



Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board

3 October 2012

-: Present :-

Councillor Thomas (J) (Chairman)

Councillors Barnby, Bent, Doggett, Hill, Kingscote, Parrott and Pountney, Parrott

(Also in attendance: Councillor Davies)

26. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Pentney and Penny Burnside. Councillor Tyerman (as the relevant Executive Lead) had been invited to attend the meeting but had also sent his apologies.

It was also reported that, in accordance with the wishes of the Liberal Democrat and Non-Coalition groups, the membership of the Board had been amended to include Councillors Doggett and Parrott in place of Councillors Darling and Stockman respectively.

27. Council Tax Support Scheme

The Board has previously received briefing information about the introduction of local Council Tax Support Schemes and reduction of 10% in the expenditure allocated to the localised schemes.

At the meeting, the Board received a report which set out how the Council had worked with other Devon local authorities to establish a common framework for the new Scheme. It was noted that the Council was proposing to adopt the existing Council Tax Benefit Scheme but, in order to make up the losses from the reduction of the grant subsidy, there would need to be changes to some elements of the scheme.

The proposals which had been subject to consultation were:

- Limit the maximum level of support to 75% of their Council Tax Liability
- Restrict the maximum level of support to a Band D charge
- Withdraw the second adult rebate
- Reduce the upper capital/savings limit from £16,000 to £6,000

The Council had consulted with residents, especially those who will be affected by the proposal, about the proposals through a survey which had been developed in conjunction with other Devon authorities. The consultation had run for eight weeks until 1 October 2012 and had been available in a variety of forms. A draft impact assessment had also been drafted which would be reviewed and updated

following the consultation feedback and then used to inform the final recommendations which would be considered by the Council at its meeting in December 2012.

A range of issues were discussed at the meeting including the risk associated with collecting Council Tax from residents who had never previously had to pay, the impact on residents in a variety of circumstances and the methods used to consult with the public.

Resolved: (i) that the following findings of the Board be incorporated into its report:

1. The Board recognises that the Government requirement to introduce a Local Council Tax Support Scheme (taken with other welfare reforms) is likely to have a substantial, adverse impact on the local economy and that awareness of this should be raised by a range of different means.
2. In understanding the impact, it would be helpful for a view to be taken on the areas of Torbay in which the residents lived who would now, if the proposals were implemented, be required to meet at least 25% of their Council Tax liability.
3. In addition, the specific impact that the introduction that the Local Council Tax Support Scheme will have on children in Torbay be considered and that the Strategic Welfare Group and the Child Poverty Commission be urged to continue to work together to mitigate this impact.
4. The Board have every expectation that residents will pay their Council Tax and will recognise that the Council is being required to make these changes as a result of Government legislation. Equally, the Board endorse the need for there to be robust procedures in place to collect Council Tax. There will, however, be a need to assess the impact on the Collection Fund as the Local Council Tax Support Scheme is implemented.
5. The Board congratulated the officers involved in undertaking the consultation but were disappointed at the response rate. It was felt that, whilst various means of raising awareness with the public of the consultation had been pursued, those means may not have been wide enough.
6. The Board felt that the broader details of the Hardship Fund needed to be defined prior to the final Council Tax Support Scheme being agreed and that, in order for proper consideration to be given to these criteria, those groups of people who will be disproportionately affected needed to be identified.

(ii) that the results of the consultation, the final Equality Impact Assessment and the draft Local Council Tax Support Scheme be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Board prior to them being considered by the Council.