

COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES - 23 JANUARY 2018

Present: Councillor R Williams (Mayor);

Councillors David Absolom, Debs Absolom, Ayub, Ballsdon, Brock, Chrisp, Davies, Dennis, Duveen, Eden, D Edwards, K Edwards, Ennis, Gavin, Gittings, Grashoff, Hacker, Hopper, Hoskin, Jones, Khan, Livingston, Lovelock, Maskell, McGonigle, McKenna, O'Connell, Page, Pearce, Skeats, Stanford-Beale, Steele, Stevens, Terry, Tickner, Vickers, White, J Williams and Woodward.

Apologies: Councillors James, McDonald, McElligott, Robinson, Rodda and Singh.

24. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

(a) Mapledurham Playing Fields Trustees' Sub-Committee

The Mayor asked the Council to note that the Head of Legal & Democratic Services had exercised his delegation at the request of the Conservative Group Leader to appoint Councillor McDonald to the Mapledurham Playing Fields Trustees' Sub-Committee in place of Councillor Grashoff.

25. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

26. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC IN ACCORDANCE WITH STANDING ORDER 9

	<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Answer</u>
1.	Richard Stainthorp	Piper Ceramic Tile	Cllr Hacker
2.	Richard Stainthorp	Forbury Gardens Cannon	Cllr Hacker
3.	Terry Dixon	Tourist Information Centre in Reading	Cllr Hacker
4.	Peter Burt	Equal Pay Claims	Cllr Lovelock
5.	Peter Burt	Sport and Leisure Forum	Cllr Hacker
6.	Roger Lightfoot	Arthur Hill Pool Site	Cllr Hacker
7.	Roger Lightfoot	Palmer Park Swimming Pool	Cllr Hacker
8.	John Mullaney	East Reading MRT	Cllr Page
9.	Tony Warrell	Reading Roads Bus Affect	Cllr Page
10.	James Berrie	Reading Buses Route 22	Cllr Page

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As there was insufficient time, pursuant to Standing Order 9(4), written replies to Questions 9-10 above would be provided in accordance with Standing Order 11(3).

(The full text of the question and reply was made available on the Reading Borough Council website).

27. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS IN ACCORDANCE WITH STANDING ORDER NO 10

	<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Answer</u>
1.	Cllr White	Progress on Reducing Consultant Spend	Cllr Lovelock
2.	Cllr Dennis	Cost of Bed & Breakfast Accommodation	Cllr Ennis

(The full text of the questions and replies was made available on the Reading Borough Council website).

28. BUDGET 2018-19: APPROVAL OF COUNCIL TAX BASE, NNDR1 ESTIMATE & ESTIMATED COLLECTION FUND SURPLUS; APPROVAL OF THE LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2018/19

Further to Minute 63 of the Policy Committee held on 15 January 2018, the Strategic Finance Director submitted a report regarding the Council Tax support scheme, estimated Council Tax collection rate and Council tax base for the 2018/19 financial year.

The report explained that, by 31 January 2018, it would be necessary to have estimated and informed Thames Valley Police & Crime Commissioner, Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service and the Environment Agency in connection with their levy of the Council Tax base to be used for setting the tax for 2018/19. In order to do this it would be necessary to estimate the anticipated Council Tax collection rate and the allowance to be made for non-collection and changes to the Council Tax Base. It would also be necessary by the same date to have estimated and informed the Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service and Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) of the estimated collectible business rates to be used for setting the budget and ultimately the Council Tax for 2018/19, which was done by completing an NNDR1 form.

The report also explained that there was a requirement on 15 January 2018 to estimate the collection fund surplus or deficit separately for both Council Tax and business rate transactions as at 31 March 2018. Any surplus or deficit would then be taken into account when calculating the total amount to be collected from Council Tax payers in 2018/19. The report set out forecast Council Tax collection and the resulting impact on the Collection Fund.

This report also sought formal Council approval for the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2018/19. In order to consider all possible measures to close the estimated budget gap, a proposal to increase the minimum working age contribution rate from 25% to 35% was being recommended, following a statutory public consultation on the

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proposed changes to the local scheme. Appendix B to the report set out a summary of the responses to the consultation on the proposed changes to the local scheme and the officer response and advice and the Equality Impact Assessment in respect of the proposed changes to the Council tax Support Scheme was also appended at Appendix E.

The recommended changes to apply from 1 April 2018 for 2018/19 and future years were as follows:

- to increase the minimum contribution from 25% to 35%,
- reduce capital level from £6,000 to £3,000
- increase levels of Non-Dependant deductions (based on income) from £7.50 to £10.00 for those non-dependants not engaged in remunerative work (working less than 16 hours per week) and/or have gross earnings less than £196.95 per week
- increase levels of non-dependant deductions (based on income from £12.50 per week to £15.00 per week for any non-dependants engaged in remunerative work (16 hours or more) with gross weekly earnings of £196.95 per week and above
- apply administrative easements to the process of claiming Council Tax Support for those customers transferring to Universal Credit. This would enable them to continue to receive and claim Council Tax Support as easily and as efficiently as possible without causing additional risk of overpayment, and excessive numbers of new bill and award notifications being sent to them.

