

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL



COUNCIL

Monday, 20 January 2014

YOU ARE SUMMONED TO ATTEND A MEETING OF NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL, WHICH WILL BE HELD AT THE GUILDHALL NORTHAMPTON ON MONDAY, 20 JANUARY 2014 AT 6:30 PM WHEN THE FOLLOWING BUSINESS IS PROPOSED TO BE TRANSACTED

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2. MINUTES.

To approve the minutes of the proceedings of the Meeting of the Council held on 9th December 2013.

3. APOLOGIES.

4. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

5. PUBLIC COMMENTS AND PETITIONS

6. MEMBER AND PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Copy herewith

7. CABINET MEMBER PRESENTATIONS

(Copy herewith)

8. OPPOSITION GROUP BUSINESS

Councillor Beardsworth to make a statement on "Consultation; the need for public

scrutiny”.

9. LOCAL COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME - YEAR 2 - PROPOSED CHANGES

Report of the Chief Finance Officer – LGSS (Copy herewith)

10. COUNCIL TAX BASE

Report of the Chief Finance Officer – LGSS (Copy herewith)

11. NOTICES OF MOTION

- i. Councillor Stone to propose and Councillor Wire to second:

“This council is mindful of our responsibility to protect our citizens in the event of bad weather, flooding and other environmental disasters.

This Council asks Cabinet to put in train the necessary refresh of all emergency policies and procedures and training for local authority staff, members and partners”.

- ii. Councillor Stone to propose and Councillor Wire to second:

“This Council notes fuel poverty is becoming an ever increasing issue in the town. In order to ameliorate this and to help bring down the cost of domestic consumption this council resolves to work with energy companies on a favourable tariff for consumers willing to bulk switch to the same provider”.

- iii. Councillor Glyname to propose and Councillor Beardsworth to second:

“This Council notes that since the current administration has overseen shocking decline of the town centre, highlighted by:

- A record number of empty shops
- Dropping footfall
- A misunderstanding of what people want from the town centre, evidenced by public resistance to Administration plans. (i.e the removal of the market square fountain, reopening of Abington Street etc.)
- The stalling of the Legal and General agreement that was progressing under the Liberal Democrat administration, even in the worst economic climate for regeneration.

The Council therefore concludes that:

- The current Administration is failing the town centre, and as such, the town.
- A radical policy shift is needed to undo the damage caused by the Administration

over the last three years.

- The Administration either lacks, or is not motivated by a clear understanding of what is required for the health of the town centre

This Council resolves:

- Embrace, promote and deliver the “town centre first; policy.

12. MATTERS OF URGENCY WHICH BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES THE MAYOR IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED.

The Guildhall
Northampton

D. Kennedy Chief Executive

Public Participation

1. Comments and Petitions

- 1.1 A member of the public (or an accredited representative of a business ratepayer of the Borough) may make a comment or present a petition on any matter in relation to which the Council has powers. A comment or presentation of a petition shall be for no more than three minutes. No notice of the nature of the comment to be made or of the petition is required except for the need to register to speak by 12 noon on the day of the meeting.

(Public comments and petitions will not be taken and the Annual Council Meeting or other civic or ceremonial meetings.)

NOTES

- i. Comments may be on one or more subjects but each person has no longer than three minutes to have their say.*
- ii. The same person may make a comment and present a petition on different subjects. In such instances that person will have three minutes to make their comment and a separate three minutes to present a petition.*

2. Member and Public Questions

- 2.1 A member of the public (or business ratepayer of the Borough) may ask a maximum of two written questions at each meeting, each limited to a maximum of 50 words, on any matter in relation to which the Council has powers. Each question shall:
- be submitted in writing and delivered, faxed or e-mailed to Democratic Services no later than 10.00am seven calendar days before the day of the meeting; and
 - include the name and address of the questioner and the name of the Cabinet member/Committee Chair to whom the question is put.

- 2.2 At the meeting, copies of all questions and the responses to them from the public and Members will be made available to the public and press. The Mayor may allow one

supplementary question, without notice, that arises directly from the original question or response.

(Questions will not be taken at the Annual Council Meeting or at civic or ceremonial meetings or meetings called to deal with specific items of business.)

NOTES

In respect of paragraph 2.1 above, questions may be rejected on certain grounds that are set out on page 4-12 of the Council's Constitution and which may be viewed at www.northampton.gov.uk/site/scripts/download_info.php?fileID=1919 or by seeking advice using the contact details below.

3. Motions

- 3.1 A member of the public may register to speak to a motion under the 'Notices of Motion' item on the agenda. Registration to speak must be made to Democratic Services by 12 noon on the day to the meeting. Speaking to a motion is restricted to three minutes per person.

(The 'Notices of Motion' item will not be taken at the Annual Council meeting or meetings called for civic or ceremonial purposes.)

4. General

A member of the public may make a comment, present a petition, ask a question or speak to a motion at the same meeting subject to the restrictions set out above.

5. Contacts

Democratic Services: e-mail democraticservices@northampton.gov.uk

Tel 01604 837722

Mail Democratic Services
Northampton Borough Council
The Guildhall
St Giles Square
Northampton NN1 1DE

MINUTES

OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF A MEETING OF NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL HELD AT THE GUILDHALL, NORTHAMPTON, ON Monday, 9 December 2013 AT SIX THIRTY O'CLOCK IN THE EVENING

PRESENT: HIS WORSHIP THE MAYOR Councillor Marriott (in the Chair).

COUNCILLORS: Caswell, Ansell, Aziz, Beardsworth, Begum, Bottwood, Capstick, I. Choudary, N Choudary, Conroy, Davies, Duncan, Eales, Eldred, Flavell, Ford, Glynane, Golby, Hadland, Hallam, Hibbert, Hill, King, Lane, Lynch, Mackintosh, Malpas, Markham, Mason, Mennell, Meredith, Nunn, Oldham, Palethorpe, Parekh, Patel, Sargeant, Stone, Strachan, Wire DL and Yates

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Oldham declared a personal, non-pecuniary interest in Item 9 – Housing Options Review as a Council tenant.

Councillor Conroy declared a personal, non-pecuniary interest in Item 9 – Housing Options Review as a Council tenant.

Councillor Mennell declared a personal, non-pecuniary interest in Item 9 – Housing Options Review as a Council tenant.

Councillor Ford declared a personal & pecuniary interest in Motion v) – as his wife is the catering manager at Delapre Tea Rooms.

Councillor Capstick declared a personal, non-pecuniary interest in Item 7- Cabinet Member Presentations – as a board member of WNDC.

Councillor Hadland declared a personal, non-pecuniary interest in Item 7- Cabinet Member Presentations – as a board member of WNDC.

2. MINUTES.

The minutes of the meeting of Council held on the 28th October 2013 were agreed, and signed by the Mayor, subject to the following members being included in the attendance list:

Councillor Conroy
Councillor Beardsworth
Councillor Hill
Councillor Davies
Councillor Golby
Councillor King

The minutes of the meeting of special Council held on the 28th November 2013 were agreed and signed by the Mayor.

3. APOLOGIES.

Apologies were received from Councillors Subbarayan, Larratt and Gowen.

4. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

The Mayor commented that there was a book of condolences that would be available for Councillors and members of the public to sign in memory of Nelson Mandela. The Mayor offered his congratulations to the Leader of the Council in his successful bid to become selected to stand as a Member of Parliament for Northampton South. He also thanked Councillor Davies for her hard work with regards to the food bank and thanked those who had made donations.

5. PUBLIC COMMENTS AND PETITIONS

Mr Newbury addressed Council as the Chairman of St David's residents association. He commented that with recent housing developments, the infrastructure in the area was unable to withstand the increased number of vehicles and that improvements in the area were much needed.

Mr Shah commented that he wanted the Council to focus on the long term implications of having an ALMO and requested that they consider establishing the ALMO for 10 years which would be subject to yearly reviews. It was noted that there was a need for openness, transparency and continued tenant involvement and asked that there be protection put in place to ensure a continuation of the ALMO should there be a change in Administration.

Mr Mallard addressed Council and commented that he agreed with the recommendation to approve the implementation of the Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO) and stated that the Tenant's Panel had shown dedication of joined up working and noted that the Council had the opportunity to continue with, and promote, improvements to Social Housing.

Mr Humphris commented that he believed that the ALMO was the best option for the Council as it would provide overall control of the stock, but from the ALMO. He stated that the estimated cost of a ballot was no longer a viable option.

Mr Whitehead commented that all associated parties had worked exceptionally hard in carrying out the review and stated that in terms of a ballot, many tenants would prefer the option but noted that the ALMO should proceed regardless of whether a ballot was conducted.

Ms Bennet commented that it was only after the completion of tenants panel review that the cost of a ballot was realised, having received further information. She commented that out of 236 residents consulted only 2 of them were in favour in having a ballot. She also requested that safeguards be put in place to ensure the future of the ALMO regardless of the administration and thanked all the political parties for their cross party support.

Ms Daley commented tenants needed to have a dedicated housing service and that there had been other numerous successful ALMO's, and noted that they should be autonomous, with which would come positive change. She further commented that the Council and ALMO should work together in partnership and that new homes should be built and agreement reached between the partners on how to proceed and ensure social housing continues to expand.

Ms Linekar stated that she was happy to support the recommendations within the report and thanked everyone who had been involved and dedicated their time and effort whilst undertaking the review. She expressed some concerns with regards to the cost of setting up the ALMO, whether rents would be increased and questioned if there would be any redundancies of Council staff as a consequence of the ALMO. She thanked Councillor Markham for her support and dedication in undertaking the review.

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6. MEMBER AND PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Mayor advised that eleven questions had been received from members of the public and Councillors and that the answers had been tabled in accordance with the Constitution.

Questions and answers given were as tabled (included in an updated agenda on the website)

In response to a supplementary question asked, relating to question 2, Councillor Hadland confirmed that the fire escape routes for the Greyfriars were irrelevant as it did not refer to the original question.

In response to a supplementary question asked, relating to question 3, Councillor Markham confirmed that a report containing information about Disabled Facilities Grant was going to Cabinet on the 11th December 2013.

In response to a supplementary question asked, relating to question 4, Councillor Eldred confirmed that they were at the final stages of the legal investigations and that progress was being made as quickly as possible.

In response to a supplementary question asked, relating to question 5, Councillor Eldred confirmed that the offer to store the Sekhemka statue by the Northampton Museum had been declined as there had not been adequate alarms or CCTV in place at the time.

In response to a supplementary question asked, relating to question 6, Councillor Eldred confirmed that all Councillors would be informed of the selected auction house to be used for the sale of the Sekhemka, by email.

In response to a supplementary question asked, relating to question 7, Councillor Eldred confirmed that any written reports referring to the Deed of Gift would be published.

In response to a supplementary question asked, relating to question 10, Councillor Hallam confirmed that the Winter Maintenance Programme had started and commented that he would be in attendance at the next resident's association meeting.

7. CABINET MEMBER PRESENTATIONS

At this point, each of the Cabinet Members made a presentation of their respective portfolios that had been circulated with the agenda.

Councillor Mackintosh submitted his Cabinet Member report and commented that he would be announcing the draft budget later in the week. In response to comments made, Councillor Mackintosh stated that he was pleased with the Community Covenant scheme and the poppy appeal. He commented that with regards to Community Safety, he was continuing to work with the Police and Crime Commissioner and noted that Serious Acquisitive Crime was on a downward trend. In response to a question raised, Councillor Mackintosh commented that funding had been agreed for the demolition of Greyfriars and that the Fire Service would be consulted during this period.

Councillor Markham submitted her Cabinet Member report and elaborated thereon. In response to a question with regards to Disabled Facilities Grant, she stated that no one had been left in desperate need and that emergencies had been dealt with promptly and subsequently additional money had been released.

Councillor Hadland submitted his Cabinet Member report and elaborated thereon. In response to a question, the Cabinet Member commented that he was in continued negotiations with Legal and General and that action was being taken on the demolition of Greyfriars. In response to a further question, Councillor Hadland commented that there were sufficient resources when the Council would take over a number of assets, with the closure of WNDC.

Councillor Hallam submitted his Cabinet Member report and elaborated thereon. In response to a question, he commented that there was an increase in the amount of recycling being carried out, but that further work was needed in moving some residents over from black to green bin bags. He also responded to a further question by stating that static dog fouling signs were ineffective and there were moves to increase the number of temporary signs erected.

Councillor Eldred submitted his Cabinet Members report and elaborated thereon. He offered his congratulations to Councillor Ansell on coming second in the

'Northampton Strictly Come Dancing' competition. He also confirmed that there would be a reduction in pitch fees for football league teams.

Councillor Bottwood submitted his Cabinet Member report and elaborated thereon. He offered his congratulations to the Revenue and Benefits service having been nominated for two national Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation awards. In response to a question asked, the Cabinet Member commented that he did not have the figures before him with regards to the load to the Northampton Football Club and Saints but he would forward that information.

8. OPPOSITION GROUP BUSINESS

Councillor Stone commented that she believed that work should pay and that the number of working families in poverty had massively increased. She questioned how many Council Officers were becoming increasingly worse off and how many more were using services such as payday loans and pawn shops to subsidise their wages. She commented that a motion had previously been submitted to Council asking for the 'Living Wage' to be introduced but had been unsuccessful. She suggested that a small increase in Council Tax could be an option of implementing the Living Wage and stated that Officers should be proud of their employment with the Council.

The Leader, in response, stated that there had been a significant number of reductions in senior management, from 21 to ten and that even during austere times; the administration would be announcing a balanced budget.

