

# STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

## COUNCIL MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 26 February 2020

Time: 7.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

**Present:** Councillors: Simon Speller (Mayor), Jim Brown (Deputy Mayor), Sandra Barr, Philip Bibby CC, Stephen Booth, Lloyd Briscoe, Rob Broom, Teresa Callaghan, Laurie Chester, Michael Downing, Alex Farquharson, John Gardner, Michelle Gardner, Jody Hanafin, Liz Harrington, Richard Henry, Jackie Hollywell, Graham Lawrence, John Lloyd, Mrs Joan Lloyd, Lin Martin-Haugh, Sarah-Jane McDonough, Andy McGuinness, Maureen McKay, John Mead, Sarah Mead, Adam Mitchell CC, Margaret Notley, Robin Parker CC, Claire Parris, Loraine Rossati, Graham Snell, Sharon Taylor OBE CC, Jeannette Thomas and Tom Wren

**Start / End** Start Time: 7.00pm  
**Time:** End Time: 9.50pm

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

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Doug Bainbridge, Adrian Brown, Dave Cullen and Lizzie Kelly.

There were no declarations of interest.

At this juncture, Council agreed to suspend Standing Order 19 (c) so that Members could stay seated when speaking.

### 2 **MINUTES - 29 JANUARY 2020**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 29 January 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

### 3 **MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS**

The Mayor introduced a short film entitled "The Canyon". The film featured Stevenage District Scouts at the Activity Centre. It was noted that the centre had received Local Community Budget funding from some Members. The Leader thanked Stevenage District Scouting for a wonderful addition to the young people offer in Stevenage.

The Mayor highlighted the following upcoming events:

- Mayor's Charity Concert – 11 March 2020

- Environment Action Day – 26 March 2020
- Litter picks with Stevenage District Scouts – 28 March 2020
- Mayor’s Reception for Stevenage Community Trust and Stevenage Kadoma Link Association – 21 April 2020

The Mayor reported that Climate Change was the main debate item at the Schools Parliament event that was held at the Council offices on 25 February 2020. The school children expressed interest in growing their own vegetables. Cllr Speller informed Council that the Mayor’s Reception in April would be an opportunity to celebrate the corporate and civic history of Stevenage. The Community History Project would capture stories of past Mayors, town pioneers and community champions. The Mayor informed Council that several events to mark the 75th anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE) Day were lined up between 8 May and 10 May 2020.

#### 4 **MAIN DEBATE - 2020/21 COUNCIL TAX AND GENERAL FUND AND CAPITAL BUDGETS**

The Main Debate related to item 4 on the agenda. The Leader of the Council, Councillor S Taylor OBE CC opened her climate change-themed budget speech by announcing that Stevenage had received the regional Labour Party’s Merit Award for Council of the Year in recognition of the Council’s work on regeneration, housing development and neighbourhood management. Councillor Taylor highlighted the Council’s commitment to tackling climate change with a robust four step plan to meet the challenging target of net zero carbon emissions by 2030.

Councillor Taylor noted that austerity remained a challenge for families, for business, for the public sector in general and local government in particular. She raised concerns about uncertainty surrounding the business rates review, future New Homes Bonus allocation and the short window between the announcement of the government’s financial settlement and delivery of the budget to Council.

The Leader’s announced the following budget initiatives:

- £54,000 had been allocated in the budget for an officer to drive our climate action and £20,000 will be ring-fenced towards quick wins on climate change and the work of a citizen-led forum called the People’s Climate Action Forum
- The Chief Financial Officer had granted permission for Members to carry forwards their 2019/20 Local Community Budgets where they are committed to the Council’s climate change programme
- £20,000 to help Stevenage Citizen Advice with the funding cuts they are dealing with and to enable them to deliver more support for the people of Stevenage
- Supporting the Royal British Legion with events to mark the 75th anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE) Day

Councillor Taylor also highlighted the following climate change initiatives:

