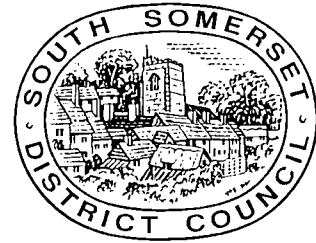


South Somerset District Council

Notice of Meeting



South Somerset District Council

Making a difference where it counts

Thursday 17th January 2019

7.30 pm

**Council Chamber
Council Offices
Brympton Way
Yeovil, BA20 2HT**

(disabled access and a hearing loop are available at this meeting venue)



All members of Council are requested to attend this meeting:

If you would like any further information on the items to be discussed, please contact the Democratic Services Specialist on 01935 462148 or democracy@southsomerset.gov.uk

This Agenda was issued on Wednesday 9 January 2019.

Alex Parmley, *Chief Executive Officer*

This information is also available on our website
www.southsomerset.gov.uk and via the mod.gov app



South Somerset District Council Membership

Chairman: Tony Capozzoli

Vice-chairman: Mike Best

Clare Paul	Kaysar Hussain	Jo Roundell Greene
Jason Baker	Val Keitch	Dean Ruddle
Cathy Bakewell	Andy Kendall	Sylvia Seal
Marcus Barrett	Jenny Kenton	Gina Seaton
Mike Beech	Mike Lewis	Peter Seib
Neil Bloomfield	Sarah Lindsay	Garry Shortland
Amanda Broom	Mike Lock	Angie Singleton
Dave Bulmer	Tony Lock	Alan Smith
Hayward Burt	Paul Maxwell	Sue Steele
John Clark	Sam McAllister	Rob Stickland
Nick Colbert	Graham Middleton	Gerard Tucker
Adam Dance	David Norris	Andrew Turpin
Gye Dibben	Graham Oakes	Linda Vijeh
Sarah Dyke	Sue Osborne	Martin Wale
John Field	Tiffany Osborne	William Wallace
Nigel Gage	Stephen Page	Nick Weeks
Carol Goodall	Ric Pallister	Colin Winder
Anna Groskop	Crispin Raikes	Derek Yeomans
Peter Gubbins	Wes Read	
Henry Hobhouse	David Recardo	

Information for the Public

The meetings of the full Council, comprising all 60 members of South Somerset District Council, are held at least 6 times a year. The full Council approves the Council's budget and the major policies which comprise the Council's policy framework. Other decisions which the full Council has to take include appointing the Leader of the Council, members of the District Executive, other Council Committees and approving the Council's Constitution (which details how the Council works including the scheme allocating decisions and Council functions to committees and officers).

Members of the Public are able to:-

- attend meetings of the Council and its committees such as Area Committees, District Executive, except where, for example, personal or confidential matters are being discussed;
- speak at Area Committees, District Executive and Council meetings;
- see reports and background papers, and any record of decisions made by the Council and Executive;
- find out, from the Executive Forward Plan, what major decisions are to be decided by the District Executive.

Meetings of the Council are scheduled to be held monthly at 7.30 p.m. on the third Thursday of the month in the Council Offices, Brympton Way although some dates are only reserve dates and may not be needed.

The agenda, minutes and the timetable for council meetings are published on the Council's website – www.southsomerset.gov.uk/councillors-and-democracy/meetings-and-decisions

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The Council's corporate aims which guide the work of the Council are set out below.

Further information can be obtained by contacting the agenda co-ordinator named on the front page.

South Somerset District Council - Council Aims

South Somerset will be a confident, resilient and flexible organisation, protecting and improving core services, delivering public priorities and acting in the best long-term interests of the district. We will:

- Protect core services to the public by reducing costs and seeking income generation.
- Increase the focus on Jobs and Economic Development.
- Protect and enhance the quality of our environment.
- Enable housing to meet all needs.
- Improve health and reduce health inequalities.

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South Somerset District Council

Thursday 17 January 2019

Agenda

1. Apologies for Absence

2. Minutes

To approve and sign the minutes of the previous meeting held on Thursday, 13 December 2018.

