

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL MINUTES

Date: Thursday, 23 February 2023

Time: 7.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: Margaret Notley (Mayor), Myla Arceno (Deputy Mayor), Julie Ashley-Wren, Sandra Barr, Philip Bibby CC, Stephen Booth, Lloyd Briscoe, Rob Broom, Adrian Brown, Jim Brown, Teresa Callaghan, Nazmin Chowdhury, Michael Downing, Bret Facey, Alex Farquharson, John Gardner, Richard Henry, Jackie Hollywell, Chris Howells, Wendy Kerby, Graham Lawrence CC, Mrs Joan Lloyd, Lin Martin-Haugh, Conor McGrath, Andy McGuinness, Maureen McKay, Sarah Mead, Adam Mitchell CC, Robin Parker CC, Claire Parris, Graham Snell, Simon Speller, Baroness Taylor of Stevenage, OBE, Jeannette Thomas, Anne Wells and Tom Wren

Start / End Start Time: 7.00pm
Time: End Time: 9.20pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors John Duncan, Liz Harrington, Loraine Rossati and Paige Abrey – Youth Mayor.

At this juncture tributes were given in remembrance of former Councillor and Mayor David Weston who had passed away on 8 February 2023.

The Leader of the Council advised that David Weston a former engineer at BAE, had served the Town well for many years. He represented the Pin Green Ward for 16 years including a year as Mayor in 1995/96 and had a passion for Leisure and Housing. Cllr Henry spoke of David Weston's support and guidance to him as a newly elected councillor. Cllr Henry sent best wishes on behalf of the Council to David's family and friends.

Councillor Robin Parker, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group spoke of David's good humour and friendliness and his fairness when chairing meetings.

Councillor Simon Speller advised that David had also been a Councillor in Martins Wood between 1979 and 1982 before his election to the Pin Green Ward in 1983. He spoke of David having an independent minded spirit and being an absolute gentleman with a quiet insistent voice particularly when speaking on his passion of housing in the Town.

Further tributes were paid and Members were advised that David Weston's funeral would be taking place on Wednesday, 8 March 2023 at 12.30pm at Harwood Park

A minute's silence was then observed.

2 MINUTES - 25 JANUARY 2023

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Council held on 25 January 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

3 BOROUGH COUNCIL BY-ELECTION 2023

The Council considered a report detailing the results of the By-Election in the Bedwell Ward held on 19 January 2023, together with the percentage turnout.

The Leader, in moving the report congratulated Councillor McGrath on achieving one of the highest percentage of votes the Town had seen.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Nazmin Chowdhury welcomed Councillor McGrath to the Bedwell team.

Councillor McGrath thanked the Labour Group for their support and his predecessor Matt Creasey for his work in the Ward and advised that he was very proud to represent Bedwell, the Ward he had lived in his whole life and that he would be working hard alongside his fellow ward councillors and colleagues for the Town and the residents of the Bedwell Ward.

Further welcomes and congratulations were given to Cllr McGrath and it was **RESOLVED** that the results of the Bedwell By-Election held on 19 January 2023, together with the percentage turnout, be noted.

4 GENERAL FUND AND COUNCIL TAX SETTING 2023/24 AND CAPITAL STRATEGY 2022/23 - 2027/28

Councillor Richard Henry, Leader of the Council, then introduced the proposed 2023/2024 General Fund Budget and final proposals for the 2023/24 Council Tax and Council Tax Support Scheme.

Before introducing the Budget, Councillor Henry wished the Mayor a happy birthday and as it had fallen on Budget night presented her with a bouquet of flowers on behalf of the Council.

Councillor Henry, in his introduction, reflected on the current year which had been challenging for the residents of the Town as well as the council. He spoke of the work undertaken with partners to support local people through the cost of living crisis and the effect of the rise in inflationary costs on the Council particularly in the face of rising demand for some services such as homelessness prevention.

