

Present: Councillor Chris Burke (*in the Chair*),
Councillor Debbie Armiger, Councillor Liz Bushell,
Councillor Natasha Chapman, Councillor Callum Roper
and Councillor Calum Watt

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Rachel Storer

9. Confirmation of Minutes - 29 July 2024

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 29 July 2024 be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a true record.

10. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

11. Localised Council Tax Support Scheme 2025/26

Tracey Parker, Revenues and Benefits Manager:

- a. presented the proposed scheme for Local Council Tax Support for the financial year 2025/26 and accompanying Exceptional Hardship Payments Scheme, as part of the formal consultation period
- b. gave the background to the scheme as detailed at paragraph 2 of the report and advised that there were currently 8,278 residents claiming Council Tax Support in Lincoln
- c. advised that there were 2,546 pensioners in receipt of Council Tax Support who protected under the legislation so that they would not be affected by any changes made to the Council Tax Support Scheme
- d. further advised that there were 5,732 working age claimants who could be affected by any changes made to the scheme. This figure included those working age customers considered 'vulnerable'
- e. highlighted the changes in caseload as detailed at paragraph 3 of the report and advised that there was potential that the number of claimants could rise due to the ongoing cost of living pressures on residents
- f. referred to paragraph 4 of the report and gave an overview of the current Council Tax Support Scheme
- g. advised that based on the current core elements of the existing scheme, caseload decreases of 1% and 0% change and an increase of 5% had been modelled, along with Council Tax increases of 1.9% and 2.9%. These were summarised in Appendix 1 of the report which gave an indication of the potential cost and savings to the City of Lincoln Council. Also included was the potential value for non-collection (based on projected collection in the tax base of 98.75%)

- h. explained that as a billing authority the Council could decide whether or not to amend core elements of its Council Tax Support scheme each year. Schemes being consulted on were summarised at Appendix 1 of the report
- i. referred to paragraph 5.3 and 5.4 of the report and explained the technical amendments and assumptions that had been made in developing the modelling for each Council Tax Support Scheme
- j. reported that the options considered for consultation by Executive on 16 September 2024 were as follows:
 - Option 1: No change to the current scheme;
 - Option 2: Introduction of a 'banded scheme' for all working age customers (as detailed at paragraph 5.6 of the report)
- k. referred to paragraph 5.8 of the report which detailed the Exceptional Hardship Payments Scheme and proposed an Exceptional Hardship Budget of £25,000 be put in place for 2025/26
- l. asked for Committee's consideration and comments as part of the formal consultation process.

Question: There was still work being undertaken on the modelling of a potential banded scheme. Would all of the information be available for Executive to make a decision in January 2025?

Response: Most of the information would be available in time for Executive, however, the cost of the scheme would not be available which was usual practice. The aim with the modelling would be to keep the bands similar to what the customer was currently receiving. If the work was not completed there was still the option of no change to the current scheme.

Question: There were concerns regarding the software. Would it be possible for the banded scheme to be implemented in the next financial year.

Response: The aim would be to implement the banded scheme in the next financial year. Testing of the software needed to implement the scheme was ongoing and was likely to take several months to complete. It was important to ensure that the software was thoroughly tested.

Question: Would there be a transition period to move to the proposed banded scheme?

Response: There would not be a transition period. The Exceptional Hardship fund would be used for those vulnerable people who had been disproportionately affected by changes made to the Council Tax Support Scheme.

Question: Would the Council consider helping those people who were just outside the eligibility criteria for receiving the winter fuel payment?

Response: This was not within the remit of the Council Tax Support Scheme.

Question: Could the proposed banded scheme include a formula for additional children to help mitigate the impact of the 2 child benefit cap?

Response: The Council Tax Support scheme was aligned with Universal Credit. The suggestion could be included as part of the consultation.

RESOLVED that:

1. The introduction of a 'banded scheme' for all working age customers be supported.
2. The provision of an Exceptional Hardship Fund of £25,000 for 2025/26 be supported.

12. Health Scrutiny Update

No update available.

13. Policy Scrutiny Work Programme 2024-25 and Executive Work Programme Update

The Democratic Services Officer:

- a. presented the report 'Policy Scrutiny Work Programme 2024-25 and Executive Work Programme Update'
- b. presented the Executive Work Programme September 2024-August 2025
- c. requested councillors to submit any items they wished to scrutinise from the Executive Work Programme and policies of interest
- d. invited members questions and comments:

The Business Manager – Corporate Policy and Transformation explained that a review of the Equality and Diversity Corporate Document Suite was currently being undertaken. It needed to be considered by the Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel prior to consideration by Policy Scrutiny Committee. She suggested that it be added to the work programme for March 2025.

RESOLVED that:

1. The work Policy Scrutiny work programme be noted.
2. The Executive work programme be noted.
3. The Review of the Equality and Diversity Corporate Document Suite be scheduled into the work programme for 18 March 2025.

14. Exclusion of Press and Public

RESOLVED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item(s) of business because it was likely that if members of the public were present there would be a disclosure to them of 'exempt information' as defined by Section 100I and Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 19.

15. Lincoln Big Ballot

Simon Walters, Strategic Director for Communities and Environment:

- a. presented the Lincoln Business Improvement Group (BIG) ballot arrangements in advance of seeking Executive views on how the

nominated officer should vote in the ballot using the votes attributable to council properties within the Business Improvement District (BID) designated area

- b. explained the BID Ballot process and provided details of the BID Levy mechanics
- c. advised that an all Member Workshop was held on 18 November 2024 and gave an overview of the key themes explored during the session
- d. summarised the impact of an overall 'yes' vote and also the impact of an overall 'no' vote
- e. invited members questions and comments.

The committee discussed the contents of the report in detail and acknowledged the extensive services that Lincoln BIG provided to the City. They were unanimously in support of the nominating Officer casting a 'yes' vote in the upcoming BID Ballot on behalf of City of Lincoln Council properties.

RESOLVED that the proposal to instruct the Chief Finance Officer to cast a 'yes' vote on behalf of City of Lincoln Council properties for the continuation of Lincoln BIG for the next 5 years be supported.