

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Wednesday 20 January 2016

Time: 6.00 p.m.

Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors L Martin-Haugh (Chair), P Bibby (Vice Chair), L Bell, L Briscoe, J Brown, M Downing, M Gardner, L Harrington, C Latif, R Parker CC and P Stuart.

Start / End Time Start Time: 6.00 p.m.
 End Time: 7.20 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

An apology for absence was received from Councillor S Mead.

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES – OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 16 DECEMBER 2015

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 16 December 2015 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. DRAFT 2016/2017 COUNCIL TAX SETTING AND GENERAL FUND BUDGET

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) introduced the report which detailed proposals for the Council's draft General Fund Budget for 2016/2017, the projected 2015/2016 General Fund Budget and the draft proposals for the 2016/2017 Council Tax.

A question was asked concerning the requirement to identify an alternative savings option to compensate for the Executive's decision not to realise Community Transport Service savings of £14,050. The Committee was advised it was a matter of principle to seek to do so that the savings target identified in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy was achieved and savings shortfalls were not funded from reserves which in the long term would be unsustainable.

In reply to a further question when the meeting had moved into its Part II session the Committee was advised of the savings options discussed by the Leader's Services Priority Group (LSPG) that had been rejected by the Executive.

The Committee did not wish for any comments to be incorporated into the final report.

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

4. 2016/2017 DRAFT CAPITAL FORWARD PLAN AND 5 YEAR CAPITAL STRATEGY UPDATE

The Committee was reminded that this 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) presented the report which detailed revisions to the 2015/2016 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme, sought approval to the draft Capital Programme for 2016/2017 and updated Members on the Council's draft 5 year Capital Strategy.

The Committee was advised that all the General Fund capital growth bids had been considered challenged and prioritised by LSPG prior to their inclusion in the draft 2015/2016 onwards Capital Strategy.

A question was asked concerning parking enforcement and the provision of parking bays the Committee was advised that works would generally be prioritised on highway safety grounds and it was noted that the recommendations of the Broadwater Parking Survey had yet to be fully implemented.

In reply to a further question the Committee was advised of potential funding sources to allow the capital bid for improvements to the Forum Square to be included in the Capital Strategy in 2016/17

The Committee did not wish for any comments to be incorporated into the final report.

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

5. 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 27 January 2016, it be considered on this occasion.

Housing Revenue Account Final Budget Proposals 2016/2017 and Rent Setting

The Assistant Director (Finance) presented the report which provided Members with an update on the proposals on the HRA budgets and rent settings for 2016/17 which would be considered by Council on 26 January 2016.

In reply to a question concerning communication to tenants the Committee was advised that all tenants would receive a comprehensive leaflet detailing changes to the rents and services structure and that drop-in sessions would be arranged for those requiring further assistance.

Final Council Tax Support Scheme

The Assistant Director Finance presented the report which provided an update on the local Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme implemented from April 2015 and proposed a local CTS scheme for 2016/2017.

In reply to a question it was confirmed that the 2% social care precept increase as shown in table 3b referred solely to the County Council precept element of the total.

In reply to a further question it was confirmed that it was the Council's intention to review the Council Tax Support Scheme in 2016/2017 for the following financial year 2017/2018.

Draft 2016/2017 Council Tax Setting and General Fund Budget

This report was dealt with as a Budget and Policy Framework item at item 3.

National and Non-Domestic Rates 2016/2017 Tax Base

The Committee was advised that this report had been withdrawn from the Executive agenda and authority to approve the tax base had been delegated to the Assistant Director Finance, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources.

In reply to a question concerning the Government's announcement on the retention of Business Rates the Committee was advised that the provisional settlement had been drawn up under the existing regime pending the outcome of the consultation process.

Council Tax Base 2016/2017

The Assistant Director Finance presented the report which sought approval of the Council Tax Base for 2016/2017.

In reply to a question concerning the reduction in provisions for bad debts the Committee was advised that as the levels of Council Tax Support given reduced there would be a corresponding drop in the level of bad debt provision for those payments.

2016/2017 Draft Capital Forward Plan and 5 Year Capital Strategy Update

This report was dealt with as a Budget and Policy Framework item at item 4.

Review of the Implementation of the Allocations Scheme

The Head of Housing Management presented the report which detailed the operation

of the first twelve months of the Allocations Scheme which had been implemented in January 2015.

Members then asked a number of detailed questions about the 5 year rule, key-workers, exemptions and the reduction in the numbers on the allocations list which were answered by the Officer.

The Committee was advised that a further review of the scheme was possible in 2016/2017 due to a number of pending changes to legislation.

Revised Rent and Service Charging Policy.

The Assistant Director Housing Services presented the report which recommended amendments to the Council's Rent and Service Charge Policy in line with the draft Welfare Reform and Work Bill.

In reply to a question it was confirmed that the 1% rent reduction would be cumulative over the next 4 years.

SBC ICT Strategy 2016/2018

The Head of Business and Technology Services introduced the report which set out proposals for the Council's new ICT strategy.

The Committee was advised that the Executive had expressed an interest in the provision of tablets as 'pool' equipment.

The Committee was further advised that the Executive had discussed ICT training for Members and were of the view that a 'one size fits all' approach would be inappropriate.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following Part I decisions taken by the Executive at its meeting on 19 January 2016 be noted:

- Minutes – 15 December 2015
- Minutes – Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees
- Housing Revenue Account Draft Budget Proposals 2016/2017 and Rent Setting
- Final Council Tax Support Scheme
- Draft 2016/2017 Council Tax Setting and General Fund Budget
- National and Non-Domestic Rates 2016/2017 Tax Base
- Council Tax Base 2016/2017
- 2016/2017 Draft Capital Forward Plan and 5 Year Capital Strategy Update
- Review of the Implementation of the Allocations Scheme
- Revised Rent and Service Charge Setting Policy
- SBC ICT Strategy 2016-2018

6. URGENT PART 1 DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

None.

7. URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

8. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Not required.

9. PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

This report had not been circulated to Members five clear days before the meeting. The Chair determined however that given the short time left before the end of the call-in period on 27 January 2016, it be considered on this occasion.

BMO Review and Improvement Plan

Members asked a number of detailed questions about the report which were answered by the Officer.

Framework for the Provision of Agency Workers – Contract Award

Members asked a number of detailed questions about the report which were answered by the Officer.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following part 1 decisions of the Executive be noted:

- BMO Review and Improvement Plan
- Framework for the Provision of Agency Workers – Contract Award

10. URGENT PART II DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

None.

11. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

Chair