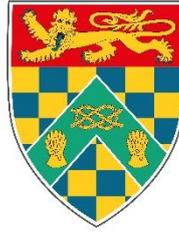


Decision Notice

CABINET

TUESDAY, 12 JANUARY 2021



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

43. Local Council Tax Support scheme proposals 2021/22

Decision

1. Cabinet recommends to Council the Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2021/22 be based on the same overarching criteria as the current year's scheme.
2. Cabinet considered the request from the Lincolnshire Police and Crime Commissioner to include Special Constables within the Local Council Tax Support scheme from 1 April 2021, however, Cabinet did not support the inclusion of Special Constables within the scheme.

Considerations/reasons for decision

- Report from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources on the Council's on a review of the Council's Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTSS).
- Any proposed Local Council Tax Support Scheme must comply with the provisions stated within the Local Government Finance Act 2012 before adoption by the Billing Authority.
- Covid-19 had impacted the amount of LCTSS awarded. There had been an increase in new customers making claims for Universal Credit and in turn Council Tax support. The Department of Work and Pensions had fast-tracked processes which had seen an increase in claims.
- The increase in the cost of the scheme was a direct result of the increase in caseload due to Covid-19.
- The Council's local scheme has been updated with amendments since the introduction in April 2013 to maintain the link with Housing Benefit and the previous Council Tax Benefit scheme, the maximum entitlement was currently capped at 80% for working age customers.
- Technical changes needed to be applied to ensure that the Council's scheme complied with the Prescribed Scheme Regulations (covering Universal Credit, premiums and discounts). Details were still outstanding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).
- Assumptions had been made when modelling the Council Tax Support Scheme options.
- Lincolnshire County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner had been consulted as major preceptors.
- Options had been presented to the Finance, Economic Development and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10 November 2020,

this had excluded the proposal from the Police and Crime Commissioner as it had not been received.

Other options considered

To increase the maximum award from 70% to 100% (increments of 5% increase):
With 3.5% Council Tax increase and 3% caseload increase.

44. Draft Budget Proposals 2021/22

Decision

1. Cabinet considered the budget proposals for 2021 in respect of:
 - General Fund – Revenue and Capital
 - Housing Revenue Account – Revenue and Capital
2. Cabinet approves that consultation be carried out in respect of proposed Council Tax levels for 2021/22 for the period 13-26 January 2021 (inclusive).
3. Cabinet approves the cessation of the Deepings Special Expense Area from 1 April 2021.
4. Cabinet considered the proposed fees and charges for 2021/22 as set in the supplementary Appendix D of the joint report from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources and the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning.
5. Cabinet approves the increase of the regeneration reserve by £500k by the following movements:
 - £250k movement from the Commercial reserve.
 - £250k movement from the Invest to Save reserve.
6. Cabinet approves the Climate Change reserve be included in the 2021/22 budget framework proposals at a minimum level of £20k.

Considerations/reasons for decision

- Joint report from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources and the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning on the Budget Proposals for 2021/22 and indicative budgets for 2022/23 and 2023/24 giving details of the draft budget estimates for 2021/22, revenue and capital for both the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).
- The Council had approved a Corporate Plan that sets out a clear vision and key actions over the period of the Plan 2020 - 2023. The budget proposals had been formulated within the context of the Corporate Plan ambitions and alignment to the five priorities; Growth and our economy; Housing that meets the needs of all residents; Healthy and strong communities; A clean and sustainable environment; A high performing Council.

- The budget proposal had been built against a backdrop of financial challenges; the delay in the national review of the local government funding formula and the detrimental impact the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the Council's resources.
- The proposals had been formulated by the Cabinet, working closely with senior officers, through a number of budget sessions. Workshops had been held which focused on the spending ambitions of the Council to drive forward the Corporate Plan within financial parameters.
- The financial outlook for 2021/22 remained uncertain and the budget proposal were underpinned by a number of assumptions relating to the recovery of income levels and future expenditure projections.
- The Provisional Settlement from Government had included a number of financial measures to support the financial assumptions which included the income losses compensation scheme which would continue to June 2021 and a one year lower tier un-ring fenced grant.

General Fund – Revenue

- An increase in Local Government core spending power of 4.5% for 2021/22. The increase was calculated on the assumption that Council's will maximise the Council Tax increases available.
- A new lower tier services grant of £365k had been allocated to the Council for 2021/22 only.

