

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Wednesday 25 January 2017

Time: 6.00 p.m.

Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors L Martin-Haugh (Chair), P Bibby (Vice Chair), J Brown, M Downing, E Harrington, J Hollywell, A Mitchell, R Parker CC, and P Stuart

Start / End Time Start Time: 6.00 p.m.
 End Time: 6.45 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Gardner, C Latif, S Mead and C Saunders. There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES – OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 15 DECEMBER 2016

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 15 December 2016 are approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

In relation to Minute 4, the Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) updated Members on the position regarding the Single Person Discount Rules. She advised that if a resident had another person with no permanent address staying with them on a temporary basis, the resident would no longer be entitled to receive the Single Person Discount regardless of the length of the stay.

3. DRAFT 2017/2018 COUNCIL TAX SETTING AND GENERAL FUND BUDGET

The Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) presented the Council's draft General Fund Budget for 2017/18, projected 2016/17 General Fund Budget and draft proposals for the 2017/18 Council Tax.

The Committee was reminded that the report was before them as a Budget and Policy Framework item and any comments made would be incorporated into the final report that the Executive would consider for recommendation to Council in February.

The Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) clarified that District Councils could increase the level of Council Tax by either 1.99% or by an increase of £5 per Band D property. The final decision would not be confirmed until the February Council meeting but based on the increasing financial dependency on the General Fund, an increase of £5 on a Band D property would be recommended by Officers.

In relation to the level of balances in the General Fund, it was noted that this was needed to meet unforeseen expenditure but these could change with the finalisation of the Business Rates. It was also noted that there were future unquantifiable risks in terms of the impact of 100% retention of Business Rates from 2019/20 with the Council likely to get some financial responsibilities in exchange for this retention.

It was **RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

4. PART 1 DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

This report had not been circulated to Members five clear days before the meeting nor had it been made available for public inspection. The Chair determined however that given the short time left before the end of the call-in period on 1 February 2017, it be considered on this occasion.

- **Council Tax Base 2017/18** – The Committee noted the Council Tax Base for 2017/18.
- **Housing Revenue Account Final Budget Proposals 2017/2018 and Rent Setting** – The Committee received a report updating them on the draft proposals on the HRA budgets and rent setting for 2017/18. Officers advised that the rents and service charges remained unchanged since it had been reported in December.
- **Draft 2017/18 Council Tax Setting and General Fund Budget** – Dealt with as a Budget and Policy Framework item at item 3.
- **Draft 2017/18 Draft Capital Forward Plan and 5 Year Capital Strategy Update** - Updated versions in colour of several of the charts shown in the report were circulated at the meeting. With reference to the bids that had come forward for funding, Members agreed with the view of the Executive that relevant Portfolio Holders and where appropriate Ward Members should be consulted on individual schemes at an early stage.
- **National Non Domestic Rates (NNDR) 2017/18 Tax Base** – The Committee was informed that the drafting of a report was not possible in the required timescale as changes to the 2017 rating list, changes to NNDR tariff and retained amounts and transitional arrangements, the timing of the Government announcing the new rules and the consequential changes required to software systems, had meant that testing to produce the NNDR1 form had started only in the week commencing 16 January 2017.
As the Local Government Finance Act 2012 required the tax base (NNDR1) to

be approved by 31 January 2017, determination of this matter could not wait until the next meeting of the Executive on 22 February and therefore the Executive had agreed that delegated authority be given to the Assistant Director (Finance & Estates) to take this decision following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources.

The Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) advised that any 'gains' resulting from the 2017/18 retained share should be ring-fenced in an allocated reserve to either refund the Collection Fund as a result of much higher level of appeals on the new list or used to meet the Council's regeneration ambitions. Members also asked officers to ensure that any future Invest to Save bids were tracked to enable a report to come back to Committee at an appropriate stage outlining the detail of the savings achieved.

It was **RESOLVED** (i) that the report be noted;

(ii) that in relation to the report on the Draft 2017/18 Draft Capital Forward Plan and 5 Year Capital Strategy Update, the views of the Executive that relevant Portfolio Holders and where appropriate Ward Members should be consulted on the individual schemes at an early stage be endorsed.

5. URGENT PART I DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

None

6. URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None

7. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was **RESOLVED** that:

1. Under Section 100(A) 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 involved 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. Members having considered the reasons for the following reports being in Part II and determined that the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

8. PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

None

9. URGENT PART II DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF OVERVIEW AND

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

None

10. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None

Chair