



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

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Our ref: CorpFin/02/19-20/DFS
Your ref:

Local Government Finance Settlement Team
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Dear Sir,

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE SETTLEMENT 2019/20 – CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Wokingham Borough Council welcomes the Government's decision not to enact the potential transfer of our council taxpayers' money to other councils through the imposition of Negative Revenue Support Grant. We hope that this baseline funding for 2019/20, without the imposition of Negative Revenue Support Grant, will be honoured in any new settlement beyond 2019/20. In the interest of sound financial planning, it is also important that any future settlement is for at least a four year period, in the same way as this one (for the period 2016/20).

The ministerial statement that accompanied the 2019/20 provisional settlement made reference to a new local government funding model based on needs and resources. We very much hope that the disproportionate amount of income we are already required to levy from our council taxpayers, as a result of our extremely low historical government funding, is not taken into account in a way that penalises them further. We also very much hope that there is a greater weighting given towards recognising the basic cost of delivering services, when determining need, as opposed to steering funding elsewhere as a result of recognising specific factors such as deprivation. In 2019/20, Wokingham will receive the lowest percentage of Settlement Funding Assessment Grant as a share of its total income, of any unitary authority. Wokingham will receive 11%, compared to some unitary councils for which government grants will fund over 40%, and on average 34%. As a result, the percentage of expenditure met by Wokingham council tax payers is already the highest of any unitary authority.

There are a number of one-off funding items included in the 2019/20 settlement and although additional funding is always welcome, it makes longer term financial planning difficult and therefore ongoing funding commitments in future settlements are strongly encouraged, particularly where they are required to address long term terms challenges within our statutory care services.

We believe that the continuation of the New Homes Bonus is important if local authorities are to remain financially incentivised for their work in "fixing our broken housing market", and therefore support its inclusion in the 2019/20 proposed settlement and hopefully its continued inclusion beyond 2019/20. We would however urge the Government to introduce measures to prevent housing developers sitting on significant Local Authority granted planning permissions and thereby frustrating housing delivery. Again certainty over future year

settlements would be appreciated to allow longer-term budget planning and investment in local services, whilst recognising and rewarding the important part that local authorities play in the delivery of additional housing in support of key national objective.

The Council also welcomes the additional flexibility to increase its Council Tax and believes that local discretion to levy taxes and generate additional income should be provided to councils in any new funding settlement, particularly in the context of the escalating costs of statutory demand led care services.

On a final point, this Council like many other councils, face spiralling special education needs costs that cannot be accommodated within existing budgets and are extremely difficult to contain. The funding for this nature of expenditure is both significantly constrained by regulation and wholly inadequate. Ideally we would like this addressed through the 2019/20 settlement, but if this is not possible it should be incorporated in the fundamental funding review for 2020 onwards.

I hope the above response clearly conveys this Council's key concerns in respect of the proposed Local Government Finance Settlement and informs future funding considerations. If you would like to discuss any of the points raised then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Anthony Pollock
Lead Member for Finance, HR and Corporate Services

Graham Ebers
Deputy Chief Executive (& Chief Finance Officer)