

COUNCIL FUNCTIONS COMMITTEE

26 FEBRUARY 2015

Present: Councillor M Watkin (Chair)
Councillor M Hofman (Vice-Chair)
Councillors J Aron, S Johnson, N Shah and D Walford

Also present:

Officers: Head of Revenues and Benefits
Acting Head of Finance
Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer (AG)

5 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/ COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Apologies were received from Councillor Mills.

6 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS (IF ANY)

There were no disclosures of interest.

7 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2014 were submitted and signed.

8 COUNCIL TAX 2015/16

The Committee received a report of the Director of Finance to consolidate the decisions of the Council and the two precepting authorities to give the overall Council Tax for the residents of Watford for the forthcoming financial year.

The Acting Head of Finance introduced the report and explained that the County had set its Council Tax for the forthcoming financial year on 24th February; with the Police and Crime Commissioner setting the Police precept on the 16th February. He confirmed that the Borough's share of the Council Tax had been agreed at Budget Council on 28th January. He informed the Committee that both the Borough and the Police amounts had been frozen. The County had raised its levy by 1.99 percent; leading to an increase for Band D properties of £22.26 a year.

Councillor Aron asked whether the County's increase would affect the Borough's budget. The Acting Head of Finance explained that it would not; the role of Watford Borough Council was to collect the monies on behalf of the County.

Councillor Hofman asked whether a fee was charged by the Borough for the service; the Acting Head of Finance explained that no fee was charged.

Councillor Johnson asked why the Committee was required to agree the total Council Tax for Watford Borough Council and not the Budget Panel. The Acting Head of Finance explained that Budget Panel did not have the power to do so; rather the authority had been delegated by Council to this Committee. The Chair then confirmed this by explaining the role of the Committee in these circumstances.

The Acting Head of Finance outlined the breakdown of charges for every £1 of Council Tax collected; with 74 pence to the County, 16 pence to the Borough and 10 pence to the Police.

The Chair asked whether there was confidence that Council Tax letters would go out in a timely fashion. The Head of Revenues and Benefits explained that there was; with Three Rivers commencing sending letters today and Watford Borough Council next Thursday. He added that there were only 70 outstanding documents relating to the previous year and this was the lowest level ever achieved. Councillor Johnson asked whether this had been achieved by withdrawing staff from the front desk and telephone service. The Head of Revenues and Benefits explained that the employment of five extra temporary staff had assisted significantly.

The Head of Revenues and Benefits explained that the law required any increase in Council Tax to be shown to one decimal point on Council Tax bills; albeit the increase had been calculated at the 1.99 percent figure. Consequently, a "two percent increase" would be shown on bills and this might cause confusion to residents. As a result, a statement would be shown on the bills as to why they indicated 2% when in fact the increase was just 1.99%. Also, there would be a briefing supplied to Members on this matter so they would be able to answer enquiries from constituents.

Councillor Hofman asked how much money Council Tax raised. The Acting Head of Finance explained that this amounted to £7,696,220 for Watford Borough Council.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, a recorded vote was taken.

Those voting in favour of the resolution:
Councillors Walford, Aron, Hofman, Shah, Johnson and Watkin. No-one abstained or voted against.

RESOLVED –

That the Committee formally sets the total Council Tax for Watford Borough Council, which includes the precepts for Hertfordshire County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire, as set out in the report.

Chair
Council Functions Committee

The meeting started at 6.00 pm
and ended at 6.12 pm

Chair

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