



**REPORT of
DIRECTOR OF SERVICE DELIVERY**

to
**STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE
28 JANUARY 2021**

COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2021 / 22

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To approve a significantly unchanged Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTS) for 2021 / 22.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Council

- (i) That the following changes to the existing Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTS) are approved:
- a. a cost of living increase in line with the Department for Work and Pensions schemes be included in the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2021 / 22 for Pensioners only;
 - b. that any legislative changes being introduced to the Housing Benefit Scheme, for 2021 / 22 are mirrored in the Councils LCTS scheme to ensure consistency;
 - c. that amendments to the discretionary provisions of the LCTS to ensure that the Council is able to administer the various schemes to reflect local and national guidance;
 - d. that the LCTS may reflect any additional changes to government welfare benefit regulations during the year which are intended to:
 - increase the income of benefit recipients; and
 - be introduced during a financial year to;to avoid any unintended consequences to customers.
 - e. that this decision has been made following Members careful reading of and regard to the Equality Impact Assessment at **APPENDIX 1**.

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

3.1 Following the abolition of the National Council Tax Benefit Scheme in 2013 a replacement LCTS Scheme was approved by the Council on 13 December 2012 (Minute No. 688 refers), and a substantially unchanged scheme was approved for the subsequent years up to and including 2020 / 21.

3.2 The current scheme reflects the Council's decision to deliver a long-term sustainable scheme based on cost neutral principles, and it proposed that minimal changes be introduced to the scheme as above to ensure that scheme reflects national legislative changes.

3.3 Scheme Costs and impact on Council Tax Collection

3.3.1 The net cost of the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2020 / 21 to date is being largely contained within the collection fund. The consequence of future welfare reforms and current effect of collection rates due to the Pandemic may adversely affect this but based upon current projections the proposed LCTS scheme remains sustainable for 2021 / 22.

3.3.2 Additional support and advice continue to be provided to customers who have difficulty in paying, including independent budgeting and financial advice provided by Maldon Citizens Advice.

3.4 Changes to scheme in year

3.4.1 During 2020 / 21 we have seen some in year changes to welfare benefits schemes to provide additional support for customers, primarily as a result of the Pandemic. As the Council Tax Support schemes are locally determined this has had an unintended consequence of any additional help from Central Government being eroded by local schemes to assist with Council Tax. This year's scheme makes provision for us to be able to amend our scheme to mirror wider Welfare Benefit changes and avoid any unintended impact.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 The significantly unchanged scheme support the delivery a largely cost neutral LCTS Scheme within the budget proposed for 2021 / 22.

4.2 Provision has been made to enable changes to the scheme during the year as a result of unexpected Government welfare benefit regulations, to ensure that the changes do not have unintended consequences to Customers.

4.3 An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken showing no significant issues with the proposed scheme.

5. IMPACT ON STRATEGIC THEMES

- 5.1 A Local Council Tax Support Scheme supports the Councils Goal of “Healthy, safe and vibrant communities” by ensuring that the service can be targeted to reduce inequalities and the goal of “excellent services and value for money” by complying with its statutory obligations in the most efficient and effective way.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – 3,512 residents are currently entitled to LCTS of which is an increase of almost 9% from the previous year.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – An Equalities Impact Assessment of the LCTS scheme has been undertaken. Members are asked to carefully consider the content of the assessment as part of their decision to approve the proposed LCTS scheme for 2021 / 22.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk** – The proposed scheme is expected to continue to deliver a cost neutral scheme. The cumulative effects of various welfare reforms and Pandemic continue to have an effect both upon Council Tax collection and the number of customers with housing issues. The impacts are being monitored with help and advice being provided by the Council and its partners to support customers.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – The cost of the proposed scheme is largely within budget. The expenditure on the scheme is monitored on a monthly basis, and any significant variations will be reported to Members.
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – The proposed LCTS scheme can be delivered within existing staffing resources.
- (vi) **Impact on the Environment** – None.
- (vii) **Impact on Strengthening Communities** – None.

Background Papers:

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