Council Tax

- Indicative income from Council Tax based on proposals which would be subject to public consultation from 13 January 2021 to 26 January 2021; a £5 increase on a Band D property, a 3% increase on a Band D property, a 2% increase on a Band D property or no increase.
- Budget proposals compiled on the assumption that the Cabinet recommended a £5 increase on a Band D property for 2021/22 in order to take advantage of the limited availability of the high level.

Fees and Charges

- A summary of draft fees and charges proposals for 2021/22 as set in the report of the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources and shown within the supplementary Appendix D circulated.
- Highlighted proposals were the £3 increase on the annual collection charge for Green waste, Grantham Pay and Display car parking, 10p increase per tariff up to and including 3 hours and Stamford Pay and Display car parking, 30p increase per tariff up to and including 3 hours

Housing Revenue Account

- The Housing Strategy 2017-2021 continued to provide the overarching framework for the budget proposals.

- The budget formation had taken into consideration the deliverables arising from the Compliance Audit Action Plan.
- Following a reduction in the (Consumer Price Index) CPI in September 2020 to 0.5%, budget income for the next financial year had been reduced by approximately £1.1m and cumulatively over £5m for the next three financial years.
- Due to a number of competing factors it had only been possible to present a one-year balanced revenue account, following years are projecting a revenue deficit.
- The rent increase is proposed at 1.5% and garage rents are proposed to increase by 3%.

Capital Programme (General and Housing Revenue Account)

- The detailed Capital Programme attached to the report from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources and the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning at Appendix B.
- The Council's ambitions of growth and investment in its assets and to support the delivery of quality services.
- The capital programme focused on investing in Council assets to improve the service offer and particularly in relation to the arts offer with a combined investment programme of £390k across the two arts venues. Other investments included the Street Scene Fleet and the car parking offer with maintenance required at Welham Street car park, Grantham.
- The Housing Investment Programme focussed on the new build and stock acquisition programme and the objectives of the HRA Business Plan.
- A new build programme which outlined a 3-year capital programme totalling £44.3m and anticipated the delivery of 412 properties.
- The investment programme may need reviewing once the full details of the Stock Condition Survey was analysed, other priority investment areas could be identified.

Reserves and Balances

- Details of the reserves, used to meet known and predicted liabilities.
- Reserve movements outlined within Table 17 and 18 of the report and shown within Appendix C.

Collection Fund

- Recognition by the Government that the Collection fund would be under pressure due to the challenges in collection rates for both Council Tax and Business Rates. New legislation introduced to allow billing authorities to spread the anticipated deficit over a three financial year period. The change affected all three major precepting authorities proportionally from 2021/22.

45. Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy

Decision

1. Cabinet notes the results of the public consultation.
2. Cabinet approves the South Kesteven District Council Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy with effect from 1 April 2021, with the exception of reduction in vehicle age at first registration from 7 to 5 years which will take effect on 1 October 2021.
3. Cabinet delegates to the Director of Commercial and Operations in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Commercial and Operations, to make minor amendments to the policy, such as legislative updates, which may become necessary from time to time to ensure its continued accuracy, but do not affect its direction or intent.

Considerations/reasons for decision

- Report from the Cabinet Member for Commercial and Operations following a review of the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy and a four week consultation period.
- A workshop held with Members of the Licensing Committee and the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee which considered a review of the existing Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy.
- New statutory standards published in July 2020, by the Department for Transport on statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards.
- Significant changes made under environment sustainability, driver knowledge and language proficiency and determining a “fit and proper” person to hold a licence as well as the use of e-cigarettes, compliance tests to reflect changes to MOT defect types, as well as a list of other general requirements.
- Consultation carried out with the hackney carriage and private hire trade, general public and other relevant stakeholders including the Authorities Licensing Committee which showed broad support for the proposed changes.

Other Option considered

To proceed with the Council’s Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy as issued for consultation, with the policy taking effect in full from 1 April 2021.

