserves for 2016/17 as shown in Appendix E to this report be approved.
9. That the increase of £149,570 to the 2016/17 HRA working budget be approved.
10. That the Rent and Service charge Policy as shown in Appendix G be approved.
11. That the contingency sum of £250,000 within which the Executive can approve supplementary estimates for 2017/18 be approved.

#### **4. COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME**

Council had before it an officer report concerning the 2017/2018 Council Tax Support Scheme which had been considered by both the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Executive.

In moving the recommendations Councillor Mrs Lloyd informed Council that the scheme would remain unchanged for 2017/18, that the working aged claimants in Stevenage would be liable for 8.5% of their council tax bill, one of the lowest schemes in Hertfordshire and probably the Country. Councillor Mrs Lloyd also informed the meeting that the 10% council tax discount on short term empty properties would be removed and that in light of the shortage of housing in the borough, the Council would be introducing a premium of 50% for owners that leave their properties empty for more than two years.

Councillor Taylor then seconded the motion and explained that the long term empty property premium would not apply where there were delays in selling a property due to probate.

A vote was then taken and it was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the 2017/18 Council Tax Support Scheme as set out in the report be adopted.
2. That the removal of empty homes discounts and the introduction of the long term empty premium from April 2017 be approved.

**Mayor**