

**BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK**

**CABINET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee  
held on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2012 at 6pm  
in the Committee Suite, King's Court, Chapel Street, King's Lynn.**

**PRESENT:**

Councillors C Joyce (Chairman)  
B Ayres, A Lovett, I Mack (Vice Chairman), G McGuinness (substitute for J Collop)  
G Sandell, M Tilbury, A Tyler and D Tyler (substitute for T Manley).

**Other Member Present:**

Councillor Daubney, Leader and Portfolio Holder for Corporate/Strategic Issues and Resources

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J Collop and Councillor Manley.

**CSC35: MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2012 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**CSC36: URGENT BUSINESS UNDER STANDING ORDER 7**

There was no urgent business to report.

**CSC37: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**CSC38: MEMBERS PRESENT PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 34**

There were no Members present under Standing Order 34.

**CSC39: CHAIRMAN'S CORRESPONDENCE**

The Chairman had no correspondence to report.

**CSC40: RESPONSE TO PREVIOUS COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS**

There were no previous Committee recommendations.

**CSC41: MATTERS CALLED-IN PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 12**

There were no matters called-in pursuant to Standing Order 12.

CSC42: **LOCAL SUPPORT FOR COUNCIL TAX SCHEME (LSCT)**

Councillor A Tyler questioned how the Cabinet had prioritised the groups recommended for protection under the Local Support for Council Tax Scheme (LSCT). In response, the Leader explained that some of the priorities were prescribed by the Government with Pension Age Claimants being protected by default. The Cabinet also had to give consideration to what they considered to be a vulnerable group as there was no clear definition but local authorities must have due regard to their equality duty. Cabinet had therefore proposed that households with at least one child under the age of 5 would also be protected. It was considered that a household with children above the age of 5 and at school would have a better chance of gaining some level of employment. One of the principles of the Government's Welfare reform was to encourage people to increase their income through work. It was also proposed that War Pensioners be protected. It was highlighted that there were no proposals to treat the circumstances of a person receiving disability benefits any differently under LSCT. The Resources and Performance Panel had agreed with the Cabinet's recommendations and also included a further recommendation that provision for the funding of £75k be allocated to add people receiving a disability premium to the category of protected groups. The Leader stated Cabinet also had to give consideration to ensure the scheme was operated within budget. In response to a further question from Councillor A Tyler, the Leader explained that the figures were calculated on the circumstances of each individual however the maximum amount of support to non protection groups was 75% of their charge compared to the existing Council Tax Benefit Scheme.

Councillor Lovett referred to the additional income raised through the Council Tax Technical Reforms and it was explained that discussions were to be held to create a Hardship Fund. Norfolk County Council and Norfolk Police authority had indicated they may be willing to contribute. If the Council wished to maintain Council Tax support at its current level, it would have to fund any shortfall from within its own reserves. In response to a further question from Councillor Lovett as to the approach other district authorities were adopting, the Leader explained that the Council had worked closely with all other neighbouring authorities but each district faced different challenges. The percentage of pensioners and what was deemed to be a vulnerable person may vary in each district. Councillor Lovett also referred to the potential cut in benefits which could compound people's problems. The Deputy Chief Executive explained that an analysis of the impact had been carried out as to the number of people that would be effected.

Councillor Sandell referred to the glossary of terms outlined on page 24 of the Cabinet report and questioned the definition as to what was deemed to be a war pension in that it stated "pension payable to ex-service personnel" which could have wider implications. The Chief Executive agreed that it would be reworded.

In response to a question raised by the Chairman, as to whether the County Council, being in receipt of the largest amount of council tax monies were prepared to consider contributing to the scheme, the Leader explained discussions had been held but they were not willing to contribute to the scheme. The Deputy Chief Executive also explained that the Police had been formally consulted and they had also subsequently confirmed that they were not prepared to contribute to the scheme.

In response to a question from Cllr Mack, the Deputy Chief Executive explained that a considerable amount of modelling had been carried out in relation to child benefit payments. He undertook to send this electronically to Members of the Committee. The Chief Executive also explained that some difficult decisions had to be considered to determine which groups to protect.

In response to a question from the Chairman as to why the age of children under 5 was being proposed, the Leader explained that this was the school starting age. He also explained that both the Revenues and Benefits Manager and the Deputy Chief Executive had worked hard to outline all the various options to the Cabinet with current information, however the future make up of the residents was unknown, so the scheme would be reviewed at the appropriate stage to assess performance.

Councillor Mack explained that he was grateful to be given the opportunity to consider the proposals particularly in light of them going out to consultation which would give the Committee a further opportunity to review the results and subsequent report. He questioned whether any modelling had been done on the impact of the scheme on the number of people defaulting with their payments and the cost implications. The Leader explained that it was difficult to predict but it was likely that the scheme would result in an increase of half to one percent which could effect the base rate of Council Tax. Councillor Mack also highlighted that officer time would also be impacted on in times on recovering any subsequent debt.

In response to a further question from Councillor Mack in how the hardship fund would be administered, the Chief Executive explained that the detail had not been fully worked up but discussions would be held with the County Council in relation to the social fund run by the DWP in order to try and administer just one fund at a local level.

In response to a question raised by Councillor Tilbury, the Chief Executive explained that the Government had not ring fenced the funding, it was for the Council to determine how it was spent.

The Leader confirmed that negotiations would continue with the County Council but the process would be open and transparent.

The Leader, Deputy Chief Executive and the Committee wished to place on record their appreciation to Joanne Stanton, Revenue and Benefits Manager for her efforts in drafting a well written report.

CSC43: **PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' DECISIONS MADE UNDER DELEGATED POWERS**

The following Portfolio Holders' Decision was noted:

CCTV Communications Upgrade.

CSC44: **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee was scheduled to be held on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> September 2012 at 6pm.

**Meeting closed at 18.37pm**