

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL MINUTES

Date: Thursday, 24 February 2022

Time: 7.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: Sandra Barr (Mayor), Margaret Notley (Deputy Mayor), Myla Arceno, Julie Ashley-Wren, Sandra Barr, Philip Bibby CC, Stephen Booth, Lloyd Briscoe, Rob Broom, Adrian Brown, Matt Creasey, Michael Downing, John Duncan, Alex Farquharson, John Gardner, Jody Hanafin, Liz Harrington, Richard Henry, Jackie Hollywell, Chris Howells, Wendy Kerby, Graham Lawrence CC, Nick Leech, Mrs Joan Lloyd, Lin Martin-Haugh, Andy McGuinness, 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: 8.40pm

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Doug Bainbridge, Teresa Callaghan, Wendy Kerby and Maureen McKay.

The Chief Executive advised the Council that in relation to agenda item 3 – Final General Fund and Council Tax Setting, in accordance with guidance from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, there was no requirement for Members to declare a disclosable pecuniary interest. The exception to this being any councillor who was two or more months in arrears on their Council Tax, in which case they would need to declare this and not take part in the vote.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES - 26 JANUARY 2022**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Council held on 26 January 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

3 **FINAL GENERAL FUND AND COUNCIL TAX SETTING 2022/23 AND CAPITAL STRATEGY 2021/22 - 2025/26**

Before presenting the 2022/23 Budget, the Leader spoke about the assault on freedom and democracy and the prospect of the destructive and tragic war and the consequential humanitarian issues as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. She encouraged Council members to stand together in solidarity with the people of

Ukraine and sent them the Council's prayers and love.

The Leader then presented the proposed 2022/2023 Budget, projected 2022/23 General Fund Budget and final proposals for the 2022/23 Council Tax and Council Tax Support Scheme.

In presenting the budget, the Leader advised that the proposed budget would be a budget to:

- invest in covid recovery;
- support Stevenage residents at the time of a cost of living crisis;
- invest in Stevenage peoples' priorities;
- invest in tackling climate change and
- continue to strive for equality.

The Leader reflected on the extraordinary circumstances that had been faced by the town, businesses, Stevenage communities and residents as the pandemic inflicted new Covid-19 variants on everyone with their particular impact on the most vulnerable. She thanked Stevenage residents for the way they had supported family, friends and neighbours throughout the pandemic and the way in which they had embraced the vaccination programme.

She also thanked Council officers for delivering the vital front-line services, which supported the most vulnerable residents, housing the homeless, delivering help and emergency funding to businesses, keeping public spaces safe and taking on the move to virtual working.

Council was advised by the Leader that the bottom line cost of COVID to the Council was an estimated £4.8Million which made setting a budget next year more difficult than ever. Residents would also be facing a cost of living crisis unprecedented in recent times as the cost of fuel, energy and food were hit by inflation not seen for decades and which was about to be exacerbated by a huge national insurance increase negating any pay rises local people may have been awarded.

The Leader advised that the Council was proposing to increase Council Tax by £4.45 a year or 2.26% for a band C property, as well as increases to a number of fees and charges and make budget reductions of £93k to meet the funding gap and set an affordable and manageable budget. When taking account of the County Council increase of 3.99%, and 4.69% from the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Band C Council Tax in Stevenage for 2022/23 would be £1,758.11, per month, an overall increase of 3.87%. The Police and Crime Commissioner would receive £198.22, Hertfordshire County Council would get £1,359.38 and the final £200.51 would be for Stevenage Borough Council.

The Leader reminded Council that only 11% of the Council Tax Bill would go to Stevenage Borough Council, which represented a charge of £3.86 a week for all of the 120 services which included town centre transformation, building more social and affordable homes, waste and recycling, the co-operative neighbourhoods programme, leisure services and many more. The remainder of the charge would be for the County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner for policing charges.

The Leader thanked the Members of the Leader's Financial Services Group, a cross party group of Councillors, who had scrutinised the detail of the savings and growth proposals.

In relation to the Council Tax Support Offer from the Council, the Leader advised that for those households in receipt of maximum benefit they would only pay £17 per year or 33 pence per week.

In her speech, the Leader shared some of the Council's achievements over the previous year including:

- Securing £37.5m from the Government to contribute to 9 major projects across the Town which would support the Council to deliver better transport links and improved leisure and cultural facilities;
- A new Bus Interchange;
- Town Centre improvements including demolitions across the Town centre to ready sites for development;
- The relocation of Autolus – a cell therapy company who were building their £65million European headquarters in the Town Centre.