Councillor Henry spoke of Members and Officers working hard to ensure that books were balanced whilst at the same time responding to residents top priorities such as regenerating the Town, building more social and affordable homes and reducing crime and anti-social behaviour.

The Leader advised that he had been proud to have led the process which resulted in the award of the new leisure contract to Everyone Active who would be supporting the Council's ambition to expand the leisure and cultural offer across Stevenage from 1 April 2023.

Councillor Mrs Joan Lloyd, Executive Member for Resources, Transformation and ICT then moved the Motion, recommendations of the Executive and the formal Council Tax Resolution which had been circulated to Members.

In moving the motion, Councillor Mrs Lloyd advised that this year's budget had been particularly challenging as evidenced by the regrettable need for service cuts alongside other efficiency, transformation, commercial and fees and charges options.

Councillor Mrs Lloyd highlighted some key numbers to set the context for the proposed budget:

- £1million increase in utilities costs since setting the current year's budget, representing a 100% increase;
- £2.3million increase in inflation cost pressures;
- £600,000 reduction in parking income compared to pre-pandemic levels;
- The proposed 2.99% Council Tax increase resulting in an additional £223 thousand based on the Council's share;
- The increase in the funding received from Government equated to £229 thousand.

Councillor Mrs Lloyd gave some examples of activity undertaken to form the budget, including:

- All in-house services had been reviewed including how to improve the way in which the Council served its residents using technology or self-service options;
- Development of commercialisation and insourcing plans to look at generating income;
- Looking at underused assets;
- Considering increases in fees and charges which in the main remained below inflation recognising the difficult economic environment.

Members were advised that the Council's balances were sufficient to remain financially resilient. Councillor Mrs Lloyd then informed the Council that with great regret it was recommended that the Play Scheme would be closing. She advised that the service cost £601 thousand to run per annum, equating to £566 per registered child. Unfortunately, the service had not been well used since the pandemic and was one of the Council's biggest areas of discretionary spend. There were a number of further smaller service cuts which were also necessary due to the

inflationary pressures which were beyond what could be funded through fees and council tax increases.

The Council were reminded of the £37.5million the Council and the Stevenage Development Board had secured from the Town's Fund and the £14million secured from the Local Enterprise Partnership which allowed spending on key Future Town Future Council (FTFC) priorities such as Transforming Our Town.

In relation to the Council tax increase for next year, Councillor Mrs Lloyd advised that there would be an overall increase of 4.96% on a Band C property. She reminded Members that whilst the Council collected the Council Tax from residents, only 11% of the total sum was kept by Stevenage Borough Council. Councillor Mrs Lloyd urged anyone who thought they could be eligible for the Council Tax Support Scheme to visit the Council's website to look at how to claim.

The Leader, Councillor Henry then formally seconded the recommendations from the Executive on the General Fund and Capital Budgets, together with the formal Council Tax resolution set out on the paper circulated to members.

Councillor Phil Bibby, Leader of the Opposition moved and Councillor Adam Mitchell seconded the following amendment:

'The Stevenage Conservative Group propose the following amendments to the 2023/24 General Fund budget. This is a fully costed proposal that seeks to deliver a £55,000 pot of money which children's groups/clubs/sports bodies can bid for to provide extra sessions, spaces and/or resources for children to attend during school holidays.

This proposal is funded through the following budget reductions:

- Removal of Town Twinning from the 2023/24 budget saving £14,000 (noting this is not in the budget for 2024/25)
- Reduction in the growth for the Climate Change Head of Service Post to a part time role with a 100% focus on dealing with the climate impact of our Housing stock saving the General Fund £41,000

These General Fund budget reductions total £55,000 and mean the proposed amendment is cost neutral to the General Fund for 2023/24.'

In moving the amendment, Councillor Bibby advised that in the current climate all Councils would be finding it difficult to balance their books but he hoped that frontline services would be maintained. He was pleased to see that the Council was looking at a shared waste operation service within the County.