Councillor Stone commented that the suggestion of increasing Council Tax was just one option that should be considered and that public sector workers deserved to be well looked after and given a decent wage.

9. HOUSING OPTIONS REVIEW

Councillor Markham submitted a report that sought to approve the establishment of an Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO) to manage the Councils housing stock. She noted that there were 6 options which examined the future of the council housing stock and it was agreed that the ALMO was the preferred option as it was the most stable and sustainable.

The Leader of the Council thanked the speakers for their contributions, work and involvement in the review. He further thanked all parties for the cross party work that had been demonstrated during the review and seconded adoption of the report.

Councillor Wire DL stated that on behalf of the Labour Group, they fully supported the recommendations.

Councillor Beardsworth commented that the Liberal Democrats were also fully supportive of the ALMO and asked that it be protected for as long as possible, regardless of the administration.

Councillor Palethorpe expressed his delight and the work undertaken during the review and noted that when this had previously been considered, there had only been

two options, and stated that the conclusion of the review was testimony to the hard work of those involved and thanked Councillor Markham for her work.

Councillor Mennell commented that she was happy to support the report and recommendations as a member of UKIP and as a Council tenant.

Councillor Mason commented that she was impressed with the work carried out by all involved and looked forward to seeing the development of the ALMO, and commented that there was still a need to provide more social housing.

Councillor Hadland paid tribute to the work undertaken by Councillor Markham who had gained the trust and understanding of the tenants and officers involved in the review.

Councillor Markham thanked everyone for their comments and gave thanks to the dedication shown throughout the review.

RESOLVED:

That Council endorsed the recommendations contained in the Cabinet report attached to the agenda.

Councillor Markham commented that the next steps of establishing an ALMO would involve further collaborative working and cross party support and stated that the ALMO would be set up within the next 12 months. She confirmed that D Robertson would be Programme Board Director, G Davies would be Interim Managing Director of the project and PS consultants would continue to work on the implementation of an ALMO.

10. TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID YEAR REPORT 2013-2014

Councillor Bottwood submitted a report which sought Councils endorsement of the Treasury Management activities and performance.

Councillor Mackintosh seconded adoption of the report.

RESOLVED:

That Council endorsed the treasury management activities and performance for the period 1 April to 30 September 2013.

11. NOTICES OF MOTION

i) Councillor Hope, Northamptonshire County Council addressed Council and commented that the cost of £3 million of opening up Abington Street to traffic was an extravagant waste of money and urged the cross party support of the motion.

Councillor Stone proposed and Councillor Palethorpe seconded:

“This Council notes that this Conservative Cabinet wants to open up the top section

of Abington Street to road traffic next year.

This Council believes sufficient public consultation has yet to be carried out whether this is actually what the general public want for the town centre. Nor have the Conservative Cabinet provided a proper rationale for this decision.

This Council further believes opening up the top section of Abington Street would be a retrograde step for the town centre and puts the interests of the car and associated traffic problems ahead of pedestrians. This Council opposes the opening up of the top end of Abington Street until proper consultation has taken place”.

Council debated the motion.

Upon a requisition for a recorded vote:

There voted for the motion: Councillors Beardsworth, Capstick, N Choudary, Conroy, Davies, Glynane, Mason, Mennell, Meredith, Palethorpe, Stone, Strachan and Wire DL

There voted against the motion: Councillors Ansell, Bottwood, Caswell, I Choudary, Duncan, Eldred, Flavell, Ford, Golby, Hadland, Hallam, Hibbert, King, Lane, Lynch, Mackintosh, Malpas, Markham, Nunn, Oldham, Patel, Sargeant and Yates.

There abstained the Mayor and Councillor Hill

The motion was lost.

ii) Councillor Mason proposed and Councillor Palethorpe seconded:

“This Council notes that the Conservative Cabinet carried out low key consultation on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

Northampton Borough Council is proposing to reduce the maximum amount of discount a person can receive each year. In 2014/15 the proposal is to reduce the maximum amount of discount a person can receive to 85% of their Council Tax bill, which may then be reduced to 64% in 2015/16.

This Council believes these proposals are iniquitous as they harm the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in Northampton. In order to fill any shortfall this Council should look seriously at revenue raising measures”.

Council debated the motion.

Upon a requisition for a recorded vote:

There voted for the motion: Councillors Beardsworth, Capstick, N Choudary, Conroy, Davies, Glynane, Mason, Mennell, Meredith, Palethorpe, Stone, Strachan and Wire DL

There voted against the motion: Councillors Ansell, Bottwood, Caswell, I Choudary, Duncan, Eldred, Flavell, Ford, Golby, Hadland, Hallam, Hibbert, Hill, King, Lane, Lynch, Mackintosh, Malpas, Markham, Nunn, Oldham, Patel, Sargeant and Yates.

There abstained the Mayor

The motion was lost.

There was a change in the proposer and seconder of Motion iii) the Chief Executive having been duly notified in writing prior to the meeting.

iii) Councillor Capstick proposed and Councillor Stone seconded:

“This council recognises that local government workers’ earnings have fallen by 18% since 2010 and that over 500,000 across the country now earn less than the Living Wage outside of London of £7.65 pence an hour. We recognise that this has placed many of our employees in financial hardship.

This council notes and supports calls by Government, Shadow Cabinet Ministers and MP’s from all parties for action on low pay, for a significant increase in the National Minimum Wage and for the Living Wage.

This council therefore resolves to:

- support the 2014-15 NJC pay claim by UNISON, GMB and Unite
- call upon the LGA to support the claim and lobby government for funding for it.

This council further resolves to call upon the Chancellor and Secretary of State for the Department for Communities and Local Government to ensure that funding is made available for councils to meet the NJC pay claim for a minimum increase of £1 an hour to:

- achieve the Living Wage for the lowest paid and
- begin to restore the earnings of the rest of the workforce”.

Council debated the motion.

Upon a requisition for a recorded vote:

There voted for the motion: Councillors Beardsworth, Capstick, N Choudary, Conroy, Glynane, Mason, Meredith, Palethorpe, Stone and Strachan

There voted against the motion: Councillors Ansell, Bottwood, Caswell, I Choudary, Duncan, Eldred, Flavell, Ford, Golby, Hadland, Hallam, Hibbert, Hill, King, Lane, Lynch, Mackintosh, Malpas, Markham, Nunn, Oldham, Patel, Sargeant and Yates.

There abstained the Mayor

The motion was lost.

iv) Councillor Beardsworth proposed and Councillor Meredith seconded:

“This Council recognises that:

- It, and its members, are here to serve the people of Northampton, not be served by them.
- That often, service users and local residents have a far better understanding of local services and the needs of their local communities than Council officers, or even Councillors – particularly as not all Councillors are as engaged as they should be with their wards, as the current fiasco at Blackthorn Workshops shows.
- With these facts in mind, the Council has procedures for consultation laid out in consultation documents.
- Unfortunately, these procedures have been, at times, ignored.

This Council therefore resolves that:

- Cabinet decisions should demonstrate Consultation in line with the Council’s own consultation document at all times. “

Council debated the motion.

Upon a requisition for a recorded vote:

There voted for the motion: Councillors Beardsworth, Captsick, N Choudary, Conroy, Davies, Glynane, Mason, Mennell, Meredith, Palethorpe, Stone and Strachan.

There voted against the motion: Councillors Bottwood, Caswell, I Choudary, Duncan, Eldred, Flavell, Ford, Golby, Hadland, Hallam, Hibbert, Hill, King, Lane, Lynch, Mackintosh, Malpas, Markham, Nunn, Oldham, Patel, Sargeant and Yates.

The motion was lost.

Having declared a personal and pecuniary interest, in Motion v) Councillor Ford left the Council Chamber for the duration of the debate.

v) Councillor Glynane to propose and Councillor Conroy to second:

“The Delapre tea rooms are a beloved institution in the local area. The tea rooms, run by the Friends of Delapre Abbey, have been established for a number of years, and run by people who have a passion for the abbey and community, often volunteering substantial amounts of time with no expectation of return. That it has become a social and community hub, where many people from across the town meet

This Council therefore resolves that:

During the works at Delapre Abbey, there will be proper provision in place to ensure an uninterrupted service, protecting the tea rooms customer base, and allowing what has become an essential community facility to keep serving the town”.

Council debated the motion.

Upon a vote, the motion was lost.

12. MATTERS OF URGENCY WHICH BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES THE MAYOR IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED.

There were none.

The meeting concluded at 9.31pm

Question for Full Council Monday 20th January 2014

Question 1

Question to Councillor Markham from Mr N Adams

Tenants are exempt from the bedroom tax if they meet BOTH the following conditions:

1. They have continuously received Housing Benefit (full HB or 1p per week) on or before 1 January 1996, AND
2. They have lived in the same property since 1 January 1996

Can you give assurance that the above conditions were taken into account and that the bedroom tax has NOT been imposed on ANY Tenant(s) meeting the above conditions?

Response

The reality is that housing benefit claimants satisfying relevant conditions to qualify under the provisions you are referring to, and who are also affected by the spare room subsidy, are very few in number. LGSS, our housing benefit service provider, is of course fully aware of these provisions and has systems in place to identify such cases to ensure they are correctly determined.

***Cllr Markham
Cabinet Member for Housing***

Question for Full Council Monday 20th January 2014

Question 2

Question to Councillor Markham from Mr N Adams

On the 28th October 2013 in response to a written question, you gave the number of voids at the end of September 2013 as 115

I would bring to your attention that for week 26 (23 September to 29 September) the rental loss on void properties was £18,538.88

On your stated 115 properties it would suggest an average council rent of £174.80

Would you please confirm the number of 115 voids given on 28th October?

Response

The total number of lettable voids in September 2013 was 115 but there were also a further 114 void properties that were awaiting Major Works and were therefore not lettable. The combined total for void properties for September was 229.

***Cllr Markham
Cabinet Member for Housing***

Question for Full Council Monday 20th January 2014

Question 3

Question to Councillor Markham from Mr N Clarke

A recent article in the local press 'Licence error forces lorries off Northampton's roads' stated the overall cost to the public purse won't be known until the hired vehicles are returned.

Question:

What part of the public purse will cover the cost?

- a) The General Fund
- b) The Housing Revenue Account

Response

The Housing Revenue Account

***Cllr Markham
Cabinet Member for Housing***

Question for Full Council Monday 20th January 2014

Question 4

Question to Councillor Hadland from Councillor Palethorpe

Would the Cabinet member tell us if during his and the Leaders regular fortnightly meetings with Legal and General whether they have given any indication that the decision on Grosvenor Centre redevelopment is conditional on the Secretary of State rejecting the Rushden Lakes Development?

Response

I would refer you to the evidence submitted by Legal and General to the Inspector at the Public Inquiry.

The evidence submitted by Legal and General supports this Council's position that Rushden Lakes would, if approved, have a significant, adverse impact on Northampton town centre. Legal and General confirmed at the Inquiry that if the Secretary of State approved the Rushden Lakes application, then Legal and General would not proceed with the proposals for the development of the Grosvenor Centre extension on the scale that have previously been published.

There have been discussions with Legal and General about Rushden Lakes, but we have plans for the regeneration of site whatever the decision from the Secretary of State

***Cllr Hadland
Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning***

Question for Full Council Monday 20th January 2014

Question 5

Question to Councillor Mackintosh from Councillor Palethorpe

In order to clarify the position of the Northampton Borough Council will the Leader of the Council inform the Council if the Northamptonshire Enterprise Partnership LEP and South East Midlands LEP support his opposition to the proposed Rushden Lakes Development?

Response

I can confirm that neither NEP nor SEMLEP submitted any evidence or made any representations to the Rushden Lakes Public Inquiry.

We all recognise that Rushden Lakes would have a negative impact on Northampton, which is why I have campaigned so hard against it.

It is a shame that on 10th October 2012 when the decision was taken, Cllr Palethorpe tweeted:

'Good luck to East Northants Planning Committee tonight.'

What a disgrace.

***Cllr Mackintosh
Leader of the Council***

Question for Full Council Monday 20th January 2014

Question 6

Question to Councillor Bottwood from Mr L Costello

What is the collection rate for households who are now having to pay at least 20% Council Tax under the new Council Tax Reduction scheme, and how many of those households in default are being prosecuted to recover the debt?

Response

The current rate is 8.5%, which is due to increase to 15%. The Borough Council will support individuals in financial hardship, and where possible avoid court action. It should be noted that the Council follows national legislation that prescribes the use of court action in recovering Council Tax.

Cllr Bottwood
Cabinet Member for Finance

Question for Full Council Monday 20th January 2014

Question 7

Question to Councillor Bottwood from Mr L Costello

What are the amounts of Council Tax Base Reduction grants being given to each parish council in the borough in 2014/15?

Response

The Council currently has no plans within its draft budget for 2014/15 to pay any Council Tax Reduction Scheme Grants to parish councils.

***Cllr Bottwood
Cabinet Member for Finance***

Question for Full Council Monday 20th January 2014

Question 8

Question to Councillor Hallam from Councillor Stone

What measures have been put in place to safeguard our citizens, including the most vulnerable (such as homeless) in light of the recent severe weather and floods?

Response

The Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP) will be open in Oasis House, which will activate when temperatures are forecast to be below freezing for three consecutive nights. The Provision opens on the first night in these conditions. The weather in Northampton has been very mild for the time of year, and therefore the SWEP has not been activated this year so far. There have been no areas in Northampton that have been affected by flood waters, therefore no intervention has been required.

***Cllr Hallam
Cabinet Member for Environment***

Question for Full Council Monday 20th January 2014

Question 9

Question to Councillor Mackintosh from Councillor Stone

What are the issues with the local authority working with the public health authority and what can be done to improve our working practice?

