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Southend-on-Sea City Council

Civic Centre
Southend-on-Sea

6 December 2023



I hereby summon you to attend the meeting of the Southend-on-Sea City Council to be held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Southend-on-Sea on, **Thursday, 14th December, 2023** commencing **6.30 p.m.** for the transaction of the following business.

R Tinlin
Chief Executive & Town Clerk

A G E N D A

- 1 Apologies for Absence**
- 2 Declarations of Interest**
- 3 Communications**
- 4 Questions from Members of the Public**
- 5 Questions from Members of the Council**
- 6 Minutes of the meeting of Special Council held Tuesday, 26 September 2023 (Pages 3 - 4)**
- 7 Minutes of the meeting of Council held Thursday, 19 October 2023 (Pages 5 - 10)**
- 8 Minutes of the meeting of Special Council held Monday, 20 November 2023 (Pages 11 - 12)**
- 9 Leader of the Council Update**
- 10 Southend City Council Corporate Plan 2023-2027 (Pages 13 - 14)
Cabinet Minute Extract**
- 11 Resourcing Better Outcomes - Finance Performance Report for September 2023 (Period 6) (Pages 15 - 16)
Cabinet Minute Extract**

- 12 Freedom of the City and Honorary Aldermen Nominations (Pages 17 - 18)**
General Purposes Committee Minute Extracts
- 13 Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/25 (Pages 19 - 30)**
Report of Executive Director (Finance and Resources)
- 14 Notice of Motion - Cuckoo Corner (Pages 31 - 32)**
Notice of Motion
- 15 Notice of Motion - Fly-tipping (Pages 33 - 34)**
Notice of Motion
- 16 Appointments to Committees**

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SOUTHEND-ON-SEA CITY COUNCIL

Meeting of The Council

Date: Tuesday, 26th September, 2023

Place: Council Chamber - Civic Suite

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Present: Councillor S Habermel (Chair)
Councillors K Robinson, M Berry, M Borton, H Boyd, K Buck, S Buckley, P Collins, D Cowan, T Cox, M Davidson, A Dear, M Dent, F Evans, N Folkard, D Garston, S George, I Gilbert, J Harland, L Hyde, D Jarvis, A Jones, D Jones, J Lamb, A Line, R McMullan, M O'Connor, M Sadza, M Terry, S Wakefield, C Walker, J Warren, P Wexham, R Woodley, S Ayles, C Campbell, O Cartey, G Leroy, R Longstaff and C Nevin

Start/End Time: 10.00 am - 11.03 am

71 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Beggs, Burton, Courtenay, Cowdrey, Moyies, Mulroney, Murphy, Nelson, Richardson, Stafford and Ward.

72 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest at this meeting.

73 Civic Visit

The Worshipful the Mayor welcomed two distinguished representatives from the sister cities in Ukraine, Mr Ivan Fedorov, Mayor of Melitopol City Council and Ms Olha Pikula, Deputy of Mariupol City Council and Director of Communications and Fundraising at the Charity Fund 'I'Mariupol'.

Mr Ivan Fedorov and Ms Olha Pikula addressed the Council and shared a short film and presentation about the City of Melitopol. The Worshipful the Mayor, on behalf of the Council, exchanged gifts of friendship with Mr Fedorov and Ms Pikula.

The Council offered its unwavering support and solidarity and its firm commitment to stand by Ukraine as they face the challenges ahead.

The meeting closed with the National Anthems of Ukraine and the United Kingdom.

Chair: _____

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SOUTHEND-ON-SEA CITY COUNCIL

Meeting of The Council

Date: Thursday, 19th October, 2023
Place: Council Chamber - Civic Suite

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Present: Councillor S Habermel (Chair)
Councillors K Robinson, B Beggs, M Berry, M Borton, H Boyd, K Buck, S Buckley, L Burton, P Collins, J Courtenay, D Cowan, T Cowdrey, T Cox, M Davidson, A Dear, M Dent, F Evans, N Folkard, D Garston, S George, I Gilbert, J Harland, L Hyde, D Jarvis, A Jones, D Jones, J Lamb, R McMullan, J Moyies, C Mulrone, D Nelson, M O'Connor, M Sadza, M Terry, S Wakefield, N Ward, J Warren, P Wexham, R Woodley, S Aylene, C Campbell, O Carthey, G Leroy, R Longstaff, C Nevin, D Richardson and K Murphy

Start/End Time: 6.30 pm - 11.00 pm

74 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Line, Stafford and Walker.

75 Declarations of Interest

The following declarations of interest were made:

All Councillors - Minute 82 (Review of Members' Allowances) – However, the Standards Committee on 11th July 2012 granted a dispensation to all Councillors to participate in the debate and vote on the matter (this was endorsed by Council on 19th July 2012).

76 Communications

(a) Sir David Amess – Minute's Silence

The Council remained silent for one minute as a mark of respect to Sir David Amess on the second anniversary of his tragic death.

(b) Southend United Football Club

The Mayor, on behalf of the Council, formally thanked the supporters and all those involved in securing and retaining the future of Southend United Football Club.

