

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SPECIAL COUNCIL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
HELD ON 28 JANUARY 2016 FROM 8.55 PM TO 9.05 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Parry Batth (Chairman), Bob Pitts (Vice-Chairman), Anthony Pollock, Keith Baker, Angus Ross and Prue Bray

Other Councillors Present

Lindsay Ferris, Guy Grandison, Norman Jorgensen and Pauline Jorgensen

1. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence received.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 29 January 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions received.

5. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions received.

6. COUNCIL TAX BASE 2016/17

The Committee considered a report relating to the proposed Council Tax Base for 2016/17 in respect of the whole Borough and all constituent parts in order that each precepting body could subsequently set their Council Tax budgets for the year. It was noted that the higher the tax base the lower the tax burden.

Members were informed by the Executive Member for Economic Development and Finance that the tax base was the denominator used to calculate council tax. The tax base was based on the number of houses in the Borough which following a further calculation was converted into the number of Band D equivalents. This year's tax base calculations showed that with a total of 64,430 properties on the council tax register, and after making all relevant adjustments for discounts, exemptions, new builds, bad debts, etc, the proposed tax base of band D equivalents was 68,774.8 for 2016/17.

Councillor Pollock also advised that the Council would be allocating £80,000 to parishes, as set out in the table contained in the report, to offset some of the reduction in the council tax base arising from the council tax reduction system which replaced council tax benefit in April 2013.

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 an £80,000 grant to the parishes in respect of council tax reduction, as set out in the council tax base table contained in the report, be approved;
- 3) the proposed reduction in grant to the parishes in respect of the council tax reduction of £20,000 each year over the four years 2017/18-2020/21 be approved.

7. 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.

The Executive Member for Economic Development and Finance advised the meeting that from 1 April 2013 local authorities were given the responsibility for designing and administering their own local Council Tax Reduction Scheme which, following the withdrawal of the previous Government grant, now falls completely on the council tax payer. Following a review of the current scheme some minor changes were proposed which have recently been consulted upon. The principle of the revised Scheme was that everybody would pay something towards their council tax and that where there was more than one working adult in a household the fact that the other adult was working would be taken into account.

It was noted that there was a hardship fund available to assist council tax payers who could not pay their council tax liabilities, particularly as a result of changes for 16/17.

Councillor Bray stated that although she could see the justification for some of the changes being proposed eg restricting awards to Band D she was disappointed with the proposals for all recipients of Council Tax Reduction to pay a minimum of 10% towards their council tax liability because not everybody would have the money to pay their liability. Therefore she feared that there was a risk of ending up with a hole in the council tax collection fund. This could also lead to the Council having to pay for expensive court proceedings in order to prosecute more people for not paying their council tax; which would go against the anticipated saving.

Councillor Bray also felt that the way the report was worded seemed to suggest that the proposed changes had come out of the consultation but no details of the consultation outcomes, other than to say that the key views arising from the consultation were that the respondents generally supported the tightening of restrictions, were provided within the report. Therefore there was no way of knowing how many people had responded or what they had said. Councillor Bray further stated that she would be disappointed if there had been only 25 respondents and none of them had actually supported this proposal or the consequences had not actually been explained to them. Although Councillor Bray was in favour of parts of the proposed scheme she would not be able to support recommendation 1b as she felt it was a mistake.

Councillor Pollock responded that his recollection was that most of the respondents did support the principle set out in recommendation 1b. He also advised that in contrast to other neighbouring authorities, who were requesting a contribution of around 15% or over towards their residents' council tax liability, the Council had taken a more cautious approach.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) a local Council Tax Reduction (CTR) scheme for 2016/17 be adopted on the same basis as the 2015/16 scheme with the following changes:
 - a) Awards are restricted to Band D;
 - b) All recipients of CTR pay a minimum of 10% towards their council tax liability;
 - c) The band widths and levels of deduction made for a non-dependant be revised and increased. Currently deductions range from £3.74 to £11.36 over five income band widths, it is proposed to increase deductions to range from £3.74 to £13.00 over 6 income band widths;
- 2) all applicable amounts, premiums, allowances, disregards and deductions used in the calculation of entitlements be uprated in line with the same increases applied to the Government set Prescribed and Default CTR schemes, along with any other legislative changes;
- 3) the full disregard currently allowed for War Widows and War Disability Pensions be continued from 1 April 2016 in respect of the Prescribed and Local council tax reduction and housing benefit schemes;
- 4) funds be made available to the hardship fund, known as Section 13A, for those who cannot pay their council tax liabilities, particularly as a result of changes for 16/17. This sum will be funded from the general fund and spend is estimated at £6,000 for 15/16.