

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL**COUNCIL
MINUTES****Date: Wednesday 27 February 2013****Time: 7.00 pm****Place: Council Chamber**

Present: The Mayor (John Lloyd CC) and Councillors S Batson MBE DL, L Bell, P Bibby CC, J Brown, H Burrell, M Cherney-Craw, L Chester, B Clark, G Clark, D Cullen, J Gardner, M Gardner, L Harrington, R Henry, J Hollywell, PD Kissane, C Latif, 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, B Underwood, S Walker, V Warwick, A Webb and M Yarnold-Forrester.

Also present: A Danaher and J McCarthy

Start/End Time: Start Time: 7.00 p.m.
End Time: 9.05 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Hearn, C Hurst and J Pickersgill.

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES – WEDNESDAY 5 DECEMBER 2012

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on Wednesday 5 December 2012 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

3. MINUTES – MONDAY 10 DECEMBER 2012

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Special Council held on Monday 10 December 2012 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

4. MINUTES –COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY 23 JANUARY 2013

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Special Council held on Wednesday 23 January 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor subject to deleting A Pritchard as an attendee and to be replaced with A Wilson.

5. 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 launch of Graces Space, an after school club, the Betty Game Opportunity Trust AGM and the opening of a new gym at Marriotts School. He had presented the awards for 'Youth Speaks' and had been presented himself with a Bible from the Gideons.

The Mayor had also hosted the Holocaust Remembrance Event which had been well attended.

The Mayor drew Members attention to the new plaque in the Chamber recording the Town's Youth Mayors and also to the new inscriptions recognising the award of Freedom of the Borough to the Stevenage Royal British Legion in 1998 and commemorating the presentation in December 2012 to the Royal Anglian Regiment

Finally the Mayor on behalf of the Council congratulated the Leader of the Council, Councillor Sharon Taylor CC on being awarded the Order of the British Empire for her services to Local Government.

6. MAIN DEBATE – 2013/2014 COUNCIL TAX AND GENERAL FUND AND CAPITAL BUDGETS

Item 9 was taken in conjunction with this debate.

The Main Debate related to items 6A and 6B on the agenda. The Chief Executive informed the meeting that recommendation 2 from the Executive on the General Fund Budget report had been amended to reflect the level of balances to take account of the final Government Settlement for the Rate Support Grant and retained Business rates; and concerning the Capital Report at 6B – the Appendix A circulated for Council was revised from that considered by the Executive in order to align with the final HRA Budget and Business Plan.

The Chief Executive stated 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.

Finally the Chief Executive informed the meeting that an additional recommendation had been included in the Motion in order to address a loophole in the Council Tax discount policy for empty dwellings.

The Mayor called upon the Leader of the Council, Councillor S Taylor CC OBE to move a Motion on the Council Tax Setting and 2013/2014 budget.

In her speech Councillor Taylor acknowledged the lack of growth in the economy over the last three years and its impact on residents, but most importantly she was concerned that following further cuts in grants by central government, as part of its strategy of reducing the national deficit, a number of services for the vulnerable sections of the society would be affected.

She indicated that the Council would endeavour to support its residents by promoting economic growth at local level. She welcomed a number of activities in the last year which had raised the town's profile such as the Queen's visit during her diamond jubilee celebration, the Duke of Edinburgh's visit to the Business and Technology Centre and the Olympic Torch relay which attracted many visitors to the town.

Councillor Taylor informed the meeting that the focus in the coming year would be the economy; housing; creating a future for the young people and tackling domestic abuse.

Faced with a 10% cut by the Government, a new Council Tax Support Scheme had been introduced. The Council, by removing the discounts from empty properties and second homes had reduced the financial impact on low income families by limiting the cut to 8.5%.

Positive initiatives seen over the last year included the revitalisation of both the Town Centre and the neighbourhood centres to support businesses; building new Council homes at both Herford Road and Wedgewood Way to support public housing; the 'First Step' scheme with Lloyds TSB and Leeds Building Society to stimulate private sector housing and Jobs and Skills Fair facilitated by both local businesses to support young people.