- Exploring opportunities to become Britain's first all-electric bus town
- Establishing community orchards
- Collaboratively working with local traders to offer free water refills
- Future plans to introduce free drinking water refill stations in the town centre, High Street and parks
- Banning the use of plastic at Council events and using biodegradable plates and cutlery
- Exploring opportunities to provide a cycle hire scheme
- Installing four more electric car parking bays later this year
- Consultations with the Old Town Business and Community Partnership to make an area plan for the High Street and when funds allow, bring in a High Street Co-ordinator to bring together the efforts of the council and the retailers
- Encouraging commuters to 'Park and Stride' from the currently underutilised Primett Road car parks

The Leader of the Council reported that Stevenage remained on track to build 550 council, affordable and private homes by 2025. The Co-operative Neighbourhoods Programme was set to benefit from the investment of £387,000 to continue the work of localising teams and services. The Housing and Investment team had been awarded a Rough Sleeper programme grant of £177,000.

The Stevenage Works Partnership had been offered £330,000 by the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) to establish a Hub that will support local people into training and employment opportunities over the next 3 years with support from our major developers and contractors. Since 2007, the Council had taken on more than 50 apprentices with many being employed permanently in a variety of roles. Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse (SADA) had won further funding through expansion and had been contracted to deliver services for neighbouring councils. Young people of Stevenage continued to be involved in the design of playgrounds as part of the £1.5million playground improvement programme. The Leader of Council commended the Mayor, Simon Speller, for his work on the 'real history' project documenting the lives and events that shaped the town.

Councillor Taylor informed Council that the budget included proposals to increase Council tax by 2.37% for a band C property, a County Council increase of 3.99%, and 5.32% from the Police and Crime Commissioner. The Leader thanked Sandy Eaton, Clare Fletcher and the finance team for their help with budget preparations for the budget. She extended thanks to staff, Councillors and Member Services team for their support throughout the year. Councillor Taylor particularly thanked her Personal Assistant (PA), Gill Harrison, for her patience, skill and support over the last years. She announced that her PA would be moving to a new job at Hertfordshire County Council.

In conclusion, Councillor S Taylor formally moved the recommendations from the Executive on the General Fund and Capital Budgets, together with the formal Council Tax resolution circulated around the Chamber.

The Motion was formally seconded by Councillor Mrs J Lloyd who advised that the budget before Members ensured a prudent level of General Fund balances in the

Council's reserves. She advised that the Council still needed to deliver the £2.1million of Financial Security savings of which £1.1million had still to be identified. Councillor Mrs Lloyd informed Members that Stevenage maintained 120 services in spite of the budget constraints. She thanked the Members of the Leader's Financial Security Group and staff involved in the budget preparation.

The Mayor then invited the Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Phil Bibby to address the meeting. Councillor Bibby advised that his Group would not be supporting the Budget. He stated that austerity measures were put in place to reduce national debt and as a result of the measures the UK's budget deficit was now at its lowest since 2002. Councillor Bibby suggested that cost-cutting measures such as holding elections once every four years and outsourcing the refuse collection service should be explored. He pointed out that the electric car club scheme was not self-financing the benefits of car parking charge increases would diminish with time.

The Leader of the Minority Opposition Party, Councillor R Parker CC stated that his Group would be supporting the budget. He reported that his Group had carried out research on the feasibility of electric buses in Stevenage and it appeared current guideline precluded Stevenage from becoming an all-electric bus town. Councillor Parker welcomed the homelessness grant and the revised graphic presentation of the Council's financial reserves. He expressed concerns about the late notification of central government financial support to local authorities, the withholding of Growth Deal funds and the proportion of Council Tax allocated to the Police and Crime Commissioner. Councillor Parker sought clarification on the grant to Stevenage Citizens Advice.

A full debate then took place. Council acknowledged that events to mark the 75th anniversary of VE Day would provide Stevenage with an opportunity to reflect on the enormous sacrifice, courage and determination of people from all walks of life during World War II. Members were pleased to see support for the climate change initiatives and grants to Stevenage Citizens Advice. Members noted the benefits of Arts funding for Stevenage and successes of the house building programme. Members also highlighted payment delays and other problems with the Universal Credit system. Council expressed delight in the opening of the North Stand at Lamex Stadium (Stevenage FC Stadium).