Response

The public health authority is Northamptonshire County Council. This authority has an excellent working relationship with the County Council.

***Cllr Mackintosh
Leader of the Council***

Question for Full Council Monday 20th January 2014

Question 10

Question to Councillor Markham from Councillor Mason

Can we have updated figures on the number of households in arrears as a consequence of the bedroom tax?

Response

303 tenants subject to the under-occupancy charge did not have arrears on the 1st April but had arrears at the end of December. The bottom line here is that we cannot be certain why anyone falls into arrears, so the question can't be answered with total clarity.

***Cllr Markham
Cabinet Member for Housing***

Question for Full Council Monday 20th January 2014

Question 11

Question to Councillor Markham from Councillor Mason

What are the current homeless figures and when will the next count be conducted?

Response

The last count was done in November 2013, and we returned a figure of 9. The next count will be due in November this year.

***Cllr Markham
Cabinet Member for Housing***

Question for Full Council Monday 20th January 2014

Question 12

Question to Councillor Hadland from Councillor Capstick

How many new homes have been built or are in the process of being built in this town since May 2011? Furthermore, how many of these are affordable homes? How many are for social rent?

Response

Net number of dwellings built 1st Apr 11 – 31st December 2013 = 1349 (423, 11/12 +516, 12/13 +410, 13/14)

Number of New Affordable Dwellings Built = 397 (82, 11/12 + 179, 12/13 +136, 13/14)

Number of Social Rented Built = 186 (70, 11/12, 76, 12/13, 40, 13/14)

Number of Affordable Rent (80% of market rent) Built = 119 (3 11/12, 62 12/13, 54 13/14)

Cllr Hadland

Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning

Question for Full Council Monday 20th January 2014

Question 13

Question to Councillor Mackintosh from Councillor N Choudary

How many apprenticeships do we have as a local authority and how many do our contractors/commissioned services have?

Response

I can confirm that the Borough Council has 6 apprentices.

I am unable to confirm how many of the authority's contractors/commissioned services have apprentices, or how many they employ.

***Cllr Mackintosh
Leader of the Council***

Question for Full Council Monday 20th January 2014

Question 14

Question to Councillor Markham from Councillor Gowan

How many children spent Christmas in temporary and emergency accommodation?

Response

There were 27 households in B&B type accommodation, with a total of 18 dependents between them. There were 47 households in Council Stock accommodation, with a total of 55 dependents between them.

***Cllr Markham
Cabinet Member for Housing***

Question for Full Council Monday 20th January 2014

Question 15

Question to Councillor Bottwood from Councillor Beardsworth

At the Council meeting on the 22nd April 2013 the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mackintosh presented a report recommending that £88,325 of Special Expenses be refunded to the residents of Hardingstone and West Hunsbury Parish Councils and that this sum, plus the cost of issuing recalculated Council tax demands to the two parishes, be taken from the general reserves.

The Council also resolved that: -

2.4 That Council approve a full review of special expenses to be undertaken during 2013 prior to setting the Council Tax for 2014/15

Can the Cabinet Member advise the Council on the details of this review?

(In particular, please include conclusions, consultations, scrutiny and subsequent actions, particularly in communicating with Parish Councils regarding the consequences for their budgets, steps taken to factor the review into the upcoming budget and moves to replenish the depleted general reserves used to resolve the administration's error when approving the last budget)

Response

The Council has been working closely with Parish Council's as part of their budget setting process. The conclusion of the review has led to the Special Expenses for the residents of Hardingstone and West Hunsbury Parish Councils being permanently reduced and these expenses being spread across the residents of the whole Borough. As part of the Council's budget setting process a review of reserves will be undertaken to ensure they are set at a reasonable level to reflect the risks faced by the Council.

Cllr Bottwood
Cabinet Member for Finance

Question for Full Council Monday 20th January 2014

Question 16

Question to Councillor Eldred from Councillor Glynane

Would the Cabinet Member please advise the Council on the current status of the Administration's plans to sell off the Sekhemka statue?

Response

Plans to sell Sekhemka are progressing well. Due to commercial confidentiality associated with the sale, I am not currently in a position to go into greater detail, as to do so would be detrimental to the Council's position in this matter. I will of course provide more information when I am able to do so.

Cllr Eldred
Cabinet Member for Community Engagement

Question for Full Council Monday 20th January 2014

Question 17

Question to Councillor Eldred from Councillor Beardsworth

Could the Cabinet Member please detail the consultation that has taken place with the families attached to the Francis Crick statue regarding plans to move it?

Response

Discussions have taken place with the families attached to the Francis Crick statue and no final decisions have yet been taken about where to relocate it.

Cllr Eldred
Cabinet Member for Community Engagement

Question for Full Council Monday 20th January 2014

Question 18

Question to Councillor Hadland from Councillor Conroy

Could the Cabinet Member tell the Council how many retail units in Northampton town centre are owned by Northampton Borough Council?

Response

The Council owns 22 retail units within the Town Centre.

Cllr Hadland

Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning

Question for Full Council Monday 20th January 2014

Question 19

Question to Councillor Hadland from Councillor Conroy

Could the Cabinet Member tell the Council how many of the retail units in Northampton town centre which are owned by Northampton Borough Council are vacant?

Response

There are two units that are currently unlet. However, some units are let, but temporarily are not trading, whilst physical works are completed to premises by the tenant.

Cllr Hadland

Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning

Question for Full Council Monday 20th January 2014

Question 20

Question to Councillor Hallam from Councillor Meredith

Could the Cabinet Member please detail to the Council how NBC is preparing for Northamptonshire County Council plans to start charging for Household Waste Recycling?

(Please include details of mitigating the anticipated rise in flytipping, and how this has been built into the upcoming budget)

Response

The Borough Council has discussed this draft budget proposal with the County Council at political and officer level and are looking at options.

***Cllr Hallam
Cabinet Member for Environment***

Question for Full Council Monday 20th January 2014

Question 21

Question to Councillor Markham from Mr N Clarke

In 2013 the Council paid £230,866 to eight establishments for B&B accommodation.

My understanding is that limited use of council stock was also used to help reduce reliance on expensive B&B accommodation.

Question

- a) What was the extent of the use of council housing stock?
- b) What savings were achieved from the use of HRA stock?

Response

a) We currently have 50 Council Stock properties which are used to reduce the need for B&B accommodation – 47 were in use last month – three were out of use due to essential maintenance works needing to be carried out.

b) It is not possible for me to precisely state the level of savings derived from the use of housing stock as an alternative to B&B due to variable factors such as charging rates, length of stay and the contribution the customer can be required to make to the charge.

Cllr Markham
Cabinet Member for Housing

Agenda Item 7



Report of the Leader of the Council

Northampton Borough Council

20th January 2014

2014 is set to be an exciting year for our town, with major events such as the commemoration of World War One, the 825th anniversary of the Borough Charter and the return of Alive@Delapre. The look and feel of Northampton is due to change during 2014 with the opening of the new Bus Station in March, the start of demolition work at Greyfriars, students moving into the new University accommodation at St Johns, the reopening of Abington Street to traffic, work beginning on the redevelopment of Sixfields Stadium and plans due to be approved for Franklins Gardens, plus the opening of the new railway station in the summer. 2014 will be an exciting year for Northampton.

Christmas 2013 proved to be another successful festive period for our town. Borough Council initiatives such as our Christmas free parking offers and the Frost Fairs helped draw people into our town and support local traders. Feedback from local businesses and the public has so far been very positive and plans are already underway to make Christmas 2014 in Northampton even better.

On 18th December the Cabinet approved the budget proposals for 2014/15, which will come before Full Council in February. The proposed budget will continue this Administration's commitment to reduce waste and bureaucracy to make sure that tax payers' money is spent on front line services and investment that will help the local economy.

On 31st January Councillor Markham and I will be joining others to sleep rough for a night at Christ church in Abington to raise awareness of the issues faced by homeless people as well as much-needed funds for the Northampton Hope Centre. The sponsored Big Sleepout is organised annually by the Northampton Hope Centre, which celebrates its 40th anniversary in 2014, and is its biggest fundraiser of the year. Last year 65 people slept out at the main event and another three events were supported by local scouts and guides groups, together raising over £20,000 in just one night.

Following the sad news of the death of Nelson Mandela a Book of Condolence was opened at The Guildhall. The public were also able to pay their respects and show their admiration at a service at All Saints Church on Wednesday 18th December. The Book of Condolence and tributes to Nelson Mandela have been sent to the South African High Commission in London.

The Borough Council highlighted our town's many great independent businesses to mark the UK's first- ever Small Business Saturday on 7th December 2013. Small Business Saturday is a Government-backed event to raise awareness of the contribution independent businesses make to the economy and encouraging people to shop local. To show our support for local businesses Councillor Nunn and I visited several small businesses in the Town Centre and Wellingborough Road to listen to their views and speak to them about the many issues facing small businesses in the current economic climate.

Community Safety

A roadshow offering people free home security and personal safety advice visited the Town Centre between 16th and 20th December 2013. The roadshow was the third to be staged by the Northampton Community Safety Partnership as part of its latest Week of Action programme. Partners from the Borough Council, the Police and other agencies gave advice on crime prevention, home security and fire safety as well as tackling concerns raised. Mobile phone and

laptop security registration and bike marking were offered free to those wanting to protect their property.

All Crime, Violence and Serious Acquisitive Crime has continued to fall beyond the annual Community Safety Partnership (CSP) targets. To date there has been a 10.8% reduction in overall crime (2,160 less crimes) and a 13.9% reduction in violence (489 less crimes), which exceeds the annual target. Serious Acquisitive Crime shows a 12.7% reduction (519 less crimes) and dwelling burglary has reduced slightly. Criminal damage has also reduced by 10.4%, exceeding the annual target.

A follow up meeting for the Blackthorn Goldings Week of Action showed that 62 adults and 38 young people visited the Crime Prevention House. Seven tonnes of waste was collected, and the area was still clear a fortnight later. 52 people were engaged with during the Mounts/Abington Square Week and five tonnes of waste was collected. The Town Centre Week of Action (16th – 20th December 2013) focused on street drinking and begging, with many agencies attending throughout the week. The Police also carried out free bike marking and property registering.

Councillor David Mackintosh
Leader of the Council



Cabinet Member Report for Housing

Northampton Borough Council

20th January 2014

Disabled Facilities Grants

As I said I would in my last Cabinet Member report, I have reviewed the budget available to meet the high level of demand we are experiencing for disabled facilities grants. A thorough review of DFG policies, processes and procedures is now underway and will ensure an efficient, effective and proportionate response to the needs of our customers. I have also ensured that the same rigorous approach to DFGs will apply to the Aids and Adaptations processes when we adapt our own housing to meet the needs of our tenants. We want to make sure that we make the best use of all our adapted properties and will be looking to match tenants who need an aid or adaptation to a property where we've already undertaken the work. This may mean that some people have to wait a little longer for a new home but this is the right way to make sure we make the best use of all our housing stock.

Allocation Policy Refresh

The refreshed Housing Allocations policy went live on 1st December 2013. I will keep the policy under review to ensure it continues to meet the needs of individuals and families seeking social housing in Northampton.

Housing Stocks Options Review

The Housing Stock Options Review was successfully completed, with the decision to create an ALMO unanimously supported by Full Council on Monday 9th December. Tenants and employees involved were thanked for their commitment and significant contribution to the success of the project. The drive to improve Housing Services will continue and tenants will still be at the heart of the next stage of the process in the creation of the ALMO. Tenants will be encouraged, once again, to come forward to take part in the process and Tenant Panel meetings will start again in January 2014. It is intended that the ALMO will be in place by 5th January 2015.

Tenant Involvement

My commitment to putting tenants at the heart of our business will continue and we are broadening the range of opportunities we have for people to get involved in the development of the service. I am very pleased with the progress of the Service Improvement Panels and I want to thank those tenants who have given up their time to work with our officers on establishing the service standards they want, and have a right to expect, from us. I have asked officers to collate and codify the proposed Standards from each Service Improvement Panel and intend to have them introduced and operational early in the New Year.

Decent Homes Programme

Phase 2 of the Decent Homes Programme is working well with Lovell about to complete their tranche of homes and FHM preparing to complete theirs by the early summer. I am pleased with the quality of work from both contractors although, as with any large scale programme like this there will always be issues along the way. I am content that the commitments given to me so far by all the contractors will mean that we will make good progress with Phase 3 up to the end of the financial year and go into next year in a strong position to complete the Decent Homes programme in good time.

Rogue Landlords

On 3rd December 2013 the Borough Council put forward proposals to extend the local authority's powers to license landlords in the town. The changes give greater protection to tenants, as well as making landlords accountable for the effect their property and tenants have on the local area. This covers anti-social behaviour such as noise, putting too many refuse bags out or blocking up parking spaces in the street. It is an opportunity to set standards that protect tenants and neighbours by making more landlords responsible for the appearance of their property, stopping overcrowding of properties and making sure repairs work is completed. The new powers would be introduced in the Town Centre and areas where there is a high level of student accommodation in the north of the town. At the moment the Borough Council only has the power to license three-storey HMOs (house in multiple occupation). The proposed new scheme would see the same rules and standards applied to HMOs of all sizes in the area. The consultation on these proposals ends on 10th February.

Councillor Mary Markham
Cabinet Member for Housing



Cabinet Member Report for Regeneration, Enterprise & Planning

Northampton Borough Council

20th January 2014

Town Centre Operations

The free parking offer on Saturdays in the Council's multi storey car parks and free parking in all car parks after 3.00pm on Thursdays leading up to Christmas was well received by shoppers and traders, and at one point on the Saturday before Christmas all four multi storey car parks were full.

