

**SUBJECT: STAFFING CHANGES**

**DIRECTORATE: CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND TOWN CLERK**

**REPORT AUTHOR: MARTIN WALMSLEY, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR SHARED REVENUES AND BENEFITS**

## **1. Purpose of Report**

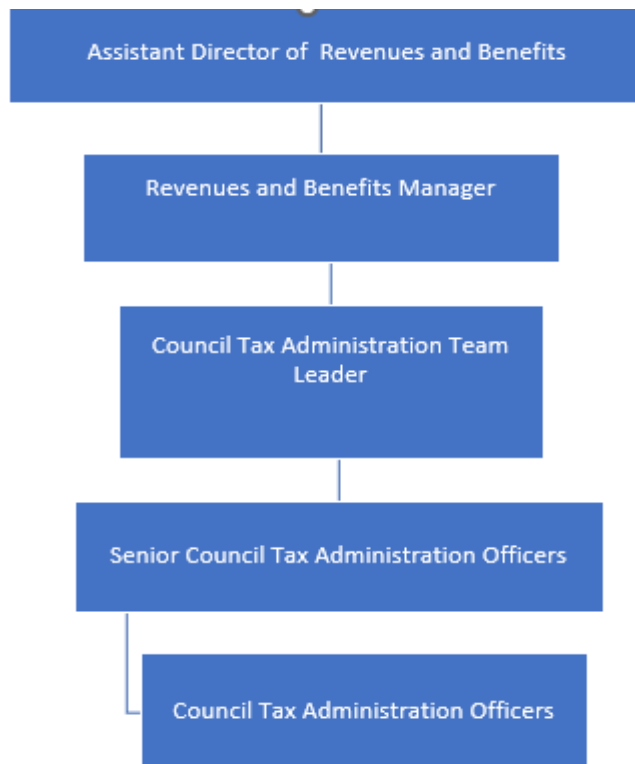
- 1.1 To request an amendment to the allocated hours in the LiNK staffing structure regarding:
- Senior Council Tax Administration Officer, and
  - Council Tax Administration Officer.
- 1.2 To request that certain staffing structural changes be delegated to Revenues and Benefits Operational Board.

## **2. Executive Summary**

- 2.1 This report provides a business case for changes to Senior Council Tax Administration Officer and Council Tax Administration Officer hours on the permanent staffing structure establishment.
- 2.2 The report also sets out a rationale regarding future such 'relatively minor' staffing structural changes being delegated to Revenues and Benefits Operational Board.

## **3. Background and Business Case for Changes to Council Tax Administration Team**

- 3.1 The Revenues and Benefits Shared Service (LiNK) staffing structure is well established, being in place since 1<sup>st</sup> February 2012 – with mainly only relatively minor 'tweaks' being made to the staffing structure since then. The structure is, however, fit for purpose and flexible to adapt quickly and effectively to the changing needs of the service. Job roles have been designed which such flexibility, as well as short-term secondment roles being utilised as and when appropriate.
- 3.2 An extract of the current LiNK staffing structure, is shown below:



- 3.3 There are currently 12.0 FTE (full-time equivalent) Council Tax Administration Officer positions in the structure, - a mix of full time and part time officers. Of the fifteen officers currently in post, five have been in post for less than one year and understandably need support with their day to day activities. It is expected that the level of support that these officers will require will reduce over the next twelve months. However, officers have seen a relatively high turnover of staff in the Council Tax Administration Team over the last two years, and a further officer has recently handed in their notice for retirement in June 2024, so this has meant further recruitment to fill this post.
- 3.4 Managing fifteen staff is time consuming, which includes management of hybrid working. The Senior Officers and Team Leader deal with a variety of staffing issues including;
- Rotas for working on the phones and correspondence,
  - Training,
  - 1-1 meetings,
  - Appraisals,
  - Recruitment,
  - Personal matters;
    - Changes to work patterns
    - Changes to contractual hours
    - Dealing with the first stages Human Resources policy processes, where required
    - Sickness management
  - Performance and training, including;

- Training new staff in Council Tax legislation
- Maintaining internal manuals and communication of changes to legislation
- Monitoring of performance and providing statistics to line manager.

3.5 In addition to staffing matters, cost of living challenges has had an effect regarding contact with the public and officers have noted an increase in the following contacts –

- Requests from customers to reduce or remit their Council Tax under Discretionary Policy (Section 13a). This is due to an increase in awareness of the Discretionary Policy through Citizens Advice, national media etc, and at times because some Council Tax payers just cannot afford to pay and are directed to make an application by either Citizens Advice, Customer Services, Council Tax Officers etc. These requests are dealt with by the Council Tax Administration Team Leader and Senior Officers.
- Challenges to Council Tax, this has resulted in an increase in Valuation Tribunal cases.
- Challenges to the changes to the empty property premium .
- Officers expect to receive challenges to the Second Home premium to be introduced in April 2025, although challenges to the introduction of this scheme have been minimal so far.

3.6 Additional Senior Council Tax Administration Officer resource has been trialled since October 2023, and the requirement for this resource to continue is clear, due to reasons including those as set out in paragraph 3.5 (above).