In her reply, Councillor Taylor highlighted the Growth Deal funding for Stevenage which remained withheld at this time following action initiated by the local MP. This was money that could be used to improve the Town Centre. She stated that austerity was a deliberate political choice that had brought hardships for some residents and small businesses. The government's announcement in October 2019 of an increase in the cost of borrowing through the Public Works Loan Board Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) was unexpected and it was considered to be heavy-handed given that probably only a few local authorities had made significant investments. Outsourcing of services such as refuse collection was rarely the preferred option because in-house services can provide better value for money, more flexibility and better employment conditions for staff. Councillor Taylor confirmed that a Service Level Agreement (SLA) was in place between the Council and Stevenage Citizens Advice.

The Mayor advised Members to submit any queries on the budget to relevant officers. Council agreed to an additional recommendation that officers report back on the feasibility and implications of allowing members to roll forward, within limits, their Local Community Budgets at the financial year end.

After a full debate, a recorded vote\* was taken and it was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the following be approved:
  - a. the revised working revenue estimates for the year 2019/20 amounting to £9,678,680 and the revenue estimates for 2020/21 amounting to £9,069,830;
  - b. the contribution from balances totalling £924,606 in 2019/20;
  - c. the contribution from balances totalling £349,030 in 2020/21.
2. That it be noted that at its meeting on 22 January 2020 the Executive calculated the amount of 27,780.7 Band D equivalent properties as its council tax base for the year 2020/21 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 2020/21 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. £82,599,746 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. £76,611,145 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. £5,988,601 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. £215.57 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	£ 143.71
B	£ 167.67
C	£ 191.62

D	£ 215.57
E	£ 263.47
F	£ 311.38
G	£ 359.28
H	£ 431.14

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 2020/21 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	2020/21 Council Tax
A	£ 860.82	£ 81.98	£ 942.80
B	£ 1,004.26	£ 95.67	£ 1,099.93
C	£ 1,147.75	£ 109.32	£ 1,257.07
D	£ 1,291.21	£ 122.99	£ 1,414.20
E	£ 1,578.16	£ 150.31	£ 1,728.47
F	£ 1,865.07	£ 177.66	£ 2,042.73
G	£ 2,152.03	£ 204.97	£ 2,357.00
H	£ 2,582.42	£ 245.98	£ 2,828.40

- b. That it be noted that for the year 2020/21 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	£ 132.00
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B	£ 154.00
C	£ 176.00
D	£ 198.00
E	£ 242.00
F	£ 286.00
G	£ 330.00
H	£ 396.00

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 2020/21 for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

Valuation Bands

A	£1,218.51
B	£1,421.60
C	£1,624.69
D	£1,827.77
E	£2,233.94
F	£2,640.11
G	£3,046.28
H	£3,655.54

6. That in accordance with Section 52ZB Local Government Finance Act 1992 it be determined that the Council's basic amount of Council Tax for 2020/21 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 above.
7. That the updated position on the General Fund and the Risk Assessment of General Fund balances, be approved.
8. That a minimum level of General Fund reserves of £2,920,935, in line with the 2020/21 risk assessment of balances be approved.

9. That the contingency sum of £400,000 within which the Executive can approve supplementary estimates, be approved for 2020/21, (unchanged from 2019/20).
10. That the 2020/21 proposed Financial Security Options of £846,964 and including fees and charges of £117,490 be included in the final budget.
11. That the 2020/21 proposed Growth bids and pressures of £653,220 be approved
12. That 2020/21 business rate gains totalling £1.14Million above the baseline need be allocated as set out in paragraph 4.6.7 of report 4A.
13. That the 2020/21 Council Tax Support scheme is approved as set out in section 4.8 of report 4A.
14. That New Homes Bonus of £30,380 be transferred to the reserve to fund future potential shortfalls in funding.
15. That the advice of the Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) on the robustness of the draft budget and the adequacy of reserves as set out in Appendix D of report 4A, be noted.
16. That the comments from Overview and Scrutiny be noted.
17. That the final 2020/21 General Fund Capital Programme as detailed in Appendix C of report 4B be approved.
18. That the final 2020/21 HRA Capital Programme as detailed in Appendix D of report 4B be approved.
19. That the updated forecast of resources as detailed in Appendix C (General Fund) and Appendix D (HRA) to report 4B be approved.
20. That the Council's investment strategy for non-treasury assets as shown at section 3.2 of report 4B be approved.
21. That the approach to resourcing the General Fund capital programme as outlined in report 4B be approved.
22. That the actions required to ensure the General Fund programme is funded as outlined in paragraphs 4.9.3-4.9.8 of report 4B be noted.
23. That the approach and progress on Local Asset Reviews be noted together with the target to realise receipts for 2020/21.
24. That the growth bids now included in the Capital Strategy (Appendix A to report 4B) be approved.
25. That the return of Right to Buy one for one receipts as outlined in section 4.14



of report 4B be noted.