Six state-of-the-art electronic traffic information signs were installed around the Town Centre during December to provide parking details for drivers coming into the Town Centre. They make it easier for shoppers to find their way to our premier car parks and take advantage of our free parking offers. This is part of the Administration's drive to improve parking information, thus making it easier for people to navigate around the town, and to help local trader by increasing footfall. The new signs are located at key gateways to the town centre, including Bedford Road, Towcester Road, Bridge Street, Barrack Road, St James Road and Abington Square.

The large scaffold and hoarding that has been in place at the fire-damaged Angel Hotel in Bridge Street since the historic building was gutted in a blaze on 2nd January 2012, will be remodelled so that it is clear of the road in Bridge Street by the end of January 2014. Discussions can then begin with Northamptonshire County Council and businesses in the area about removing existing traffic orders and reopening the road to two way traffic.

The old Angel Hotel had been home to two separate businesses before the fire, which damaged it so badly that it was in danger of collapse. Scaffolding has supported the buildings ever since and the protective hoardings around that have meant traffic flow in Bridge Street has been reduced to one way.

The Council has kept up liaison with the owners of the building to encourage them to remove the scaffolding as soon as possible, and has also held meetings to bring together businesses in the area with the landlord's representatives to discuss progress.

Regeneration

On 11th December 2013 Cabinet approved the allocation of funding that will allow for the reopening of Abington Street to traffic. The investment will also support the wider regeneration of the Town Centre, which has seen millions of pounds invested in North Gate bus station, a new railway station, new student accommodation, improved office facilities and improvements to the appearance of the area. When reopened, Abington Street will allow one way traffic movement from St Giles Terrace along Abington Street to Wellington Street, provide parking and dropping off points for businesses and shoppers, and increase footfall to help local traders.

The Council has welcomed the switch on of cutting edge 4G mobile services from mobile network EE in Northampton on 4th December 2013. Independent research has found that 4G is likely to drive economic growth locally by improving business productivity and helping businesses increase mobile-commerce, while also allowing residents to quickly and easily access social network sites, stream TV and music, and access government, banking, shopping and other online services on the go.

The new Castle Station is taking shape and the steel frame is there for all to see. The new layby outside of the station has been completed and the bridge across the railway lines is in place.

A contractor has been appointed and has commenced operations at Delapre Abbey. The first stage includes renewals to significant sections of the roof, including structural repairs that will help to protect the building. This is an important initial programme of work before the wider Heritage Lottery Fund supported restoration begins later in the year. The work is due to last for thirty weeks

Under a deal agreed with the Borough Council, a floating restaurant has been launched on the River Nene at Midsummer Meadow. The fitting out works will be completed over the coming months, and when completed it should provide a unique addition to the range of food offers in the Town.

In November 2013 Kier was appointed by open tender for the development of St Peters Waterside. Contract negotiations are ongoing and proceeding well. One particular end user is showing interest in the site, but no decisions have yet been taken.

New play equipment for children has been installed in the area of green space near Riverside Way in Hunsbury Meadows. A tightrope walk, turnstile, catwalk, rolling barrel, rubber stepping post, springboard see saw and crazy car are just some of the new pieces of equipment now installed. The investment to improve the green space was in response to calls from local residents who were keen to give young children suitable and fun equipment to play on. It has been funded by a £10,000 allocation from S106 money set aside by the developers of Pineham Locks.

The University's student accommodation is nearly complete, and the first students will move in the next few weeks. The building is sure to become a significant Northampton landmark.

Planning

The Planning Committee approved the application by the University of Northampton for the new campus at Avon Nunn Mills at its meeting in December 2013. It is expected that construction at the new university site will begin later this year.

On 15th January the Cabinet discussed a plan for the Borough Council to consult the public on the Conservation Management Plan for the Northampton Battlefield. This follows a series of workshops held with interested parties including English Heritage, the Delapre Abbey Preservation Trust and the Friends of Delapre Abbey last year.

Councillor Tim Hadland
Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise & Planning



Cabinet Member Report for Community Engagement

Northampton Borough Council

20th January 2014

Councillor Community Fund

Applications for the Councillor Community Fund totalled 105 applications received by December 2013, which amounts to £62,998 of funding. The Councillor Community Fund has been a popular scheme and has enabled individual councillors to direct thousands of pounds of funding where it will do the most good in their communities.

Partnership Support

The partnership grants application process will open in January 2014. There will be a total budget of £550,000 for community and voluntary groups. Northampton Community Foundation administer the small grants process on behalf of NBC. There is £50,000 available for small projects, to support community events and activities; small scale training costs, pieces of equipment etc. Access to the fund has been added to NBC's website to help promote the scheme.

Forums

Support is being offered to the Chairs and Community Co-Chairs of all six forums, to increase attendance, widen representation, develop a calendar of activity and events and develop a set of action plans, to encourage all six of the forums to become more outcome focused and continue to make a useful contribution.

Events

In December The Frost Fair on the Market Square hosted over 100 unique individual traders with crowds enjoying the entertainment and the Christmas atmosphere with an increase of over 33% of visitors compared to the same time in 2012.

The team are now in the planning stages for the 2014 events calendar, with Holocaust Memorial Day events being held on 27th January.

Culture & Heritage

After a busy December with ten popular evening events, the New Year has started with four new exhibitions at the Museum. On the first floor of the gallery a selection of art is being shown from the Museum's own collection, all of which were painted during "The Golden Age" immediately before the First World War. This is a prelude to several of the exhibitions that will come later in the year.

A second art exhibition contains works by local artist Mark McMurdie and is titled "Portraits and Townscapes". Mark is the Lead Teacher in Fine Art at Duston School and has exhibited in the Royal Academy, the Barbican and various London galleries.

The first shoe exhibition is showing shoes from the "Golden Age" in order to compliment the art exhibition upstairs in the museum. The major shoe exhibition on the ground floor has a "Vintage" theme. "The Dream Shoe Closet" invites visitors into a late 1970s bedroom and shoe closet with a shoe twist. In this interactive experience you can enjoy the space, play games from the period, open cupboards and drawers or walk through our Narnia style wardrobe and find shoes from our shoe collection from the 1920s to the 1980s. The exhibition was originally developed for the Vintage festival in Oxford in 2013 organised by Wayne and Geraldine Hemingway. It is the first time that it has been displayed in Northampton.

On January 14th the Museum will collaborate with The Royal and Derngate to provide an innovative evening of drama titled "All in the Timing". Six short plays will be presented, in sequence, in six different spaces in the Museum, for four different audiences.

Northampton Leisure Trust

Northampton's First Play Street scheme, which is designed to give children a safe and fun place play outside in their own neighbourhood has had a big impact in Spring Boroughs. The Play Street saw 221 visits by local children in its first sixteen weeks. The Play Streets scheme is being run in partnership with Spring Lane Primary School and Spring Boroughs Residents Association.

Customer Services

The Customer Service team participated in the help the soldiers' campaign and donated various items to this cause which were all gratefully received.

Several new partners have now joined the One Stop Shop, The Royal British Legion, Stop Smoking, Polish Stop Smoking and Options 2 (National Careers Service, professional advice, guidance on careers, skills and job market). Assistance has also been put in place in the One Stop Shop to support residents who are facing fuel and food issues.

Councillor Brandon Eldred
Cabinet Member for Community Engagement



Cabinet Member Report for Finance

Northampton Borough Council

20th January 2014

The administration is proposing a challenging programme of internal cost-cutting measures to tackle the 2014/15 budget shortfall, and prevent the budget gap growing even further in 2015/16.

There will be a focus on investment, despite the need for the Borough Council to make savings to deal with a budget shortfall of £3.4 million in the next financial year.

The gap has already been reduced significantly by work to streamline management and cut back office costs. The cost of senior management at Northampton Borough Council has reduced by 50% over the last three years. Since 2010/11, the number of senior managers has been cut from 21 to 10 as a result of work to streamline the organisation and create efficiencies.

As a result, total pay and remuneration for senior managers has fallen from £1.68 million to around £850,000 currently, a reduction of about £850,000 or around 50%.

This reduction, along with savings made by sharing back office functions such as HR and finance with other authorities through the LGSS scheme, has helped to close the budget gap and will safeguard investment in frontline services and regeneration in the next budget setting period, which begins next week.

The proposals for investment will support businesses to encourage growth and job creation. The Borough Council will set up a business incentive scheme, with an initial contribution of £250,000 to fund measures aimed to fill empty properties and help small businesses. The scheme would be in addition to the cap on business rate increases and doubling of Small Business Rate Relief that were announced in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement last week.

There are also proposals to drive footfall in the town centre, including offering free parking in the town's four multi-storey car parks every Saturday throughout the year and extending the one hour free offer in the multi-storey car parks to two hours. This follows a successful trial this summer and over the Christmas period. This will start at the beginning of April 2014.

The opening hours of both Northampton Borough Council museums would also be extended to attract more visitors to both Abington Park and the Town Centre, and there would be investment in the number of neighbourhood wardens and park rangers providing visible support in communities.

There are also proposals for a capital programme investment of more than £13 million to be spent on infrastructure projects that will open the way to further regeneration. The budget will be debated and agreed at the Full Council meeting next month.

Councillor Alan Bottwood
Cabinet Member for Finance



Cabinet Member Report for Environment

Northampton Borough Council

20th January 2014

Environmental Services

The green sack scheme that started in September 2013 has now been running for three months. The Neighbourhood Wardens are reporting back to the Council that the majority of residents are now complying with the green sack scheme. Areas where there are still issues with the wrong colour sacks being presented are being targeted by the Neighbourhood Wardens through the delivery of educational leaflets or Section 46 Notices.

The Partnership Unit, Housing and Enterprise are continuing to identify properties that could be transferred from green sacks to containers. The project aims to get at least 7,500 properties transferred from sacks to containers by the end of June 2014; either on to eurobins or wheelie bins. During December, the Partnership Unit and Housing transferred Overslade House (66 flats) over to eurobins and also installed recycling containers.

Allotments

The Partnership Unit has visited fifteen out of the seventeen council owned allotments throughout the town. Each allotment was asked to submit a "Wish List" of what they would like to improve their field, such as security fencing, road planings, new or additional water tanks, etc. All this information has been collated and the Partnership Unit is now assessing their requests and sourcing quotations for priorities affordable within this year's capital budget allocation.

Environmental Health

During the Autumn term the Junior Warden scheme has been delivered at Ecton Brook Primary School and at Lings Primary School. Plans are in hand to present the programme at Blackthorn and Lumbertubs Primary schools supported by funding from the Growing Together Programme.

Licensing

Since my last report, two multi-agency school contract vehicle checks have been undertaken to ensure vehicles used as school taxis are safe.

One VOSA operation (Vehicle safety) has been conducted. Seventeen vehicles were checked, one of which was immediately taken off the road, and three were subject of delayed prohibition.

The towns Hackney Tariffs have now been increased following a request from drivers and a review by the Licencing committee.

Councillor Mike Hallam
Cabinet Member for Environment

Appendices 4



NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL
20th January 2014

Agenda Status: Public

Directorate: Revenues & Benefits
(LGSS)

Report Title	Local Council Tax Support Scheme – 2014/15
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1. Purpose

1.1 That Council approve the proposed amendment to the local Council Tax reduction scheme from an 8.5% reduction in support in 2013/14 to a 15% reduction in 2014/15

2. Recommendations

2.1 That Council endorse the recommendation contained in the Cabinet report attached no later than the 31st January 2014.

3. Issues and Choices

3.1 Report Background

3.1.1 See Cabinet Report attached

4. Implications (including financial implications)

4.1 Policy

4.1.1 See Cabinet Report attached

4.2 Resources and Risk

4.2.1 See Cabinet Report attached

4.3 Legal

4.3.1 See Cabinet Report attached

4.4 Equality

4.4.1 See Cabinet Report attached

4.5 Other Implications

4.5.1 See Cabinet Report attached

5. Background Papers

5.1 See Cabinet Report attached

**Robin Bates, LGSS Head of Revenues & Benefits (ext. 7119)
Glen Hammons, Section 151 Officer, Northampton Borough Council**

Appendices:
3



CABINET REPORT

Report Title	LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME
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AGENDA STATUS: PUBLIC

Cabinet Meeting Date:	18 th December 2013
Key Decision:	Yes
Within Policy:	Yes
Policy Document:	No
Directorate:	Finance
Accountable Cabinet Member:	Alan Bottwood
Ward(s)	All

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This report recommends the Council Tax reduction scheme for 2014/15, including amendments.
- 1.2 The report follows a period of consultation and provides the recommended scheme for approval at Council.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet approve the proposed amendment to the scheme from an 8.5% reduction in Council Tax Support (CTS) in 2013/14 to a 15% reduction in 2014/15.
- 2.2 That Cabinet recommends the CTS scheme amendment for approval at Council on the 20th January 2014.

