

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Wednesday 17 February 2016

Time: 6.00 p.m.

Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors L Martin-Haugh (Chair), L Bell, J Brown, M Downing, M Gardner, C Latif, S Mead, 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 Councillors P Bibby, L Briscoe and L Harrington.

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES – OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 20 JANUARY 2016

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 20 January 2016 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. 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 24 February it be considered on this occasion.

Minutes – Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees

A Member commented that the Council could consider giving Local Community Budgets a higher profile on its website.

In reply the Committee was advised that this issue would be considered when the website was refreshed.

Prudential Code Indicators and Treasury Management Strategy 2016/17

The Assistant Director Finance presented the report and advised the Committee that the proposed review of the Council's Treasury Management Strategy would be comprehensive and include input from the Audit Committee.

2016/17 Council Tax Setting and General Fund Budget

The Assistant Director (Finance) presented the report which outlined the Council's General Fund Budget for 2016/17 and proposals for the 2016/17 Council Tax prior for recommendation to Council.

The Committee asked a number of questions about the level of the proposed Council Tax increase and the impact on Council services.

In reply the Officer advised the Committee that the increase was one of a number of measures outlined in the report to meet the ongoing challenges of a reducing Revenue Support Grant, other central government initiatives and inflationary pressures. However it was understood that it was the Council's intention to protect frontline services wherever possible as consultation exercises with the townspeople had indicated a preference amongst residents for increases to service charges and Council Tax ahead of any cuts to meet budgetary targets.

To clarify, the Committee was further advised that the 2.65% increase would be applied across all council tax bandings.

In reply to a further question the Committee was advised that the cost to the Council of freezing Council Tax would be approximately £130,000 cumulatively per year. It was noted that a 'Freeze Grant' from central government would not be payable to the Council to offset this loss of revenue.

2016/17 Capital Forward Plan and 5 Year Capital Strategy

The Assistant Director (Finance) presented the report which provided an update to the 5 Year Capital Strategy and detailed the final Capital Programmes for 2016/2017 prior to recommendation to Council.

In reply to a question concerning the repayment of 'Right to Buy' receipts the Committee was advised that the Council was exploring every avenue to retain these receipts. Options under consideration included collaboration with neighbouring authorities and purchase of new build properties.

Crime Reporting and Performance

The Head of Service (Chief Executive's Unit) presented the report and informed the Committee that this item had moved to Part I following clearance from Herts Constabulary being given to the figures quoted in the report.

The Committee was advised that the Executive had requested a report with a more

detailed breakdown of the data for their April meeting. The initial report had been requested as a result of a balanced scorecard presentation and the purpose of that report was to recognise the changes in crime reporting and question the level of policing resource allocated to the town.

A Member commented that the facility provided (under Section 136 of the Mental Health Act) at the Lister Hospital had been relocated outside of Stevenage. As a result more Police Officer time was being spent supervising the A&E Department with a knock on impact on the amount of resource available for policing work in the town. The Head of Service (Chief Executive's Unit) undertook to raise this issue with the Police.

It was noted that the Executive did not have access to the data provided at appendix A when the initial report was commissioned. The Committee recommended that the Executive receive this information when reviewing the final report at their April meeting.

Part II Minutes – Executive 19 January 2016

A Member requested that where figures in reports were corrected at meetings the minutes should record detailed reasons for the changes.

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

- Executive Minutes – Tuesday 19 January 2016
- Minutes – Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees
- Prudential Code Indicators and Treasury Management Strategy 2016/17
- 2016/17 Council Tax Setting and General Fund Budget
- 2016/17 Capital Forward Plan and 5 Year Capital Strategy Update
- Crime Reporting and Performance
- Executive Part II Minutes – Tuesday 19 January 2016.

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

It was **RESOLVED** that the following urgent Part I decision authorised by the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 25 January 2016 be noted:

- National Non-Domestic Rates 2016/2017 Tax Base

5. URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

6. 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 SI2006 No.88.

2. Members having considered the reasons for the following item being in Part II and determined that the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

7. PART II MINUTES – OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 20 JANUARY 2016.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 20 January 2016 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

8. PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

None

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

None.

10. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

Chair