Councillor Taylor informed Members that the Council had received £800,000 from the New Homes Bonus Scheme which would be used as part of its 'Investing for the Future' programme by the Council. She advised Members that the proposals would be subject to the normal process of scrutiny and review before Executive considers its implementation. The proposals included:

- Town Centre Improvements Project - £200,000
- Improvements to the Leisure Centre Walkway- £600,000
- Wenta (via BTC) -£5000
- Women's Resource Centre - £5,000 and £47,000 (2 years to employ a Domestic Abuse Coordinator) and
- 'No More' Intervention Project - £40,000

The Leader acknowledged that though the Council had not increased Council Tax in the last 4 years and despite Government imposed cuts, it was still able to introduce new initiatives to stimulate the local economy. Finally she thanked the Executive, the Scrutiny Members, Councillors, the Assistant Director (Finance) and her finance team for the work undertaken in producing a balanced budget.

The Motion was formally seconded by Councillor Mrs J Lloyd. She acknowledged the work undertaken by both the Leaders Service Priority Group (LSPG) and Officers, however she requested that Council would need to respond to an

erroneous view being expressed in the press that the Council had high levels of balances and cash flow thereby avoiding the cuts to services.

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 but enquired about the criteria used in determining the amount of community grants awarded especially in light of the reduced funding received to Stevenage CVS. Councillor Clark also suggested that Council should consider other ways of achieving savings instead of the present “salami slicing” method.

The Leader of the Minority Group moved two amendments to the Motion which were seconded by Councillor Graham Snell. The amendments concerned an increase in funding to Stevenage CVS and a cut in Members allowances.

In response to the amendments proposed, Councillor Taylor CC OBE acknowledged the work undertaken by CVS. She stated that funding criteria was based on a number of factors such as whether groups were locally based; if they offered frontline services to the residents in Stevenage such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and Cross Roads; and also if they used volunteers in their daily operations.

At this juncture, the two amendments to the main Motion were put to vote and were lost.

As the Leader had addressed the question from Mark Pickersgill in her speech the Mayor invited him to ask a supplementary question. He asked that given the increasing evidence of child poverty, why didn't the Council make a stand against the Government and not implement the cuts?

The Leader responded that she had raised the issue of Child Poverty at the County Council and SBC had looked to minimise the impact of the new Council Tax Support Scheme, but this would have resulted in cuts in other services that would also affect the most vulnerable. Regarding rent levels, the Council had to strike a balance and decide whether new homes should be built and current stock improved or not. She added that there would be no benefit to the community for the Council to set a budget that was not balanced

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

- The Council would only fund priority items in the future.
- The HRA and Business Plan was healthy and Council would still continue with its Decent Homes programme
- The Council Tax support scheme would ensure no group of people were disadvantaged more than any other.
- The Council deplored the government's policy that rents charged for social housing should align with private rents.
- The 'bedroom tax' was unfair but Council would endeavour to alleviate its unfairness.

- Employers should be encouraged to introduce a 'living wage' as this would lift people out of poverty.
- The multi agency approach to the issue of Domestic violence and the Council's proposal to fund the post of a Domestic abuse Coordinator was welcomed.
- That the Council funded the voluntary sector to the amount of £480,000 was commendable despite cuts in funding from central government.
- It was hoped that the new Council homes built at Hertford Road and Wedgewood Way would be the first of many.

