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The Editor
Stevenage Comet

5.3.2017.

Dear Sir

In addition to my reported comments on the Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) council tax setting meeting for 17/18 (Comet, 2 March, page 5) it should also be recorded that at the meeting – where a 2.6% increase was agreed - I made some other points, such as:

- the town centre car park charges are too high (thus risking diminishing returns)
- a call to devolve more local budgets to individual wards or councillors (and to increase these local budgets as soon as possible)
- I commended the on-going work of the all-party Financial Security Group (from which nearly all the vast savings in recent years have originated, and which led in turn to a freeze in the SBC council tax for 6 years from 10/11 to 15/16 inclusive).

I remain very critical however about the way each year that the Labour majority deal with the annual New Homes Bonus (NHB) from central government. This year it amounts to over £445,000 and, as usual, the majority group's plans for it were announced briefly at the budget meeting, with no time for discussion, and then sent to the so-called Scrutiny Committee two days later, on 2 March.

The Scrutiny Committee has 13 members, 10 of whom are Labour, and of the 13, only 7 including myself were at the meeting on 2 March. The reports presented there were incomplete, had errors and in some cases added no information. Everything in them could have been properly presented weeks before. This is no way to scrutinise nearly half a million pounds of local council tax payers' money!

Yours sincerely

Robin Parker

