

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee held in the Council Chamber at the Guildhall, Gainsborough on Thursday 14 January 2016 commencing at 6.30 pm.

Present: Councillor Tom Regis (Chairman)
Councillor Ian Fleetwood (Vice Chairman)

Councillor Owen Bierley
Councillor Matthew Boles
Councillor Alex Bridgwood
Councillor David Cotton
Councillor Michael Devine
Councillor Adam Duguid
Councillor John McNeill
Councillor Jeff Summers
Councillor Anne Welburn

In Attendance:
Ian Knowles Director of Resources
Alan Robinson Strategic Lead Democratic and Business Support
Alison McCulloch Revenues Team Manager
Angela Matthews Benefits Team Manager
Dinah Lilley Governance and Civic Officer

Apologies: Councillor Reg Shore

Membership: No substitutes were appointed

62 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

63 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee held on 10 November 2015 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

64 MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Cotton sought assurance that all Members were eligible for a blanket dispensation for the report which set the Council Tax Base. It was affirmed that this was a 'provided for exemption'.

Note Councillor Duguid arrived at 6.33pm

65 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE SETTING OUT CURRENT POSITION OF PREVIOUSLY AGREED ACTIONS AS AT 6 JANUARY 2016 (CPR.44 15/16).

Members gave consideration to the Matters Arising Schedule which set out the current position of all previously agreed actions as at 6 January 2016.

RESOLVED that progress on the Matters Arising Schedule as set out in report CPR.44 15/16 be noted.

66 COLLECTION FUND SURPLUS AND COUNCIL TAX BASE (CPR.45 15/16)

The Strategic Lead Democratic and Business Support presented the report which set out the declaration of the estimated surplus on the Council's Collection Fund relating to Council Tax at the end of March 2016 and how it was shared amongst the constituent precepting bodies.

The Council was required to declare an estimate of the surplus or deficit that would occur on the Collection Fund at the end of each year. The Collection Fund recorded the amount of income collected from Council Tax, together with precept payments to principal authorities. These elements would generate a surplus or a deficit which had to be taken into account when determining the Council Tax for the following year.

The report also set out the Council tax base calculation for 2016/17. The tax base was a key component in calculating both the budget requirement and the council tax charge. Any surplus or deficit generated through the Collection Fund in relation to Council Tax was shared between the County Council, the Lincolnshire Police Authority and West Lindsey District Council in the same proportion as the amount of their precepts for 2015/16.

The amount calculated as available from the Collection Fund for distribution during 2016/17 has been calculated as £1,255,000, of which £202,083 had to be taken into account when the Council set its element of the Council Tax for 2016/17.

The overall tax base for 2016/17 was estimated to be 28,878.71 (total of parishes set out in the appendix to the report) Band D properties.

The paper was moved, seconded and voted upon.

RESOLVED that:

- a) the estimated surplus of £202,083 be noted as accruing in the Council's Collection Fund at 31 March 2016 relating to an estimated Council Tax surplus;
- b) the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee recommend to Council that it use its element of the Collection fund surplus in calculating the level of Council Tax in 2016/17; and
- c) the calculations of the Council's tax base for 2016/17 as set out in Appendix A be recommended to Council for approval, and that in accordance with the Local Authorities' (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1993 (as amended), the tax base for each part of the Authority's area shall be as set out in Appendix B.

67 LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT (CPR.46 15/16)

The Revenues Team Manager presented the report which sought approval for Council to agree the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for West Lindsey DC for 2016/17.

As a result of changes made by Central Government, Council Tax Support was introduced on 1 April 2013 to replace Council Tax Benefit. The Council was required to review the Council Tax Support Scheme each year to ensure it continued to reflect the needs of the community and that it remained as fair as possible with the funding available. Whilst previously, 100% of the cost of Council Tax Benefit payments were reimbursed to local authorities, this was no longer the case and it was becoming increasingly difficult to fund the scheme as it currently existed with the continued reductions in funding. In addition, the council needed to take into account the recent welfare reforms announced by the government, which could mean more people on low incomes would need help, or more help, to pay the council tax.

The scheme was administered at a local level but claimants who had reached pension age were protected by legislation and therefore any changes that might be made to the scheme would only affect working-age people. A local scheme was adopted and approved by full Council in January 2013 and this scheme was re-adopted for 2014/15 and for 2015/16.

Re-modelling of the scheme had taken place and a consultation with suggestions for possible amendments to the scheme had been conducted. The consultation took place between 29 September 2015 and 6 November 2015 with residents, voluntary groups, stakeholders and citizen panel members and was available both on-line and via a hard copy.

The results of the consultation were included in the report to help inform the decision making process. The finalised local council tax support scheme must be approved and adopted by Full Council by 31 January 2016 at the very latest.

The report set out five options for consideration for the 2016/17 scheme. Option 1 was considered the most appropriate for recommendation for Council approval. The proposed main change to the scheme under this option was to reduce the amount of support provided from 91.5% to 90%.

Option 1 was moved, seconded and voted upon.

RESOLVED that, having considered the contents of the report and consultation responses and read the Equality Impact Assessment at Appendix D the Committee agrees Option 1 as the preference for the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for West Lindsey District Council for 2016/17 and recommends this to Council for approval.

68 COMMITTEE WORK PLAN (CPR.47 15/16)

The Governance and Civic Officer introduced the Committee Work Plan, which would be updated for 2016-2017 in due course.

RESOLVED that the Work Plan be noted.

69 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED that under Section 100 (A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

Note Councillor Bridgwood arrived at 6.45pm

70 NATIONAL NON DOMESTIC RATES, COUNCIL TAX AND HOUSING BENEFIT OVERPAYMENTS WRITE OFFS (CPR.48 15/16)

The Revenues Team Manager presented the report detailing debts which had been assessed as irrecoverable.

The National Non Domestic Rate write offs were split into two totals the first accounts totalling £51,960.74 related, in the main, to businesses that had gone into liquidation or individual bankruptcy. The second totalling £45,374.85 related to accounts that had been incurred due to action taken by the Valuation Officer. These debts were however unexpected charges raised due to the actions of the Valuation Office and was not money that was expected to be paid.

The report also summarised Council Tax debts, Housing Benefit Overpayments and Sundry Debtor accounts, and set out reasons for the writing off of the accounts.

Members were reminded that the writing off of these debts did not preclude the writing back should any further details come to light that might affect the accounts.

Members questioned whether support was offered to businesses that were struggling, in an attempt to maintain trade until recovery was possible. The Strategic Lead for Democratic and Business Support informed the Committee that there were mechanisms for applying for hardship relief, which would have to be proven and scrutinised. Comments were made on the old fashioned system of National Non Domestic Rates which was not considered relevant in current society.

Officers were congratulated on their diligence in continuing to maintain a high record of collection wherever possible.

The recommendations in the report were moved, seconded and voted upon.

RESOLVED that:

- a) the write off arrears of National Non Domestic rates to the value of £97,335.59 be agreed;
- b) the write off arrears of Council Tax to the Value of £2,721.52 be agreed;
- c) the write off arrears of Housing Benefit Overpayments to the value of £2,261.34 be agreed; and
- d) the write off arrears of Sundry Debtor Accounts to the value of £7,062.80 be agreed.

The meeting concluded at 7.05 pm.

Chairman