

REPORT OF: FINANCIAL SERVICES MANAGER

TO: COUNCIL

DATES: 15th DECEMBER 2016

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LOCAL SCHEME OF COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT 2017/18

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to request Council approval for the proposed scheme of local council tax support for the 2017/18 financial year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. It is recommended that Council,
 - (a) approves the Council's scheme of Local Council Tax Support as provided at [Appendix B](#) with an implementation date of 1st April 2017;
 - (b) grants delegated authority to the Financial Services Manager, in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Finance, to make any amendments to the scheme resulting from the annual updating of the detailed regulations which underpin the primary legislation.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

3. The Council is required to approve its scheme of local council tax support for a financial year by 31st January in the preceding year. As there is no Council meeting in January this report seeks approval now to the revised scheme from 1st April 2017.
4. At the time of writing this report the updated scheme regulations have not been issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). These are updated annually and set out any updated allowances, deductions and other such parameters. These simply update elements of the scheme but do not change the substance of the scheme. Hence delegated authority is normally provided for the report author to reflect any updated values in the Council's final scheme prior to its publication.

ISSUE

Background

5. This matter was reported to the Executive in November. A copy of that report is attached at [Appendix A](#) for all Councillors.

6. Earlier this year the Executive resolved that the maximum support provided to working age claimants would remain unchanged at 80%. This followed consideration of a report in August which outlined potential savings from reducing this to 60% or 70%.
7. The scheme proposed for 2017/18 retains this maximum level of support for working age claimants at 80%. However, the scheme does reflect a small number of changes which are intended to align the local scheme of council tax support with changes made, both in this year and due from 1st April 2017, to the national housing benefit scheme.
8. For information, the background to the changes is set out in the report at [Appendix A](#) and is not repeated here. These changes were accepted by the Executive in November and this followed a period of public consultation. At this time there is nothing to indicate any change in national policy in respect of those changes due to come in from 1st April 2017. As a result the council's scheme at [Appendix B](#) has been drafted on the assumption these changes will be applied.
9. Annually, DCLG update the Prescribed Requirements Regulations which (a) uprate the relevant premiums, allowances and deductions and (b) keep the regulations consistent with housing benefit regulations. At the time of writing this report the updated information for 2017/18 has not been issued hence the scheme provided at Appendix B reflects current parameters.
10. As there is no Council meeting in January, the scheme for next year is submitted for approval to this meeting of Council. Delegated authority is requested for the Financial Services Manager, in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Finance, to conclude the scheme once the above matters have been completed. Following this, the final scheme will be published on the Council's website and come in to operation from 1st April 2017.

IMPLICATIONS

Policy

11. The adoption of any revised localised scheme of Council Tax Support will determine the Council's policy for providing financial support to those residents who need help to pay their Council Tax.

Financial

12. These are set out in paragraphs 33 - 37 of the Executive report at [Appendix A](#).

Legal

13. The statutory provisions for the introduction of the localised Council Tax Support Scheme are contained in the Local Government Finance Act 2012.

Risk Management

14. There are mainly compliance and financial risks associated with the operation of a local scheme of council tax support. The scheme must have regard to regulations and other statutory provisions. These extend to consultation which must be meaningful and allow an appropriate period of time. Financial risks stem from the potential volatility regarding caseload and associated costs. The former risks are managed in conjunction with Liberata who administer the Council's scheme and include the use of external consultancy support to advise on technical matters. Financial risks are managed through the Council's existing budget framework and arrangements for regular monitoring.

Health and Safety

15. There are no Health and Safety implications arising directly from the contents of this report.

Climate Change

16. There are no climate change or sustainability implications arising directly from this report.

Community Safety

17. There are no community safety issues arising directly from the contents of this report.

Equality and Diversity

18. The changes proposed are technical in nature and primarily aimed at aligning the council's local scheme of council tax support with the national housing benefits framework. The changes proposed in this report should not have a disproportionate impact on those groups with protected characteristics under equality legislation namely, by reference to age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity

APPENDICES

Appendix A – report to the Executive (November 17th 2016)

Appendix B – draft scheme of local council tax support for 2017/18

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Reports to the Executive in 2016 (<http://www.pendle.gov.uk/meetings/committee/16/executive>):

- 26th May (item 8)
- 25th August (item 9)
- 17th November (item 12)