In terms of the loss of the Play Service, Councillor Bibby advised that this could have been avoided and suggested savings options within the amendment would free up funding that could be used for other children's groups.

Councillor Mitchell in seconding the amendment advised that although Town Twinning was a valuable way of building international and cultural relationships it

had to be acknowledged that tough decisions were necessary to be taken in terms of the allocation of resources and funds should be redirected to where there would be a direct benefit to the community. In relation to the Climate Change post, it was felt that a part time role would be sufficient and it was essential that we would be using our resources in as effective way as possible.

Following a full debate the following comments were made on the amendment:

- The Town Twinning link would be celebrating a 60 year partnership this year and the Town had benefitted in many ways from this partnership;
- The future of the Partnership be part of the discussions at the next Partnership meeting;
- The Council was in the difficult financial position due to the reduction in Government funding since 2010/11;
- For Groups to bid for the pot of money suggested in the amendment, this would require administration which had not been addressed or funded in the amendment;
- Local Community Budgets could be used to fund activities and schools to support vulnerable children;
- A review would be undertaken of the whole spend around Stevenage events including Town Twinning and those events run by Leisure, Town Centre, Old Town and Members Services;
- The cut to the Play Service had real human impact and would affect many families in the Town;
- Grants would not cover the cost of running or investing in the buildings;
- The take-up of the play service was low, partly due to schools now providing after school activities;
- A Member commented that most Town Twinning activities were now not funded by local authorities;
- The Twinning Association should be retained for the Town's Heritage;
- The Liberal Democrat Group would be supporting the amendment as even though there were unanswered questions around how the new scheme would work, it would go some way to mitigate the cut made to the play Service;
- Climate change although essential was not as immediate as the effect of the closure of the Play Service on residents;
- The Council should be serious in their pledge to address climate change having declared a climate change emergency and the appointment of the new officer would provide strategic leadership for the Council and the Town;
- It was important to celebrate the achievements made through the civic link of

the Town Twinning Association and it was important to promote peace, understanding and friendship with other countries;

- The SureStart scheme had underpinned the delivery of Early Years provision across the Country but had been destroyed by the Conservative Government, along with other early years schemes which had disappeared over recent years;
- Evidence showed that the priority for young people was climate change over any other issue.

A vote was then taken on the amendment and was lost.

A further debate then took place on the substantive motion. The following points were raised:

- It was appreciated that the cuts were not welcomed but the Leaders Financial Security Group had not had the opportunity to consider the recommended savings. This should have happened to ensure cross party consultation and alternatives found. It was essential that this process happened earlier in the next year;
- The mention of income generation was welcomed;
- The Play opportunities provided for young people were fundamental and essential, other paths should have been followed to find smaller savings throughout the Council;
- The Play Service had been doing less over the years as the budgets had reduced and having a bespoke specialised service became more and more difficult to justify;
- Some of the Play workers were now driving this area of work through the Community and Neighbourhoods Team;
- Unfortunately, the numbers of children using the Play Scheme had reduced significantly over a number of years.

Councillor Mrs Lloyd advised in response that it was with a heavy heart that the Play Scheme would be stopped. She advised that both opposition parties had opportunities throughout the year to come up with alternative budget saving proposals. In relation to the buildings, officers would be looking at uses for them going forward as part of a wider building review.

A recorded vote* was then taken on the substantive motion and it was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the following be approved:
 - a. the revised working revenue estimates for the year 2022/23 amounting to £11,368,750 and the revenue estimates for 2023/24 amounting to £12,463,780;

- b. the contribution from balances totalling £1,932,974 in 2022/23;
 - c. the contribution from balances totalling £572,268 in 2023/24.
2. That it be noted that at its meeting on 7 December 2022 the Executive calculated the amount of 28,153.1 Band D equivalent properties as its council tax base for the year 2023/24 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 2023/24 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. £80,829,244 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. £74,288,875 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. £6,540,369 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. £232.31 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	£ 154.87
B	£ 180.69
C	£ 206.50
D	£ 232.31
E	£ 283.93
F	£ 335.56
G	£ 387.18
H	£ 464.62

