

Extract from the minutes of the Joint Strategic Committee - 7 December 2021

JSC/069/21-22 Council Tax Support Schemes for 2022/23

Members were asked to recommend to their respective Full Councils the Council Tax Support Schemes in respect of 2022/23.

The Leader of Worthing Borough Council noted the report and its recommendations but wished to propose that for Worthing Borough Council, the Committee did not accept the recommendations to keep the Council Tax Support Scheme as proposed but explore a new scheme that did not include the £5 minimum per week for working age households. He therefore wished to propose an amendment to the recommendations if possible.

Officers advised that in relation the timeline for delivering the change, consideration had been given to the delivery in 2022/23. Having assessed the timeline, there was a technical possibility that the change could be implemented in 2022/23 but the advice was that it ran a number of significant risks. They were:-

- notification to precepting authorities would be required by the end of the week (10th December), delivering a notice period of just 14 days;
- the revised scheme and proposed consultation would need to be presented to the Joint Strategic Committee on 11 January 2022, providing a public consultation period of just 14 days;
- a material shock to West Sussex County Council and Police partner budgets and an impact on their budget setting processes;
- the estimated £875k reduction in income would be shared by the County, Police and Borough, with an estimated impact on the County Council of £670k and the Police of £88k;
- a significant impact on partner relations going forward in relation to such an immediate change; and
- the risk of Judicial Review for lack of fair notice.

Therefore, Officers advised the Committee that in light of the risks identified and in order to allow sufficient time to implement the proposed changes, the introduction of a revised Council Tax Support Scheme in 2023/24 be considered. A report would be brought to the Joint Strategic Committee in January 2022 to outline a timeline for the

proposed changes and to explore any other salient matters.

The Leader of Worthing Borough Council proposed the following amendment to the recommendations:-

- c. With respect to the Worthing Borough Council working age Council Tax Support Scheme, that the Joint Strategic Committee:
 - i. Agrees that the £5 weekly restriction be removed as soon as possible;
 - ii. Notes that on the advice of officers that the risks of changing the scheme at this point mean that we cannot now change for 2022/23 due to the timescales available to develop and consult on a revised scheme;
 - iii. Recommends to Worthing Borough Council:
 1. That the discretionary budget to support those in severe financial difficulties should be retained;
 2. Given the inability to change this scheme for 2022/23, that it should be based upon the scheme for 2021/22 with the £5.00 weekly restriction retained; and
 3. No other changes should be made beyond necessary technical amendments required to keep the scheme consistent with the national rules in respect of Housing Benefit
 - iv. Requests that a scheme be developed for 2023/24 which removed the £5.00 weekly restriction and started the consultation process with the precepting bodies as soon as possible.
 - v. Notes that a report outlining the options for the new scheme, the consultation process and associated timescales to be presented to members in January 2022.
 - vi. Requests that officers investigate the feasibility of a discretionary hardship scheme for 2022/23 similar to the current scheme of £150 per household with a report to be presented to the Joint Strategic Committee by March. 2022.
 - vii. Requests officers to investigate other measures to alleviate hardship and consider how to fund this as part of the budget process.

The proposed amendment was seconded by Councillor Elizabeth Sparkes and supported by the Committee.

Decision

That the Joint Strategic Committee

- a. noted the contents of the report;
- b. recommended to Adur District Council that the Council Tax Support scheme for Adur District Council in respect of working age customers for 2022/23
 - i) Should be based upon the scheme for 2021/22 with no restrictions; and
 - ii) No other changes should be made beyond necessary technical amendments required to keep the scheme consistent with the national rules in respect of Housing Benefit.
- c. with respect to the Worthing Borough Council working age Council Tax Support Scheme:-
 - i) agreed that the £5 weekly restriction be removed as soon as possible;
 - ii) noted that on the advice of officers, the risks of changing the scheme at this point meant that we cannot now change for 2022/23 due to the timescales available to develop and consult on a revised scheme;
 - iii) recommended to Worthing Borough Council:
 - 1. That the discretionary budget to support those in severe financial difficulties should be retained;
 - 2. Given the inability to change this scheme for 2022/23, that it should be based upon the scheme for 2021/22 with the £5.00 weekly restriction retained; and
 - 3. No other changes should be made beyond necessary technical amendments required to keep the scheme consistent with the national rules in respect of Housing Benefit
 - iv) requested that a scheme be developed for 2023/24 which removed the £5.00 weekly restriction and started the consultation process with the precepting bodies as soon as possible;
 - v) noted that a report outlining the options for the new scheme, the consultation process and associated timescales be presented to members in January 2022;
 - vi) requested that officers investigate the feasibility of a discretionary hardship scheme for 2022/23 similar to the current scheme of £150 per household with a report to be presented to the Joint Strategic Committee by March 2022; and
 - vii) requested officers to investigate other measures to alleviate hardship and consider how to fund this as part of the budget process.