



<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF FINANCE &amp; IT</b>
<b>TO:</b>	<b>COUNCIL FORUM</b>
<b>ON:</b>	<b>25<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2018</b>

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**SUBJECT: Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2018/19**

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

1.1 To seek approval for the adoption of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2018/19.

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- a) That the contents of the report are noted;
- b) That the Localised Council Tax Support Scheme that was approved by Council in January 2017 is continued for the financial year 2018/19, and;
- c) That any subsequent technical amendments to the Council Tax Support Scheme that may be required following legislative changes are delegated to the Director of Finance & IT in consultation with the Executive Member, Resources.

## **3. BACKGROUND**

### **Local 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 Council on 31st 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.

Full Council has confirmed in previous years that this scheme would continue to apply. This report fulfils the Council's obligation to consider the local scheme each financial year and formally agree the provision for 2018/19.

## **4. KEY ISSUES**

### **4.1 Local Council Tax Support**

In preparation for setting the budget for 2018/19, the Council is obliged to formally continue the scheme already agreed or make any adjustments prior to 1st February 2018. This report seeks to fulfil the necessary legal requirements and confirm Blackburn with Darwen BC's Council Tax Support scheme for 2018/19.

It is proposed that the Council Tax Support scheme for 2018/19 is amended as follows:

#### **Universal Credit**

The notices received from the Department of Work and Pensions regarding claimants of Universal Credit will now be considered as an acceptable claim form for the Council Tax Support scheme. In order to receive this notice, the claimant must have already stated to the Department of Work and Pensions an intention to claim Council Tax Support. This change will improve the current application process and reduce barriers to customers claiming the support. In addition, the time taken to award the entitlement will be reduced substantially.

#### **Uprating**

In each financial year all claim types are amended to take into account any central government changes known as 'uprating'. In line with previous years, these changes will be made prior to the annual billing process in March 2018.

## **5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

By maintaining the main body of the Local Council Tax Support scheme from 2017/18 and only making minor changes detailed in section 4, key issues, there are no significant policy changes to consider.

The full scheme is available on request.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Whilst any increase in the number of claimants or the amount of Council Tax Support awarded would increase the financial cost to the Council, the actual expenditure has consistently decreased over a number of years. There is no reason to suspect that this trend will not continue into 2018/19.

## **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

The Localised Council Tax Support Scheme must be agreed before the 31<sup>st</sup> January each year by full Council.

## **8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

There are no other resource implications associated with this report.

## **9. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

In preparing for the transfer of council tax benefit 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 EIA is still valid and applicable for 2018/19.

## **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 2018/19 there is no further requirement to undertake a new consultation exercise.

### **Chief Officer/Member**

Contact Officer: Louise Mattinson, Director of Finance & IT

Date: 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2018

Background Papers: Council Tax Support Scheme 2018/19