

# STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

## COUNCIL MINUTES

**Date: Wednesday, 26 January 2022**

**Time: 7.00pm**

**Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage**

**Present:** Councillors: Sandra Barr (Mayor), Philip Bibby CC, Lloyd Briscoe, Teresa Callaghan, Graham Lawrence CC, Nick Leech, Mrs Joan Lloyd, Andy McGuinness, Maureen McKay, Lin Martin-Haugh, Adam Mitchell CC, Robin Parker CC, Claire Parris, Sharon Taylor OBE CC and Jeannette Thomas.

**Start / End Time:** Start Time: 7.00pm  
End Time: 7.49pm

### 1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Mayor announced that in light of the current Covid situation, including the spread of the Omicron variant, the meeting was being held with reduced numbers of Councillors present.

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Myla Arceno, Julie Ashley-Wren, Doug Bainbridge, Stephen Booth, Rob Broom, Adrian Brown, Matt Creasey, Michael Downing, John Duncan, Alex Farquharson, John Gardner, Jody Hanafin, Liz Harrington, Richard Henry, Jackie Hollywell, Chris Howells, Lizzy Kelly, Wendy Kerby, Sarah Mead, Margaret Notley, Loraine Rossati, Graham Snell, Simon Speller and Tom Wren.

There were no declarations of interest.

At this juncture, the Mayor paid tribute to the late former County Councillor Mona Warren and the recently deceased former Borough Councillor Carol Latif (a past SBC Mayor).

A number of further tributes to both former councillors were given by other Members and the Council stood to observe a minute's silence.

### 2 MINUTES - 15 DECEMBER 2021

It was **RESOLVED** that, subject to the deletion of Councillor Stephen Booth from the list of those present at the meeting, the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 15 December 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

### 3 FINAL HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET SETTING AND RENT REPORT 2022/23

The Council considered a report seeking approval to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget and Rent Setting for 2022/23. The recommendations of the Executive, made at its meeting held on 19 January 2022, had been circulated to Members on a supplementary agenda.

The Executive's recommendations contained in the supplementary agenda, together with an amended Appendix A to the report contained in a second supplementary agenda, were moved and seconded.

In response to a Member's question asking if the contingencies figure in the report included ring-fenced amounts set aside for the identified risks of inflation costs and potentially higher interest rates, the Strategic Director (CF) advised that when the Council increased the amount of borrowing to enable investment into its housing stock, a sum of £3.4Million had been ring-fenced for interest rate changes. She added that the HRA Business Plan would be taking a significant proportion of that increased debt in the next few years when interest rates were expected to be low. It was currently forecasted that there would be no further borrowing until 2030/31. A much higher interest rate for these loans (which would all be fixed rate) had been built into the Business Plan.

Another Member asked the following questions on the report:

- Paragraph 3.3 – why does the hardship criteria not apply to SBC's HRA?;
- Are the HRA Service Charges set separately from the rent levels each year?;
- What effect will the higher rent arrears level due to the Covid-19 pandemic have on the HRA? And what is being done to address those anticipated arrears?;
- Could there be clarification of the sense/meaning of the final sentence in the bottom paragraph of the second page of Appendix B to the report (Page 28 of the Agenda Pack) with regard to re-letting of voids?; and
- Paragraph 3.2 - Could it be confirmed that the lower levels of inflation than expected in the HRA Business Plan for 2020/21 was a positive impact, and could the meaning of the third sentence regarding interest rates on borrowing and inflation be clarified?

The Strategic Director responded to these questions, and agreed to provide the questioner with a full written reply to each of them.

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

1. That HRA rent on dwellings be increased, week commencing 4 April 2022, by 4.1% which is an average increase of £4.06 for social rents, £6.60 for affordable rents and £4.74 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 2022/23 HRA Budget, as set out in the amended Appendix A to the report, be approved.
3. That the 2022/23 growth options, as set out in Section 4.8 of the report, with supporting impact assessments in Appendix B, be approved. This includes new match funding for a Decarbonisation Grant application of £950,000.
4. That the 2022/23 Fees and Charges, as set out in Appendix C to the report, be approved.
5. That the 2022/23 service charges be approved.
6. That the minimum level of reserves for 2022/23, as shown in Appendix D to the report, be approved.
7. That the Rent Increase Equalities Impact Assessments set out in Appendix E to the report be noted.
8. That the contingency sum of £250,000 within which the Executive can approve supplementary estimates be approved for 2022/23 (unchanged from 2021/22).
9. That the comments from the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Portfolio Holder Advisory Group, as set out in Paragraph 4.10 of the report, be noted.

#### **4 RESOLUTION TO GRANT APPROVAL FOR COUNCILLOR ABSENCE AT COUNCIL MEETINGS - SECTION 85 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

The Council consider a report seeking approval, in accordance with section 85(1) of the Local Government Act 1972, for Councillor non-attendance at in- person meetings of the Council for reasons related to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic.

It was **RESOLVED** that, in accordance with Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972, non-attendance for any Councillor unable to attend meetings in person due to the ongoing impact of the Coronavirus pandemic be approved, the period of approval to commence from 15 December 2021 and will expire on 24 May 2022 (the day immediately before Annual Council).

#### **5 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraphs 1 – 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as amended by Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.
2. That the reasons for the following report being in Part II were accepted, and that the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

**6 PART II MINUTES - 15 DECEMBER 2021**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the Council meeting held on 15 December 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

**MAYOR**