

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 26 February 2025

Time: 7.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: (Chair), (Vice Chair), Myla Arceno, Julie Ashley-Wren, Philip Bibby CC, Stephen Booth, Robert Boyle, Lloyd Briscoe, Rob Broom, Jim Brown, Kamal Choudhury, Forhad Chowdhury, Nazmin Chowdhury, Peter Clark, Coleen De Freitas, Akin Elekolusi, Alistair Gordon, Richard Henry, Jackie Hollywell, Lin Martin-Haugh, Conor McGrath, Andy McGuinness, Sarah Mead, Robin Parker CC, Claire Parris, Ellie Plater CC, Tom Plater, Ceara Roopchand, Loraine Rossati, Simon Speller, Jeannette Thomas, Carolina Veres, Nigel Williams, Jade Woods and Tom Wren

Start / End Start Time: 7.00pm
Time: End Time: 8.45pm

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

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Sandra Barr, Leanne Brady, Lynda Guy, Mason Humberstone, Anne Wells and Tom Wren.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES - 22 JANUARY 2025**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 22 February 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

The Mayor congratulated and welcomed Councillor Peter Wilkins who had been elected in the Manor Ward at the recent By-Election. Councillor Richard Henry, Leader of the Council welcomed Peter on behalf of the Labour Group. Councillor Stephen Booth, Leader of the Opposition also welcomed Peter as a fellow Liberal Democrat and as a worthy successor to Graham Snell who had sadly passed away at the end of 2024. Councillor Wilkins thanked everyone for their warm welcome.

The Mayor then referred to a list of events he had supported since the last meeting and provided a verbal report on a number of events including his upcoming Ceilidh Dance on Saturday 1 March. He also thanked all those involved in the success of his recent Mayor's Ball held at the Cromwell Hotel.

At this juncture, the Mayor paid tribute to the Council's Chief Executive Matt Partridge who would be leaving the Council next month to start his well-deserved retirement. The Mayor thanked Matt for his support and guidance particularly

throughout both of his Mayoral years.

Councillor Richard Henry, the Leader of the Council thanked Matt for his work in many leadership positions he had held throughout the County and Country. He also paid tribute to the relationship between them both which had been a great support to him particularly since becoming Leader of the Council.

A number of other Members spoke to thank Matt for his service to Stevenage Borough Council and to wish him well in his upcoming retirement.

In response, Matt spoke of his long local government career and advised that his time at Stevenage Borough Council had reflected his values as a place where the Members and Officers cared greatly for the Town and its residents. He advised that throughout the time he had spent as Director and then Chief Executive there had been challenging and rewarding times and that he was proud to have made a contribution to Stevenage. He thanked the Leader of the Council for his support and friendship and the other Group and Opposition Leaders for their trust. He also thanked both current members and those who were no longer part of the Council. He then spoke of the support he had received from his Senior Leadership Team, his PA and secretaries and also his wife and family for their support.

3 GENERAL FUND AND COUNCIL TAX SETTING 2025/26

The Mayor advised that Item 3 and Item 4, Final General Fund and Council Tax Setting 2025/26 and Capital Strategy 2024/25 – 2028/29 would be taken together. Council was advised that the motion including the Formal Council Tax Resolution with the increases agreed by the County Council, the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Council's Revenue and Capital Budgets was attached as an appendix to the report.

Councillor Richard Henry, Leader of the Council, introduced the proposed 2024/2025 General Fund Budget and Capital Strategy 2023/24 – 2028/29, together with final proposals for the 2024/25 Council Tax. In his introduction, Councillor Henry was pleased to announce that the Council would be setting another balanced budget for the forthcoming year which would be key to make Stevenage an Even Better place for everyone. He then shared a number of his highlights throughout the year including:

