

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 17 December 2019

Subject: Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2020/21

Portfolio Holder: Councillor S Kane (Customer Services)

Recommending:

That Cabinet recommend that Council note that the Local Council Tax Support scheme for 2019/20 will continue unchanged for 2020/21.

1. The Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTS) replaced Council Tax Benefit in 2013. Each local authority must review its scheme annually. The Government brought in regulations to ensure that pensioners continue to receive the same level of assistance as they would have done if the Council Tax Benefit scheme was still in place. The Council can therefore only make amendments to the scheme for people of working age. The Council has approved the general principle that the Local Council Tax Support scheme should be cost neutral. In legislative terms the scheme needs to be approved by 11th March each year so for 2020/21 approval needs to be made at Full Council on 17th December 2019.

2. As there are no proposed changes to the 2019/20 scheme there is no legal requirement to consult residents of the district.

3. Currently, the total expenditure on LCTS is £6,145,788, which is made up of £3,521,040 for elderly recipients and £2,624,748 for working age recipients. This is £112,013 up on last year's expenditure with an increase of £80,868 for elderly recipients and an increase of £31,145 for working age claimants. The total number of recipients off LCTS is 6,049 comprising 3,136 elderly recipients and 2,913 working age. This compares with a total number of claimants at 31st March 2019 of 6,115. Although there has been a reduction of around 66 claimants which may look contradictory in terms of an increase in expenditure on the scheme, but the average increase in Council Tax of 4.6% in 2019/20 needs to be factored in. However, the overall expenditure on the scheme will continue to be monitored over the year as the principle is that it is self-funding. This will also form part of the review for the 2021/22 scheme.

Resource Implications:

LCTS scheme for 2020/21:

4. From 2014/15 the funding has been rolled into the Council's overall funding position made up of Revenue Support Grant and locally retained Business Rates. The actual amount of funding for LCTS is therefore not identifiable within the settlement figures, although the overall package continues to be reduced each year. The LCTS scheme is designed to ensure, as far as possible, stability and sustainability in the Council's finances. It should be noted that LCTS is not a form of benefit and it is treated as a discount within the Council Tax calculations. This means that the Council's Taxbase is reduced (as is the Taxbase for all other preceptors) and

that a large proportion of the lost Council Tax income is covered by Government funding.

Exceptional Hardship Fund:

5. For the last five years there has been a small hardship fund to assist households which have been experiencing exceptional hardship. It is anticipated that the current year's budget for this fund will be adequate. The County, Fire and Police are all contributing towards this fund and they have agreed that they will continue with those contributions for 2020/21.

Conclusion

6. We recommend as set out at the commencement of this report.