

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SPECIAL COUNCIL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
HELD ON THURSDAY 30 JANUARY 2014 FROM 8.55PM TO 9.05PM**

Present: UllaKarin Clark (Chairman), Chris Singleton (Vice Chairman), Prue Bray, Anthony Pollock and Rob Stanton

PART I

5. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25 July 2013 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

6. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor David Lee.

7. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

8. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions received.

9. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

There were no Member questions received.

10. COUNCIL TAX BASE 2014/15

The Committee considered a report relating to the Council Tax Base for 2014/15 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 financial year.

The Executive Member for Finance advised the meeting that every year there was a need to approve the tax base which formed the basis around which the council tax was raised. Last year the Government decided to localise council tax benefit and implemented this by providing a grant. They also changed the council tax base which affected town, parish and other preceptors and last year the Council received their grant from Government and passported it on to the towns and parishes in full. However as the Council's grant has been reduced, and due to other financial pressures, it has been decided to reduce the grant provided to town and parish councils to £100k; with a further £50k reduction in 15/16. The intention is to phase it out from 16/17 onwards.

Councillor Bray felt that it was unfortunate that the Government had not been quicker in coming forward with this information which was another argument for having a Council meeting in January. She also felt that it was a shame that given that £50k was a relatively small amount of money to the Borough Council that the towns and parishes were being top sliced and for a small parish the money could make a lot of difference. Councillor Bray provided the example of her ward, Winnersh, which would lose £2k; which was equivalent roughly to the predicted rise that was intended to be made to the precept this year.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the proposed Council Tax Base, for the whole area and by Parish, as set out in the report be agreed;

- 2) the proposed allocation of £100,000 grant to the parishes in respect of council tax reduction as set out in the council tax base table be approved and the further proposed grant allocation of £50,000 in 2015/16 and nil beyond 2015/16 be noted.

11. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME

The Committee considered a report setting out a proposed Localised Council Tax Reduction 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 Bray commented that she had felt that the scheme put forward last year had been good and the proposed changes would further enhance it.

Councillor Pollock thanked Kevin Mercer, the Head of Revenues and Benefits, who had come up with the scheme; had put forward these improvements and was also trying to establish links with the third sector to provide further support to help those people who had financial difficulties.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) a local CTR scheme for 2014 /15 be adopted on the same basis as the 2013/14 adopted scheme without change to the general entitlement criteria;
- 2) that all applicable amounts, premiums, allowances, disregards and deductions used in the calculation of entitlements be updated in line with the same increases applied to the Government set Prescribed and Default CTR schemes;
- 3) that the full disregard currently allowed for War Widows and War Disability Pensions be continued from 1 April 2014 in respect of the Prescribed and Local council tax reduction and housing benefit schemes;
- 4) that £10,000 be allocated to the hardship fund for those who cannot pay their council tax liabilities. This sum will be funded from the additional tax liabilities collected from the changes to empty property charges that are now levied;
- 5) that the relief allowed to general empty properties (former class C) liable for council tax be changed to 100% relief for 28 days only.

12. NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATES RETURN 1 (NNDR 1)

The Committee considered a report setting out the 2014/15 National Non-Domestic Rates Return 1.

Councillor Pollock informed the Committee that the non-domestic rate was primarily set by the Government but councils had to set the baseline figure. Because of how the localisation of business rates worked when somebody shuts a business the Council loses 50% of the business rates but when the Council builds something new it only gets to keep 25%.

In relation to rating appeals lodged with the Valuation Office, which were shown in the report as totalling £40m, Councillor Bray queried how much of the £40m might be at risk. The Director of Finance and Resources advised that the amount at risk was estimated to be in the region of £2.6m.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the 2014/15 National Non-Domestic Rates Return 1 (NNDR 1), including the baseline income figure of £25,992,567 be approved;
- 2) that in future approval of the NNDR 1 be delegated to the Director of Finance and Resources.

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

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