- The General Election, resulting in a new Labour Government and a new Labour MP for Stevenage who he thanked for the work he was undertaking to support and promote the Town;
- The Council's agreement to support the Government's plans for Local Government Reorganisation which would deliver real devolution both locally and across the County and the Country;
- The commencement of a 50:50 Joint Venture agreement with MACE for the development of the former Swingate House with 261 homes along with a café at ground level known as Claxton House. This was in addition to 561 Council homes already built with the aim to deliver 1,000 properties by 2028;
- The expansion of Co-Space bringing a further 150 desks into the space which was also home to the UBS Banks Graduate Training Programme;

- Working closely with the University of Hertfordshire and North Herts College to drive the Stevenage Works programme and the £1million skills programme with Sir Lewis Hamilton's Mission 44 Charity;
- The planned £45million development of the new Sports and Leisure Centre; and
- The transformation of the underpasses throughout the Town.

Councillor Jeannette Thomas, Deputy Leader of the Council, then moved the motion, including the recommendations regarding the General Fund Budget 2025/26 and Capital Strategy 2024/25 – 2028/29 and the formal Council Tax Resolution, which had been circulated to Members.

Councillor Thomas highlighted the following points:

- She was presenting a balanced budget with no use of any balances for next year;
- The Council would not be cutting any services and the Commercial Strategy was bringing in income contributing to the budget;
- The Council's target to further reduce anti-social behaviour, including clearing up even more graffiti on council owned and managed property;
- The launch of a brand new corporate Apprenticeship programme to boost talent, skills and work opportunities for local people;
- The increase in Council Tax for residents in a Band D property would equate to £4.74 or for single resident properties £3.55 per week. For residents receiving full benefit they would pay 8.5% of their Council Tax bill and for pensioners on maximum benefit the cost would be zero;
- Councillor Thomas thanked her fellow Cabinet Members, the Overview and Scrutiny Members and the Council's Financial Services priority Group alongside the Strategic Director and Chief Financial Officer and her Team for their work in developing the budget

Councillor Henry then formally seconded the recommendations from the Cabinet on the General Fund and Capital Budgets, together with the formal Council Tax resolution, as set out on the paper circulated to Members.

Councillor Stephen Booth, Leader of the Opposition advised that although his Group had welcomed many of the initiatives over the past 12 months which had been taken by the Council, he questioned the efficiency savings proposed, along with the assumption that the move of the indoor market would improve town centre business. He also queried why there was no evidence to reduce the headcount which in his opinion would enable the increase to local residents to be kept at under 1.99%. Councillor Booth thanked the Council's Section 151 Officer for her help and advice.

A number of members took part in the debate on the motion and raised the following points:

- The budget would ensure there were new homes built in the Town including different types of tenures of ownership for residents along with people wanting to come and live in Stevenage;

- Assumptions within the budget relating to current inflation figures and the Union's request regarding the staff pay award could affect the budget;
- The increase of 2.99% would be difficult for residents to absorb during a cost of living crisis;
- The budget demonstrated the Council's commitment to its services including Planning, Environmental and Direct Services;
- The vast majority of traders within the indoor Market welcomed the move to the new space;
- Most Councils throughout Hertfordshire were increasing Council Tax by the full amount of 2.99% which was prudent and gave the best financial position for this and future years.

A recorded vote* was then taken on the motion, and it was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the following be approved:
 - a. the revised working revenue estimates for the year 2024/25 amounting to £12,251,910 and the revenue estimates for 2025/26 amounting to £10,753,540;
 - b. the contribution to balances totalling £596,801 in 2024/25;
 - c. the contribution to balances totalling £6,053 in 2025/26.
2. That it be noted that at its meeting on 11 December 2024 the Cabinet calculated the amount of 28,571.8 Band D equivalent properties as its council tax base for the year 2025/26 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.
3. That the following amounts be calculated by the Council for the year 2025/26 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.	£90,151,990	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.	£83,111,480	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.	£7,040,510	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. £246.41 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	£ 164.27
B	£ 191.65
C	£ 219.03
D	£ 246.41
E	£ 301.17
F	£ 355.93
G	£ 410.68
H	£ 492.82

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.

