

Minutes of a Meeting of: Business Panel information meeting on the 2015-16 budget

held on: 9th February 2015 – 6pm

Present: Cllr. Alan Law, Executive Portfolio Member for Finance and Economic Development
 Stephen McKinnon, Owner, Abstract Precision Bodyworks
 Steve Painter, Painter PR
 Jackie Osborne, Buzz Magazine
 Tim King, FSE Group
 John Middleton, Handelsbanken
 David Pickett, Parkway
 Matthew Hensby, Sovereign
 Jane Grunseid, WBEBP
 Jon Thompson, WBTC
 Andy Walker, Head of Finance
 Apologies from Cllr Gordon Lundie, Leader West Berkshire Council
 Bill Blackett, Revenues & Benefits Manager
 Janet Duffield, Economic Development Officer

	<u>Action</u>
<p>1. PROPOSED BUDGET 2015-16</p> <p>Cllr Law gave an outline of the meeting including the processes followed to arrive at the budget and also outlined the strategic themes underlying the Council's budget as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use YOUR money wisely • Protect Essential Services • Invest for the Future • Helping communities and residents to help themselves <p>Cllr. Gordon Lundie's "talking head" video found on the Council's website was played to the meeting.</p> <p>Cllr. Law introduced the budget for 2015-16 and circulated a high level summary document that outlined the key points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0% council tax rise from WBC ▪ Focus our investments on:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintaining roads and transport infrastructure Schools The vulnerable Superfast Broadband ICT 	

- Retained support for:
 - Core frontline services
 - Libraries & Leisure centres
 - Arts & Culture
 - Countryside
- Improved Council Efficiencies

The document also showed some headline figures.

There then followed some comments and questions from the group:

SM- asked about the process and percentages for business rate retention and Cllr. Law gave an explanation of this. SM then asked why the budget papers appeared to make no direct reference to the business community and Cllr. Law explained that economic development was a key strand in meeting the needs of all stakeholders in the community and contained many strands to deliver the right environment for business to grow and develop.

DP raised concerns over Planning resource levels if the economy was improving and application numbers were on the increase and Cllr. Law reassured everyone that this area was appropriately resourced to deliver the expected service requirements in 2015/16.

JT stressed the need for a Post 16 strategy to address localised skill shortages and NEETS. Cllr. Law acknowledged this point and mentioned the role of the LEP and City Deal that will assist with addressing some of these concerns.

The meeting closed at 7.20pm