

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21 November 2016

Present:

Councillor Haines (Chairman)

Councillor Bullivant (Vice Chairman)

Councillors: Brodie, Clarence, Colclough, Connett, Cox, Dennis, Dewhirst, Eden, Ford, Golder, Grainger, Hocking, Hook, Jeffery, Kerswell, Mayne, Nutley, Parker, Smith, Thorne and Winsor.

Apologies:

Councillors Fusco, Prowse and Walters.

Other Members in Attendance:

Councillors Austen, Barker, Christophers, Cook, Gribble, Jones and Russell.

In Attendance:

Neil Aggett – Monitoring Officer

Sue Aggett – Business Lead for Environment Health & Well-Being

Martin Flitcroft – Finance Manager

Liz Gingell – Corporate Performance Officer

Chris Omerod – Finance & Insurance Officer

Amanda Pujol – Business Manager Housing

Phil Shears – Deputy Chief Executive

EXTRACT FROM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING

3. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME

The Revenue, Benefits & Fraud Manager presented the report seeking Members' views on the local Council Tax Reduction Support (CTR) Scheme 2017-18 following a period of public consultation.

Members noted that the Devon Benefit Officer's Group had considered the position for 2017-18 and recommended that changes should be made to bring the scheme into line with the changes made by Central Government to Housing Benefit and Universal Credit.

The Revenue, Benefits & Fraud Manager advised that no existing claimant would find any change to their benefit, with the exception of self-employed claimants. Any impact on individuals was likely to be limited and that any resulting hardship could be managed through the Exceptional Hardship Fund.

During discussion, particular reference was made to:-

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- (a) concern that the proposals would affect those who were already deprived;
- (b) a suggestion that the proposals should not be implemented for at least 12 months to enable those who would be affected to be able to plan for the changes;
- (c) concern that proposal 2, reducing backdating for new claims to 1 month would cause difficulties for claimants;
- (d) Proposal 6 – limiting the number of dependant children within the calculation for CTR to a maximum of 2. Concern that this proposal would penalise those who experience multiple births.

In response, Members were advised that this proposal aligned the rules with Housing Benefit. Someone would not receive extra benefit from increasing their family size, after 1 April 2017, if they were receiving maximum CTR they would not receive any additional benefit from an additional child. It was noted that the Government was continuing to consult regarding multiple births.

- (e) Proposal 8 – Removing the additional earnings disregard and apply the standard disregards irrespective of hours worked to those applicants also claiming Universal Credit. A Member suggested this was profoundly unacceptable. The proposal would affect those who were already working and on low wages, that they required the Council's support, not more cuts.
- (f) Concern that 317 out of 396 applicants would lose all their CTR. 40% of whom would be single parents. It was felt that Teignbridge was a generous authority, and it was important it should continue to be so.

There was concern that no clear financial pressures had been set out in the report and a view that the proposals, 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 8 were unjustified and would have a financial impact on those who could not afford it.

Members were advised that the scheme mirrored Universal Credit and incentivised working. The proposals would only affect new claimants, those who already received 100% CTR would continue to do so.

- (g) Cost of the scheme £44,000 being offered as a saving. A Member question if the saving would be spent elsewhere.
- (h) Information. A Member raised concern that the report did not provide sufficient detail on the evidence received from other local authorities, or detail on how the self-employed would be affected. Further, that there was no information about help for those with disabilities.

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- (i) Concern regarding the appeal process and a suggestion this could be undertaken by the Council's Regulatory & Appeals Committee. In response, Members were advised that it was a statutory requirement for the appeal to be heard by the Valuation Tribunal Service.
- (j) The hardship being placed on people was not worth the saving to the Council. The need to help those required support.
- (k) The amount collected in Council Tax would reduce, there being no information within the report on the cost of collecting and chasing those who could not afford to pay.

In response to a number of issues raised, the Revenue, Benefits & Fraud Manager advised, should the Council not accept all the changes set out in the proposals, it would be necessary to go back out to full public consultation with any new proposals.

Cllr Ford proposed that: the proposals should be refused and the Council should continue with its current scheme, this was seconded by Cllr Dewhurst.

Five Liberal Democrat Members stood and requested a recorded vote, as follows:

For the resolution: Councillors: Brodie, Bullivant, Clarence, Colclough, Connett, Cox, Dennis, Dewhurst, Eden, Ford, Grainger, Haines, Hocking, Hook, Jeffery, Kerswell, Mayne, Nutley, Parker, Smith.

Against: Councillor Golder

Abstain: Councillors Thorne and Winsor

Recommended

That the Executive be asked to note that the proposals should be refused and the Council should continue with its current scheme.