The report also noted that the various technical changes to Council Tax made in previous years would continue. The proposed change introduced by the Chancellor in the Autumn 2017 budget to increase the long term empty homes premium did not apply in 2018/19, but would need to be formally approved next year. The forward plan from 2019/20 had assumed the change would be implemented in Reading in line with the policy position taken last year to maximise this premium.

Pursuant to the approval of the revised Council Tax Support Scheme and other estimates explained, the report then set out the detailed calculations to be made under the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992, as amended.

The following motion was moved by Councillor Lovelock and seconded by Councillor Page and CARRIED:

Resolved:

- (1) That the 2018 uprating of the allowances in the council tax support scheme and other amendments to the scheme as set out in paragraph 1.5 of the report be approved, in particular the regrettable increase in the minimum contribution payable by those of working age from 25% to 35%;
- (2) That it be noted that the following had previously been adopted:
 - (i) the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Default Scheme) (England) Regulations 2012 (SI 2886(2012)) in 2013;

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- (ii) the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013 (SI 3181 (2013)) in 2014;
- (iii) the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2014 in 2015;
- (iv) the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2015 in 2016
- (v) the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2016 in 2017;

and that these would remain in place as the basis of the 2018-19 scheme, to the extent that the requirements in each regulation remained prescribed;

- (3) That the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2017 which came into force on 12 January 2018 be adopted and apply to local schemes from 1 April 2018 and (in the case of three of the 17 regulations) 6 December 2018, as set out in Appendix A;
- (4) That the proposed local changes set out in Appendix B for 2018/19 and the overall Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2018/19 be approved;
- (5) That the Council's "plain english" guide to the Council Tax Support Scheme which explains how the 2018/19 scheme works be published on the website;
- (6) That for the purpose of, and in accordance with, the provisions of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations, 1992 (as amended):
 - (a) The estimated Council Tax collection rate for the financial year 2018/19 be set at 98.75% overall (unchanged since 2015/16);
 - (b) Taking account of the Council Tax technical changes, the amount calculated by the Council as its Council Tax base for the financial year 2018/19 shall be 54,850;
- (7) That it be noted that neither a surplus nor deficit had been estimated in respect of Council Tax transactions as at 31 March 2018, and Reading's share of this was therefore £0;
- (8) That it be noted that a surplus of £9,360,000 has been estimated in respect of NNDR transactions as at 31 March 2018, and Reading's share of this is £4,586,400 {both figures subject to (10) below};
- (9) That the NNDR1 summary form as at Appendix D be approved, noting that it was estimated that the Council would collect £130,000,000 {figure subject to (10) below} of which £81,036,855 (to be confirmed in the final Local Government Finance Settlement-LGFS) (62.3%) would be paid to DCLG as the tariff, and the balance retained in Berkshire as part of the Berkshire pilot/pool; further noting that Reading will retain a minimum of £35,429,714 {figure subject to (10) below} and that 70% of the excess over this sum adjusted for the gain from not paying NNDR levy would be

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paid to the Berkshire LEP to support further local economic growth, and the balance retained by Reading provided every Berkshire authority had a balance of at least £1m, with a pro rata reduction to authorities with a balance exceeding £1m to bring others up to this agreed minimum gain per authority from the pilot/pool;

- (10) That the Strategic Finance Director, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Chairman of the Audit & Governance Committee, be authorised to amend any estimated figures stated in (8) and (9) above, by 31 January 2018, in order to reflect the final agreed position of the Berkshire business rates pilot and associated NNDR pool.

29. HOUSING

Pursuant to Notice, the following motion was moved by Councillor Pearce and seconded by Councillor Ennis and CARRIED:

Resolved -

This Council notes:

- The average monthly rent in Reading is now over £1000 a month (valuation office agency)
- The average house price in Reading is over £300,000 (according to the Land Registry)
- The earnings to house price ratio in Reading is now 10:1.
- The average house deposit in the UK is £33,960 and in Reading this is much higher (Halifax)
- Reading Council is doing all it can to ease the housing crisis with the Homes for Reading company and the building of new Council houses including at Conwy Close.

This Council resolves to write to Housing Minister Sajid Javid to ask if he will support the Local Government association campaign that asks to enable Councils to:

- Allow Councils to borrow to invest.
- To keep all of the money received from the sale of homes on right to buy.

To use this and other funding to reinvest in building new homes that are good quality and affordable.

30. ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Pursuant to Notice, the following motion was moved by Councillor Gittings and seconded by Councillor Brock and CARRIED:

Resolved -

That the Council:

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- Recognises the new and emerging pressures placed on Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service by the Grenfell Tower fire;
- Supports the call for flexibility along the lines of that offered to police and crime commissioners for Royal Berkshire Fire Authority in the setting of Council Tax locally for 2018/19;
- Recognises that this flexibility is critical in ensuring the continuation of critical and life-saving prevention, protection and response services for the people of Berkshire;
- Reading Borough Council writes to Central Government to express our support for this position and request that this be taken into consideration in the setting of the Council Tax Referendum Principles and Local Government Finance Settlement.

(The meeting closed at 8.00 pm).