

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL MINUTES

Date: Thursday, 24 July 2025

Time: 7.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: (Chair), (Vice Chair), Myla Arceno, Julie Ashley-Wren, Sandra Barr, Philip Bibby, Stephen Booth, Robert Boyle, Leanne Brady, Lloyd Briscoe, Rob Broom, Jim Brown, Kamal Choudhury, Forhad Chowdhury, Nazmin Chowdhury, Peter Clark, Coleen De Freitas, Akin Elekolusi, Alistair Gordon, Lynda Guy, Richard Henry, Jackie Hollywell, Mason Humberstone, Dermot Kehoe, Lin Martin-Haugh, Sarah Mead, Claire Parris, Ceara Roopchand, Loraine Rossati, Carolina Veres, Nigel Williams and Jade Woods

Start / End Start Time: 7.00pm
Time: End Time: 8.20pm

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

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors Robin Parker CC, Ellie Plater, Tom Plater, Anne Wells and Peter Wilkins.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting including Councillors, officers, community members, and in particular Baroness Taylor, her family and close friends.

The Mayor highlighted the historic and prestigious nature of the Freedom of the Borough honour, which was only granted in exceptional circumstances to individuals who had rendered eminent services to the borough. She advised that Baroness Taylor was being recognised for her extraordinary commitment over 27 years as a Borough Councillor, including 16 years as Leader of the Council.

The Mayor spoke of Baroness Taylor's personal dedication, her determination to stand up for local government, and her leadership through times of both progress and adversity. She was praised for leading with integrity and compassion, and for being a trailblazer not only locally but also nationally.

3 **FREEDOM OF THE BOROUGH - BARONESS TAYLOR OF STEVENAGE, OBE**

Cllr Richard Henry, Leader of the Council, praised Baroness Taylor as a true champion of Stevenage whose leadership set the standard for community-focused

politics. He credited her with laying the foundation for many of the Borough's successes and noted her ongoing national influence.

Cllr Henry referred to Baroness Taylor's unwavering work ethic, principled stance on public service, and her ability to remain calm and focused under pressure.

Chief Executive, Tom Pike reflected on Baroness Taylor's national and local legacy, describing her as someone who embodied the values of public service. He emphasised how her leadership contributed to innovation within council services and drove forward improvements in housing, sustainability, and social justice.

Leader of the Opposition, Cllr Stephen Booth expressed cross-party admiration, noting that although their politics often differed, he held great respect for Baroness Taylor's consistency, integrity, and dedication to the town.

A number of other tributes were given by Members who expressed their appreciation for Baroness Sharon Taylor's enduring commitment to Stevenage. They shared personal anecdotes about Baroness Taylor's unwavering work ethic, principled stance on public service, and her ability to remain calm and focused under pressure. She was also commended for mentoring younger councillors and officers, and for always ensuring residents' voices were heard at every level.

Alderman Michael Downing commended Baroness Taylor's dedication to Stevenage and in particular the Symonds Green Ward and her ability to balance national responsibilities with grassroots service.

Former Councillor and Mayor, John Lloyd shared recollections from his time serving alongside Baroness Taylor at both Stevenage Borough and Hertfordshire County Councils. He paid tribute to her dedication to veterans, and in championing the Royal Anglian Regiment's march through Stevenage, supporting the creation of a Veterans' Champion role, refurbishing the Town's War Memorial, and funding commemorative railings and benches. Mr. Lloyd offered thanks on behalf of the armed forces and the Royal British Legion.

A number of speakers from the public gallery including Kevin Bonavia, MP for Stevenage, Jim Callaghan from the Labour Party, Adrian Hawkins on behalf of the Local Enterprise Partnership paid tribute to the Baroness. They recalled her proactive approach and collaborative spirit, crediting her influence for the town's advancement and national recognition and considered the Freeman recognition to be a thoroughly deserved tribute.

A framed scroll was then presented by the Mayor to Baroness Taylor.

Baroness Taylor then read out the Freedom of the Borough Oath and responded with a speech thanking the council, her colleagues, the people of Stevenage and her family. She reflected on her deep-rooted pride in the town and acknowledged the importance of collaborative leadership. She expressed particular pride in initiatives that had improved lives for vulnerable people, including housing and domestic abuse support. She concluded by reaffirming her ongoing commitment to Stevenage in her new role as a Government Minister in the Ministry

of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Baroness Taylor concluded with gratitude for the support shown throughout her journey and thanked the Council for presenting her with the award of Freedom of the Borough.

CHAIR