



<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF FINANCE &amp; IT</b>
<b>TO:</b>	<b>COUNCIL FORUM</b>
<b>ON:</b>	<b>26 JANUARY 2017</b>

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**SUBJECT: Council Tax Support Scheme 2017/18**

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## **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 To seek approval for the adoption of the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2017/18.

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- a) That the contents of the report are noted;
- b) That the Council Tax Support Scheme that was approved by Council in January 2016 is continued for the financial year 2017/18, and;
- c) That any subsequent technical amendments to the Council Tax Support Scheme that may be required in 2017/18 following legislative changes are delegated to the Director of Finance & IT, in consultation with the Executive Member, Resources.

## **3. BACKGROUND**

### **Council Tax Support Scheme**

The Welfare Reform Act contained provisions which abolished Council Tax Benefit and recommended localised schemes to be administered by Local Authorities throughout England with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013.

As a consequence of the legislation, it was agreed at full Council on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2013 that the localised scheme adopted by Blackburn with Darwen BC would be means tested in the same way as Council Tax Benefit, however, awards would be 20% less for working age claimants than the previous national scheme.

The Council has in previous years confirmed that this scheme would continue to apply each financial year. This report fulfils the Council's obligation to consider the local scheme each financial year and formally agree the provision.

## **4. KEY ISSUES**

### **4.1 Council Tax Support**

In preparation for setting the budget for 2017/18, the Council is obliged to formally continue the scheme already agreed or make any adjustments prior to 1st April 2017. This report seeks to fulfil the necessary legal requirements and confirm Blackburn with Darwen BC's Council Tax Support scheme for 2017/18.

There are no changes proposed to the calculation of the scheme, however, a number of minor changes relating to welfare benefits terminology have been made.

The Council Tax Support scheme has in previous years mirrored the Housing Benefit assessment process. The correlation of the two schemes has helped with customer understanding and simplified the administration process. A number of significant changes to the Housing Benefit scheme have been introduced within 2017. These changes have included, reductions in Housing Benefit payments for temporary absence, reduction in backdating claims to a maximum of 4 weeks and the removal of the family premium in the calculation for new claims and new births.

After consultation with the Executive Member for Resources, it was agreed that these changes would not be adopted within the Council Tax Support scheme at this time.

## **5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

By maintaining the same Council Tax Support scheme from 2016/17 into 2017/18 there are no significant policy changes to consider.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Whilst any increase in the number of claimants or the amount of Council Tax Support awarded would clearly increase the financial cost to the Council, the actual total award of Council Tax Support has consistently decreased over the previous four years. There was a small increase in 2016/17, however, this was as a direct result of the increase in Council Tax and the Adult Social Care precept.

## **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

The Localised Council Tax Support Scheme must be agreed by Council each financial year.

## **8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

There are no other resource implications associated with this report.

## 9. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

In preparing for the ending of the national Council Tax Benefit scheme and the localising of support to local authorities, the DCLG completed an initial Equality Impact Assessment in January 2012, and an updated Impact Assessment in June 2012. In addition, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council prepared a high level Equality Impact Assessment. As the scheme remains the same, the Equalities Impact Assessment is still valid and applicable for 2017/18.

## 10. CONSULTATIONS

The Council, as a billing authority, was required to enter into public consultation to develop and adopt a localised Council Tax Support scheme for implementation across Blackburn with Darwen from 1st April 2013. As the scheme will remain the same for 2017/18 there is no further requirement to undertake a new consultation exercise.

### **Chief Officer/Member**

Contact Officer: Louise Mattinson, Director of Finance & IT

Date: 5<sup>th</sup> January 2017

Background Papers: Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2017/18