The Leader referred to the continuing priorities for the Council including:

- Delivering more social and affordable housing for the Town. The building of hundreds of new homes in Stevenage alongside generating local prosperity by creating new jobs on the development sites and offering workers professional training;
- Work to combat crime and anti-social behaviour through the efforts of the Neighbourhood Wardens, Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse and the No-More Service, all of which offering much needed support for the Community;
- Changes to the Leisure Facility Management Contract to update the leisure provision and exciting proposals for a new leisure centre and a new museum/heritage centre to help residents to stay fit and well as part of the Healthy Stevenage Strategy;

The Council were then advised of plans for the Town for the upcoming year:

- The celebration of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, with Beacon Lighting taking place on 2 June 2022;
- The Big Jubilee Lunch would be taking place on Sunday 5 June with a Picnic in the Park event at Fairlands Valley Park. It was hoped that this would encourage the Stevenage community to come together and celebrate;
- Stevenage Day would be returning on 12 June to King George V playing fields after a break of 2 years;
- The Area Action Plan for the Station Gateway area, construction works on the new cycle, electric vehicle and car park hub would be starting in May;
- Construction would be starting on the first phase of the £350m flagship SG1 Town Centre Transformation scheme at Southgate and at the former Matalan site and the Swingate building would be demolished ready for construction.

The Leader spoke about the challenging target for climate change in Stevenage which was to get to net zero by 2030 and advised that the Council had set out ten things that every resident could do to help achieve that goal. She also advised that through the Herts Growth Board a study had been commissioned of Gunnels Wood Road to prepare a master plan to drive the development of the industrial area and also that the Town was eagerly awaiting the opening of Marks and Spencers in April

The Leader then moved the Motion, recommendations of the Executive and the formal Council Tax Resolution that had been circulated to Members. This was seconded by Councillor Mrs Joan Lloyd, Deputy Leader.

In seconding the Motion, the Deputy Leader advised that there had been a clear significant impact of Covid on the Budget over the last 2 years. Impacts had been felt including lower parking and commercial income, and increased homeless costs. Although some additional funding had been received from the Government, it had cost the Council an additional £4.8million which had to be found within the Budget.

The Deputy Leader advised that despite this the Council had managed to retain a prudent level of resources within its Budget. However an additional £2.14m still remained to be found from the 2022/23 Budget.

It was noted that Business Rates gains would help to improve the Council's financial resilience or continue to provide the services important to residents.

Council was advised that due to a projected period of high inflation and the number of uncertainties facing the Council there would be an additional financial report submitted to the June 2022 Executive meeting.

The Deputy Leader advised that due to the financial situation, there would unfortunately be some service reductions to services including during term time to the Play Service and also the Council would have to increase some fees and charges. However, the increase in Council Tax would allow the Council to continue with the 120 Services it provided.

She thanked Members and Officers for their consideration and scrutiny of the proposed budget.

The Leader of the Opposition (Councillor Phil Bibby) stated that his Group had intended to put forward an alternative budget but the timescales involved had not made this a viable proposal. He agreed that there were additional challenges due to the impact of Covid but that the Council could not expect the Government to provide unlimited funding.

Cllr Bibby advised that in order to bridge the gap in the budget, his Group were of the view that a number of issues could be considered including:

- Whether the move to digitalisation would actually contribute to the Council's required savings;
- Whether the Council was getting good Value for Money from Consultants

- employed;
- Communications – could all the expenditure proposed be justified;
- Could the Modern Member Programme be revisited to make more effective for Members;
- were there alternative ways to fund the Civic Links Programme;
- Significant savings could be made if a Joint Waste Authority was in place.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, Councillor Robin Parker advised that despite the limitations of only being advised by Central Government of settlement figures in December, the budget process remained successful in Stevenage with the input of the Leaders Financial Services Group although the deadline for submission of Budget Amendments should be removed.

The points raised by the Group included:

- There should be much better publicity about the Council Tax share for Stevenage Borough Council;
- New budget initiatives were publicised, sometimes to the detriment of the basics which could be forgotten such as cycleways, telephone response times, housing and fence repairs, recycling boxes not being replaced etc;
- Improved publicity on issues such as the Lytton Way works was essential to avoid public criticism;
- Income generation should be considered such as solar power generation on the Council's own buildings, advertising on Council property;
- Assumed income from land sales may not come to fruition.