(c) Car Parking Charges

At the meeting of the Council held on 7th September 2023 Councillors received a minute of the Cabinet meeting held on 28th June concerning the removal of 6-9pm parking charges. This matter was deferred pending the receipt of legal advice.

The Mayor confirmed that the Council cannot determine car parking fees and charges as this is an Executive matter. Therefore, the deferred matter has been withdrawn.

77 Questions from Members of the Public

The relevant Cabinet Members responded to written questions received from the public.

78 Questions from Members of the Council

The relevant Cabinet Members responded to written and supplementary questions received from Councillors.

79 Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday, 7 September 2023

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday, 7 September 2023, be confirmed as a correct record and signed.

80 Leader of the Council - Update

The Leader of the Council addressed the Council and provided a brief overview of the work of the Cabinet. The Group Leaders and Councillors Aylen, Longstaff and Murphy responded.

81 Election Cycle Change Consultation

The Council considered a report of the Executive Director (Strategy and Change) seeking approval to launch a consultation to gauge public and stakeholder opinion on whether to move to an 'all out' electoral cycle or continue with election by thirds.

Resolved:

1. That an 8-week consultation be commenced with relevant stakeholders on a proposal to change the Council's scheme for elections by thirds to a scheme for whole Council 'all-out' elections.

2. That authority be delegated to the Executive Director (Strategy and Change), in consultation with the group leaders to agree the consultation approach and plan.

82 Review of Members' Allowances

The Council considered a report of the Executive Director (Strategy and Change) presenting the report and recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) on Members' Allowances for the Council.

Resolved:

That the following recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel, as set out in its report at Appendix 1 and summarised in the new Members' Allowances Scheme 2023-2027 at Appendix 2, be approved:

1. That the Basic Allowance be set at £10,400.
2. That the Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) summarised in the IRP report and the revised SRAs set out in the report, be approved.
3. That the allowances payable to the Independent Persons and the Co-opted Members, be approved.
4. That, subject to the introduction of a 5p per mile passenger supplement rate, the existing provisions in the Members' Allowances Scheme, regarding travelling and subsistence allowances, be reaffirmed.
5. That, subject to Booking Fee for claiming the Dependants' Carer's Allowance being increased to £15 and the maximum rate claimable for a special care allowance being set at the hourly rate charged by the Council for a Home Care Assistant, the existing provisions in the Members' Allowances Scheme regarding the Carers' Allowance, be reaffirmed.
6. That the following indices be applied to the remuneration and allowances paid to Members of the Council:
 - (a) Basic Allowance, Special Responsibility Co-optees and Independent Persons allowances to be indexed to the annual percentage salary increase for local government staff (at spinal point 43) to be implemented from the start of the municipal year, rather than the financial year, for which year it is applicable.
 - (b) Mileage allowances to be updated by reference to the rates which apply to Council officers (HMRC rates).
 - (c) Subsistence allowances to be updated by reference to the schemes which apply to Council officers.
 - (d) Basic 'sitters' allowance be linked to the National Living Wage. Specialist Care Allowance to be indexed to the hourly rate charged by the Council for a Home Care Assistant.
7. That the existing Members' Allowances Scheme be revoked and that, subject to the following amendment the new Members' Allowances Scheme 2023-2027, as set out in Appendix 2 to the submitted report, be approved with the implementation date being 1st August 2023:

Under the heading “Other Facilities” on page 5 of the scheme the first sentence of the second paragraph be deleted and replaced with the following text:

‘The Council also offers elected Councillors a free car parking permit for use when carrying out official Council duties across the city and can be used for parking in council operated car parks (including both the gated and general areas of Civic Underground) and on-street pay by phone/pay-and-display bays and residential permit parking bays.’

8. That the part year costs in 2023/24 of £33,000 resulting from the implementation of the recommendations of the IRP be funded from the Council’s contingency budget and that the full year cost of £50,000 be dealt with as part of the setting of the base budget for 2024/25.

83 Finance and Corporate Performance Report 2023/24 to end July 2023

The Council had before it Minute 36 of the Cabinet held on 18th September 2023 concerning the finance and corporate performance report 2023/24 to the end of July 2023 (period 4).

Resolved:

That Minute 36 (Recommendation 4) of the Cabinet, be approved.

84 Notice of Motion - Financial Affairs

During consideration of this matter an amendment was proposed by Councillor Cowan and seconded by Councillor Collins. The amendment was carried.

Resolved:

That the Notice of Motion concerning the financial situation at Southend-on-Sea City Council, as amended below, be referred to the Cabinet for consideration:

‘Under the last Joint Administration, their April 2022 – April 2023 budget was £6.835 Million overspent and a recent Cabinet paper reported that the budget that they set and voted for in February 2023 and came into effect from April 2023 is current running at a projected overspend of £14 Million with £13.4m of this sitting in Adult Social Care and Children’s Services.

It is currently the worst financial position that this Council has ever faced since it became a Unitary Authority in 1998, though the Council remains in a relatively financially resilient position.

