

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**SPECIAL COUNCIL
MINUTES**

Date: Wednesday 23 January 2013

Time: 7.00 pm

Place: Council Chamber

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

Also present: A Danaher (Youth Mayor) and A Pritchard (Youth
Council)

Start/End Time: Start Time: 7.00 p.m.
End Time: 7.35 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L Bell, H Burrell,
M Cherney-Craw and V Warwick.

An apology for lateness was received from Councillor J Hollywell.

There were no declarations of interest.

**2. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) RENT SETTING FOR
2013/2014**

Council had before it an officer report on the 2013/2014 rent setting
and HRA Budget which had previously been considered at a meeting
of the Executive on 15 January 2013.

The Chief Executive informed the meeting that the Executive had
agreed the recommendations to Council set out at paragraph 2.1 of the
report.

In moving the recommendations Councillor Webb said it was with
regret that the Council was proposing an average 5.1% rent increase
but there was a need to protect rental incomes in the face of the
challenges posed by the introduction of Universal Credits, the

'Bedroom Tax' and reduced receipts from the sale of homes under the Right to Buy initiative.

She concluded by reminding Council that although the average rent for a council property would be in the region of £96 per week this was less than half the rental for a similar property in the private sector.

Councillor Mrs Lloyd seconded the recommendations and informed Council that following the reintegration of Stevenage Homes Limited the HRA and rent increase proposals had been through the same scrutiny process as the General Fund budget.

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

1. That the rents of HRA dwellings be increased with effect from the week commencing 1 April 2013 by an average 5.15 in accordance with the Council's rent policy.
2. That the HRA Savings Option (as shown at Appendix C of the report), of £239,080 in 2013/2014, as summarised in paragraph 4.3 of the report be approved and incorporated into the HRA budgets.
3. That the HRA Growth Options (as shown at Appendix D of the report), of £315,000 in 2013/2-14, as summarised in paragraph 4.4 of the report be approved and incorporated into the HRA budgets.
4. That the revised HRA budget for 2012/2013 and the final 2013/2014 HRA budget be approved as set out in Appendix A of the report.
5. That the 2013/2014 HRA Fees and Charges as shown at Appendix F be approved.
6. That the contingency sum of £400,000 within which the Executive can approve supplementary estimates be approved for 2013/2014.

3. COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

Council had it before it an officer report on the outcomes from consultation and recommendations for a local Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme.

In moving the recommendations Councillor Mrs Lloyd informed Council that the scheme had been 18 months in preparation and that over 1000 responses had been generated from an extensive consultation exercise. The Executive had also examined the proposals, particularly the Equality Impact Assessment.

She added that it might prove necessary to revisit the level of cuts in future years should circumstances dictate.

The Leader, Councillor Taylor OBE CC, formally seconded the recommendations.

A Member offered thanks and congratulations to those involved in the drawing up of the scheme and observed that, through no fault of the Council, the impact would fall disproportionately on working claimants on a low income. This could be seen as a disincentive to people working, the opposite effect to that intended by the Government.

Another Member stated that the localisation of the benefit was welcomed, but not the cut of 10% in the fund that accompanied it, adding that, in conjunction with other changes to the benefits system more children would be raised in poverty.

In conclusion Councillor Mrs Lloyd said that the benefits system had become a postcode lottery. The Council had done its best to minimise the impacts of the CTS scheme but could go no further at the current time.

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

1. That the findings and outcomes from the Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme consultation carried out with residents and other stakeholders as set out in section 4.3 of the report and the Consultation Report attached at Appendix C be noted.
2. That the findings on equalities and other impacts arising from the proposed CTS scheme as set out in paragraphs 4.4.19 and 4.4.20 of the report be noted.
3. That the forecasted financial implications arising from the recommended CTS scheme with effect from 1 April 2013 and the risks and assumptions attached to these as set out in paragraph 4.8.1 of the report be approved.
4. That the CTS scheme proposed within the report be adopted.
5. That the Strategic Director (Resources) be given delegated authority to apply annual uprating to the scheme when received.
6. That the reduction of Council Tax exemption for class A and class C dwellings from 100% to 10% with effect from 1 April 2013, with no grace period, be approved.
7. That the reduction of Council Tax discount for second homes from 10% to nil with effect from 1 April 2013, with no grace period, be approved.

4. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

1. That under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1-7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by SI 2006 no 88.
2. That Members, having considered the reasons for the report being in Part II, determined that the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

5. INVESTMENT PROPOSAL

A revised recommendation 2.2 was circulated at the meeting together with an Appendix C that had been omitted from the original agenda.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the amended recommendation 2.2 and the other recommendations contained within the report be approved.

Mayor