

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 30 January 2019

Time: 7.00pm

Place:

Present: Councillors: Simon Speller (Deputy Mayor in the Chair), Doug Bainbridge, Sandra Barr, Philip Bibby CC, Lloyd Briscoe, Rob Broom, Jim Brown, Howard Burrell, Laurie Chester, Michael Downing, James Fraser, John Gardner, Michelle Gardner, Jody Hanafin, Lizzy Kelly, Graham Lawrence, John Lloyd, Mrs Joan Lloyd, Lin Martin-Haugh, Andy McGuinness, Maureen McKay, John Mead, Sarah Mead, Adam Mitchell CC, Robin Parker CC, Sarah-Jane Potter, Graham Snell, Simon Speller, Sharon Taylor OBE CC, Jeannette Thomas 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 Liz Harrington, Roni Hearn, Richard Henry, Jackie Hollywell, Matthew Hurst, Margaret Notley, Ralph Raynor and Ann Webb.

The Deputy Mayor welcomed Jen Jeffries, the newly elected Mayor of the Stevenage Youth Council to her first meeting.

Councillor Adam Mitchell declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 2 – Notice of Motion as the Hertfordshire County Council Deputy Executive Member for Education, Libraries and Localism and also as a parent of two children attending Barclay School.

Councillor Sharon Taylor declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 3 - HRA Final Budget Proposals 2019/20 and Rent Setting as her daughter was employed within the Council's Housing Section.

At this juncture, the Deputy Mayor reported on the recent death of former Councillor and Deputy Mayor Bruce Jackson. He called upon a number of Councillors to speak in tribute.

Councillor John Lloyd spoke of Bruce Jackson's seven consecutive years as Deputy Mayor when he chaired the Council meetings with good humour and patience. He also spoke of Bruce's wife Sandra and his children Callum, Robert and Lisa as well as his love of all sports especially football.

Councillor Sharon Taylor gave her personal thanks to Bruce for his outstanding and

exemplary service to the Council particularly in regard to his skill in chairing the Full Council meetings. Councillor Taylor also spoke of Bruce's calm, reassuring nature in his party political role as agent for the Labour Party over many years.

Councillor Robin Parker, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group added his condolences to Sandra and Bruce's family and added his thanks to Bruce for his service over the 26 years of being a Councillor.

Councillor Jeannette Thomas paid tribute to Bruce as a friend and colleague working for many years at Fujitsu as well as their work together as Councillors. She passed on condolences from many of their previous colleagues.

Councillor James Fraser, Leader of the Opposition gave his appreciation for Bruce's service to the Council and the community and passed on his best wishes to his family.

The Deputy Mayor read a tribute from Councillor Ann Webb who referred to Bruce's dedication and conscientiousness to the Council but also as a friend to her and her late husband Eddie Webb.

Council stood and observed a minute's silence in remembrance.

The Deputy Mayor then invited Councillor Taylor to come forward to receive a certificate in recognition of the work of Stevenage Borough Council against Modern Slavery. In accepting the award, Councillor Taylor thanked Sarah Pateman, Community Safety Manager and her Team for their work and commitment to this issue.

2 NOTICE OF MOTION

Motion moved by Councillor Jim Brown

In moving the Motion, Councillor Brown expressed his concern that the dates had been changed by the Secretary of State for the academisation from 1 April 2019 and brought forward to 1 February 2019 with no consultation with affected parties. Councillor Brown spoke of the importance of Barclay School as a community asset and also the lack of evidence that academies did any better than community schools.

Councillor Sandra Barr in seconding the motion referred to the difference between schools opting to become academies on their own terms and having academisation forced on them as in this case.

Contributions from the public gallery came from parents and grandparents of children at Barclay School as well as members of staff. Concerns included the secrecy of the plans for the school to become an academy, the lack of consultation and visibility from the Futures Academy Trust and the lack of information for current and prospective parents.

In supporting the Motion, the Leader of the Council gave her heartfelt

congratulations to the organisers of the 'Save Barclay School' campaign for their commitment over the past few weeks and for the well-attended and lively march which had taken place over the previous weekend. Councillor Taylor called for the Secretary of State to rescind the academisation order before the deadline.

Councillor James Fraser, the Leader of the Opposition agreed that the future of Barclay School was of paramount importance but after taking advice from other local Headteachers, felt that some of the fears expressed might not be justified.

Councillor Robin Parker, Leader of the Liberal Democrats expressed his concern regarding the Government funding arrangements generally for schools and stressed his opposition to enforced academisation particularly as Barclay School had recently made significant improvements towards its Ofsted Rating.