This Council therefore:

- 1 Notes the last Joint Administration’s April 2022 – April 2023 budget was £6.835m overspent, this was reduced in-year from a projected £14.484m overspend.*
- 2 Notes that the last Joint Administration set and voted for the current budget in February 2023 and is running at a current year-end projected overspend of £14 Million, with £13.4m of this sitting in Adult Social Care and Children’s Services.*

- 3 *Notes that on 21st October 2022 the Chairman of the Local Government Association (LGA) and the leaders of all the political groups on the LGA wrote to the Chancellor regarding the tough financial positions facing local government due to short funding settlements and cost of adult social care.*
- 4 *Notes that independent national analysis suggests that as many as 1 in 6 local authorities could run out of money in 2023/24 without substantial additional funding.*
- 5 *Resolves that the Council takes appropriate measures to reduce the current deficit by working cross-party to determine and realise savings, build upon ‘The Dozen Principles’ as instigated by the Section 151 Officer, to address and reduce the deficit in 2022/2023 as well as instruct the Leaders of all the Groups to urgently write to the Prime Minister, Chancellor, and Secretary of State for Local Government asking that Government recognises that even with drastic cuts, local councils are struggling to afford statutory services and resolves to put local councils on a long-term sustainable financial footing by providing:*
 - *Funding that keeps pace with the growing demand for adults and children’s services*
 - *Fully funding social care*
 - *Properly funding Special Educational Needs provisions*

85 Notice of Motion - Improving Cuckoo Corner

The Notice of Motion concerning improvements to Cuckoo Corner was deferred to the next meeting of Council.

86 Appointments to Committees, etc

Resolved:

That it be noted that Councillor Alan Dear will replace Councillor Walker on the Licensing Sub-Committee C and be appointed Chair of the Committee.

Chair: _____

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SOUTHEND-ON-SEA CITY COUNCIL

Meeting of The Council

Date: Monday, 20th November, 2023

Place: Council Chamber - Civic Suite

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Present: Councillor S Habermel (Chair)
Councillors K Robinson, B Beggs, M Borton, H Boyd, K Buck, L Burton, P Collins, J Courtenay, D Cowan, T Cowdrey, T Cox, M Davidson, A Dear, M Dent, F Evans, N Folkard, D Garston, I Gilbert, J Harland, L Hyde, D Jarvis, A Jones, D Jones, J Lamb, A Line, R McMullan, J Moyies, C Mulroney, D Nelson, M O'Connor, M Sadza, M Stafford, M Terry, S Wakefield, C Walker, N Ward, P Wexham, R Woodley, S Ayles, C Campbell, O Cartey, R Longstaff, C Nevin and K Murphy

Start/End Time: 6.30 - 6.44 pm

87 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Berry, Buckley, George, Leroy, Richardson and Warren.

88 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest at this meeting.

89 Minute Silence

The Council remained silent for one minute as a mark of respect for Barbara Armitage, former Mayoress to her partner, John Armitage, in his Mayoral Year 1989-1990, who sadly passed away recently.

90 Appointment of Chief Executive

The Council considered a report of the Executive Director (Strategy and Change) recommending that Mr Colin Ansell be appointed as the Council's Chief Executive, Head of the Council's Paid Service, Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer, in accordance with the recommendation of the Appointments and Disciplinary Committee held on Thursday 16th November 2023.

Resolved:

1. That Mr Colin Ansell be appointed to the post of Chief Executive, Head of the Council's Paid Service, Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer in accordance with the recommendation of the Appointments and Disciplinary Committee, subject to the completion of normal pre-employment checks.

2. That authority be delegated to the Executive Director (Strategy and Change), in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to deal with the pre-employment checks, finalise the conditions of employment and start date and offer the post to Colin Ansell.

Chair: _____

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Cabinet – 20th November 2023

Minute 59 (extract): Southend City Council Corporate Plan

10

The Cabinet considered a report of the Executive Director (Strategy and Change) presenting the refreshed Corporate Plan 2023-2027.

On behalf of the Cabinet, the Leader of the Council conveyed his thanks and appreciation to both Councillors and officers for their contribution towards the production of an excellent Plan.

Recommendation:

That the Council be recommended to approve the draft Corporate Plan 2023-27, as set out in Appendix 1 to the submitted report and that any final changes prior to publication be delegated to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council.

Reasons for recommendation:

To ensure that the Council has a robust strategic plan which clearly articulates the priorities for the organisation enabling efficient use of resources.

Other options:

There is no requirement to have a Corporate Plan, but it is best practice and provides a helpful narrative to set the direction for the work.

Note: This is a Council Function

Not eligible for call-in as the matter has been subject to pre-Cabinet Scrutiny by the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee.

Cabinet Member: Cllr Cox

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Cabinet – 20th November 2023

Minute 60 (Recommendation 9): Resourcing Better Outcomes – Finance Performance Report for September 2023 (Period 6)

11

The Cabinet considered a report of the Executive Director (Finance & Resources) summarising the current forecast position at this half-way point of the financial year and reinforcing the need to make some difficult choices and take decisive action.

Resolved:

1. That the continued unprecedented levels of reported financial pressure and challenges right across the local government sector, as set out in Appendix 1 to the submitted report, be noted.

In respect of the 2023/24 Revenue Budget Performance, as set out in appendix 2 to the report:

2. That the forecast outturn for 2023/24 for the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account as at 30 September 2023, be noted.