26. That the 2020/21 de-minimis expenditure limit as set out in section 4.15 of report 4B be approved.
27. That the 2020/21 contingency allowances as set out in section 4.16 of report 4B be approved.
28. That the work undertaken by LFSG on behalf of the Executive in reviewing and challenging the General Fund Capital Strategy be noted.
29. That officers report back on the feasibility and implications of allowing members to roll forward, within limits, their Local Community Budgets at the financial year end

\* Votes for the Motion – Councillors S Barr, S Booth, L Briscoe, R Broom, J Brown, T Callaghan, L Chester, M Downing, J Gardner, M Gardner, L Harrington, R Henry, J Hollywell, Mrs J Lloyd, J Lloyd, S-J McDonough, A McGuinness, M McKay, L Martin-Haugh, J Mead, S Mead, R Parker, C Parris, L Rossati, G Snell, S Speller, S Taylor OBE CC, J Thomas and T Wren

Votes against the motion – Councillors P Bibby CC, A Farquharson, J Hanafin, G Lawrence, A Mitchell CC and M Notley

Abstentions – nil

Did not vote/Apologies: Councillors D Bainbridge, A Brown, D Cullen and L Kelly

## 5 **PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS**

None.

## 6 **QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL**

Council received four questions from the Youth Council. The responses to the four questions were circulated at the Meeting and are appended to the Minutes.

The Youth Council representative did not ask supplementary questions.

## 7 **QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

None.

## 8 **LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S UPDATE**

The Leader of the Opposition asked about the Council's plans to contribute towards the Labour Party's 2019 general election pledge to plant two billion trees by 2040. In response, the Leader of the Council acknowledged that planting trees across the world was one of the most effective means of tackling the climate crisis. Councillor Taylor indicated that the Council would work with communities, business and other

partners on the climate change agenda.

In light of the current outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19), the Leader of the Council invited Strategic Director (RP) to give Members an update on global and local perspectives of the outbreak. The World Health Organisation (WHO) had declared the outbreak a public health emergency of international concern and the UK had raised the risk to from low to moderate. Central government and local authorities were planning for all scenarios.

The Herts Strategic Co-ordinating Group was now holding weekly meetings to monitor the situation and agree actions to be taken. Resilience officers across Hertfordshire were monitoring the situation daily. An officer working group had been established to co-ordinate the Council's response to a potential coronavirus outbreak within the town. General advice had already been issued to Members and SBC staff. Regular updates based on the latest Public Health and government travel advice would be provided.

The Leader of the Council welcomed the announcement by the Health Secretary that staff self-isolating due to coronavirus should get sick pay. Members recommended that links to government advice on the coronavirus outbreak be added to the Council website.

9 **NOTICE OF MOTIONS**

None.

10 **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRS/PORTFOLIO HOLDERS**

Council received four questions. The responses to the four questions were circulated at the Meeting and are appended to the Minutes.

A. Question from Councillor Alexander Farquharson

In response to a supplementary question from Cllr Farquharson, Cllr Sharon Taylor stated that the government's austerity measures and the introduction of Universal Credit had driven some vulnerable residents into poverty.

B. Question from Councillor Jody Hanafin

Cllr Lloyd Briscoe advised Cllr Hanafin that no timescales had been set for a new Post Office in Old Town High Street noting the autonomy of Post Office Limited in this matter.

C. Question from Councillor Graham Lawrence

Councillor Lawrence sought clarification on whether the Council had considered installing electric vehicles (EV) charging points in recently completed schemes. Cllr John Gardner confirmed that the Council had held discussions with developers regarding EV charging points and existing and future housing developments. The

Portfolio Holder also stressed that further government funding was vital for these projects if Climate Change targets were to be met.