3. Issues and Choices

3.1 Report Background

- 3.1.1 In April 2013 the CTS scheme was implemented by Northampton Borough Council. The funding for CTS was incorporated into the Council's funding allocations from Government. The amount transferred was based on historic levels of council tax benefit grants less 10% to reflect the reducing government resources. As the funding for CTS is included within the Council's general funding allocation it is reducing annually at the same rate as the rest of the Council's funding, which is forecast to be 10% per annum until at least 2018, possibly longer. To ensure the CTS scheme is not subsidised by the borough's council tax payers or by reduced service levels the Council would need to approve a CTS scheme which is self-funding. The scheme approved by Council in 2013/14 was self-funding through the sources set out in the following paragraphs.
- 3.1.2 Under management from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), using devolved power under the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended); Northampton Borough Council has been operating a means tested local reduction. This came into effect on the 1st April 2013 and saw an 8.5% reduction in the support available to working age customers.
- 3.1.3 Central Government's funding arrangements for 2013/14 were at a lower amount than received for the previous Council Tax Benefit scheme. A further reduction in funding is anticipated in 2014/15 and 2015/16 as the funding for CTS starts to be included as part of the Council's annual settlement.
- 3.1.4 Local Authorities are expected to ensure their CTS Scheme is suitable for its local community and promotes the Governments position on Welfare Reform, by protecting the vulnerable and encouraging work for those of working age.
- 3.1.5 A further review of a chosen scheme will be undertaken for 2015/16. This could recommend no change to the scheme, be a completely new scheme or a further refined version of the 2014/15 scheme.
- 3.1.6 Pensioners will not be affected by the proposed changes to our CTS Scheme and will remain fully protected.
- 3.1.7 A full income disregard of War Widows Pension and War Disablement Pension will continue. This was originally adopted as part of the 2013/14 CTS Scheme in Northampton.
- 3.1.8 Additional protection will continue for those in receipt of disablement benefits and **Appendix A** provides the groups afforded additional support under the scheme. The scheme will also continue to support people back into work through a 4-week run on period of support.

3.2 Issues

- 3.2.1 DCLG provided funding for an additional transitional grant to help fund CTS Schemes in their first year (2013/14). However, no such grant will be made available for subsequent years. This means the Council is required to consider how to meet this further reduction.

- 3.2.2 Central Government suggested that in 2013/14 Local Authorities could meet the funding deficit by implementing other changes, to ensure that Local Authorities maximise their opportunities to be financially efficient with the current budgetary pressures. As part of the implementation of the CTS Scheme from 1st April 2013. NBC has already:
- Reconfigured funding, in particular its transfer of services to Local Government Shared Services (LGSS)
 - Used the new flexibility over Council Tax to remove the reliefs in respect of second homes and some empty properties; and other reforms of the council tax system, including the use of an electronic leaflet and removal of expensive printing costs traditionally associated with the annual billing process.
- 3.2.3 Pensioners remain protected as part of the 2014/15 scheme. Therefore NBC will continue to administer protection for year 2014/15 for approximately 7,074 residents.
- 3.2.4 Claimant's aged between 18 and 62 are classed as working Age (not of pensionable age) and are subject to the CTS Scheme. Approximately 11,588 accounts fall into this group and will be affected for collection and financial purposes by a reduction of their existing award. The reduction is applied by a reduction in benefit after all calculations have been made.

3.3 Choices (Options)

- 3.3.1.1 There are two proposed options for amending the CTS Scheme which were consulted upon. These would reduce or mitigate the impact of the reduced funding for the CTS Scheme over the next two years. The options consulted upon are shown in section 3.3.2.
- 3.3.1.2 Positive responses from the consultation centred on the concept of 'fairness' and everyone having to contribute and that the scheme does help support people in paying their Council Tax bills.
- 3.3.1.3 Some acceptance of the current economic climate was also expressed, as was a view that if these changes were implemented it would prompt better budgeting and would give a push to find rewarding work and therefore regain self-respect and pride.
- 3.3.1.4 Negative responses included concerns about being able to afford increasing contributions toward Council Tax bills, because this amounted to a large proportion of an already limited income.
- 3.3.1.5 Questions were raised about how those already on a low income being able to afford additional money and the impact on their ability to afford necessities such as food, fuel or clothing for children.
- 3.3.1.6 It was also raised that the proposed increases are well above inflation and that benefits would not increase in line with increases. This is compounded by rising prices (e.g. food and utilities) and the impact of other welfare reforms. An increased reduction to 36% was seen as unaffordable.

- 3.3.1.7 Anxieties were expressed about how these changes will affect tenants' ability to sustain their tenancy and the implications if these people were made homeless due to arrears.
- 3.3.1.8 It was highlighted that reduced support could cause increased hardship, poverty and misery across the Borough
- 3.3.1.9 It was highlighted that these changes could impact vulnerable people and jeopardise mental health recovery and independent living. Causing health problems e.g. stress and worry and potentially cause existing health conditions to deteriorate.
- 3.3.1.10 This will impact on other local services that support those with mental health problems, disabilities, social services, troubled families unit etc. This will cost more than these proposed changes will save.
- 3.3.1.11 Neutral responses resulted from the respondent not being affected by the changes, either because they were of pension age or were not receiving CTS.

3.3.2 Local Council Tax Reduction Options

3.3.2.1 Maintain the existing CTR Scheme

The option to maintain the 8.5% reduction made in 2013/14, alongside meeting the loss of the transitional grant in 2014/15 was considered as the Council calculated the budgetary pressures in 2014/15. Unfortunately the tough economic situation nationally meant that this option was not viable.

- 3.3.2.2 Therefore as part of consultation two options have been consulted upon. These are:

3.3.2.3 Option 1 Increase Percentage Reduction for 2014/15

This option proposed a 15% reduction in awards across working age customers for 2014/15.

3.3.2.4 Option 2: Increase Percentage Reduction for 2015/16

This option proposed a reduction of up to 36% in awards across working age customers for 2015/16.

3.4 Choices – Northampton Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme

- 3.4.1 The Council has undertaken a four week consultation in order to obtain the views of citizens and stakeholders.
- 3.4.2 Following the consultation a full impact assessment has been carried out encompassing the views expressed by those that responded to ensure the impact to existing and future citizens in need of financial support is minimised.
- 3.4.3 The impact of retaining the existing 2013/14 scheme would see a financial cost to the Council. This would be an additional cost to NBC and its major preceptors and represent a pressure on the Councils general fund in 2014/15.

- 3.4.4 In order to address the impact of this increased pressure an additional reduction in support has been considered. This option increases the reduction in CTS award to 15% from 8.5%.
- 3.4.5 The pressure facing the council in future years to retain a self-balancing CTS scheme will remain as Government funding continues to reduce. In order to balance the Councils budget in future years it may be necessary to reduce the level of support further. As a result the Council have also consulted on a range of reduction in 2015/16 of up to 36%.
- 3.4.6 The Council has existing policies and procedures that aim to balance the need for maximising income to pay for services, with the need to protect tax payers from homelessness or additional charges. These policies and procedures were put in place over the last 3 years as a direct result of welfare reform announcements. They are reviewed regularly.
- 3.4.7 Recommended Option (Chosen CTR Scheme)**
- 3.4.8 A reduction of 15% in CTS support from working age recipients from 1st April 2014. This option balances the financial position in 2014/15 and contributes to the expected shortfall in CTS funding in 2015/16.
- 3.4.9 Protection as set out in **Appendix A** will be continue to be afforded to ensure the Council protects disabled and vulnerable citizens, whilst ensuring there remains an incentive to work.
- 3.4.10 Alongside this the Council will continue to provide protection for recipients of war widows and war disablement pension. Therefore income and capital disregards for this group will be retained.
- 3.4.11 A four–week period of extended payments will continue to be provided. This period will mean that benefit rates are retained for 4 weeks before any reduction is made.
- 3.4.12 Any further amendments to the CTS scheme, if required, from the 1st April 2015 will need to be considered during 2014/15. Any change will need to be agreed by full Council no later than the 31st January 2015.
- 3.4.13 Regulations also require the Council to consult on any further proposed changes to the scheme from 1st April 2015.
- 3.4.14 The Council will review carefully any proposed increase in 2015/16. Alongside this it will ensure its policies and procedures to support those in hardship meet the needs of our citizens in providing or referring for financial advice.

4. Implications (including financial implications)

4.1 Policy

- 4.1.1 The report outlines options for a Local Council Tax scheme, which if chosen, will set policy.

4.2 Resources and Risk

- 4.2.1 There are significant financial implications to the Council and the two other major precepting authorities as a result of the requirement to run a local council tax scheme with a reduction in funding, whilst protecting pensioners.
- 4.2.2 If the Council maintains the existing scheme there would be a funding gap across the Council, County and Police Authority.
- 4.2.3 The current financial modelling undertaken on the recommended CTS scheme for 2014/15 is based on the latest intelligence around collection rates and government funding forecasts and is considered to be self-funding. However, the position would need to be closely monitored during the financial year and the position re-assessed for 2015/16.
- 4.2.4 Increased recovery and associated court costs could see increased resource requirements within the revenues team. The impact of other welfare reforms could also contribute to reduced collection on Council Tax and wider corporate debts. The Council has taken full account of pressures across corporate income and debt in calculating the impact of the recommended CTS Scheme.
- 4.2.5 If the Council fails to agree and implement an amended scheme by 31st January 2014 we will need to retain our current scheme. The cost of the 2013/14 scheme would not be affordable to the Council and therefore have a financial impact on the Council in 2014/15.

4.3 Legal

- 4.3.1 As part of the process of amending the CTS Scheme, legal advice will be obtained in order to ensure that processes and procedures that underpin the CTS Scheme are compliant.

4.4 Equality

- 4.4.1 Northampton Borough Council must demonstrate to DCLG, that in order to amend the CTS Scheme, a full stakeholder review has taken place and these people have been consulted, to ensure that the scheme reflects the needs of the community as a whole. **This can be found at Appendix B.**
- 4.4.2 A full equality impact assessment has been completed - this can be found at **Appendix C.**
- 4.4.3 The equality impact assessment recognises that the amendment to the CTS Scheme will place an additional financial burden on working age customers in 2014/15. Included within this group will be individuals and families with vulnerable characteristics.
- 4.4.4 In order to mitigate against the impact on this group and in particular those vulnerable citizens the Council has continued to afford protection within the more generous means-tested element of the CTS Scheme. This can be found at **Appendix A.** Alongside this the Council will continue to consider fair debt collection principles and provide or refer those under financial pressure for debt advice.

4.5 Consultees (Internal and External)

- 4.5.1 Local Authorities are obligated to carry out a thorough consultation in order to reduce the opportunity for the scheme not to reflect the needs of the local population. The Cabinet Office Code of Practice for Consultation in 2004,

defined consultation in five principles, which Northampton Borough Council will adopt;

- Proportional
- Inclusive
- Genuine
- Consistent
- Transparent

4.5.2 Consideration required that any consultation that occurred be proportional to the needs of the community and time barred in line with good practice.

4.5.3 Care must be given to ensure that all members of the community have access to this consultation to ensure that everyone is given a right to be heard on the CTS Scheme.

4.5.4 A four week consultation was undertaken and included:

- Members
- Forums including:
 - Northampton Pensioner
 - Northampton LGBT and Q
 - Northampton Disabled People Forum
- Members of the Public via web & a number of drop-in sessions

4.5.6 A total of 35 responses were received by 1st December 2013, and 7 people attended the drop-in sessions.

4.5.6 Nationally, the response to Local Authority engagement on local Council Tax schemes has been low. Benchmarking with other Local Authorities has established that this is the case.

4.5.7 The methodology and results of the consultation is attached at **Appendix B**.

4.6 How the Proposals deliver Priority Outcomes

4.6.1 The CTS Scheme is a statutory requirement as a result of national austerity measures and wider reforms of the benefit system.

4.7 Other Implications

None

5. Background Papers

- 5.1 Appendix A – Specific Protection
- 5.2 Appendix B – Consultation
- 5.3 Appendix C – Equalities Impact Assessment

Glenn Hammons, Section 151 Officer, Northampton Borough Council
Robin Bates, LGSS Head of Revenues & Benefits

Northampton Borough Council's Council Tax Reduction Scheme

Northampton Borough Council's current Council Tax Reduction (CTR) scheme provides for a means-tested reduction. This reduction takes the form of a discount and reduces the amount of Council Tax the person remains liable to pay.

This document provides an explanation of how the means-testing process incorporates specific protection for working age customers who may be considered vulnerable.

Applicable Amounts:

The means-testing process for our CTR scheme begins with an applicable amount, which specifies the amount of income that someone needs to have before their discount decreases – prior to the application of any reduction. An applicable amount is made up of a personal allowance with additional premiums and it is individual to the applicant and their family. Applicable amounts are more generous for disabled people, carers and couples or lone parents with children in order to recognise the additional costs incurred with raising children, managing a disability or health problem.

Dependants' Allowance

A customer's applicable amount is increased by a dependant's allowance for each dependent child. This ensures that the applicable amount reflects the additional costs of raising children.

Family Premium

This is awarded in the applicable amount if the applicant or their partner has at least one dependent child or young person.

Disability Premium

This premium is awarded in the applicable amount if the applicant or their partner is in receipt of either:

- Attendance Allowance
- Disability Living Allowance
- Personal Independence Payment
- The disability element or the severe disability element of working tax credit,
- Incapacity Benefit

Severe Disability Premium

This is awarded in the applicable amount if the applicant or their partner has no non-dependents aged 18 or over and no-one receives Carer's Allowance for looking after them. Either the applicant and/or the partner also have to be in receipt of either:

- Attendance Allowance
- Disability Living Allowance - care component at the middle or higher rate
- Personal Independence Payment – daily living component

Enhanced Disability Premium

This premium is awarded in the applicable amount if the applicant, partner or dependent child is receiving:

- Disability Living Allowance - care component at the highest rate
- Personal Independence Payments – daily living component at the enhanced rate.

Disabled Child Premium

This premium is awarded in the applicable amount for each dependent child receiving:

- Disability Living Allowance
- Personal Independence Payments
- Or is registered blind.

Carer premium

This premium is awarded in the applicable amount where the applicant or his partner is entitled to Carer's Allowance.