#### **4. Proposal – Council Tax Administration Team**

- 4.1
- 1) To increase permanent establishment Senior Council Tax Administration Officer capacity from 1.59 FTE (59 hours per week) to 1.78 FTE(66 hours per week), and
  - 2) In order to fund the above additional Senior officer hours from existing cash-limited budgets, to reduce Council Tax Administration Officer hours by 8.5 hours (0.23 FTE). These hours are currently vacant.

#### **5. Future Potential Changes to LiNK Staffing Structure**

5.1 The Delegation Agreement for the LiNK Revenues and Benefits Shared Service includes the below (extract):

30. *The responsibilities of the Operational Board shall be to:*

- *Manage the performance of the shared revenues and benefits services to be in relation to the Joint Committee Functions so as to ensure, so far as is possible and practicable, ensure the delivery of such services in accordance with the delivery plan approved by the Joint Committee and the progress and performance targets set by the Joint Committee.*
- *To report to the Joint Committee meetings on the progress and performance of the services provided in connection with the performance of functions delegated to the Shared Service against the delivery plan and targets set by the Joint Committee.*
- *Strive to ensure that the services provided are delivered equitably between*

*both Councils, so far as may be practicable.*

- Prepare and submit to the Joint Committee for its approval on or before 30<sup>th</sup> November in each year an annual business plan, annual budget and annual delivery plan for the next Financial Year.*
- To report to the Joint Committee on the income and expenditure of the shared service against the approved budget.*
- To seek to ensure so far as is practicable that the functions delegated to the shared service are performed within the budget approved by the Joint Committee and to notify the Joint Committee of any material divergence from the annual budget and the reasons therefore.*
- To recommend to the Joint Committee the resources required to perform the functions delegated to the shared service to the requisite performance standards and any changes required in such resources to maintain such performance standards.*

*To make appropriate recommendations to the Joint Committee on any matter of relevance to the business of the Joint Committee and of the shared service*

## **SHARED REVENUES AND BENEFITS (NORTH KESTIVEN DISTRICT COUNCIL AND CITY OF LINCOLN COUNCIL)**

### **JOINT COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE**

- 1. To approve and monitor the Shared Revenues and Benefits Service Delivery Plan for each Financial Year.*
- 2. To approve the annual budget for the Joint Committee and the Shared Revenues and Benefits.*
- 3. To approve the annual report of the Joint Committee and the Shared Revenues and Benefits.*
- 4. To monitor expenditure and income of the Joint Committee and Shared Revenues and Benefits Service against the agreed annual budget.*
- 5. To set progress and performance targets for the functions delegated to the shared service, approve the delivery plan for the performance of such functions and monitor and review the performance of such functions against such targets and delivery plan.*
- 6. To approve changes to staffing structures and any associated management of change procedures including redundancies.*

5.2 Whilst understood that it is correct that any fundamental changes to the LiNK staffing structure should be considered/approved by Joint Committee, for relatively minor 'tweaks' to the structure it is proposed that these should be delegated for Revenues and Benefits Operational Board (comprising of Section 151 Officers of both partner Councils) to consider/approve. This could be for changes which have;

- No financial impact on the shared service;
- Does not place any LiNK member of staff 'at risk;'

- Does not permanently delete any post.

## **6. Strategic Priorities**

- 6.1 Both City of Lincoln and North Kesteven have a number of strategic priorities. Three that have an impact on the Revenues and Benefits Service are:-
- Lincoln: "Let's reduce all kinds of inequality."
  - North Kesteven: "Our Communities," "Our Economy."
- 6.2 The Benefits Service plays a key role in reducing inequality by ensuring residents receive the benefits they are entitled to and providing money / debt advice. The Revenues Section is also mindful of the strategic priorities when engaging with business ratepayers as they recover business rates – and also promoting and encouraging growth in the districts. Digital Inclusion, Channel Shift / Customer Experience, Financial Inclusion, Employment, Skills and Partnership Working are all key priorities for the shared service.

## **7. Organisational Impacts**

### **7.1 Finance**

The increase of the Senior Council Tax Administration Officer hours and the decrease in Council Tax Administration Officer hours is cost neutral, with no impact on the overall Revenues staffing budgets.

### **7.2 Legal Implications including Procurement Rules**

There are no direct Legal or Procurement implications arising from this report.

### **7.3 Equality, Diversity & Human Rights**

There are no direct implications arising from this report.

## **8. Risk Implications**

- 8.1 A Risk Register is in place for the Revenues and Benefits shared service.

## **9. Recommendations**

- 9.1 Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee approve an increase in permanent establishment Senior Council Tax Administration Officer capacity from 1.59 FTE (59 hours per week) to 1.78 FTE (66 hours per week).
- 9.2 Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee approve a decrease of permanent establishment Council Tax Administration Officer capacity by 0.23 FTE (8.5 hours per week).
- 9.3 Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee approve that with immediate effect Revenues and Benefits Shared Service staffing structural changes be delegated to Revenues and Benefits Operational Board to consider/approve, in the following circumstances:
- Where there is no financial impact on the shared service, and
  - Where no member of LiNK staff is placed 'at risk;' and
  - Where there is no permanent deletion of any post.

**Is this a key decision?** No

**Do the exempt information categories apply?** No

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

**How many appendices does the report contain?** None

**List of Background Papers:** None

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