3. That the plans and intentions to try to reduce the forecast overspend of the Council's revenue budget for 2023/24, be noted and that the Chief Executive and Executive Director (Finance & Resources) continue to explore all opportunities within their delegated powers and authority to improve the financial position by the year-end.

In respect of the 2023/24 Capital Budget Performance as set out in appendix 3 of this report:

4. That the expenditure to date and the forecast outturn as at 30 September 2023 and its financing, be noted.

5. That the requested changes to the capital investment programme for 2023/24 and future years, as set out in Appendix 3 to the report, be approved.

6. That the Corporate Performance Report as at 30 September 2023, as set out in Appendix 4 to the report, be noted.

7. That the planned budget transfers (virements) of £2,710,000 from earmarked reserves, as set out in the report, be approved.

8. That a Working Group be established on a political proportionate basis to consider budget proposals for 2024/25 and future years, with nominations from Group Leaders to be notified to the Chief Executive.

Recommended:

9. That the removal of the footbridge over the Queensway highway be approved and the relevant budget be included in the Capital Investment Programme, as set out in paragraph 7.17 and Section 4 of Appendix 3 to the report, with the funding for this project coming from borrowing and that it be noted that the construction of the road layout included in the planning permission or any other major changes to the road layout will require a further Cabinet report before progressing.

Reasons for Decisions

To provide detailed financial information on the financial performance of the Council. The report sets out the key variances by budget holders and associated management action being implemented to address the identified issues.

Other Options

The Council could choose to monitor its budgetary performance against an alternative timeframe, but it is considered that the current reporting schedule provides the appropriate balance to allow strategic oversight of the budget by Councillors and to also formally manage the Council's exposure to financial risk.

Note: The decisions in resolutions 1 to 8 above constitute an Executive function and the recommendation in 9 above constitutes a Council function.

This matter is not eligible for call-in.

Cabinet Member: Cllr Cox

Minute 4 Extract: Freedom of the City Nomination

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director (Strategy and Change) relating to the nomination received, to confer the Freedom of the City on Mr Kevin Maher.

Resolved:

1. That pursuant to Section 249(5) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council be recommended to confer the Freedom of the City of Southend-on-Sea on Mr Kevin Maher, in recognition of his eminent and outstanding public service he has rendered to Southend United Football Club and the City of Southend-on-Sea.
2. That a Special meeting of the Council be convened in the New Year, to confer the honour and to present Mr Kevin Maher with a ceremonial scroll.

Minute 7 Extract: Honorary Aldermen Nominations

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director (Strategy and Change) relating to the Honorary Alderman nominations received.

Resolved:

That, pursuant to Section 249(1) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council be recommended to confer the title of Honorary Alderman on Mr Roger Weaver and Mr Mike Royston and that a Special Meeting of the Council be convened in the New Year, to confer the honours.

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Title: Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/25

Meeting: Council

Date: 14 December 2023

Classification: Part 1

Policy Context: All Corporate Priorities

Key Decision: Yes

Report Authors: Tracey Nicola, Benefits Service Manager

Executive Councillor: Councillor Cox, Leader and Cabinet Member for Special Educational Needs & Disability

1 Executive Summary

To adopt a new Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2024/25.

2 Recommendations

2.1 That the proposed changes to the current Local Council Tax Support Scheme be adopted for 2024/25.

2.2 That the administration changes be adopted for 2024/25.

3 Background

3.1 For each new financial year, each billing authority must consider whether to revise its Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTSS) or to replace it with another scheme. The design of the LCTSS must be finalised by 31 January each year at the very latest. Failure to provide a scheme by this date would trigger the imposition of the Governments default scheme. The Government default scheme would require the Council to revert back to the level of support that would have been provided under the national Council Tax Benefit arrangements. Reverting to this scheme would mean that the Council would have to find in the region of circa £1.5 million from elsewhere in its annual budget.

- 3.2 The Council originally designed a scheme for 2013/14 which passed the reduction in funding received onto working age claimants, delivering a cost neutral scheme overall.
- 3.3 This scheme has been formally re-adopted each year since. It has proved to be a robust scheme with no legal challenges and good outcomes in terms of increasing collection. However, Southend has now been live with the Government's Universal Credit policy since July 2017 which has some impacts on our locally adopted LCTSS, particularly around claim dates and treatment of income.
- 3.4 As the scheme impacts on the Council Tax base, a key component in estimating the resources available to the Council, it is deemed prudent to confirm the scheme in December allowing Cabinet to agree a Council Tax base in January 2024 for the financial year 2024/25.

4 Current Scheme

- 4.1 Local Council Tax Support replaced Council Tax Benefit with effect from 1 April 2013. People of pension age continue to be protected from adverse changes by the Government but for people of working age, the Council has adopted a scheme which has the following key elements:
- The calculation of support is based on 75% of the Council Tax liability rather than 100%.
 - The calculation of support is based on a maximum of a band D property. This means that anyone of working age that lives in a property with a Council Tax band of E, F, G or H, has their support calculated as if their property was a band D.
 - The capital limit is £6,000 so those with capital exceeding £6,000 are required to make full payment of their Council Tax liability.
 - The introduction of an exceptional hardship scheme which is intended to help people whose individual circumstances mean that the increased Council Tax bill is causing them exceptional hardship.
- 4.2 In 2018/19 the Scheme was adapted to include 3 assessment changes. A flat rate deduction for non-dependents in the household. A minimum income floor for Self Employed earners and the Universal Credit Award Notification accepted as a claim for LCTS.
- 4.3 As Members will be aware people with disabilities that have had their property adapted can apply for a reduction in their Council Tax liability. Within the Council Tax Support Scheme disability benefits are disregarded when calculating the amount of support given and additional allowances for living expenses are applied.