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 2021/22 amounting to £11,680,510 and the revenue estimates for 2022/23 amounting to £11,151,760;
 - b. the contribution from balances totalling £1,458,912 in 2021/22;
 - c. the contribution from balances totalling £1,055,629 in 2022/23.
2. That it be noted that at its meeting on 19 January 2022 the Executive calculated the amount of 28,003.7 Band D equivalent properties as its council tax base for the year 2022/23 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 2022/23 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. £82,635,061 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. £76,318,266 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. £6,316,795 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. £225.57 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 | £ 150.38 |
| B | £ 175.44 |
| C | £ 200.51 |
| D | £ 225.57 |
| E | £ 275.70 |
| F | £ 325.82 |
| G | £ 375.95 |
| H | £ 451.14 |

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 2022/23 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	2022/23 Council Tax
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A	£ 899.09	£ 120.45	£ 1,019.54
B	£ 1,048.93	£ 140.53	£ 1,189.46
C	£ 1,198.78	£ 160.60	£ 1,359.38
D	£ 1,348.63	£ 180.68	£ 1,529.31
E	£ 1,648.33	£ 220.83	£ 1,869.16
F	£ 1,948.02	£ 260.98	£ 2,209.00
G	£ 2,247.72	£ 301.13	£ 2,548.85
H	£ 2,697.26	£ 361.36	£ 3,058.62

- b. That it be noted that for the year 2022/23 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	£ 148.67
B	£ 173.44
C	£ 198.22
D	£ 223.00
E	£ 272.56
F	£ 322.11
G	£ 371.67
H	£ 446.00

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 2022/23 for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

Valuation Bands

A	£1,318.59
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B	£1,538.34
C	£1,758.11
D	£1,977.88
E	£2,417.42
F	£2,856.93
G	£3,296.47
H	£3,955.76

6. To determine in accordance with Section 52ZB Local Government Finance Act 1992 that the Council's basic amount of Council Tax for 2022/23 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.
7. That Members note the inclusion of the 2022/23 Fees and Charges of £341,780 (Appendix B to the report) in the draft 2022/23 budget.
8. That the updated position on the General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), summarised in section 4.13 of the General Fund and Council Tax Setting report be noted.
9. That the minimum level of General Fund reserves of £3,471,038 in line with the 2022/23 risk assessment of balances, as shown at Appendix C to of the General Fund and Council Tax Setting report be approved.
10. That the contingency sum of £400,000 within which the Executive can approve supplementary estimates, be approved for 2022/23, (reflecting the level of balances available above the minimum amount).
11. That the Making Your Money Count (MYMC) options as set out in section 4.2 and Appendix A, of the General Fund and Council Tax Setting report totalling £780,945 and £39,370 for the General Fund and HRA respectively for 2022/23 be approved.
12. That the Growth options included in section 4.3 of the General Fund and Council Tax Setting report are approved for inclusion in the 2022/23 General Fund (£120,078) and HRA (£63,360) budgets.
13. That the General pressures set out in section 4.3 of the General Fund and Council Tax Setting report be approved.
14. Members approve a further £300,000 to pump prime Transformation to be included in the Council's 2022/23 budget setting processes to enable to significantly contribute to the savings targets as set out in section 4.11 of the General Fund and Council Tax Setting report.
15. Members approve the identification of a further £500,000 of MYMC options

for the June 2022 MTFS report as set out in paragraph 4.11.4 of the General Fund and Council Tax Setting report.

