

Business ratepayers' consultation

13 February 2018

Attendees:-

- Alice Charrington, Tymperleys
- Shahram Bagherzadeh, Voice Loop & Data
- Ian Morehouse, Flakt Woods
- David Cant, Birkett Long
- Nicholas & Sheila Charrington, Layer Marney Tower
- Cllr Paul Smith,
- Cllr Annie Feltham
- Cllr Tim Young
- Sean Plummer, Strategic Finance Manager
- Karen Turnbull, Economic Growth

Sean Plummer presented information on the Council's 2018/19 budget. The following points were discussed on the budget presentation:

- Revenue Support Grant (RSG) has been **cut by £645k (70%) and was now only £275k for next year (it was £11m in 2010/11)**
- The reforms to New Homes Bonus were reducing the grant CBC received had been **cut by £1.34m (28%)**
- General cost pressures from inflation (pay and prices etc added to cost pressures
- Budget includes £2.8m of savings and income.
- £0.9m of this is a reduction in how much we can spend from NHB due to the grant cut.
- Most other saving or income related to anticipated savings through earned income and business process changes.
- Proposal of an increase of £4.95 (2.8%) in Council Tax, the second increase in 8 years and in line with assumptions made by Government.
- Over the next three years we are now showing a gap of £2.6m. This includes a number of savings already planned for the next 2 years.
- The changes to NHB means that the grant will be fall by about a **further £1.2m** in the next two years. The MTFF assumes this reduction will be balanced by spending less on one-off investment.

Sean also presented details of business rate changes including SBRR (small business rate relief), discretionary relief provided by the Council.

There was a general discussion on the Council's changing budget position including:-

- The methodology of the NHB grant and whether this grant increased because of increased housing numbers.
- Income from business rates and the risk posed by appeals

Karen Turnbull then presented a summary of the Annual Economic Report and there was a discussion on the findings within the report.

A number of other areas were then raised by attendees including:-

- The Council's broadband strategy and ensuring that this was priced appropriately and delivered what business needed.
- Road infrastructure, including in the Northern Gateway area.
- The potential Business Improvement District (BID).
- concern around future take up of apprenticeships following a change in criteria for funding them (a national issue)
- Whether the current election cycle provides the framework for longer term planning.
- Whilst it was understood that responsibility for different functions rested with either Colchester Borough Council and Essex County Council attendees all stressed it was essential for business that both councils worked together to resolve issues to support business.