D. Question from Councillor Margaret Notley

In response to a supplementary question, Cllr Briscoe indicated that there was no indication of a significant increase in rail passenger numbers in the short term. The Leader assured Members that extra disabled parking spaces would be available after the planned construction of a multi-storey car park at the railway station.

11 **UPDATE FROM SCRUTINY CHAIRS**

The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee reported that due to other business the review of the Council's scrutiny arrangements was still in progress.

The Chair of the Community Select Committee informed Council that since the last meeting, the Committee had met as a Group to advise the Portfolio Holder on Damp and Condensation Policy and Aids & Adaptations Policy. The Chair invited Members to submit topics for consideration in the work programme for 2020/21.

The Chair of the Environment and Economy Select Committee also invited Members to submit topics for consideration in the work programme for 2020/21. He informed Council that the Committee was at the fact-finding stage of the Neighbourhood Centres review and had commenced with site visits to inform the approach to be taken to the review.

12 **ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY INCLUDING PRUDENTIAL CODE INDICATORS 2020/21**

Members received a report with an update on Treasury Management Strategy 2020/21, including Annual Investment Strategy and the prudential indicators. In response to a question, the Strategic Director (CF) stated that the Council's financial regulations did not have a provision for investment in gold. The Portfolio Holder for Resources informed Members that the next review of the regulations would consider other climate-friendly investments and other investment options.

It was moved by Councillor Mrs J Lloyd, seconded by Councillor M McKay and **RESOLVED:**

1. That the Treasury Management Strategy be approved
2. That the prudential indicators for 2020/21 be approved
3. That the minimum revenue provision policy be approved
4. That an increase to the maximum level of long term (invested for longer than 12 months) investments from £10Million to £20Million when cash balances are higher than £30Million be approved

13 **MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES SCHEME 2020/21 (INCLUDING IRP REPORT)**

The item was moved by Councillor S Taylor and seconded by Councillor Mrs J Lloyd. Councillor Taylor informed Council that the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) had consulted widely and carried out benchmarking against other local authorities. The Leader stressed the independence of the Panel. It was also pointed out that the Licensing Committee played a crucial statutory role of reviewing and making recommendations to Council on policies in relation to licensing matters and discharging the Council's functions as a Licensing Authority. The frequency of meetings of a Committee did not have any bearing on the Chair's allowance. The Leader of the Council extended her thanks to the Panel.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the report of the Independent Panel be noted and that findings form the basis of the formal Members' Allowances Scheme and the allowances paid the Mayor and Deputy Mayor
2. That in accordance with the comments of the Panel regarding payment of carers' allowances, the scheme be extended to accept payments to relatives who do not live in the same household as the Councillor. In all circumstances receipts must be submitted
3. That in the light of the report of the Independent Panel the draft formal Scheme shown at Appendix B to this report be approved for 2020/2021
4. That following the recommendation from the Independent Panel allowances be increased in line with future staff pay wards covered by the terms and conditions of the National Joint Council for Local Government Services (NJC) once known and as recommended by the Panel. This indexation to apply until 2024 subject to any further Independent Panel reports

14 **PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2020/2021**

It was moved, seconded and **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 1 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

15 **LICENSING ACT 2003 STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES/POLICY**

The Licensing Act 2003 Statement of Principles/Policy was moved by Councillor J Hollywell and seconded by Councillor L Chester. In moving the item, Councillor Hollywell advised that as the Licensing Authority, the Council had a duty to prepare a Statement of Licensing Policy that it proposes to apply in exercising its functions under the Licensing Act 2003 and to publish such a policy every five years. In

response to a question, the Senior Environment Health and Licensing Manager confirmed that the Licencing Policy addressed concerns raised by the British Beer and Pub Association regarding licence reminders. The Manager also indicated that officers would advise an applicant to seek a permanent licence rather than making a larger number of Temporary Event Notice applications over a given period.

It was **RESOLVED** that Council adopts the proposed Stevenage Borough Council Licensing Act Statement of Policy 2020-2025 as attached at appendix A of the report.

16 **AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES**

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the Draft Minutes of the Audit Committee of 3 February 2020 are noted.

**CHAIR**