Council Tax Reduction Scheme – Weekly Applicable Amount Rates

These rates are based on the figures for 2013/14. These figures will increase in-line with the Housing Benefit annual up-rating due to be released by the Department of Work and Pensions by the end of January 2014. We are also expecting the applicable amounts for pensioners to be increased by the Department of Communities and Local Government.

Applicable Amount Rates (Working Age)	April 2013 Rates
Personal Allowances	
Single	
16 to 24	£56.80
25 or over	£71.70
Any age – entitled to main phase Employment & Support Allowance	£71.70
Lone Parent	
Under 18	£56.80
18 or over	£71.70
Any age – entitled to main phase Employment & Support Allowance	£71.70
Couple	
Both under 18	£85.80
One or both over 18	£112.55
Any age – entitled to main phase Employment & Support Allowance	£112.55
Dependent Children (for each child)	£65.62
Premiums	
Family Premium	£17.40
Disability Premium	
Single	£31.00
Couple	£44.20
Severe Disability Premium	
Single Rate	£59.50
Couple Rate – One member qualifies	£59.50
Couple Rate – Both members qualify	£119.00
Enhanced Disability Premium	
Single Rate	£15.15
Disabled Child Rate	£23.45
Couple Rate	£21.75

Disabled Child Premium	£57.89
Carer Premium	£33.30

Treatment of Income:

Increased Earnings Disregards

Net income from part-time or full-time work is taken into account when our CTR scheme discount is calculated. However, a small amount of earned income is then disregarded, which helps incentivise people to move into work.

A higher earnings disregard applies for those who qualify for the disability premium or severe disability premium (or either component of the Employment and Support Allowance) in our CTR scheme. This means that less of the disabled customer's net earnings are taken into account when calculating the amount of discount they receive. This is also the case for lone parents and carers.

Earnings Disregards	April 2013 Weekly Rates
Single person	£5.00
Couple	£10.00
Disability or Severe Disability Premium	£20.00
Carer Premium	£20.00
Lone parent	£25.00

A further £17.10 a week is also disregarded for:

- Lone parents working 16 hours or more a week; or
- Couples where either/or member are working 24 hours a week, with at least one member working at least 16 hours a week
- Their applicable amount includes a disability premium and they work 16 hours or more a week.

Disregard of Disability Benefits

The following income is ignored in the means-test of our CTR Scheme:

- Disability Living Allowance
- Personal Independence Payments
- Attendance Allowance
- Severe Disablement Allowance
- War Disablement Pension
- War Widows Payment

Non-Dependant Deductions:

For certain disabled customers non-dependant deductions are not applied to the means test of their discount, regardless of the number of non-dependants that they may be living with them. This applies if the applicant or their partner is registered blind or if either of them are receiving:

- Attendance Allowance; or
- Disability Living Allowance – care component; or
- Personal Independence Payments – daily living component

Non-Dependent Deductions	April 2013 Weekly Rates
In receipt of state Pension Credit or in receipt of IS, JSA(IB), or ESA(IR)	Nil
Aged 18 or over and in remunerative work	
-gross income greater than £401.00	£10.95
-gross income not less than £322.00 but less than £400.99	£9.15
-gross income not less than £186.00 but less than £321.99	£7.25
-gross income less than £186.00	£3.65
Others aged 18 or over	£3.65

Childcare:

The cost of eligible childcare (for a child up to the age of 15, or 16 (if they are disabled) can be disregarded up to £175 a week for one child or £300 a week for two or more children. This is providing that the applicant and/or their partner are:

- A lone parent working 16 hours or more a week ; or
- A couple where both of them are working 16 hours or more a week; or
- A couple where one of them is working 16 hours or more and the other is incapacitated

This provision is also aimed at incentivising people to move into work.



Council Tax Reduction Scheme Consultation

Author	Beccy Salmon
Version	3.0
Status	Draft Report

INTRODUCTION:

On the 1st April 2013 Northampton Borough Council introduced its own local discount scheme to help people on low incomes pay their Council Tax.

Under the Local Government Finance Act 2012, Northampton Borough Council is required to publically consult on proposed changes to our local Council Tax Reduction (CTR) scheme.

The consultation had two aims:

- 1) To find out what people thought of the scheme in the first year.
- 2) To understand the impact on those who rely on this support if the proposed changes are implemented.

This consultation took place between Monday 4th November 2013 and Sunday 1st December 2013.

This document details the methodology, which underpinned the consultation, plus a full analysis of the results.

METHODOLOGY:

The consultation included the following:

- On-line survey
- News release
- Social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
- Northampton Borough Council's internet and intranet pages
- All e-mail communication from the Benefit, Council Tax and Customer Services mailboxes included an invitation link to take-part in the consultation
- Display screens in the One Stop Shop
- Details of the consultation were emailed to the Multi Agency Forum and our welfare partners, including registered social landlords.
- Invitations to participate was sent to key stakeholders, including Precepting Authorities, parishes, local Councilors and Member of Parliaments
- Engagement with housing associations and voluntary and community sectors via their various networks
- Council's proposals raised at various Community Forums:
 - Disabled People Forum - 19.11.2013
 - Northampton LGBT and Q Forum – 12.11.2013
 - Northampton Pensioner Forum - 29.10.2013
- 1,500 email invitations were issued to email addresses held on the Benefit and Council Tax database
- Letters were issued to a random sample of 200 CTR recipients.
- Letters were issued to a random sample of 200 local Council Tax payers.

To help support the public the following was also made available and advertised in-line with the above:

- Dedicated email address for enquiries from the public
- Our Customer Service teams were made available to help the public complete the on-line form to mitigate any accessibility issues. In addition we carried out a home visit to support a request made to overcome specific accessibility issues.
- 4 drop in-sessions were run, aimed at providing those affected with a personal illustration on what the proposed changes would mean to them – ensuring they were able to provide a fully informed response.

RESULTS:

A total of 35 responses to our on-line survey were received by the end of the consultation and 7 members of the public attended one of the drop-in sessions.

Whilst we had taken the additional steps of sending 1500 email and 400 written invitations to take part, the response rate remained low.

The website was viewed 487 times during the consultation period. This demonstrates that media coverage of the consultation was active, however members of the public, did not complete the form to air their views.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

Due to the type of questions asked in the on-line survey, in-line with the number of responses received, the results are mainly qualitative. The data has provided an in-depth look at what the proposed changes mean to the respondents and how it will impact them.

KEY RESULTS:

Question 1 focused on collecting personal data and will therefore not be summarised in this report.

Question 2 established whether the respondent was currently receiving a CTR discount and whether they were responding on behalf of an organization.

- 14 respondents are currently receiving a CTR discount
- 6 respondents were responding on behalf of an organization:
 - Citizen's Advice Bureau
 - Community Law Service
 - Mental Health Group
 - Richmond Fellowship (supported housing for people with mental health issues).
 - Nottingham Community Housing Association
 - Financial support and advice service
 - Northampton Borough Council's One Stop Shop

Question 3:

As from 1 April 2013 the maximum amount of discount a person can receive against their Council Tax bill is limited to 91.5% of their total annual Council Tax bill.

If during this period you have applied for or are receiving any support through our CTR scheme, please use the box below to tell us how the scheme worked for you, including any ideas you may have on how we can improve it.

24 respondents skipped question 3, the responses we did receive are summarised as follows:

- 4 respondents felt that the current CTR scheme worked well for them and helped them to pay their Council Tax.
- 5 respondents provided a response which indicated that the current scheme was placing a financial burden on them since the level of support reduced since the replacement of Council Tax Benefit.
- 1 respondent stated they had only just applied for CTR
- 1 respondent stated they felt the scheme was fair by ensuring everyone has to contribute.

Question 4:

From 1 April 2014, we are proposing that the maximum amount of discount a working age person can receive may be limited to 85% of their total annual Council Tax bill in order to help the Council bridge the gap in funding it receives from Central Government.

13 respondents skipped question 4, the responses we did receive are summarised as follows:

- 16 respondents stated that decreasing the amount of support available to them will mean they can no longer afford their expenses or place an increased financial burden on them.
- 2 respondents felt the proposed change would either help them to budget better or move into work.
- 1 respondent felt it was a fair increase when considering the current economic climate
- 6 respondents indicated they would not be impacted by the change.

Question 5:

From 1 April 2015, we are proposing that the maximum amount of discount a working age person can receive may be limited up to 64% of their total annual Council Tax bill in order to help the Council bridge the further reduction in funding it receives from Central Government.

12 respondents skipped question 5, the responses we did receive are summarised as follows:

- 15 responses stemmed from concerns that the proposed change would have a detrimental effect on their finances or that an increase of up to 36% would be too high. The concerns related to the inability to afford necessities such as food, water or fuel. There were also concerns raised about increasing debt on an individual level, the wider impact this would have on the community and the increased pressures this would place on other services e.g. social care or temporary accommodation.
- 3 responses were from disabled customers who stated the proposed change would have a detrimental effect on their quality of life or negatively impact their health.
- 2 respondents stated they felt this would encourage them to return to work or improve their circumstances.
- 3 respondents advised the proposed changes would not impact them.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES:

For Questions 3 - 5 there are a number of trends to the types of responses that were being received, summarised below.

Positive responses were limited but centered on the concept of 'fairness' and everyone having to contribute and that the scheme does help support people in paying their Council Tax bills. Some acceptance of the current economic climate was also expressed. One respondent did state they had no problem with a slight increase in the reduction but an increase up to 36% would be too much. Another respondent did indicate that if these changes were implemented it would prompt them to budget better and would give them the push to find rewarding work and therefore regain their self-respect and pride.

Negative responses can be categorised as follows:

- **Affordability:**
 - Concerns about being able to afford increasing contributions towards Council Tax bills, because this amounted to a large proportion of an already limited income.
 - Questions were raised about how those already on a low income cannot afford to find additional money and it would therefore affect their ability to afford necessities such as food, fuel or clothing for children.
 - One respondent stated their family would only be able to afford the increase by using their son's Disability Living Allowance currently used to pay for swimming lessons as part of his physiotherapy. Another

respondent stated they are disabled and due to the rising costs of heating she is living in just one room to keep warm.

- A increased reduction to 36% would be unaffordable
 - Proposed increases are well above inflation and the amount of benefits will not increase in line with these changes, this is compounded by rising prices (e.g. food and utilities) and the impact of other welfare reforms.
 - Sharp increase in the amount of Food Bank vouchers being issued, which is related to these changes and wider welfare reform.
- Debt/Arrears:
 - Expressed anxiety about how these changes will affect tenants' ability to sustain their tenancy and the implications if these people were made homeless due to arrears.
 - Increased costs to Northampton Borough Council in attempting to recover arrears and obtaining Liability Orders to recover unpaid Council Tax
 - Increased stress and worry that accompanies debt/arrears
 - Increased hardship, poverty and misery across the Borough
 - Impact on the vulnerable:
 - One respondent felt this would impact vulnerable people and could jeopardise mental health recovery and independent living.
 - These changes would cause health problems e.g. stress and worry and potentially cause existing health conditions to deteriorate.
 - This will impact on other local services that support those with mental health problems, disabilities, social services, troubled families unit etc. This will cost more than these proposed changes will save.
 - Another respondent who is blind stated that if these changes are implemented he will find it difficult to manage and will have to decide between paying for the care he receives or his other bills. If he has to reduce the amount of care he receives it will mean he will not have a proper meal because of the support his carer gives him. In addition he is concerned how he will be able to afford the bills associated with his Guide Dog, which is no longer funded by the Blind Association because of their reduced budgets. The result of this is will be a detrimental effect on his health and the ability to live independently - which will be more costly to the tax payer.

Neutral responses resulted from the respondent not being affected by the changes, either because they were of pension age or were not receiving a CTR discount.

ALTERNATIVE SUGGESTIONS:

Question 6:

The cost to the Council for running the scheme is expected to be £14million in 2014/15

The Government currently pays around £13m (Approximately 93% of the total cost).

The remaining £1m must be paid for by the Council Tax payers in Northampton.

The level of Government subsidy in the future may change and, unless the scheme is changed as proposed this may put further strain on the finances of the Council which could take money from other Council services.

10 respondents skipped question 6, the majority of responses that were received suggested alternative ways in which the funding gap can be bridged:

- 1) Charge £1.00 for each pensioner bus pass issued.
- 2) Remove protection from pensioners
- 3) Spread the cost across all tax payers
- 4) Increase Council Tax
- 5) Utilise Income generated from car parking charges
- 6) Central Government should adequately finance essential local services
- 7) Increased staff productivity at Northampton Borough Council
- 8) Find further ways to reduce Council waste
- 9) The distribution of the CTR grant should not be paid to local parishes who did not reduce their precepts last year (Billing, Collingtree, Duston & Hardingstone)
- 10) The financial burden should fall on those that have the most, not the least

FULL RESPONSE:

All responses in full are detailed in the attached spreadsheet:



CTRSII -
Consultation Respons

Or at the following:

<http://www.northampton.gov.uk/downloads/file/6827/ctrsii-consultation-responses-xls>

EQUALITIES:

Of the respondents who completed the equalities questions, relating to gender, age, disability or ethnic origin.

- 51.7% of respondents were female, 48.3% were male.
- In terms of age:
 - 0% were aged under 20
 - 3.3% were aged 20-29
 - 36.7% were aged 30-49
 - 46.7% were aged 50-64
 - 13.3% were aged 65-74
 - 0% were aged over 75
- 16.7% of respondents stated they considered themselves to have a disability.
- In terms of ethnic origin:
 - 75.9% described themselves as English White
 - 3.4% described themselves as Welsh White
 - 3.4% described themselves as White Irish
 - 6.9% described themselves as Other white background
 - 3.4% described themselves as Mixed – White and Black African
 - 3.4% described themselves as Asian or Asian British-Indian
 - 3.4% described themselves as Other black background

Equality Impact Assessment

Council Tax Reduction (CTR) Scheme

This assessment looks at actual or possible impacts of a change to our CTR scheme in relation to equalities and human rights – to make sure it works fairly for people.