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 2023/24 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	2023/24 Council Tax
A	£ 929.57	£ 140.85	£ 1,070.42
B	£ 1,084.50	£ 164.32	£ 1,248.82
C	£ 1,239.43	£ 187.80	£ 1,427.23
D	£ 1,394.36	£ 211.27	£ 1,605.63
E	£ 1,704.22	£ 258.22	£ 1,962.44
F	£ 2,014.08	£ 305.17	£ 2,319.25
G	£ 2,323.93	£ 352.12	£ 2,676.05
H	£ 2,788.72	£ 422.54	£ 3,211.26

- b. That it be noted that for the year 2023/24 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	£ 158.67
B	£ 185.11
C	£ 211.56
D	£ 238.00
E	£ 290.89
F	£ 343.78
G	£ 396.67
H	£ 476.00

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 2023/24 for each of the categories

of dwellings shown below:

Valuation Bands

A	£1,383.96
B	£1,614.62
C	£1,845.29
D	£2,075.94
E	£2,537.26
F	£2,998.59
G	£3,459.90
H	£4,151.88

6. To determine in accordance with Section 52ZB Local Government Finance Act 1992 that the Council's basic amount of Council Tax for 2023/24 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 the 2022/23 revised net expenditure for the General Fund of £11,368,750, as set out in Paragraph 4.12.1 of the General Fund and Council Tax Setting report, be approved.
8. That the inclusion of the 2023/24 Fees and Charges of £325,840, including the 5% increase in market rents approved for inclusion at the December 2022 Executive (Appendix B to the General Fund and Council Tax Setting report), in the draft 2023/24 budget, be noted.
9. That the draft General Fund Budget for 2023/24 of £12,463,780, with a contribution from balances of £572,268 and a Band D Council Tax of £232.31 (assuming a 2.99% increase), and as summarised in Appendix H to the General Fund and Council Tax Setting report, be approved.
10. That the updated position on the General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), as summarised in Section 4.14 of the General Fund and Council Tax Setting report, be noted.
11. That the minimum level of General Fund reserves of £3,419,753, in line with the 2023/24 risk assessment of balances, as shown at Appendix C to the General Fund and Council Tax Setting report, be approved.
12. That the contingency sum of £400,000 within which the Executive can approve supplementary estimates, be approved for 2023/24 (reflecting the level of balances available above the minimum amount).
13. That the 2023/24 Council Tax Support Scheme, as set out in Section 4.4 of the General Fund and Council Tax Setting report, be approved.

14. That the 2023/24 Making Your Money Count (MYMC) options, as set out in Section 4.9 and Appendix A of the General Fund and Council Tax Setting report, totalling £1,342,999 and £32,502 (cost) for the General Fund and HRA respectively, be approved.
15. That the Growth options included in Section 4.10 of the General Fund and Council Tax Setting report, be approved for inclusion in the 2023/24 General Fund (£73,150) and HRA (£56,892) budgets.
16. That the pressures identified in Section 4.2 of the General Fund and Council Tax Setting report be approved.
17. That it be noted that for 2023/24 a £300,000 budget to pump prime Transformation has been included in the General Fund budget to support efforts to realise the savings targets, as set out in Section 4.7 of the General Fund and Council Tax Setting report.
18. That the use of the business rate gains only once realised, with their use being ring fenced to maintain the financial resilience of the Council, be approved.
19. That the comments from Overview and Scrutiny as set out in Section 4.18 of the General Fund and Council Tax Setting report be noted.
20. That the Equalities Impact Assessments, appended to the General Fund and Council Tax Setting report in Appendices D and E, be noted.
21. That key partners and other stakeholders be consulted and their views considered as part of the 2023/24 General Fund budget setting process.
22. That it be noted that the Executive had approved a recommendation that the discretionary element of the funding for the Local Council Tax Top Up Scheme be awarded as set out in Paragraph 4.5.9 of the General Fund and Council Tax Setting report, and any revisions to the Scheme be delegated to the Strategic Director (S151 Officer), after consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Transformation and ICT.
23. That final General Fund Capital Growth Bids for 2023/24, as detailed in Appendix A (and incorporated into Appendix C) to the Capital Strategy 2022/23 - 2027/28 report, be approved.
24. That the revisions to the 2022/23 General Fund budget, as incorporated into Appendix C to the Capital Strategy 2022/23 - 2027/28 report, be approved.
25. That the Final 2023/24 General Fund Capital Programme, as detailed in Appendix C to the Capital Strategy 2022/23 - 2027/28 report, together with the recommended resourcing, be approved.
26. That the CFO brings a report forward during the 2023/24 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 2023/24, as detailed in Appendix B (and incorporated into Appendix D) to the Capital Strategy 2022/23 - 2027/28 report, as approved at the 18 January 2023 Executive meeting, be noted.

