

ST STEPHEN PARISH COUNCIL

In the District of St.Albans, County of Hertfordshire



**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL
HELD AT THE PARISH CENTRE, STATION ROAD
BRICKET WOOD, ST ALBANS, HERTS
ON 19 JANUARY 2017 AT 7.30 pm**

Present: Mick Freeman (Chairman), Dorothy Kerry (Vice Chairman)
John Bell, David Brannen, Wendy Berriman, Martin Doyle, Ian Getley,
John Parker, Bill Pryce, Nicholas Tyndale and Eileen Whittaker
In attendance: One Member of public
Officers in attendance: Mrs J Pienaar (Clerk)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were accepted from Cllr Karen Hurford.

2. TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS

There were none.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 17 NOVEMBER 2016

RESOLVED: *Proposed: Cllr Pryce* *Seconded: Cllr Parker* **Motion Carried**
That the minutes be approved as a true record.
Votes in favour: unanimous

4. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

There were no items.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no requests.

6. TO CONSIDER THE 2016/17 PRECEPT

Members referred to the Precept Review report. The Clerk explained the report and how the draft budget had been prepared.

The Income & Expenditure budget met the council's day to day services and included income from the council's activities. The forecast figures to the end of March 2017 were expected to show some excess income sufficient to cover the core 2017/18 Rolling Replacement programme.

The 2017/18 I&E budget had been set with the Governance and Accountability guidance 'be optimistic about spending plans and pessimistic about income levels'. A 2.5% increment had been applied across the board with variations as appropriate, for example: an increase in Buildings insurance cover as a valuation review was due in 2017; a reduction in waste disposal as dog waste collection had been brought back in-house; as well as a reduction in the Street Furniture and Discounts Allowed budgets. The figures showed a funding gap of £29k, the majority of which could be attributed to the loss of the £27k share of the Local Council Tax Support grant.

The funds held in Reserves were held and earmarked for particular projects. It was suggested that the Reserves be reviewed in May/June together with the prioritised 2017/18 project list.

The Council was required to hold a Working Balance of between 3 and 12 months expenditure to enable it to continue to provide services in the face of unforeseen circumstances. The Council usually held the equivalent of 4 months. The balance currently held was above 3 months but below 4 months. It was suggested that the balance remain at current levels.

The council's Rolling Replacement Programme for 2017 amounted to £48,5k, of which £20k was toward the improvement of the parish play areas. It was recommended that funding toward the Play Area improvement project be considered in conjunction with the Reserves and 2017/18 projects in May/June.

Each Committee had considered its forthcoming projects and prioritised them. The total amount required to progress all #1 priorities was £53k. It was recommended this be reviewed in May/June.

It was explained that the Local Council Tax Support replaced the Council Tax Benefit scheme in April 2013. This imposed a duty on the District Council to create a local scheme to support working-age people on low income to pay their tax. The LCTS reduced the St Stephen tax base from 6429. The 2017/18 tax base of 6295 still had not reached that of 2013. The Government issued a grant to soften the impact of the change and earmarked a portion for Parish Councils which St Albans District Council had honourably passed onto the Parish Councils. In 2017 there was no LCTS grant, resulting in the loss of £27k of income to St Stephen Parish. Whilst some of the local Parish Councils had increased their precept in 2013, those which had not, faced a similar decision as St Stephen.

The Parish could increase its precept between 0% and 7.2% (being the maximum amount required to meet the deficit). A 7.2% increment in the precept equated to a 39p per week increase in the Band D rate. Even with such an increase it was noted that the Band D rate would still be lower than that levied in 2016 by several of the other Parish Councils in the District.

The Council had demonstrated that it set its precept responsibly. Over the last five years the precept had been increased by an average of 2.65%. The Council continues to identify savings, such as the dog waste and long-term agreement with the insurance provider. The Council continued to seek to ways to maximise its potential income and had formed a Generating Income Working Party to focus on just that. The Working Party had looked closely at all proposals. The Parish Council had been successful in securing s106 funds ensuring that the community saw the benefit from income arising out of development in the parish and had committed to pursue s106 where possible.

A Member queried the amount paid toward the upkeep of Bricket Wood Common and asked whether that could be reduced. It was explained that the District Council collected the funds to manage the Common from residents and that the Parish Council did not receive that income.

A member suggested that the Generating Income Working Party incorporate the review of savings and efficiencies.

Another Member warned that the Government will cap precepts in future. He suggested that the Council's interest rates be reviewed and that the CCLA be considered.

There was a broad consensus that the Parish found itself in an exceptional situation with £26k less income than in previous years. It was felt that an increment was justifiable as it was not attributable to poor management.

PROPOSED: *Proposed: Cllr Pryce Seconded: Cllr Brannen Motion Unsuccessful*
That the precept be increased by 3%.

COUNTER
PROPOSED: *Proposed: Cllr Bell Motion Unsuccessful*
That the precept be increased by 8p per week.

COUNTER
PROPOSED & RESOLVED: *Proposed: Cllr Kerry Seconded: Cllr Getley Motion Carried*
That the precept be increased by 6p per week (4.85%) to £68.46 per year.
Votes in favour: 9 Votes against: 2 Abstentions: 0

The Council thanked the Clerk for preparing the draft Precept report.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.30pm.

If you require this document in an alternative format please contact the Parish Office to discuss your requirements.

The Parish Office may be contacted by telephone, email, fax or post.

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