The first part of this form is to demonstrate the extent (or 'scope') of what this assessment covers:

<p>Name of policy/activity/project/practice</p> <p>Council Tax Reduction (CTR) Scheme</p>	<p>This is:</p> <p>A change to existing policy/activity/practice</p>
--	---

Screening undertaken by: (please complete as appropriate)	
Director or Head of Service	Robin Bates (LGSS)
Lead Officer for developing the policy/activity/practice	Robin Bates (LGSS)
Other people involved in the screening (this may be people who work for NBC or a related service or people outside NBC)	Revenues & Benefits Management Team (LGSS) Finance

Brief description of policy/activity/project/practice:

Northampton Borough Council is proposing an amendment to the Council Tax Reduction (CTR) scheme from the 1st April 2014. If agreed, the amendment will see the amount of financial support available for all working age applicants' decrease.

On the 1st April 2013 Northampton Borough Council replaced the abolished Council Tax Benefit (CTB) scheme with a local CTR scheme. The CTR scheme was introduced with a reduction in support of 8.5% for all working age customers to ensure a 10% funding gap was bridged. The funding gap stemmed from a reduction in the grant received from central Government to pay for the scheme, which was mitigated to some extent by a transitional grant, which will no longer be available from 2014/15.

Due to the ongoing funding gap a further reduction in the amount of support available to working age customers is being considered.

The policy still provides for a means-tested discount to provide financial support to low income families towards their Council Tax bill.

The main issues that we have consider in relation to the proposed changes to this policy in relation to equality and diversity issues are:

Northampton Borough Council has a statutory duty to have and administer a CTR scheme, although once in place there is no statutory requirement to amend the scheme.

The requirement to amend our scheme stems from the need to bridge a funding gap, to achieve a saving while managing spending within lower limits.

If the proposed change to our CTR scheme is agreed it will mean that all working age CTR recipients will see the amount of discount they receive from the scheme reduce from the 1st April 2014.

Groups who are protected from the proposed change are:

- 1) Pension age recipients
- 2) Working age recipients in receipt of either of the following:
 - a. War Widows Pension
 - b. War Disablement Pension

The protection afforded to pensioners is a statutory requirement and we have no authority at a local level to change this. However, the decision to protect working age customers in receipt of the benefits listed above was a local decision made for the implementation of our CTR scheme from the 1st April 2013.

All decisions made in relation to the assessment of their applications will be subject to an independent appeals process.

Evidence Base for Screening

The table below summarises the information or evidence that we have used in relation to each equality group.




Equality Group	<p>The following relates to each of the groups listed on the left:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLG Localising Council Tax Equality Impact Assessment and update • Northampton Council tax database • Council Tax Benefit database • EIA's from other NBC departments that are relevant for this assessment. • Consultation responses • Unemployment by Constituency Research Paper (October 2013) • Local Government Association Report – The Local Impacts of Welfare Reform (August 2013) • Public Health England - Health Profile 2013 • Minutes for the local forums attended.
Age	
Disability	
Carers (for elderly, disabled or minors)	
Sex	
Gender Reassignment	
Pregnancy and Maternity (incl. breastfeeding)	
Race	
Religion or Belief	
Sexual Orientation	
Human Rights	
Marriage and Civil Partnership	

67

NB: Currently the Benefit data available only includes details of age, gender, receipt of disability award/benefit and relevant household composition.

Step 2: Involvement and Consultation

Outlined below is the previous consultation exercise that was conducted in relation to this policy in 2012:

Equality Group	<p>A similar consultation was carried out in 2012, as part of the implementation of our year 1 CTR scheme.</p> <p>The links below show the previous consultation methodology, results and EIA</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <small>CTRSI - Consultation Methodology (2012).</small> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <small>CTRSI - Consultation Results (2012).docx</small> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <small>CTRSI - EIA (2012).docx</small> </div> </div> <p>Or at the following:</p> <p>http://www.northampton.gov.uk/downloads/file/6828/1-ctrsi-consultation-methodology-2012-pdf</p> <p>http://www.northampton.gov.uk/downloads/file/6829/ctrsi-consultation-results</p> <p>http://www.northampton.gov.uk/downloads/file/6830/3-ctrsi-eia</p>
Age	
Disability	
Carers (for elderly, disabled or minors)	
Sex	
Gender Reassignment	
Pregnancy and Maternity (incl. breastfeeding)	
Race	
Religion or Belief	
Sexual Orientation	
Human Rights	
Marriage and Civil Partnership	

Our previous consultations demonstrated the following in terms of resulting activities or services:

Our CTR scheme is a statutory service and is available for all residents of Northampton who wish to apply. Take up of the service is governed by a number of personal circumstances e.g. breakdown of a partnership or job loss and often goes hand-in-hand with applications for Housing Benefit made directly to the Jobcentre or Pension Service.

Our scheme is published on the Northampton Borough Council website with an on-line application form.

Step 3: Data Collection and Evidence

The current data and evidence that we hold provides the following baseline position for those who rely on the Council Tax Reduction scheme:

A full consultation has been carried out and ran from the 4th November 2013 to the 1st December 2013.

The consultation included the following:

- On-line survey
- News release
- Social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
- Northampton Borough Council's internet and intranet pages
- All e-mail communication from the Benefit, Council Tax and Customer Services mailboxes included an invitation link to take-part in the consultation
- Display screens in the One Stop Shop
- Details of the consultation were emailed to the Multi Agency Forum and our welfare partners, including registered social landlords.
- Invitations to participate was sent to key stakeholders, including Precepting Authorities, parishes, local Councilors and Member of Parliaments
- Engagement with housing associations and voluntary and community sectors via their various networks
- Council's proposals raised at various Community Forums:
 - Disabled People Forum - 19.11.2013
 - Northampton LGBT and Q Forum – 12.11.2013
 - Northampton Pensioner Forum - 29.10.2013
- 1,500 email invitations were issued to email addresses held on the Benefit and Council Tax database
- Letters were issued to a random sample of 200 CTR recipients.
- Letters were issued to a random sample of 200 local Council Tax payers.

For full details on the methodology used and the results of the consultation please refer to: Cabinet Report (Appendix B – Consultation).

Data available in addition to our consultation results shows that many claimants will also be managing the impact of other welfare reforms e.g.

- Changes to Tax Credits
- Changes to Local Housing Allowance
- Social sector size criteria reductions to Housing Benefit
- 52 week restriction on Employment Support Allowance (Contributions Based)
- Replacement of Disability Living Allowance with Personal Independence Payments
- National benefit cap
- Increased non-dependent deduction rates
- Reduced uprating percentage for benefits and tax credits.

Implementing a change to the CTR scheme which will result in increased financial hardship (in addition to the other welfare reforms stated above) could also impact on health. In Northampton deprivation is higher than the national average with about 9,200 children living in poverty. In addition life expectancy is 10.5 years lower for men and 6.4 years lower for women in the most deprived areas of Northampton.

Step 4: Assessing impact and strengthening the policy

The following table highlights what evidence we have on how the proposed changes will affect different groups and communities in relation to equality and human rights:

All working age claimants will face a reduction in the amount of Council Tax support they receive from the 1st April 2014, irrespective of any protected characteristics:

Equality Group	Risks (Negative)	Opportunities (Positive)
Age	<p>The impact of this policy will disproportionately affect working age people. In addition, there may be an adverse effect on those under 25 as they receive reduced amounts of benefit based on their age.</p> <p>Children of low income families may also be adversely affected if their parent(s) have to find additional money to cover a reduced CTR discount.</p> <p>Specific Consultation Responses:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Concern was expressed by one respondent that the proposed changes only apply to working age customers and that pension age customers should also have to contribute. 2) Low income families will have to make difficult decisions over heating, food and clothing for children. 3) The change will seriously affect tenants' ability to sustain their tenancy, particularly those under 25 in receipt of benefits. 	<p>The Government has recognised that low-income pensioners cannot be expected to increase their income through paid work and therefore are to be protected from any reduction in their entitlements.</p> <p>Our CTR scheme will continue to provide a more generous means-test for those with dependent children or young persons.</p>

Disability	<p>The impact of this policy will affect all working age customers, even those where either they or a member of their household have a disability.</p> <p>It will place an additional strain on their finances. This will be further impacted as the increased reduction is not linked to the increase of benefit rates.</p> <p>Specific Consultation Responses:</p> <p>1) A respondent in receipt of Employment & Support Allowance, in the support group, stated his condition would deteriorate because of the worry associated with these changes.</p> <p>2) Another respondent stated that to afford the changes she would need to use the money currently allocated to pay for her disabled son's swimming lessons as part of his physiotherapy.</p> <p>3) Could lead to vulnerable people getting into debt which will have a detrimental effect on their mental health recovery and their ability to live independent lives.</p> <p>4) A respondent who is on disability benefits stated that with the rising cost of heating her home she is having to live in one room just to keep warm.</p> <p>5) Another respondent who is blind stated he cannot afford to find the additional money to pay his Council Tax this year and will have to make decisions between affording the additional care he has to pay for and his other bills. He went on to say that because the Blind Association no longer pays for the support of his guide dog, due to their reducing budgets, so he now has to pay these costs himself. He is concerned these proposed changes will affect his health and his ability to live independently – which will be more costly to the tax payer.</p>	<p>Working age customers who are in receipt of War Disablement or Widows Pension will be protected from this change.</p> <p>Our CTR scheme will continue to provide a more generous means-test for those receiving Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payments.</p>
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Carers (for elderly, disabled or minors)	<p>The impact of this policy will mean that all working age carers are affected regardless of who they are caring for.</p> <p>Specific Consultation Responses:</p> <p>There were no specific consultation responses regarding this protected characteristic.</p>	<p>The means-test also allows for a higher applicable amount and an increased earnings disregard for carers.</p>
Sex	<p>None identified so far through this review.</p> <p>Specific Consultation Responses:</p> <p>There were no specific consultation responses regarding this protected characteristic.</p>	<p>None identified so far through this review</p>
Gender Reassignment	<p>None identified so far through this review.</p> <p>Specific Consultation Responses:</p> <p>There were no specific consultation responses regarding this protected characteristic.</p>	<p>None identified so far through this review</p>
Pregnancy and Maternity (incl. breastfeeding)	<p>None identified so far through this review.</p> <p>Specific Consultation Responses:</p> <p>There were no specific consultation responses regarding this protected characteristic.</p>	<p>None identified so far through this review</p>
Race	<p>It is not intended that this policy will disproportionately affect any particular ethnicity. Consideration should be given to how the scheme is communicated in relation to potential language barriers.</p> <p>Specific Consultation Responses:</p> <p>There were no specific consultation responses regarding this protected characteristic.</p>	<p>We manage the current CTR & Housing Benefit schemes and are used to working with customer's whose first language is not English. We often work with the Language Line to help support these customers.</p>

Religion or Belief	None identified so far through this review. Specific Consultation Responses: There were no specific consultation responses regarding this protected characteristic.	None identified so far through this review
Sexual Orientation	None identified so far through this review. Specific Consultation Responses: There were no specific consultation responses regarding this protected characteristic.	None identified so far through this review
Human Rights	None identified so far through this review and Northampton Borough Council has not been subject to any Judicial Reviews for our current scheme. Specific Consultation Responses: There were no specific consultation responses regarding this protected characteristic.	None identified so far through this review
Marriage and Civil Partnership	This may impact on lone parent households, where there is only one parent able to secure work which can also be hampered by child care concerns. Specific Consultation Responses: 1) There are widows and children suffering because of this, this stems from the pressures causing the family unit to breakdown	The means-test process for the discount allows for increased earnings disregards for lone parents. In addition, the means-test also includes disregards for child care costs.

74

All responses to the consultation are included as an appendix to the document entitled Cabinet Report (Appendix B – Consultation)

Proportionality

The scale and likelihood of these risks and opportunities are shown below:

Based on Northampton Borough Council's caseload data from October 2013 we have 18,662 applicants in receipt of a CTR discount. Of these 7,074 are of pension age and are protected from these proposed changes.

This leaves 11,588 CTR recipients who will be impacted and if the proposed changes are adopted will receive less financial support as of 1st April 2014 than they are currently receiving under the scheme this year. This equates to 62% of our caseload.

Data in relation to Jobseekers Allowance across Northampton for September 2013 does show a fall in claimants from the previous year. There will be many reasons why the number of jobseekers has fallen e.g. the claimants have moved into work. However, this alone does not indicate a downward trend in CTR applicants, especially if those Jobseekers move into low paid work and still require some level of financial support through the CTR scheme.

Many claimants will also be managing the impact of other welfare reforms e.g.

- Changes to Tax Credits
- Changes to Local Housing Allowance
- Social sector size criteria reductions to Housing Benefit
- 52 week restriction on Employment Support Allowance (Contributions Based)
- Replacement of Disability Living Allowance with Personal Independence Payments
- National benefit cap
- Increased non-dependent deduction rates
- Reduced uprating percentage for benefits and tax credits.

What measures does, or could, the policy include helping promote equality of opportunity?

As a means-tested discount the policy would be applied equally to all applicants.

What measures does, or could, the policy include addressing existing patterns of discrimination, harassment or disproportionality?

There is a statutory requirement to ensure that all pensioners are protected from these changes, the results is that the proposed reductions will affect all working age customers.