28. That the Final 2023/24 HRA Capital Programme, as detailed in Appendix D to the Capital Strategy 2022/23 - 2027/28 report, be approved.
29. That the updated forecast of resources 2023/24, as detailed in Appendix C (General Fund) and Appendix D (HRA) to the Capital Strategy 2022/23 - 2027/28 report, be approved.
30. That the risk mitigation strategy to ensure the 2023/24 capital programme is fully financed, as set out Paragraphs 4.3.2 and 4.3.4 of the Capital Strategy 2022/23 - 2027/28 report, and that the Executive will be updated in the Capital Quarterly monitoring reports, be noted.
31. That the 2023/24 de-minimis expenditure limit, as set out in section 4.11 of the Capital Strategy 2022/23 - 2027/28 report, be approved.
32. That the 2023/24 contingency allowances, as set out in Section 4.12 of the Capital Strategy 2022/23 - 2027/28 report, be approved.
33. That the appropriation of the Dunn Close garage block, valued at £540,000, from the General Fund to the HRA, as detailed in Paragraph 4.14.3 of the Capital Strategy 2022/23 - 2027/28 report, be approved.

*Recorded Vote For – Councillors Myla Arceno, Sandra Barr, Lloyd Briscoe, Rob Broom, Adrian Brown, Jim Brown, Teresa Callaghan, Nazmin Chowdhury, Michael Downing, John Gardner, Richard Henry, Jackie Hollywell, Mrs Joan Lloyd, Lin Martin-Haugh, Conor McGrath, Maureen McKay, Sarah Mead, Claire Parris, Simon Speller, Baroness Taylor, Jeanette Thomas and Anne Wells - 22

Against – Councillors Julie Ashley-Wren, Phil Bibby, Stephen Booth, Bret Facey, Alex Farquharson, Chris Howells, Wendy Kerby, Graham Lawrence, Adam Mitchell and Margaret Notley, Robin Parker, Graham Snell and Tom Wren - 13

Abstentions – 0

Not present – Councillors John Duncan, Liz Harrington, Andy McGuinness and Loraine Rossati - 4

5 ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY INCLUDING PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS 2023/24

The Council considered a report in respect of the Annual Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24, including its Annual Investment Strategy, Prudential Indicators and Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy following consideration by the Audit Committee and Executive.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24, as attached at Appendix A to the report, be approved.

6 RESOLUTION TO EXTEND 6 MONTH RULE - SECTION 85 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

The Council considered a report in accordance with Section 85(1) of the Local

Government Act 1972, to extend Councillor Liz Harrington's non-attendance at meetings of the Council until 4 May 2023 (the date of the Borough Council Elections).

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that in accordance with Section 85(1) of the Local Government Act 1972, Councillor Liz Harrington's non-attendance at meetings of the Council until 4 May 2023 (the date of the Borough Council Elections) on the grounds of ill health be approved.

MAYOR