- 4.4 The scheme was designed to take into account the ability to pay and the collectability of the resultant Council Tax liability. The amount of Council Tax due from working age recipients of LCTSS collected in year has been as follows: -

Year	% collected in year
2013/14	73.6
2014/15	76.2
2015/16	77.8
2016/17	80.2
2017/18	80.2
2018/19	80.8
2019/20	81.0
2020/21	89.5
2021/22	85.08
2022/23	82.08
2023/24	56.00 (end of Oct)

- 4.5 Although pensioners only account for 39% of the caseload, they account for 47% of the total cost. This is a consequence of the Government's requirement that the LCTSS must leave pensioners entitlement to assistance unaltered from the previous Council Tax Benefit arrangements, with any reduction in entitlements only affecting those of working age.
- 4.6 The managed migration onto Universal Credit which was originally due to begin in January 2019 and conclude by 2020 has continued to be postponed. Included as part of the most recent update from Government was confirmation that the new date for full rollout will now be 2024, although there is still potential for this target to move again given previous precedent. An official timetable for any managed migration of current caseload onto Universal Credit has not been released. Due to continuing delays, at this stage Southend-on-Sea Council do not know when the managed migration will commence or where they will fall in the national schedule of that roll out.

5 Current Developments

- 5.1 A project is underway to maximise people's incomes using a 'low income tracker' programme. By supporting people to maximise their income and claim relevant benefits we will also be in turn be supporting people to afford their Council Tax and other expenditure commitments and help with any transition in the assessment of their support entitlement under our LCTS scheme.
- 5.2 It should be noted that by ensuring people are maximising their income and claiming all relevant benefits to which they are entitled can also lead to other support avenues being open to them. For example automatic entitlement to certain government grants, reduction costs for accessing NHS services and dental services.

6 Impact of the 'Cost of Living' Crisis

6.1 The Government have provided £2.8m in Household Support Fund for the 2023/24 year which has allowed us to support vulnerable people with the increased cost of their fuel and food bills and negate some of the impact of the cost-of-living crisis.

6.2 The Government have also provided the Local Authority with funding for a Council Tax Support Fund for 2023/24 to provide an additional top up towards their Council Tax charge for all in receipt of council tax support in 2023/24.

6.3 The Government have also issued 'cost of living' payments throughout the 2023/24 year to people on certain benefits. The first payment for £301 was issued April/May 2023, the second payment for £300 will be issued October/November 2023, and the third payment for £299 will be issued in Spring 2024.

A further payment for people on certain disability benefit for £150 was also issued in June/July 2023.

6.4 It should be noted that the percentage of people making no payments when on Council Tax Support remains steady at 15.08% of individuals yet to make a payment in this financial year. The collection of tax for those in receipt of Council Tax Support is positive also, with approx. 82% of the total debt billed collected each financial year; in the current financial year, 56% of the debt raised had been collected on 31st October 2023. The case numbers of people in receipt of LCTS in this financial year have steadily decreased, with the caseload now similar to that at pre-covid levels.

6.5 Unemployment has decreased in Southend when compared to the post pandemic years. Southend now has an unemployment rate of 2.9% compared to a national average of 3.6%, an improvement of 1.3% on last year which was 4.2% compared to a national average of 3.8%.

6.6 The Council in partnership with its stakeholders created a 'Cost of Living' booklet and webpage that provides Southend residents with details of all the support from financial to housing and health offered by the Council, Government and other organisations.

6.7 It is worth noting that the Council has provided additional support to people to help ease their financial pressures. This support will continue to be offered through the remainder of this financial year and will help to ensure the residents of Southend are in a stronger financial position moving into 2024/25.

Support Offered	Description
Council Tax Support Fund 2023/24 £331,121	The scheme gives a top up of up to £25 to all households in receipt of Council Tax Support throughout the 23/24 year. We have helped 9,958 households so far this year.
Household Support Fund £2,826,158	The grant is being used to support vulnerable households between 1st April 2023 and 31 st March 2024 with grants for food and fuel assistance, and some other essentials to vulnerable households in the city. We have made 18,059 awards so far this year.
Essential Living Fund £270,000	This is the local welfare provision in Southend. It provides food, fuel, clothing, furniture and white goods for people under exceptional pressure or settling in the community.
Discretionary Housing Payments £409,532	This is available for people who have a shortfall between their rent and the Housing Benefit or Universal Credit Housing Costs entitlement. It is designed to help secure tenancies or support people in the short term whilst they look for more affordable housing.
School Uniform Grant £25,000	This is available for parents or guardians under exceptional circumstances, either, changed schools after being housed by the Local Authority as homeless, changed schools after being placed in a refuge or having lost clothing due to a fire or flood.
Council Tax Exceptional Hardship Fund	This is for people struggling on a low income and unable to meet their Council Tax payments. They can request a reduction to the charge of 100%. This is means tested assessment and is only awarded in exceptional circumstances, and after all the available discounts/exemptions have been exhausted to assist with the reduction and management of the debt.