What impact will the policy have on promoting good relations and wider community cohesion?

This is not within the remit of the policy, which is aimed at ensuring a balanced budget to prevent the impact on other vital local services.

If the policy is likely to have a negative effect ('adverse impact'), what are the reasons for this?

The policy will have a negative impact on those in Northampton who are working age and on low incomes. The reason for this is that the proposed change will reduce the amount of financial support they receive which could adversely affect their ability to afford their household expenses. It could also lead to decisions over which necessities may need to be sacrificed e.g. the choice between food or heating.

What practical changes will help reduce any adverse impact on particular groups?

Please see table above and Step 6 below

Have you considered including treating disabled people more favourably where necessary?

Yes – Cabinet Report (Appendix A – Specific Protection)

What evidence is there that actions to address any negative effects on one area of equality may affect other areas of equality or human rights?

The means-test element of our CTR scheme is largely based on the legislation for the previous CTB scheme, from which there were no outstanding legal challenges.

What will be done to improve access to, and take-up of, services or understandings of the policy?

- All information about the scheme, including an electronic application form will be published on our website, along with other national websites.
- We provide a range of methods by which the service can be accessed:
 - On-Line
 - By telephone
 - In person at the One Stop Shop
 - Home visits
 - Use of Language Line and interpreters.
- The service is also promoted by the Jobcentre and the Pension Service along with a wide range of other welfare partners.
- Training and briefing sessions will be arranged for all affected internal staff, plus external welfare partners to ensure everyone is aware of the scheme and the changes.

Step 5: Procurement and partnerships

Consideration of external contractor obligations and partnership working:

Northampton Borough Council has a statutory requirement to operate a local CTR scheme. The scheme is currently being administered under a 'shared service agreement' by LGSS on behalf of Northampton Borough Council.

The Revenues & Benefits team that provides this service for LGSS on behalf of Northampton Borough Council are the same team that administers the current CTR scheme. The team is also responsible for the administration of both Council Tax and Housing Benefit.

The wealth of knowledge and experience within the Revenues & Benefits team, along with a strong focus on performance management ensures that there are no concerns stemming from this arrangement.

Step 6- Making a Decision

Our findings in relation to whether the policy will meet the council's responsibilities in relation to equality and human rights are summarised below:

We have identified the potential for these proposed changes to have an adverse impact on some groups with protected characteristics.

As this change will impact all working age customers there may be a disproportionate impact on groups with the following protected characteristics:

- Working age customers, including those with dependent children.
- Customers where either they or a member of their household is disabled.
- Carers
- Lone parents
- Families or lone parents where income is reduced to Statutory Maternity Pay or Maternity Allowance

However, our CTR scheme will continue to operate as a means-tested discount, which will take into consideration applicants on a low income. In addition, the means-test is still more generous for applicants where there is a disabled household member, for those with dependent children or are carers.

This is detailed in Cabinet Report (Appendix A – Specific Protection)

We have also developed a new recovery approach for customers in receipt of a CTR discount who also have Council Tax arrears:

- Recovery action commences after three months of arrears as opposed to two months for non CTR recipients.
- Small debts may not be summonsed, which means court costs are not added. These debts are reviewed regularly and will continue to be reviewed in-line with the impact if the proposed changes are implemented.
- Prior to a summons being sought for debts over £80.00 the account is passed to our Customer Service team to attempt to make contact by phone. The purpose of the call is to explain the changes from CTB to CTR then discuss the outstanding balance and then make an arrangement with the customer to pay.
- If we are unable to contact the customer by phone a voicemail message is left and an additional letter issued asking the customer to contact us.
- In the event that the debt still needs to be passed for bailiff recovery these are sent as a specialist welfare case, so that a more lenient approach is taken.
- We also have a write off policy which enables us to consider exceptional requests of hardship.

Other Considerations:

- Where the Council identifies groups/circumstances that require additional protection or support, these will be either be dealt with on an individual basis or incorporated into future schemes as appropriate.

Step 7 – Monitoring, evaluating and reviewing

How will you monitor the impact and effectiveness of the policy or activity?

How will the recommendations of this assessment be built into wider planning and review processes?

The proposed changes to our CTR scheme, and their impact on groups with protected characteristics, will be monitored, evaluating and reviewed through a number of mechanisms:

1) Impact on the Council Tax collection rate:

The collection rate of Council Tax is monitored regularly and provides an accurate figure of the amount of Council Tax collected as a percentage of the total tax expected to be collected. This data is reviewed and discussed monthly, with comparisons drawn to previous years – this allows any changes in the collection rate can be identified. This will provide a broad view of how people are responding to the repayment of an increased amount of Council Tax.

2) Review of Council Tax recovery action:

A review of Council Tax recovery action in relation to customers receiving a CTR discount will also provide an overview of the impact this change may have.

3) Monitoring Debt Levels:

In 2013/14 customers with ‘small debts’ (those under £80.00) were not subject to any further recovery action. However, there will be an accumulative effect from arrears in 2014/15, which will see these debts becoming subject to a liability order. These debts will be ring-fenced and processed separately to ensure we can monitor repayments and customer behaviour.

4) Feedback from other partners:

Liaison with our financial inclusion, housing and customer service teams will provide evidence on specific issues encountered by those impacted by any change to CTR. Further liaison will allow take place with Community Law Service and the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Step 8 –Action Plan

Actions	Target date	Responsible post holder and Directorate	Monitoring post holder and Directorate
Publish EIA	December 2013	Robin Bates/Glenn Hammons	Beccy Salmon
Liaison with Northampton Borough Council's financial inclusion service to establish what scope they have to support affected customers who require advice and budgeting support.	December 2013	Robin Bates/Glenn Hammons	Beccy Salmon
Consider communication to working age CTR recipients prior to annual billing to promote Northampton Borough Council's financial inclusion service.	December 2013	Robin Bates/Glenn Hammons	Beccy Salmon
External review - Consider the creation of a cross department register, where staff can log issues raised by the public which have stemmed from any change to CTR.	January 2014	Robin Bates/Glenn Hammons	Beccy Salmon
Review the Council Tax recovery process for those receiving CTR	January 2014	Robin Bates/Glenn Hammons	Beccy Salmon
Offer training and/or support to other services (both internal/external) so they are aware of changes to CTR and the impact on their clients.	February 2014	Robin Bates/Glenn Hammons	Beccy Salmon
Full training to be provided to all Revenues & Benefits staff so they are aware of the changes and can ensure customers can be sign-posted to Northampton Borough Council's financial inclusion service.	February 2014	Robin Bates/Glenn Hammons	Beccy Salmon
Internal Review by reporting and analysing the public response to annual billing.	March 2014	Robin Bates/Glenn Hammons	Beccy Salmon
Review of CTR Year 2 project as a 'lessons-learned' exercise to identify other potential avenues to increase response to any future CTR consultations – particularly areas that focus on groups with protected characteristics.	April 2014	Robin Bates/Glenn Hammons	Beccy Salmon

Review the impact of summons action on accumulated date from 2013/14	July 2014	Robin Bates/	Beccy Salmon
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For the record

The equality impact assessment should be signed off at Head of Service level before publication. Signing off means that the Head of Service will need to satisfy themselves that:

- **You have consulted and involved stakeholders from each group**
- **You have gathered all relevant evidence**
- **You have an action plan**

Date of sign off by Head of Service:

Name of Head of Service signing off this EIA:

Equality Duties to be taken into account include:

Prohibited Conduct under the Equality Act 2010 including:

Direct discrimination (including by association and perception e.g. carers); Indirect discrimination; Pregnancy and maternity discrimination; Harassment; discrimination arising from disability.

Public Sector Duties (Section 149) of the Equality Act 2010 for NBC and services provided on its behalf:

NBC and services providing public functions must in providing services have due regard to the need to: **eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different groups.** 'Positive action' permits proportionate action to overcome disadvantage, meet needs and tackle under-representation.

Rights apply to people in terms of their "Protected Characteristics":

Age; Gender; Gender Assignment; Sexual Orientation; Disability; Race; Religion and Belief; Pregnancy; Maternity. But Marriage and Civil Partnership do not apply to the public sector duties.

Duty to "advance equality of opportunity":

The need, when reviewing, planning or providing services/policies/practices to assess the impacts of services on people in relation to their 'protected characteristics', take steps to remove/minimise any negative impacts identified and help everyone to participate in our services and public life. **Equality Impact Assessments** remain best practice to be used. Sometimes **people have particular needs** e.g. due to gender, race, faith or disability that need to be addressed, not ignored. NBC must have due regard to the **duty to make reasonable adjustments** for people with disabilities. NBC must **encourage people who share a protected characteristic to participate in public life** or any other activity in which their participation is too low.

Duty to 'foster good relations between people'

This means having due regard to the need to **tackle prejudice** (e.g. where people are picked on or stereotyped by customers or colleagues because of their ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, etc.) and **promote understanding**.

Lawful Exceptions to general rules: can happen where action is proportionate to achieve a legitimate aim and not otherwise prohibited by anything under the Equality Act 2010. There are some special situations (see Ch 12 and 13 of the Equality Act 2010 Statutory Code of Practice – Services, Public Functions and Associations).

National Adult Autism Strategy (Autism Act 2009; statutory guidelines)

Human Rights – under the Human Rights Act 1998 which gives effect to the European convention: right not to be subjected to degrading treatment; right to a fair trial (**civil and criminal issues**); right to privacy (**subject to certain**

exceptions e.g. national security/public safety, or certain other specific situations); freedom of conscience (including religion and belief and rights to manifest these limited only by law and as necessary for public safety, public order, protection of rights of others and other specified situations); freedom of expression; freedom of peaceful assembly and to join trade unions; right not to be subject to unlawful discrimination; right to peaceful enjoyment of own possessions (subject to certain exceptions e.g. to secure payment of taxes or other contributions or penalties); right to an education; right to hold free elections by secret ballot. The European Convention is given effect in UK law by the Human Rights Act 1998.

Appendices



NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL
20 JANUARY 2014

Agenda Status: Public

Directorate: Finance & Resources

Report Title	COUNCIL TAX BASE 2014 -2015
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1. Purpose

1.1 The report sets out the calculation of Northampton Borough Council’s Tax Base for the year 2014/15 under the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (Amendment) (England) regulations 2003 (SI 2003/3012) and amendments made in the Local Government Act 2012.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That Council approve the tax base for 2013/14 at 60,651.14 Band D equivalent properties and associated parish tax bases within this report.

	2014/15	2013/14
Billing	2,402.29	2,394.26
Collingtree	508.64	443.35
Duston	5260.40	4,748.13
Great Houghton	279.44	246.80
Hardingstone	757.93	658.39
Upton	2,006.64	1,687.65
Wootton & East Hunsbury	6,214.60	5,442.79
West Hunsbury	1,585.70	1,447.71
Hunsbury Meadow	475.24	369.95
Northampton (Unparished)	41,160.27	40,635.31
Total tax base	60,651.14	58,074.34

3. Issues and Choices

3.1 Report Background

3.1.1 A summary of movement in the tax base is summarised below.

13/14		14/15
68,923.08	Tax Base (Band "D" equivalent)	70,554.19
126.28	Growth in tax base (note 1)	224.17
425.00	Planning Assumptions (note 2)	584.72
1,079.83	Exemptions & Discounts (note 3)	-12.73
-10,365.40	Council Tax Reduction Scheme (note 4)	-9,016.19
-2,114.45	Non-Collection (note 5)	-1,683.02
58,074.34	Taxbase for Council Tax	60,651.14

3.1.2 Note 1 - Movement in the tax base in last year

3.1.3 Note 2 - There is an allowance of 50% applied to the estimated new build to allow for part year liability.

3.1.4 Note 3 - Revised figure following review

3.1.5 Note 4 - Includes no increase in caseload

3.1.6 Note 5 - The non-collection rate of council tax has been decreased from 3.513% to 2.7% for the 2014/15 tax base setting. This is due to the estimated non-payment of the additional debit raised in respect of changes to the exemption, discounts, Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme and taking into consideration the current financial climate. The collection rate is reviewed each year as part of the tax base setting process.

3.1.7 There is an estimated surplus to be apportioned on the Collection Fund, as detailed in the draft budget report to the December Cabinet, of £47,049 for NBC (which would equate to £212,936 for NCC and £40,014 for PCC).

3.2 Issues

3.2.1 The report represents the application of a prescribed process.

3.3 Choices (Options)

3.3.1 To not set a tax base would render the authority unable to set a council tax.

3.3.2 The methodology used to calculate the tax base, has taken into account the previous decision by Council in 2013/14 in relation to the level of reductions awarded for Exemptions and Discounts.

3.3.3 The methodology used to calculate the tax base, has taken into account the recommendation to Council with respect to the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

3.3.4 Each of these previous decisions, either individually or as a whole, could be reconsidered by Full Council and the discounts reinstated. Any decision to change the current position would have a negative financial impact on the budget report and tax base. The value of the removal of discounts is shown as a band D equivalent in appendix 1.

3.3.5 To approve the recommendations in the report

4. Implications (including financial implications)

4.1 Policy

4.1.1 None

4.2 Resources and Risk

4.2.1 No resource required. The base has to be determined by the 31st January 2014 by Full Council

4.2.2 That the above policy position in respect of the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme be kept under review in respect of future years

4.2.3 That the above policy position in respect of discretionary discounts and exemptions be kept under review in respect of future years

4.3 Legal

4.3.1 These are covered within the body of the report.

4.4 Equality

4.4.1 No direct impact on equality context, however any resulting impact on options/ consultations for budgets will have to be considered individually.

4.5 Other Implications

4.5.1 None

5. Background Papers

5.1 None

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