16. Members approve the use of the business rate gains only once realised and ring fence the use for firstly the financial resilience of the Council and if required to be transferred to the Income Equalisation Reserve and thereafter, they are used for Regeneration or Co-operative Neighbourhood one off spend.
17. That the 2022/23 Council Tax Support scheme is approved as set out in section 4.6 to the of the General Fund and Council Tax Setting report.
18. That the comments from Overview and Scrutiny as set out in section 4.19 of the General Fund and Council Tax Setting report be noted.
19. That Members note the Equalities Impact Assessments appended to the General Fund and Council Tax Setting report in Appendices D and E.
20. That the work of the Leader's Financial Security Group (LFSG) in reviewing the efficiency, commercial and fees and charges as outlined in section 4.17 of the General Fund and Council Tax Setting report be noted.
21. That key partners and other stakeholders be consulted and their views considered as part of the 2022/23 General Fund budget setting process.
22. That in accordance with the Council's Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules, the Council be recommended to continue with the current Co-operative Corporate Plan, subject to further review in Autumn 2023, (paragraph 4.18.5-4.18.7 refers in the General Fund and Council Tax Setting report).
23. That final General Fund Capital Growth Bids for 2022/23 as detailed in Appendix A (and incorporated into Appendix C) to the Draft Capital Strategy 2021/22-2025/26 be approved.
24. That the revisions to the 2021/22 General Fund budget as incorporated into Appendix C to the Draft Capital Strategy 2021/22-2025/26 report be approved.
25. That the Final 2022/23 General Fund Capital Programme as detailed in Appendix C to the Draft Capital Strategy 2021/22-2025/26 be approved, together with the recommended resourcing.
26. That the CFO brings a report forward during the 2022/23 financial year setting out the Council's key capital regeneration and community asset ambitions and key land and asset disposals, not currently in the capital strategy to determine a funding strategy to meet these Corporate priorities.
27. That the Final HRA budget requests for 2022/23 as detailed in Appendix B (and incorporated into Appendix D) to the Draft Capital Strategy 2021/22-2025/26 report as approved at the 26 January Council be noted.
28. That the Final 2022/23 HRA Capital Programme as detailed in Appendix D to the Draft Capital Strategy 2021/22-2025/26 report be approved.

29. That the updated forecast of resources 2022/23 as detailed in Appendix C (General Fund) and Appendix D (HRA) to the Draft Capital Strategy 2021/22-2025/26 report be approved.
30. That the Council's investment strategy for non-treasury assets as detailed in Appendix E in the Draft Capital Strategy 2021/22-2025/26 be approved for consideration by the Executive.
31. That the funding increase requested for the Bus Interchange scheme as set out in paragraph 4.1.2 of the Draft Capital Strategy 2021/22-2025/26 be approved.
32. That the Executive be given delegated authority to approve all of the On Hold schemes, so that they can go ahead depending on the outcome of the work identified as set out in paragraph 4.3.1 of the Draft Capital Strategy 2021/22-2025/26.
33. That the 2022/23 de-minimis expenditure limit, as set out in section 4.11 of the Draft Capital Strategy 2021/22-2025/26 report, be approved.
34. That the 2022/23 contingency allowances respectively in paragraphs 4.12.1 and 4.12.2 of the Draft Capital Strategy 2021/22-2025/26 report be approved.
35. That the Executive delegation set out in paragraph 4.12.3 of the Draft Capital Strategy 2021/22-2025/26 report, allowing Executive to approve increases to the capital programme for grant funded projects, be approved.

*Recorded Vote

For – Councillors Myla Arceno, Julie Ashley-Wren, Sandra Barr, Stephen Booth, Lloyd Briscoe, Rob Broom, Adrian Brown, Matt Creasey, Michael Downing, John Gardner, Liz Harrington, Richard Henry, Jackie Hollywell, Mrs Joan Lloyd, Lin Martin-Haugh, Andy McGuinness, Sarah Mead, Robin Parker, Claire Parris, Loraine Rossati, Graham Snell, Simon Speller, Sharon Taylor, Jeanette Thomas and Tom Wren - 25

Against – Councillors Phil Bibby, John Duncan, Alex Farquharson, Jody Hanafin, Chris Howells, Graham Lawrence, Nick Leech, Adam Mitchell and Margaret Notley - 9

Abstentions – 0

Not present – Councillors Doug Bainbridge, Teresa Callaghan, Lizzy Kelly, Wendy Kerby and Maureen McKay.

4 **ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY INCLUDING PRUDENTIAL CODE INDICATORS 2022/23**

The Council considered a report in respect of the Annual Treasury Management Strategy 2022/23 including its Annual Investment Strategy Prudential Indicators and Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy following consideration by the Audit Committee and Executive.

In response to a question regarding the recent and potential future rises in the interest rates, Officers advised that they had factored in the recent rise and would be monitoring closely the situation including the assumed significant increase in fuel and utility costs.

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

1. That the Treasury Management Strategy 2022/23, as attached at Appendix A to the report, be approved.
2. That the prudential indicators for 2022/23 be approved.
3. That the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy be approved.

CHAIR