7 Consultation

- 7.1 A public consultation was operated from the 31st July 2023 to the 23rd October 2023 to gain feedback on the proposals as listed in section 8. There were 133 responses submitted.
- 7.2 65.6% of respondents were working age, and 94.7 were Council Taxpayers in Southend-on-Sea.
- 7.3 Some key details to highlight from the consultation in support of the new proposals are as below:
- 74.2% of respondents did not disagree with the introduction of a banded scheme.
 - Only 25% of respondents disagreed with allowing elements of Universal Credit paid in support of rent and disability to be fully disregarded from the assessment of income.
 - Only 21% of respondents disagreed with allowing the various supporting grants listed in the consultation to be fully disregarded.
 - 72% of respondents did not disagree that people in receipt of certain means tested benefits should continue to receive full support under the LCTS scheme.
 - 70.5% of respondents agreed the scheme should stay at a maximum award of 75% of liability, 11.4% voted for a cap of 70% and 18.2% voted for a cap of 65%.
 - 42.7% of respondents voted for a change to taking no deduction for a non-dependant in the household and 46.6% voted to stay at the flat rate deduction in use.
 - 9.2% of respondents agreed to flat rate disregard for earned incomes of £20 per week.
 - 80.9% of respondents did not disagree with the removal of a cap to the Band D council tax charge.
 - 84.9% of respondents did not disagree with the removal of the minimum income floor for self-employed people.
 - 75.2% of respondents agreed we should implement the proposed changes.
- 7.4 Some of the comments received during the consultation are presented anonymously below.

I think it reasonable for changes to be made, that coincide with other benefit and wage changes.

Current system penalises people who live in the properties in higher band than D and who are income poor. Non-dependent deductions should be abolished all together.

Other councils have adopted this scheme and it works well. It simplifies a complex system for the customer and the council.

Any simplification to tortuous bureaucracy is to be welcomed.

Keep it simple, save stress, save money.

Any simplification should be a no-brainer as it helps both recipients as well as reducing complexity, and hence costs, at the council.

I regularly see clients who are struggling with all aspects of council tax and making the changes above would benefit the broadest number of our clients.

The system should be easy to understand and easy to administer.

8 Proposals for Change

- 8.1 The proposal is to change to an income banded scheme for all working age people entitled to support through the Local Council Tax Support Scheme.
- 8.2 The income of the applicant and their partner if they have one would be assessed to a net value and depending on the bracket this falls within result in a percentage award of Council Tax support.
- 8.3 Income that is currently disregarded in value in the scheme would continue to be disregarded, this includes Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment, Armed Forces Independence Payment, Severe Disablement Allowance, Attendance Allowance, Child Benefit, Child Maintenance, Guardians Allowance, Fostering Allowance, War Widows Pension, War Disablement Pension.
- 8.4 The proposal is also to disregard elements paid within Universal Credit that are additions to their standard and child element. These additional elements are premiums for extra costs the applicant may have related to disability, caring needs and rental charges.
- 8.5 Income that carries an automatic entitlement to maximum Council Tax Reduction will continue to do so under the banded scheme, these incomes being primary benefits representing the applicant's other income (if any) is below a basic living needs level.
- 8.6 Under the current scheme a standard deduction is taken for non-dependants in the household dependant on income. The new proposal would be to simplify this and not take any deduction.
- 8.7 Under the current scheme a range from £5 to £25 a week is disregarded from earned income. The proposal is to simplify this with a £20 a week disregard applied to any earned income.
- 8.8 Under the current scheme the calculation of support is based on a maximum of a band D property. This means that anyone of working age that lives in a property with a Council Tax band of E, F, G or H, has their support calculated as if their property was a band D. The proposal is to remove this cap and calculate the percentage of support on the Council Tax band of the property.

- 8.9 Under the current scheme a minimum income floor is applied to self-employed people who have had their self-employed business for more than a year. This then assumes a level of income which may be higher than the income being declared by the applicant. This was introduced in 2018/19. The proposal is to remove this and accept the proof of actual self-employed income the applicant is receiving.
- 8.10 The proposal is to add into the policy the disregard of certain compensation and support payments that are already disregarded in full in the assessment of Housing Benefit and pensioner Council Tax Support are also disregarded for LCTS.
- 8.11 The recommended model for the new banding scheme was formulated based on our current caseload (2023), consultation and comparison of a wide range of Local Authority banded schemes including those already in operation in Essex.