4. a. That it be noted that for the year 2025/26 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

	Basic Amount of Council Tax	Adult Social Care Charge	2025/26 Council Tax
A	£995.18	£184.73	£1,179.91

B	£1,161.04	£215.52	£1,376.56
C	£1,326.91	£246.31	£1,573.22
D	£1,492.77	£277.10	£1,769.87
E	£1,824.50	£338.68	£2,163.18
F	£2,156.22	£400.26	£2,556.48
G	£2,487.95	£461.83	£2,949.78
H	£2,985.54	£554.20	£3,539.74

- b. That it be noted that for the year 2025/26 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	£ 176.67
B	£ 206.11
C	£ 235.56
D	£ 265.00
E	£ 323.89
F	£ 382.78
G	£ 441.67
H	£ 530.00

5. 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 2025/26 for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

Valuation Bands

A	£1,520.85
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B	£1,774.32
C	£2,027.81
D	£2,281.28
E	£2,788.24
F	£3,295.19
G	£3,802.13
H	£4,562.56

6. To determine in accordance with Section 52ZB Local Government Finance Act 1992 that the Council's basic amount of Council Tax for 2025/26 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.
7. The 2024/25 revised net expenditure on the General Fund of **£12,251,910** is approved as set out in paragraph 4.8.1 as summarised in Appendix B.
2.2 The draft General Fund Budget for 2025/26 of **£10,753,540** is proposed for consultation purposes, with a contribution to balances of **£6,053** and a Band D Council Tax of **£246.41**, (assuming a 2.99% Council Tax increase), as summarised in Appendix B and included in the Council tax resolution in Appendix F.
- 8 The updated position on the General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as summarised in section 4.10 be noted.
9. The minimum level of General Fund reserves of **£3,421,625**, which is in line with the 2025/26 risk assessment of balances, as shown at Appendix C to this report, is approved.
10. The contingency sum of **£500,000** within which the Cabinet can approve supplementary estimates, be approved for 2025/26, (reflecting the level of balances available above the minimum amount).
11. The 2025/26 Balancing the Budget options as set out in section 4.5 and Appendix A, totalling **£275,907** and **£29,651** for the General Fund and HRA respectively, be approved.
12. The use of the Business Rate reserve to fund a Graduate and Apprentice scheme as set out in section 4.6 is approved for inclusion in the 2025/26 General Fund (**£202,760**).
13. That a first call on underspends of **£150,000** (in total from the General Fund and HRA) is approved to support the Graduate and Apprentice scheme as set out in section 4.6.

14. That the growth bid for graffiti removal of **£75,000** as set out in section 4.6 is approved.
15. That the pressures identified in sections 4.2 and 4.7 to this report are noted.
16. That Members approve the Council Tax Support scheme for 2025/26 as set out in paragraphs 4.3.8-4.3.9
17. That the Section 25 Statement on Robustness of Estimates and Adequacy of Reserve as set out in Appendix D is approved.
18. That Members note the Equalities Impact Assessment appended to this report for the Council Tax increase (Appendix E).
19. That Members note the feedback on the budget from Overview and Scrutiny as set out in Para.4.13.1 and public consultation in Para. 4.13.2 onwards
20. That the Final General Fund Capital Budget for 2025/26 of £52Million, as set out in Appendix C to the report, be approved.
21. That Revisions to the 2024/25 General Fund Capital Budget for 2024/25 of £244k, as set out in Appendix C to the report, be approved.
22. That the Final HRA Capital Budget for 2025/26 of £51.4Million, as set out in Appendix B to the report, be approved.
23. That the forecast of resources and approach to resourcing the capital programme as outlined in the report (General fund Paragraph 4.4 and HRA paragraph 4.10) be approved.
24. Final General Fund growth bids identified for inclusion in the Capital Strategy (paragraph **Error! Reference source not found.**, and Appendix A to the report) be approved.
25. To enable the use of Community infrastructure levy of up to £5Million, to fund future infrastructure projects as outlined in paragraph 4.6.3. be approved.
26. The approved capital de-minimis expenditure limit of £10,000 be noted.
27. The approved revenue surplus in any year of up to £500K that can be allocated to the capital reserve to support capital expenditure be noted.
28. That the comments from Council Financial Security Group set out in section 4.14 be noted.

