

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
SPECIAL COUNCIL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE  
HELD ON THURSDAY 31 JANUARY 2013 FROM 8.45PM TO 9.00PM**

*Present: Bob Wyatt (Chairman), Keith Baker (substitute), Prue Bray, David Lee, Anthony Pollock and Rob Stanton*

*Also present:- Alistair Corrie, Michael Firmager, Charlotte Haitham Taylor, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen and Julian McGhee-Sumner*

**PART I**

**13. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 29 November 2012 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**14. APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor UllaKarin Clark. Councillor Keith Baker substituted for Councillor Clark.

**15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors Keith Baker, Prue Bray, David Lee and Bob Wyatt declared a personal interest in agenda Item No 16.00 Council Tax Base 2013/14 by virtue of the fact that they were all members of a Town or Parish Council mentioned in the report. Councillors Baker, Bray, Lee and Wyatt took part in discussions and voted on the matter.

**16. COUNCIL TAX BASE 2013/14**

*(Councillors Keith Baker, Prue Bray, David Lee and Bob Wyatt declared a personal interest in this item)*

The Committee considered a report relating to the Council Tax Base for 2013/14 in respect of the whole Borough and all constituent parts, which amounted to 63,436.4 properties, in order that each precepting parish could subsequently set their Council Tax budgets for the year.

It was noted that due to a reduction in Government grant Councils were now required to implement a Council Tax Support Scheme which would set out how savings would be made to offset this grant loss. The Council was therefore proposing to allocate £165,000 to parishes from its Start-up Assessment to offset most of the reduction in the council tax base. This would be allocated on a pro rata basis dependent on the losses suffered by each parish as a result of the council tax benefit changes.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) the proposed 2013/14 Council Tax Base of 63,436.4 for the whole area, and by parish, as set out in the report, be approved;
- 2) the proposed allocation of the £165,000 grant to the parishes as set out in the Council Tax Base table be approved.

**17. LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME**

The Committee considered a report setting out a proposed Localised Council Tax Support Scheme which would ensure that all working age Borough residents who may experience

financial difficulties in paying their council tax liabilities had access to a scheme that offered financial assistance.

Councillor Anthony Pollock reported that previously the Government themselves had set the Scheme which Councils had been required to operate and then claim the amount that had been paid from the Government. The current Scheme changed the amount of money that Councils received from effectively a reimbursement into a grant. It was noted that the grant was fixed and was actually 95% of what was received last year which equated to approximately a £600k funding reduction.

The Council had the choice of getting council tax payers to pay the difference or develop a scheme. It was therefore proposed to introduce a scheme which would meet about 80% of the shortfall by reducing periods of council tax discount which would mostly affect people moving house. It was confirmed that as much as possible had been done to consider the needs of the Council's vulnerable residents and the changes would not apply to pensioners who would be exempt.

Councillor Bray were pleased to note that Wokingham was not attempting to extract money from people with the least as around 74% of councils in the country had opted for schemes where everybody was being made to pay something however little money they had. However she did have some concerns about the new scheme particularly because under the previous scheme if you got back into work you could have up to four weeks worth of payments to get you over the period until you were paid. Also there did not appear to be any provision for backdating claims. It was noted that the hardship fund should address some of these concerns and also some money had been set aside for employment related support. Councillor Bray asked to be provided with details of how the hardship fund would operate.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) a local council tax support scheme, known as council tax reduction, be created based on the Government Default scheme but subject to the proposed changes set out in the report;
- 2) the levels of discount for council tax charging in respect of certain classes of empty property be changed in accordance with the details set out in the report;
- 3) the full disregard currently allowed for War Widows and War Disability Pensions be continued from 1 April 2013 in respect of the prescribed and local council tax support schemes;
- 4) Officers devise a hardship fund scheme, to be approved by the Executive Member for Finance and the Strategic Director of Resources, to operate in 2013/14.

**18. NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATES RETURN 1 (NNDR 1)**

The Committee considered a report setting out the 2013/14 National Non-Domestic Rates Return 1 which now, under the Local Government Finance Act 2012, had to be approved by Council or a delegated body.

Councillor Anthony Pollock went through the report and highlighted that the Business Rate Baseline was calculated at £25.4m. The baseline funding level used by the Government in the Start Up Assessment figure, mentioned earlier in the meeting, in the provisional

settlement was £12.3m. The tariff was the difference between these two figures i.e. approx £13.1m which was payable to the Government.

During discussions Members asked if there was anything that could be done to speed up the Valuation Office to ensure that the large number of appeals outstanding were dealt with more quickly. Councillor Pollock felt it was unlikely that this could be achieved but confirmed that he would be happy to write to the appropriate body.

Councillor Bray asked if information could be provided on proposals to provide rate relief under the Localism Act and how it was intended to operate such a scheme. It was noted that an estimate of £50k for such a scheme had been included for 2013/14.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) the 2013/14 National Non-Domestic Rates Return 1 (NNDR 1), including the baseline yield figure of £25,401,445, be noted and approved;
- 2) in future approval of the NNDR 1 be delegated to the Executive.

*These are the Minutes of a meeting of the Special Council Executive Committee*

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