

Welfare Reform Sub-Committee

Minutes of a meeting held on Thursday 10 October 2013 at 2.00pm, The Kasen Room, East Northamptonshire House, Thrapston

Present:

Councillors: Andy Mercer (Chairman)
 Glenvil Greenwood-Smith
 Richard Lewis
 Steven North

Officers: Lisa Hyde – Head of Customer and Community Services
 Richard Hadden – Revenue Manager
 Lucy Hogston – Benefit Manager

1.0 MINUTES

1.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 8 August 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2.0 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors John Farrer and Jeremy Taylor and from Glenn Hammons (Chief Finance Officer) and Kelly Watson (Finance Manager).

3.0 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 The following declaration of interest was made:

Councillor	Item	Nature of Interest	DPI	Other Interest
Richard Lewis	Council Tax Support Scheme	Relative affected by empty property element of scheme		Yes

4.0 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 10.3

4.1 No questions under Procedure Rule 10.3 had been received.

5.0 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

- 5.1 The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Head of Customer and Community Services setting out the options for a local Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme for 2014/15 prior to public consultation on the scheme proposed.
- 5.2 The position relating to Government funding of CTS was outlined and it was noted that there had been no indication given that transitional funding would be continued in 2014/15. In the current financial year, the Council had received £109,654 for CTS. A Government statement of intent had indicated that protection for pensioners in uprating would be provided in 2014/15.
- 5.3 The impact of the anticipated grant reduction of £575,000 in 2014/15 on ENC and other precepting authorities within the District was reported and the Executive Director and Finance Manager had met with representatives of Parish Councils earlier in the week to explain the impact on Parish Councils. There had been significant reduction in the Council Tax Base (CTB) for 2013/14 and the CTB would remain at a similar level for 2014/15 and subject to minor variations only.
- 5.4 Financial modelling on the options for a CTS scheme for 2014/15 had been undertaken and the profiling was reported based on data up to August 2013. The options outlined ranged from the current 91.5% reduction to an 80% reduction.
- 5.5 Further to the report considered at the previous meeting setting out the impacts of the 2013/14 CTS scheme, the Sub-Committee considered the anticipated impacts of a scheme for 2014/15 and noted the measures taken to provide appropriate advice and support, and to encourage payment, from those affected by the CTS scheme.
- 5.6 At its previous meeting, the Sub-Committee had considered the issue of tenancy overlaps which resulted in tenants moving to a smaller property due to “under-occupancy” rules having an additional Council Tax bill for the overlap period for their new home. This additional bill could be greater than the annual Council Tax bill for their main home. The Sub-Committee considered the establishment of a discretionary fund of £10,000 to support tenants in this situation for a period of up to four weeks.
- 5.7 As the establishment of such a fund was at this Council’s discretion, the financial implications of up to £10,000 would need to be borne by ENC and it was unlikely that this could be pooled with other Authorities in the County, although if there was an opportunity to do so, it would be explored.
- 5.8 The Benefits Manager informed the Sub-Committee that Corby Borough Council would introduce an 8.5% liability reduction scheme in 2014/15 irrespective of whether it would receive any transitional grant. Both Daventry District Council and South Northamptonshire Council would also adopt an 8.5% liability reduction scheme. Kettering Borough Council had adopted a 15% liability reduction scheme and Northampton Borough Council a 12.5% liability reduction scheme. The Borough Council of Wellingborough was consulting on a 20% liability reduction scheme.
- 5.9 Councillor Steven North reminded the Sub-Committee of this Council’s intent for its CTS scheme to be self-financing and the Sub-Committee noted the projected income from Council Tax empty property charges for 2014/15 which could be used to offset the loss of Council Tax grant.

RESOLVED:

- i) That consultation on a new Council Tax Support scheme for 2014/15 based on a Council Tax liability of 87.5% as the preferred option be approved.
- ii) That a discretionary fund of up to £10,000 be held to cover Council Tax costs where there is an overlapping tenancy for up to four weeks.
- iii) That the Sub-Committee meet at the end of November 2013 to consider the consultation responses and recommend a Council Tax Support scheme for 2014/15 to the Council meeting to be held on 13 January 2014.

(Reason – to deliver a Council Tax Support scheme for 2014/15 that meets all statutory requirements)

Chairman