[*Recorded Vote on Substantive motion:

For – Councillors Myla Arceno, Robert Boyle, Lloyd Briscoe, Rob Broom, Jim Brown, Kamal Choudhury, Forhad Chowdhury, Nazmin Chowdhury, Peter Clark, Coleen De Freitas, Akin Elokolusi, Alistair Gordon, Richard Henry, Jackie Hollywell, Conor McGrath, Lin Martin-Haugh, Sarah Mead, Claire Parris, Ellie Plater, Tom Plater, Ceara Roopchand, Loraine Rossati, Simon Speller, Jeannette Thomas, Carolina Veres, Nigel Williams and Jade Woods - 27

Against – Councillors Julie Ashley-Wren, Phil Bibby, Stephen Booth, Andy McGuinness, Robin Parker and Peter Wilkins - 6

Abstentions – 0

Not present – Councillors Sandra Barr, Leanne Brady, Lynda Guy, Mason Humberstone, Anne Wells and Tom Wren - 6]

4 **FINAL CAPITAL STRATEGY 2024/25 - 2028/29**

This item was considered together with Agenda Item 3.

5 **ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY INCLUDING PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS 2024-25**

The Council considered a report in respect of the Annual Treasury Management Strategy 2025/26, including its Annual Investment Strategy, Prudential Indicators and Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy following consideration by the Audit Committee and Cabinet.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the Treasury Management Strategy 2025/26 be approved.

6 **PAY STATEMENT POLICY 2025/26**

The Council considered a report in respect of the proposed Pay Policy Statement for 2025/26.

The Chief Executive and Strategic Directors left the Chamber during consideration of the item as the report addressed proposed changes to senior officer pay.

In moving the report, Councillor Jeannette Thomas, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Transformation advised that the pay scales for senior officers were set in accordance with the Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC). The Appointments Committee had met to consider Senior Officer pay and had recommended an increase in the Chief Executive's salary which had been ratified by Council in December 2024. Following this, further benchmarking had been undertaken in relation to Senior officer roles. After consideration of an independent report and a number of other factors, the Appointments Committee agreed to recommend to Council the proposals in the report.

Councillor Jeannette Thomas also advised that the Leader of the Council , in conjunction with Cabinet Members had considered the pay of the current Chief Executive following the changes for the incoming Chief Executive and a decision to recommend to Council that the incumbent Chief Executive should also be paid at the revised rate was agreed to ensure the pay was equitable.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Richard Henry seconded the report.

A Member expressed concern that the decision taken by Council in December had agreed the new Chief Executive's salary and was not relevant for the current postholder. The Portfolio Holder for Resources and Transformation advised that the changes had been made to ensure pay was equitable and justified and in line with corporate practice. Benchmarking had shown that the current Chief Executive had

been paid at a lower rate than counterparts within the County and beyond. Legal advice had been sought and advice received allowed the backdating of the increase to when the decision had been taken by Council in December 2024.

In response to a question regarding how the change to the salary would affect the pension of the current Chief Executive, the Monitoring Officer advised that the impact on the pension was referred to in the report at paragraph 5.1.2.

Upon the motion being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the pay policy statement set out in accordance with the Localism Act 2011 and the Local Government Transparency Code 2015, as attached at Appendix A to the report, be approved.
2. That the proposed changes to Senior Officer salary scales from 1 April 2025 in line with the Appointments Committees Recommendations be noted and approved.
3. That a payment be made to the retiring Chief Executive of £9,140, the reasons for which are set out in paragraph 4.8 and 4.9 in the report.
4. That the pay policy statement be placed on the Council's website once approved.

7 **LICENSING ACT 2003 POLICY REVIEW**

The Council considered a report in respect of the Council's proposed Statement of Licensing Policy as required under the Licensing Act 2003 (the Act).

