

Present: Councillor Ric Metcalfe (*in the Chair*),
Councillor Donald Nannestad, Councillor Sue Burke,
Councillor Bob Bushell and Councillor
Rebecca Longbottom

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Naomi Tweddle

67. Confirmation of Minutes - 11 December 2023

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 December 2023 be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a true record.

68. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

69. Council Tax Base 2024/25

Purpose of Report

To seek the Executive's recommendation to the City Council of the Council Tax Base for the financial year 2024/25.

Decision

That it be recommended to the City of Lincoln Council that:

- a) In line with the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023, with effect from 1st April 2024, a Council Tax premium of 100% for a property empty for 12 months, (changing from the current position of a property empty for 2 years) be approved;
- b) It be noted that there were no special items as defined in Section 35 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended) applicable to any part or parts of the City of Lincoln local authority area;
- c) The Chief Finance Officer's calculation of the Council Tax Base for the financial year commencing 1 April 2024 and ending 31 March 2025, as set out in Appendix B of this report be approved;
- d) In accordance with the Chief Finance Officer's calculation, and pursuant to the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992 (as amended), that the Council Tax Base for the 2024/25 financial year be 25,669.23.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None. The Local Government Finance Act 1992 and Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992 (as amended) required the Council to formally set its Tax Base as the first stage of the Council Tax setting process.

Reasons for the Decision

Before setting the Council Tax Base, the issue of any special items relating to a part of the Council's area must be considered. If there were any items of expenditure that related to one part of the local authority area, then that expenditure could be levied on those residents in that area and not on others. There were no items of special expenditure for the 2024/25 financial year.

The calculation of the Council Tax Base, was based upon the number of dwellings on the Valuation List, provided by the Government's Valuation Office. The figures were adjusted for exempt dwellings and for dwellings subject to disabled reduction. The number of chargeable dwellings in each band was further adjusted for discounts, exemptions, premiums, and Council Tax Support. The resultant figure was the total equivalent number of dwellings which were then converted using ratios into the number of Band D equivalents. For 2024/25, the equivalent number of Band D properties was calculated at 25,931.37.

The Council Tax Base was finally determined by multiplying the sum of the Band D equivalents by the Authority's estimated collection rate, which had been assumed at 98.75% for 2024/25. This was the estimate of the percentage of the 2024/25 Council Tax set which would be collected in total, and not the expected in-year collection rate in 2024/25. In addition, a final adjustment in respect of Crown properties was made. This resulted in a proposed Council Tax base for 2024/25 of 25,669.23.

The Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023 now included provision allowing billing authorities to change the period at which a long-term empty property attracted an additional Council Tax charge of 100% after 12 months rather than the current position of after 2 years. This premium could be introduced from 1st April 2024 under the provisions of this Act.

70. Collection Fund Surplus/Deficit - Council Tax

Purpose of Report

To inform Members of the estimated balance for the Council Tax element of the Collection Fund and the surplus or deficit to be declared for 2023/24.

Decision

That the action of the Chief Finance Officer in declaring a Council Tax deficit of £730,117 for 2023/24, to be distributed in 2024/25 be confirmed.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None. Prior to setting the Council Tax for 2024/25 the City Council was required to estimate whether there was to be a surplus or deficit on Council Tax element of the Collection Fund for the current financial year (2023/24).

Reasons for the Decision

The Council would declare a deficit on Council Tax £730,117 for the financial year 2023/24, with the City Council's share being £104,334, to be distributed in 2024/25.

As a Council Tax Billing Authority, the City Council was required to estimate whether there was to be a surplus or deficit on the Collection Fund for the current financial year, prior to setting its Council Tax for the next year. The calculation was based on an estimate of tax collected in-year compared to the estimate made the previous year, taking into account any previously declared surplus or deficit and the expected year-end arrears position.

The Council was required to declare any surplus or deficit during January of each financial year and once approved had an obligation to notify its major precepting authorities (Lincolnshire County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner for Lincolnshire) of their share of the estimated surplus or deficit.

71. Localised Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/25

Purpose of Report

1. To provide information regarding the outcome of consultation regarding 2024/25 Council Tax Support Scheme (CTS) options.
2. To propose options for a Council Tax Support Scheme for the 2024/25 financial year, which must be approved by Council before 31st January 2024.

Decision

- (1) That the content of the report, taking into consideration the responses received as part of the consultation be noted.
- (2) That it be recommend to the City of Lincoln Council that:
 - (a) A 'no change' to the core Council Tax Support scheme for 2024/25, as set out in Section 4 of the report, subject to the technical amendments described in paragraph 5.3 be approved.
 - (b) Provision of an Exceptional Hardship Fund of £25,000, for the financial year 2024/25, be approved.
 - (c) Approval be given to a further detailed modelling of a banded scheme for all working age customers, with delivery to be assured from our ICT provider at a timescale to allow for robust and accurate testing of such a potential scheme, with a view to consulting on such a scheme for 2025/26.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

An option of introduction of a 'banded scheme' for all working age customers for 2024/25 – as detailed within paragraph 5.6 of the officer's report. This would be subject to a further detailed modelling process with the aspiration for future adoption.

Reasons for the Decision

The council tax benefits system had been abolished by the government on 31 March 2013 and replaced by the Council Tax Support Scheme, which could be

determined locally by the City of Lincoln Council, as the billing authority, after consultation with precepting authorities, key stakeholders and residents.

As at November 2023, there had been 8,330 residents claiming Council Tax Support in Lincoln, with 2,579 of these as pensioners protected under the legislation and receiving Council Tax Support, as prescribed by the Government, broadly similar to the level of Council Tax Benefit.

It was the 5,751 working age (including those classified as 'vulnerable' for CTS purposes) claimants, where a local scheme could be determined which could change the level of support provided. The split of the 5,817 working age CTS recipients was 3,242 working age (vulnerable) and 2,575 working age (not vulnerable)

The initial City of Lincoln CTS Scheme from 2013/14 effectively 'protected' working age Council Tax payers seeking support, retaining eligible entitlement of up to 100% and not restricting other areas of entitlement calculation. However, in recent years the scheme had changed in light of increasing scheme costs and budget pressures.

Unless a decision was made by Council to apply scheme changes to vulnerable working-age claimants, the localised CTS scheme would historically only be applied to non-vulnerable working age claimants.