46. Voids Process and Performance - Housing Technical Services

Decision

1. Cabinet notes the content of the report.
2. Cabinet approves Option 2 as providing the most efficient operational way forward to implement changes to the process and management of voids at this time.
3. Cabinet requests that the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider at its next scheduled meeting in February 2021 proposals for a new suite of Key Performance Indicators relating to the effective monitoring of void property management performance, and thereafter to receive updated performance data, and progress on further actions being taken to improve overall void management performance.
4. Cabinet receives a following up report within six months relating to the implementation of the Option 2 proposals.
5. Cabinet receives a comprehensive report covering the full review of the revised void management and process changes, to ensure the objectives and anticipated benefits have been achieved, within the next 12 months.
6. That Officers update Cabinet on the progress made to introduction imprest van stocks through a preferred supplier, and the impacts anticipated in the context of the current stores and stock arrangements be subject to a further report to Cabinet.

Considerations/reasons for decision

- Report from the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning updating Members on the progress towards an efficient voids process and to begin considerations of appropriate performance measures.
- The need for a comprehensive review of the Council's management of void properties to put an efficient and effective process in place.
- The introduction and deployment of a Northgate Integrated Housing Management System in summer 2021.
- The introduction of new streamlined void work processes and targets.
- The introduction of Key Performance Indicator data to be reviewed regularly through the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Changes to the structure of the Technical Services void team.
- Consultation undertaken within the Technical Service and Housing Management Services, amendments made based on feedback and good practice principles.

Other Options considered

- 1) Leave as current. This was not a viable option and entailed carrying on the existing processes.
- 2) Investigate the potential for all void works to be delivered by an external contractor/s through a price per void contract.

47. Procurement of Housing Stock Condition Survey

Decision

1. Cabinet approves the award of a contract to Faithorn Farrell Timms LLP (FFT) to carry out a stock condition survey to all dwellings, blocks and communal areas, including Energy Performance Certification (EPC) to the housing stock of South Kesteven District Council. This appointment will be undertaken via the National Framework Partnership.
2. Cabinet includes within the budget proposals for 2021/22, a budget of £50k for the employment of an additional member of staff on a fixed term contract to conclude at the end of the stock condition activities, to support the necessary project management of the contract with Faithorn Farrell Timms LLP.
3. Cabinet includes in the budget proposals for 2021/22, a budget of up to £50k in order to procure the additional licences for the current APEX asset management software system, to enable Faithorn Farrell Timms LLP to update the Council's system with the new survey data.
4. Cabinet notes that at the Full Council meeting held on 17 December 2020 a budget of £780,000 was approved in order to procure the necessary stock condition, EPC, and project management activities as outlined within the report from the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning.

Considerations/reasons for decision

- Report from the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning on the award of a Housing Stock Condition Survey Contract to Faithorn Farrell Timms LLP (FFT) via the National Framework Partnership to conduct a stock condition survey and Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) on all dwellings, blocks and communal areas for South Kesteven District Council subject to the approval of the necessary funding to complete the work.
- The need to improve the Council's stock condition information following the recent internal audit report highlighting regulatory and compliance shortcomings in respect of stock condition and critical Health and Safety issues.
- Data compiled through the new survey would be inputted into the current APEX asset management system to provide up to date information in a single location.
- Procurement of a preferred contractor had been in accordance with the Council's Procurement Procedure Rules.
- Robust project management would be put in place to ensure surveys were completed to the required standard, tenant access was being achieved correctly and overall timelines were being met.

- Quarterly reports on key housing compliance matters to the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee would include updates on the stock condition survey.
- All costs would be met from the Housing Revenue Account.

Other options considered

- 1) Do nothing. This was not advised given the current non-compliant position, lack of up to date property condition data and the need to address the lack of data to provide a new Asset Management Strategy and inform the review of the HRA Business Plan was critical.
- 2) Complete the Survey using in house resources. The Repairs and Improvements Team had tried to complete a rolling stock condition survey to update properties on a five year cycle, however this had failed to achieve the necessary 20% completions. A 100% survey was now required and there were insufficient in-house resources to deploy to achieve this objective.

Date decisions effective:

Decisions 45, 46 and 47 as made on Tuesday 12 January 2021 can be implemented on Thursday 21 January 2021 unless subject to call-in by the Chairman of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee or any five members of the Council from any political group.

Decision 43 stands referred to Council on 1 March 2021.

Decision 44 refers to the Budget and Policy Framework and the stakeholder consultation feedback will be considered at the next Cabinet meeting on 2 February 2021 and Cabinet's recommendations will be referred to Council on 1 March 2021