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

1. That the report be noted and that the proposed Stevenage Borough Council Licensing Act Statement of Licensing Policy 2025-2030 (attached at **appendix A**) be approved.
2. That the proposed Stevenage Borough Council Statement of Licensing Policy be adopted.
3. That the Licensing Officers, the Licensing Manager and the Head of Environmental Health and Licensing, in their capacity as 'The Licensing Authority', be approved to act on behalf of the Council as a Responsible Authority as prescribed in the Licensing Act 2003 (13.4 & 69.4).
4. That it be noted that sections 6.3.1 and 16.6.5 of the draft policy have been amended accordingly to remove any wording which conflicts with the above proposed recommendation.
5. That it be noted that if the decision is made to agree for the Licensing Authority to act as a Responsible Authority, amendments to the Council's Constitution may be required, specifically Part 3 – Responsibility for Functions.

8 **GAMBLING ACT 2025 POLICY REVIEW**

The Council considered a report in respect of the Council's draft Statement of Principles as required under the Gambling Act 2005.

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

1. That the report be noted and the proposed Stevenage Borough Council Gambling Act Statement of Principles 2025-2028 (attached at appendix A) be approved.
2. That the Stevenage Borough Council draft Statement of Principles be adopted.

9 **SO SAFE (COMMUNITY SAFETY) STRATEGY**

The Council considered a report presenting a final version of the draft Community Safety Strategy 2025-28, outlining the emerging priorities of the SoSafe partnership for the next three years.

In moving the report, Councillor Conor McGrath, the Portfolio Holder for Stronger Communities advised that the work culminating in the Strategy had ensured a reduction in crime and anti-social behaviour alongside much needed support for the Town's most vulnerable residents. The Strategy built on the progress made so far and highlighted the strength of the Council's partnerships.

In seconding the report, Councillor Hollywell thanked Councillor McGrath for continuing the work on the Strategy alongside the Head of Community Advice and Support and her Team. She advised that she was particularly pleased with the work and recommendation relating to violence against women and girls.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

1. the duty placed on the Council and other responsible authorities to publish and implement a Community Safety Strategy that addresses the reduction of crime and disorder be noted.
2. the feedback from Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted and that the Community Safety Strategy be approved.
3. delegated authority be given to the Strategic Director (RP) after consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder and the So-Safe Partnership, to agree and publish an annual Community Safety Action Plan and to make minor amendments to the Strategy.

10 **MEMBERS ALLOWANCES SCHEME 2025/26**

The Council considered a report in respect of the proposed Members' Allowances Scheme for 2025/26, as recommended by the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP).

It was moved by Councillor Richard Henry and seconded by Councillor Jeannette Thomas that the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel set out in the report be agreed.

Following debate, and upon the motion being out to the vote, it was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel be noted and, subject to Members' consideration, that the findings of the report form the basis of the formal Members' Allowances Scheme for 2025/26 onwards, including:
 - the Basic Allowance, Special Responsibility Allowances, and all other Discretionary Allowances remained unchanged from 2024/25 for 2025/26, and
 - That for 2026/27 and 2027/28 the Basic Allowance, Special Responsibility Allowances, and the Co-optees' Allowances increase in line with the Retail Price Index [RPI].
2. That, in the light of Recommendations 2.1 above, the draft formal Members' Allowances Scheme, as shown at Appendix B to this report, be approved for 2025/2026 onwards.
3. That an Independent Remuneration Panel be convened in the Autumn of 2027 to consider the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2028/2029 onwards.
4. That the Democratic Services Manager undertakes a campaign in advance of 2027 to recruit new members to form the Independent Remuneration Panel

11 **CONTRACT PROCEDURE RULES**

The Council considered a report in respect of the Revision to Contract Procedure Rules 2025.

In moving the report, Councillor Veres, Chair of the Audi Committee advised that the key improvements included enhanced transparency, greater efficiency and value for money and compliance with national regulations.

It was then seconded and **RESOLVED** that the Revised Contract Procedure Rules be approved.

CHAIR