	Weekly Income & Discount (%)					
	Band 1	Band 2	Band 3	Band 4	Band 5	Band 6
	£0.00 - £100.00	£100.01 - £175.00	£175.01 - £250.00	£250.01 - £325.00	£325.01 - £400.00	£401.01 +
Single No Children	75%	50%	25%	0%	0%	0%
Couple No Children	75%	50%	25%	0%	0%	0%
Single or Couple 1 Child	75%	75%	50%	25%	0%	0%
Single or Couple 2 or more Children	75%	75%	75%	50%	25%	0%

This will provide a savings in cost for the scheme circa £157,000 for a year. Modelling on our current caseload of 7423, circa 78% of cases would remain on the same level of support as current, 9% would receive more support and 13% would receive less support. The main people who will receive less support are couples who have capacity to increase their income, households with a high number of children who receive a high level of income and others with high levels of income. The model is more generous than the current system for people in low-income employment. People on the lowest incomes are not affected and are amongst the 78% receiving the same level of support.

9 Reasons for Decisions

On the proposals

- 9.1 For 8.1 and 8.2 as listed above the introduction of a banded scheme will simplify the scheme making it easier for residents to understand and reduce unnecessary admin and associated costs. The current system is very complex calculation that is both difficult to understand and administer. A banded scheme will make the level of support more stable, making budgeting easier. Residents will be able to easily see the level of support they can get when changes in their lives happen and better budget for payment of their Council Tax charge. A simpler scheme will create capacity in the benefit service so we can better support residents.

An award of support will be calculated as a discount to the council tax charge based on the income bracket they are in, so this can be recorded on the council tax bill and no additional notification will need to be issued. This will save the printing and postage of current Council Tax Support notifications which would be circa £11,000 a year.

The resident will also receive a single notification containing both their charge and support details which will make it less confusing to understand the Council Tax they have to pay. Under the current scheme the charge and support notifications are not issued on the same day, and under separate cover, so there is often overlap with the dissemination of the information and can cause unnecessary contact from residents.

- 9.2 For 8.3 and 8.4 as above, continuing to disregard these supporting benefits in the assessment of income retains a fairness to the system where these benefits are paid as additional support to those with more needs. Housing Costs element awarded in Universal Credit should be disregarded as income as it is paid to cover rental costs and is not an 'income' for people to live on.
- 9.3 For 8.5 as above, continuing to provide full support for people on these benefits retains fairness to the system as the people in receipt of them have no income or a small income that places them below the basic living needs level and this is just bringing them up to that basic standard.
- 9.4 For 8.6 as above, the use of a flat rate deduction in a previous year's amendment did simplify the calculation, however, there is still complexity behind the decision as to whether a deduction would even apply. By removing this, applicants would find assessing their likely entitlement and budgeting for paying their Council Tax an even simpler process.
- 9.5 For 8.7 as above, using a flat rate deduction to earned income would make it easier for applicants to track the effect of moving into employment on their Council Tax Support entitlement and budget for paying of their Council Tax charge.

- 9.6 For 8.8 as above, removal of a cap to Band D would not be a large increased expense to the scheme and simplify the administration and calculation of support. There are currently only 70 claims in a banded property above band D. It will also mean that people who are property rich, but cash poor are not penalised in the system.
- 9.7 For 8.9 as above, removal of the minimum income floor will support people in self-employment but not yet reaching a standard profit level which is what the minimum income floor level applied, to stay building their business and in employment.
- 9.8 For 8.10 as above, disregarding compensation and support payments will bring the LCTS scheme in line with practice across the assessment of all other benefit schemes and be in line with Government intention.
- 9.9 For 8.11 the proposal has been used to set the recommended 1% increase in the Council Tax base that is also under cabinet decision. It is providing a cost saving circa £157,000 with the majority of people currently claiming receiving the same or more level of support.

On the recovery of Council Tax

- 9.10 Having a benefit system that works within thresholds, rather than exact calculations, will provide clear and concise, understandable calculations to residents. In addition to the residents' knowledge and understanding of the calculation, this will also prevent multiple different demands from being generated, which can lead to additional confusion for residents. Not only does this cause confusion with carried forward instalments, references from prior bills calculations etc, but also prevents the Council from taking recovery action, if necessary, as each recalculation of the account re-commences the billing procedure (with a new reminder, second reminder and final notice being required).

The reduction of account recalculations will therefore lead to a greater understanding for residents, a reduction in postage/printing costs for the Council, avoid unnecessary contact from residents, and allow the Council to seek appropriate recovery action through the court in a swift manner, for those that are avoiding payment.

10 Other Options

- 10.1 A range of options were considered as part of the consultation exercise. The recommended scheme best meets the Council's priorities within reasonable financial parameters.

11 Financial Implications

- 11.1 The new banding scheme will provide a savings in cost for the scheme of circa £157,000 for a year.

If the Council were to revert to the default scheme (the old council tax benefit scheme), the financial impact would be in the region of £1.5 million.

In headline financial terms for our residents 9% will be better off under the new scheme using current caseload all other matters unchanging. 13% of residents could see a reduction in their support using current caseload all other matters unchanging.

Most people within our current caseload would be unaffected financially.

12 Legal Implications

- 12.1 The Local Government Finance Act 2012 provided for the introduction of the localisation of Council Tax support by making changes to the Local Government Finance Act 1992. These require that:

- For each financial year, each billing authority must consider whether to revise its scheme or replace it with another scheme.
- The authority must make any revision to its scheme, or any replacement scheme, no later than 31 January in the financial year preceding that for which the revision or replacement scheme is to have effect.