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

1. That the Budget summarised at Appendix A to report, be the Council's General Fund Budget for 2012/13 and 2013/14.
2. That the following be approved:
 - a. the revised working revenue estimates for the year 2012/13 amounting to £10,684,960 and the revenue estimates for 2013/14 amounting to £10,147,320;
 - b. the contribution from balances totalling £204,788 in 2012/13;
 - c. the contribution to balances totalling £8,230 in 2013/14.
3. That it be noted that at its meeting on 15 January 2013 the Executive calculated the amount of 24,573.36 Band D equivalent properties as its council tax base for the year 2013/14 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 2012/13 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. £79,834,115 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. £75,201,545 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. £4,632,570 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 2013/14 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 2013/14 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 2013/14 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. That approval be given to a General Fund Revenue Account Contingency Sum in the Budget and Policy Framework for 2013/14 of £400,000.
8. That the advice of the Strategic Director (Resources) on the robustness of the draft budget and the adequacy of reserves (Appendix C) be noted.
9. That the Fees and Charges increases (Appendix F) be noted.
10. That the contribution from the Collection Fund for 2013/14 of £27,393 be noted.
11. 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 15 January 2013 and continues to meet the financial objectives set by the Chief Finance Officer.
12. That following on from the decision taken by the Special Council meeting on 23 January 2013 to reduce the council tax discount for current class 'A' and class 'C' dwellings (from 1 April 2013) (item3. resolution 6), in the cases where the maximum period of council tax discounts have been awarded for properties falling into either, or both, class 'A' - requiring major repair works or structural alterations to bring it back into a habitable condition, and class 'C' - unoccupied and substantially unfurnished, no further period of discount will be awarded until after the property has been continuously reoccupied for at least six weeks. The descriptions and qualifying conditions for Stevenage Borough Council's class 'A' and 'C' council tax discounts effective from 1 April 2013, remain the same as those set out in current legislation for statutory class 'A' and 'C' council tax exemptions.

CAPITAL FORWARD PLAN AND 5 YEAR CAPITAL STRATEGY (Report 6b)

1. That the revised 2012/13 and the final 2013/14 General Fund capital programme, as detailed in the revised Appendix A to the report be approved.
2. That revised 2012/13 and the final 2013/14 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) capital programme as detailed in the revised Appendix A to the report be approved.
3. That the updated forecast of resources as summarised in the revised Appendix A to the report be approved.
4. That the ongoing work of the Corporate Capital Review Group (CCRG) and Leader's Services Priority Group, to bring the 5 year Capital Strategy into balance, be noted.

7. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

None

8. QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL

None

9. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC.

This item was taken with item 6.

10. LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S UPDATE

The Leader of the Opposition raised an issue regarding the options for elderly tenants scheduled to have work carried out on their homes under the Decent Homes Programme.

The Leader requested details of the residents concerned and she and the Executive Portfolio Holder for Housing would look into it and get back to Councillor Clark.

The Leader of the Council declined the opportunity to raise any matters on this occasion.

11. NOTICE OF MOTIONS

None

12. QUESTIONS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRS/EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

None

**13. MATTER REFERRED FROM EXECUTIVE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE—
PRUDENTIAL CODE INDICATORS AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT
STRATEGY 2013/2014**

The Council considered officer report that had been before the Executive on 12 February 2013 which recommended that Council adopt the 2013/2014 Treasury Management Strategy and the Prudential Code Indicators.

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

1. That Council be recommended to adopt the 2013/14 Treasury Management Strategy as detailed in Appendix A to this report.
2. That Council be recommended to adopt the Prudential Code Indicators as detailed in Appendix A, attachment six.
3. That the comments/recommendations from the Audit Committee be noted.
4. That Council be recommended to adopt the modification to the use of money market funds, as detailed in paragraph 4.2.3 and Appendix A, attachment three for specified investments.
5. That Council be recommended to adopt the modification to the limit on investments of greater than 364 days, as detailed in paragraph 4.2.3, and Appendix A attachment six, and attachment three.
6. That Council be recommended to adopt the modification to the variable investment limit, as detailed in paragraph 4.2.3 and Appendix A, attachment six.

14. OFFICER REPORT – MEMBERS’ ALLOWANCES SCHEME 2013-2014

The Council had before it an Officer report which recommended a Members’ Allowances Scheme for 2013/2014.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that a Member’s Allowances Scheme be agreed for 2013/2014 as set out in Appendix A of the report.

15. PAY POLICY STATEMENT

The Council had before it an Officer report which recommended that Council approve the pay policy statement for the financial year 2013/14.

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.

16. MINUTES – AUDIT COMMITTEE – 4 DECEMBER 2012 AND 4 FEBRUARY 2013.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Audit Committee held on 4 December 2012 and 4 February 2013 be noted

Mayor