

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL**SPECIAL COUNCIL
MINUTES****Date: Wednesday 29 January 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, D Cullen, J Gardner, M Gardner, L Harrington, M Hearn, R Henry, 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, S Walker, A Webb and M Yarnold-Forrester.

Also present: (Youth Council)

Start/End Time: Start Time: 7.00 p.m.
End Time: 7.50 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R Clark, G Clark, C Hurst, V Warwick, B Underwood and Youth Mayor, ABK Mboho.

An apology for lateness was received from Councillor S Taylor CC.

There were no declarations of interest.

2. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) FINAL BUDGET PROPOSALS 2014/2015 RENT SETTING

Council had before it an officer report on the 2014/2015 rent setting and HRA Budget which had previously been considered at a meeting of the Executive on 21 January 2014 and the recommendations from the Executive were circulated on report 2A on the supplementary agenda together with an additional Appendix.

In moving the recommendations from the Executive Cllr Webb informed the meeting that she was delighted to announce that SBC and Wates had won a London Housing Consortium Award for its Decent Homes Programme. She said it was with regret that the Council was proposing an average 5.61% rent increase but this was unavoidable particularly due to the detrimental impact of Government policies such as the increased discount for Right to Buy.

Councillor Webb concluded by reminding Council that although the average rent for a Council property would be in the region of £106.94 per week for an average three bedroom property, it was less than half the level for the equivalent property in the private rental sector.

Councillor Mrs Lloyd seconded the motion, informing Council that the HRA budget had been through the scrutiny process similar to the General Fund by the Leaders' Services Priority Group.

The following amendment was moved by Councillor Parker and seconded by Cllr Snell –

'Rec 2.1 - That Council be recommended to approve that the HRA dwelling rents be increased, week commencing 7 April 2014 by an average 4.1% by an average of £3.84 per week subject to the Government's caps and limits applicable to each property. This reduction in the increase to be funded by

deleting Growth for 2015/2016:

– 'Reduction in allowance in 2015/2016 (use balances 2014/2015)
- £250k

Increasing HRA Savings 2014/15 :

- Make in-year savings/force under-spends (on-going) - £100k
- Implement savings re. Supported Housing Options
(Use of balances 2014/15) - £237k

Other recommendations to be amended in line with the above.'

Following a debate, the Amendment was put to the vote and declared lost.

Debate followed on the substantive Motion. The vote was taken and it was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the rents of HRA dwelling be increased from the week commencing 7 April 2014 by an average 5.61% or £5.23 per week which has been calculated using the Rent Restructuring Formula, subject to the Government's caps and limits applicable to each property.
2. That the revised 2013/14 and the 2014/15 HRA budget be approved, as set out in Appendix A of the report.
3. That the proposed fees and charges be approved as shown in Appendix B of the report.

4. That the Savings Options totalling £622,850 as shown in Appendix C of the report be approved.
5. That the Growth Options totalling £468,120 as shown in Appendix D of the report be approved.
6. That the minimum level of reserves for 2014/15 as shown in Appendix E of the report be approved.
7. That it be noted that a thorough review of the Housing Revenue Business Plan, including rent strategy, future house building and investment standards will be undertaken.

3. COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

Council had before it an officer report on the 2014/2015 Council Tax Support Scheme which had previously been considered at a meeting of the Executive on 21 January 2014 and the recommendations from the Executive were circulated on report 3A on the supplementary agenda. Council was informed that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee had made no further comments on the proposals.

In moving the recommendations Councillor Mrs Lloyd reminded Members that the localised Scheme had been introduced the previous year with a 10% cut in Government subsidy. She stated that the scheme being proposed was the same as the previous year with all working age claimants required to pay 8.5%.

Councillor S Taylor CC, seconded the recommendations and stated that whilst the proposals were the most equitable given the cut is subsidy, the impact would fall disproportionately on working claimants on a low income.

A vote was then taken and it was **RESOLVED** that the 2014/15 Council Tax Support Scheme as set out in the report (see Appendix A) be adopted.

Mayor