

SUBJECT:	INVEST TO SAVE
DIRECTORATE:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND TOWN CLERK
REPORT AUTHOR:	CLAIRE MOSES, INTERIM ASSISTANT HEAD OF SHARED REVENUES AND BENEFITS

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee with an update on the Non-Domestic Rate (NDR) project being undertaken by the City of Lincoln and North Kesteven District Council Shared Service

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report provides an update on the Invest to Save project which commenced in August 2016 and has been extended to September 2017.

3. Background

- 3.1 In August 2016, the Head of Revenues and Benefits for the shared service secured funding of £10k from the Lincolnshire Counter Fraud Partnership (LCFP) in relation to an NDR / Council Tax Support project.
- 3.2 The aim was to maximize the NDR base across the three districts for which the shared service is responsible (City of Lincoln Council, North Kesteven District Council and West Lindsey District Council). LCFP would also consider sharing any intelligence / data with Lincolnshire County Council.

4. Identification of Missing / Undervalued Properties

- 4.1 Having appointed an experienced NDR practitioner to undertake the work, the officer began by looking to identify missing / undervalued properties. The work involved:-
- Referral to the following websites: -
 - Local authorities (planning applications);
 - Guest houses (bed and breakfast and self-catering accommodation);
 - Ofcom (for phone masts);
 - Traffic Master (for traffic master sites);
 - Outdoor venture sites (paintball, motor cross etc) and
 - Food Standards Agency (road side cafes etc).
 - Reference to ATM finder (ATM's);
 - Scanning google maps (for kennels / catteries and advertising rights);
 - Researching local bus maps (advertising rights on bus shelters);

- Identifying new developments (show houses);
- Scouring local newspapers;
- Looking for Amazon and IPost collection point;
- Liaison with planning sections; and
- Speaking to practitioners undertaking similar work for other local authorities.

5. Approach

- 5.1 A decision was taken to start with West Lindsey District Council in view of weakness that had been identified in the previous use of planning applications. The officer would devote two months to each of the three authorities.
- 5.2 The full Valuation Office (VO) list was downloaded as at 31 July 2016 in order it could be cross referenced with properties the officer considered may be missing or undervalued.
- 5.3 A spreadsheet was produced to track all action being taken for potential missing / undervalued properties. Once identified, the officer would report the details through to the VO together with any supporting information. Where necessary, the outside officer would inspect in the first instance.

6. Results

- 6.1 The results for each of the three authorities, as at the date of writing this report, are as follows: -

West Lindsey District Council

Date work started	No. properties identified for VO	No. inspections	No. properties referred back from the VO as 'no action'	No. properties brought into the local rating list by the VO	2010 rating list increase	2017 rating list increase
1 September 2016	125	192	55	52	167,997	237,202

North Kesteven District Council

Date work started	No. properties identified for VO	No. inspections	No. properties referred back from the VO as 'no action'	No. properties brought into the local rating list by the VO	2010 rating list increase	2017 rating list increase
1 November 2016	122	109	60	28	266,780	342,670

City of Lincoln Council

Date work started	No. properties identified for VO	No. inspections	No. properties referred back from the VO as 'no action'	No. properties brought into the local rating list by the VO	2010 rating list increase	2017 rating list increase
9 January 2017	121	192	55	27	19,418	31,568

- 6.2 It will be for the VO to decide in the first instance, whether a property should be entered in the local rating list and if so, the rateable value (RV) attributed to it. At the same time, they will determine whether a property should be exempt (i.e. is agricultural) or included in the central rating list. Once entered in the local rating list, the billing authority will identify who is liable for the NDR, whether any relief is applicable (i.e. small business rate relief) and issue a demand notice.
- 6.3 There will be a number of reasons for 'no action' (i.e. more information required, exempt or already in the rating list) by the VO. Where cases are being returned as 'no action', each is looked at separately with a view as to what action, if any, to take. Already, it is the view of officers that some decisions warrant a challenge.
- 6.4 The billing authority has a statutory duty in relation to reporting information through to the VO that may warrant a change to the local rating list. That said, when gauging the success of the project, it is important to look beyond any increase in the NDR base for the year in which a property is brought in to the local rating list. What is important today will become even more important as we move forward to 2020 and 100% retention.

7. The Future of this Role

- 7.1 The role is currently funded to 30 September 2017. During this time, the Officer will continue to review the information which is received from the VO and update the business rates system as required. There will also be a review of current reliefs, along with a review of the Discretionary Rate Relief policy (which is referred to in a separate report on this agenda)

8. Strategic Priorities

- 8.1 Both City of Lincoln and North Kesteven have a number of strategic priorities. Two that have an impact on the Revenues and Benefits Service are:-
- Lincoln: "Let's Reduce Inequality".
 - North Kesteven: "Community Wellbeing and a Vibrant Economy".
- 8.2 Both authorities look to protect the poorest people. The Benefits Service plays a key role in reducing poverty and disadvantage by ensuring residents receive the

benefits they are entitled to and providing money / debt advice. The Revenues Section are also mindful of the strategic priorities when engaging with business ratepayers as they recover the business rate. Digital Inclusion, Channel Shift, Financial Inclusion and Partnership Working are all key priorities for the shared service.

9. Organisational Impacts

- 9.1 Finance: There is a direct impact to the budget in relation to this report. AS the role is self-funding, North Kesteven District Council will need to include this within the budget bid process and City of Lincoln will include this within the invest to save reserve.
- 9.2 Legal Implications including Procurement Rules: There are no direct Legal or Procurement implications arising from this report.
- 9.3 Land, property and accommodation: There are no direct implications arising from this report.
- 9.4 Human Resources: There are no direct implications arising from this report.
- 9.5 Equality, Diversity & Human Rights (including the outcome of the EA attached, if required) – There are no direct Equality, Diversity or Human Rights implications arising from this report.
- 9.6 Significant Community Impact: There is no change in policy / strategy or the way the service is being delivered.
- 9.7 Corporate Health and Safety implications: There are no corporate Health and Safety implications.

10. Risk Implications

- 10.1 A Risk Register is in place for the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service.

11. Recommendation

- 11.1 Members note this report.

Is this a key decision? ~~Yes~~/No

Do the exempt information categories apply? ~~Yes~~/No

Does Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (call-in and urgency) apply? ~~Yes~~/No

How many appendices does the report contain? None

List of Background Papers: None

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