

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 21 JANUARY 2016 AT 7.30 pm**

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

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were accepted from Cllrs David Brannen and Karen Hurford.

2. TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS

There were none.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19 NOVEMBER 2015

RESOLVED: *Proposed: Cllr Bell* *Seconded: Cllr Getley* **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 2015/16 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 was required to meet the council's day to day services and included income derived from council's activities. The forecasted figures to the end of March 2015 were expected to show excess income mainly due to grant funding received and savings made during the year. The 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 with variations as considered appropriate. Over half the funding gap could be directly attributed to the additional £3.5k added at the request of the Trees & Woodlands Committee to enable the Council to respond to its tree survey, as well as increases in the budget for maintenance of the football grounds at Greenwood Park and in respect of the Council's DSE policy. The Income Generating Working Party had been working on identified areas in an effort to reduce the gap.

The funds held in Reserves were specifically allocated to particular projects. Funding had already been re-allocated within the Reserves to enable Year 1 of the Play Area Rolling Replacement Programme in order to take advantage of significant savings through bulk purchase.

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 Working Balance held was above 3 months but below 4 months. It was suggested that this remain as is and meet any shortfall in the 2016 Rolling Replacement Programme.

The council's Rolling Replacement Programme for 2016 amounted to £32k. It was proposed that this be met by excess income at the year end and any deficit drawn from the Working Balance.

Each Committee had considered its forthcoming projects and prioritised them. The total amount required to progress #1 and #2 priorities was £66k. To raise enough to finance the priority #1 projects of £21,5k would require a substantial and uncomfortable increase in the precept. It was therefore proposed that priorities be pared back to £8k and further reduced by taking into account the return of the £5k loan made to the 2016 Festival event.

It was noted that a 3.3% increase in the precept would be an increase of £2.09 per year to Band D households and that it would still be lower than that levied in 2015 by five out of the nine St Albans' Parish and Town Councils, two of which were rural.

The Chairman of the Trees & Woodlands Committee explained the need for additional funding to respond to the tree survey and manage dangerous trees.

Cllr Doyle joined the meeting.

Another Councillor warned that the precept could be capped in future years and that when it was implemented an excess would trigger a referendum.

A Member noted that whilst the option of no increase was desirable, it did not allow for priority projects. The strong argument regarding capping was noted. The Council would have to work harder on costs and generating income.

It was noted that the Parish Council did not receive Government grants as did the higher tier authorities.

In response to a query it was confirmed that a 2.9% precept increase would be an increase of £1.84 per year per Band D household.

PROPOSED: *Proposed: Cllr Berriman* *Seconded: Cllr Getley*
That the precept be increased by 2.9% (Band D +15 pence per week)

COUNTER- *Proposed: Cllr Bell* *Seconded: Cllr Freeman* **Motion unsuccessful**
PROPOSED: That the precept be increased by 3.1% (Band D +16 pence per week)
Votes in favour: 3 *Votes against: 6* *Abstentions: 0*

RESOLVED: *Proposed: Cllr Berriman* *Seconded: Cllr Getley* **Motion Carried**
That the precept be increased by 2.9% (Band D—15 pence per week)
Votes in favour: 6 *Votes against: 3* *Abstentions: 0*

Each Committee was asked to review how it could reduce its project budgets to meet the shortfall and suggested that all Members consider ways in which savings could be made.

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

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.15 pm.

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