A detailed exceptional hardship discount policy has been written under section 13a of the Council Tax legislation.

13 Carbon Impact

- 13.1 There will be less printing and postage operating the new scheme.

14 Equalities

- 14.1 An equality impact assessment has been undertaken as part of the proposals for changes to the scheme from April 2024. This is available as a background paper to this report.

15 Consultation

15.1 Before final approval of local schemes, Councils are required to consult:

- Major precepting authorities (Police and Fire)
- The public
- Relevant stakeholder groups e.g. Citizens Advice, voluntary bodies

Full consultation has been previously undertaken with these groups in 2012 prior to proposing the current scheme, and then changes in 2015 and 2017.

15.2 The current proposal was fully consulted on from 31st July 2023 to the 23rd October 2023. For full details see section 7 of this report.

16 Background Papers

Latest Equality Impact Assessment Report

Full Consultation Report

17 Appendices

None

Report Authorisation

This report has been approved for publication by:

This report has been approved for publication by:		
	Name:	Date:
S151 Officer	Joe Chesterton	27/11/23
Monitoring Officer	Kim Sawyer	06/12/23
Executive Director(s)	Joe Chesterton	27/11/23
Relevant Cabinet Member(s)	Cllr Tony Cox	30/11/23

Motion for improving Cuckoo Corner

Traffic congestion is a major issue in our city, exacerbated by many bottlenecks and areas of high traffic pressure. The Cuckoo Corner roundabout is one such area with regular traffic jams tailing back in multiple directions having a knock-on effect to traffic congestion across the city.

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This junction is a vital gateway to the East of the city for buses and motorists. When clogged, tailbacks can reach the city centre, Kent Elms corner, Sutton Road roundabout, and beyond Warner's Bridge into Rochford.

Natural traffic flow is impeded by an unsuitable layout that includes partial traffic signalling at the roundabout, traffic-controlled pedestrian crossings too close to the junction, and merges in-turn that are too short. Planned large-scale developments in the city will add significant volumes of traffic including large vehicles for delivery, causing further congestion.

This junction falls between the two Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) of Southend, and the air quality here is not currently sufficiently monitored. On recent walkabouts with ward councillors, members of the senior leadership team found it difficult to breathe after a few short minutes at the junction.

Therefore, this Council resolves to:

- 1) Publish existing data around current traffic congestion and any monitoring undertaken at this junction. Where this data does not exist, Council will monitor the following for a period of at least 3 months:
 - a) Volume of traffic, given on an hourly basis to identify peak periods of pressure;
 - b) Distribution of these vehicle movements at each entry/ exit;
 - c) Use of pedestrian crossings, to be cross-referenced with peak traffic periods.
- 2) Model alternative layouts and arrangements for Cuckoo Corner junction, including:
 - a) Box junctions;
 - b) Relocation of the pedestrian crossings;
 - c) Relining options;
 - d) Improved provisions for cyclists;
 - e) Improved provision for buses;
 - f) Phasing of traffic lights;
 - g) Full traffic signalling on all exits/ entrances, or;
 - h) Removal of traffic signals to aid traffic flow.
- 3) Conduct a focused assessment of air quality at the Cuckoo Corner junction, to include:
 - a) Live monitoring of air quality over a minimum 6-month period;
 - b) Particulate monitoring (PM2.5 and PM5).
- 4) Liaise with local bus companies to understand the pressures caused by congestion at this junction on achieving a punctual service.

Proposer: Cllr Lydia Hyde

Seconder: Cllr Daniel Cowan

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Notice of Motion

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Southend-on-Sea City Council Fly-tipping Enforcement

From April 2021 to March 2022, there were 1,961 reported total incidents of fly-tipping in Southend and 3,060 total enforcement actions in response. Of these total enforcement actions, there were 0 Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) issued. For that reporting year, Southend-on-Sea Borough Council (as it was known as) was joint last in 266th place on the league tables for tackling fly-tipping through FPNs. Similarly, from the financial years of 2020-2023, a total of 0 FPNs and 2,789 warning letters were issued in relation to fly-tipping. From the calendar year of 2021-2023 (to date on 19th October 2023), 5,396 educational letters were issued in relation to fly-tipping.

Fly-tipping is a crime under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, worsens the community our residents live in, and is costly to the Council to have to action. Charging perpetrators with an FPN generates income to the Council and reduces the risk of reoffending.

It is recognised that not every situation of fly-tipping requires an FPN as other methods of enforcement may be more effective; however, it cannot be appropriate to never issue an FPN for an offence. In comparison to other local authorities, not issuing a single FPN shows a reluctance on the part of the Council to use all powers given to it to tackle fly-tipping offences. Only law-abiding residents and communities are punished through this lack of enforcement action.

This Council therefore:

1. Notes that the Council's current approach of education and engagement is enshrined in the Council's enforcement policy in accordance with central government's preferred approach.
2. Notes that the Council has not issued FPNs for fly-tipping offences in the past 4 years.
3. Resolves that the Council seeks to issue FPNs for fly-tipping offences where appropriate.

Proposed By: Cllr C Campbell

Seconded By: Cllr B Beggs
Cllr O Cartey
Cllr N Folkard

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