

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL MINUTES

Date: Thursday, 28 January 2021

Time: 7.00pm

Place: Virtual (via Zoom)

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

Start / End Start Time: 7.00pm
Time: End Time: 8.02pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from the Youth Mayor, the Chair of the Youth Council and Councillor Adrian Brown.

There were no declarations of interest.

The Mayor paid tribute to SBC staff who had lost their lives in recent months and passed his condolences to their families, friends and colleagues. He stated that two Members of the Council had been hospitalised with Covid-19. He welcomed Councillor Graham Snell to the meeting and hoped that he was recovering well, and reported that it was expected that Councillor Adrian Brown would be discharged from hospital within the next few days.

The Mayor advised that the Strategic Director (RP) would provide a national and local update on the Covid-19 pandemic at the end of the meeting.

The Mayor took the opportunity to state that he had the pleasure of announcing that a number of Councillors were to receive a certificate in recognition of their years of service as Councillors to Stevenage Borough Council, namely:

- Councillor Jackie Hollywell – 20 years' service;
- Councillors Richard Henry and Simon Speller for 25 years' service; and
- Councillor Dave Cullen for 35 years' service.

The Mayor advised that all of those Members would receive their certificates by post following the meeting.

2 MINUTES - 16 DECEMBER 2020

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 16 December 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

3 REPORT REFERRED FROM THE EXECUTIVE - HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT FINAL BUDGET PROPOSALS 2021/2022 AND RENT SETTING

The Council considered a report in respect of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Final Budget proposals and rent setting for 2021/22. The recommendations of the Executive, made at its meeting held on 20 January 2021, had been circulated to Members on a supplementary agenda.

The Executive's recommendations contained in the supplementary agenda were moved and seconded.

In response to Members' questions, the Strategic Director (CF) replied:

- In relation to Paragraph 5.4.4 of the report - the additional £500,000 included in the HRA Business Plan regarding operational implications of regulatory changes made after the Grenfell tragedy, this funding was for associated matters wider than just the cladding issue, such as Fire Safety measures and the designation of an officer responsible for the buildings;
- In respect of Paragraph 5.4.5 of the report – the interest rate reserve of £5.7M set up to offset any future variances from expected rates, this figure might seem high, but it related to such variances over the 30 year lifetime of the HRA Business Plan;
- With regard to the section in Appendix F to the report referring to cash collected in SBC controlled car parks, the situation pre-Covid pandemic provided the option of cash or card payments. The financial security option outlined in Appendix F was to cease cash payments going forward;
- In relation to consultation on the HRA Budget/rent Setting, the members of the Housing Management Advisory Board had been consulted on the report via e-mail, but no comments had been received.

During the debate, it was clarified that the recommendations referred solely to the HRA Budget, and not the General Fund Budget, which would be submitted for approval to the 24 February 2021 Council meeting. It was agreed that the relevant recommendations would be amended to state this explicitly.

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

1. That the HRA rent on dwellings be increased, week commencing 5 April 2021, by 1.5% which is an average increase of £1.46 for social rents, £2.38 for affordable rents and £1.80 for Low Start Shared Ownership homes per week (based on a 52 week year). This has been calculated using the rent formula, CPI +1% in line with the Government's rent policy as set out in Paragraph 4.1.1. of the report.
2. That the 2021/22 HRA budget, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be

approved.

3. That the 2021/22 HRA Financial Security options, as set out in Appendix B to the report, be approved.
4. That the 2021/22 HRA growth options, as set out in Appendix C to the report, be approved.
5. That the 2021/22 HRA Fees and Charges, as set out in Appendix D to the report, be approved.
6. That the 2021/22 HRA service charges be approved.
7. That the minimum level of HRA reserves for 2021/22, as shown in Appendix E to the report, be approved.
8. That the HRA contingency sum of £250,000 within which the Executive can approve supplementary estimates, be approved for 2021/22 (unchanged from 2020/21).
9. That the comments from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as set out in the report, be noted.

At this juncture, and as announced by the Mayor at the beginning of the meeting, the Strategic Director (RP) provided a verbal update on the national and local positions in respect of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Mayor asked Members to e-mail any questions they had on the update to the Strategic Director (RP), and noted that the next Coronavirus Emergency Committee meeting was due to take place at 10.00am on Tuesday, 2 February 2021.

MAYOR