After a full debate including further contributions from Councillors and from the public gallery, it was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED**:

"That Stevenage Borough Council notes that 2019 will mark the 70th Anniversary of the local Barclay School and thanks all current and past staff for the opportunities they have provided for thousands of local children. Therefore we regret that by June, when the anniversary would have been celebrated, the school may not exist in its currently recognisable form, given the forced academisation process the school is being put through.

Barclay School is an important community asset for Stevenage. After many years of academisation, no evidence exists to suggest that the educational outcomes of multi-academy sponsor trust school pupils improve. Our first priority must therefore be to support local students at Barclay School, and we condemn this recent upheaval as completely unnecessary.

The Council notes that parents of transferring year 6 students were not aware of the imminent transfer when they had to submit preferences before 1st November 2018 and is concerned that the school may no longer be accessible and affordable for not for profit community activities after this hostile take over.

We send our support to the parents, pupils and staff of Barclay School who are coming together to defend a vital resource for their local community. Thousands of people from across Stevenage have told the Education Secretary that they want Barclay to be locally rooted and accountable, yet he has refused to even answer their petition. We therefore call on the Secretary of State to respond to the people of Stevenage who have signed this petition immediately.

We believe that the process for handing over this school has been flawed and ministers have real questions to answer about how this decision is being made. As such, we urge the Regional Schools Commissioner to review the conversion timetable and whether the designation of Future Academies Trust is appropriate.

Instead of imposing a conversion that our community is overwhelmingly against, the Secretary of State for Education should work with parents, staff, the community and local Councillors to support the school. In light of the recent rapid improvements at

the school, the Secretary of State for Education has the power to rescind the academy order. We call on him to do so immediately, so that the school can get back to helping local young people “Believe, Achieve and Exceed.”

In accordance with Paragraph 22 of Part 4 of the Council’s Standing Orders, a recorded vote was taken on this item.

* Votes for the Motion – Councillor S Barr, L Briscoe, R Broom, J Brown, H Burrell, L Chester, M Downing, J Gardner, M Gardner, L Kelly, Mrs J Lloyd, J Lloyd, A McGuinness, M McKay, L Martin-Haugh, J Mead, S Mead, R Parker CC, S-J Potter, G Snell, S Speller, S Taylor OBE CC, J Thomas and T Wren.

Votes against the motion – nil

Abstentions – Councillors D Bainbridge, P Bibby CC, J Fraser, J Hanafin, G Lawrence and A Mitchell CC.

3 **REPORT REFERRED FROM THE EXECUTIVE - HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT FINAL BUDGET PROPOSALS 2019/2020 AND RENT SETTING**

Council considered a report, which updated Members on the final proposals on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budgets and rent-setting for 2019/2020.

Prior to the debate, the Chief Executive referred to the Supplementary Agenda (tabled), which set out the Executive’s recommendations to Council following consideration of this matter at its meeting held on 23 January 2019. In addition, the Chief Executive advised that there was an amendment to Page 42 of the agenda (item SC18) – the figure in the second column should be £2 per week rather than £2 per year.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing Health and Older People in consultation with the Assistant Director Finance and Estates agreed to send a written response to Councillor Parker regarding future rent increases in view of the Government Policy around recent rent caps.

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

1. That HRA dwelling rents not subject to the 1% rent reduction (currently Low Start Shared Ownership LSSOs) be increased, week commencing 1 April 2019 by 3.4% i.e. £3.86 per week which has been calculated using the existing rent formula, CPI +1% in line with the Rent and Service Charge Policy approved at the January 2018 Council.
2. That it be noted that HRA dwelling rents, (other than those outlined in 2.1) are subject to the 1% rent reduction from week commencing 1 April 2019 or £0.96 and £1.60 per week for social and affordable rents respectively, as outlined in the Government’s Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016.
3. That the 2019/20 HRA budget, as set out in Appendix A be approved.
4. That the revised 2018/19 HRA budget as set out in Appendix A to the report be approved.
5. That the HRA Fees and Charges as outlined in Appendix C to the report be

approved.

6. That the 2019/20 service charges be approved.

7. That the minimum level of reserves for 2019/20 as shown in Appendix D to the report be approved.

8. That the contingency sum of £250,000 within which the Executive can approve supplementary estimates, be approved for 2019/20 (unchanged from 2018/19).

9. That the comments from the overview and Scrutiny Committee as set out in the report be noted.

4 **APPOINTMENT OF TRUSTEES TO SHEPHALL RELIEF IN NEED**

In moving the motion, Councillor Rob Broom advised that once Trustees had been appointed, the Charity intended to apply to the Charity Commission to amend its scheme to remove the need for Stevenage Borough Council to appoint Trustees in the future.

It was then moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the appointment of Rodney Brittain, David Hughes and Sarah Kingsland as trustees of Shephall Relief In Need be approved.

CHAIR