3. Declarations of Interest

In accordance with the Council's current Code of Conduct (as amended 26 February 2015), which includes all the provisions relating to Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI), personal and prejudicial interests, Members are asked to declare any DPI and also any personal interests (and whether or not such personal interests are also "prejudicial") in relation to any matter on the Agenda for this meeting.

Members are reminded that they need to declare the fact that they are also a member of a County, Town or Parish Council as a Personal Interest. Where you are also a member of Somerset County Council and/or a Town or Parish Council within South Somerset you must declare a prejudicial interest in any business on the agenda where there is a financial benefit or gain or advantage to Somerset County Council and/or a Town or Parish Council which would be at the cost or to the financial disadvantage of South Somerset District Council.

4. Public Question Time

5. Chairman's Announcements

Items for Discussion

6. Chairman's Engagements (Page 6)

7. Presentation on the SSSC Rough Sleeper Service (Page 7)

8. Council Tax Support Scheme 2019/20 (Pages 8 - 30)

9. Appointment a new Member to represent SSSC on the Armed Forces Community Covenant (Pages 31 - 32)

10. Changes to the Council's Constitution following the Local Government Boundary Commission Review - New Ward arrangements between Area North and East Committees (Pages 33 - 39)

11. Report of Executive Decisions (Pages 40 - 43)

12. Audit Committee (Pages 44 - 45)

13. Scrutiny Committee (Pages 46 - 48)

14. Motions

No Motions have been submitted by Members.

15. Questions Under Procedure Rule 10

No questions have been submitted under Procedure Rule 10.

16. Date of Next Meeting (Page 49)

Agenda Item 6

Chairman's Engagements

15th December

The Vice-Chairman and his wife attended a Christmas Reception at Wells Cathedral.

16th December

The Chairman attended the Salvation Army Christmas Experience.

18th December

The Chairman made a Christmas visit to the Yeovil Royal Mail Sorting Office.

Agenda Item 7

Presentation on the SSDC Rough Sleeper Service

Executive Portfolio Holder: Sylvia Seal, Leisure, Culture and Welfare
Director: Martin Woods, Service Delivery
Lead Officer: Barbie Markey, Acting Housing and Welfare Manager
Contact Details: barbie.markey@southsomerset.gov.uk or (01935) 462261

Barbie Markey, Acting Housing and Welfare Manager will provide a short presentation on the homeless service in South Somerset and the support available to vulnerable homeless people.

Agenda Item 8

Council Tax Support Scheme 2019/20

Executive Portfolio Holder: Peter Seib, Finance and Legal Services
Director: Martin Woods, Director – Service Delivery
Service Manager: Ian Potter, Lead Specialist – Vulnerable People, Service Delivery
Lead Officer: Ian Potter, Lead Specialist – Vulnerable People, Service Delivery
Contact Details: ian.potter@southsomerset.gov.uk or 01935 362690

Purpose of the Report

1. To request that Council confirm the proposed amendments to the Council Tax Support scheme for the 2019/20 financial year.
2. This report is due to be discussed at District Executive on 10 January 2019 and a verbal update on the discussion will be provided at the meeting.

Public Interest

3. From April 2013 the Government changed the way in which financial help is given to working age residents to pay their Council Tax. The national Council Tax Benefit scheme was replaced with a local Council Tax Support scheme for working age people to help with the costs of Council Tax for those with low incomes. For those residents who have reached the qualifying age for a state pension continue to have support assessed under a national scheme. The Council is required to review and set a Council Tax Support scheme for each financial year.
4. In setting the scheme each year the Council has to balance the needs of those who need help towards paying their Council Tax with the Council Tax payers who help to pay for the scheme. The Council also looks to see if there are any ways the scheme can be simplified to make it easier for customers and reduce the cost of administering the scheme. The administration grant provided by the Department of Communities and Local Government to help pay for the administration of the scheme reduces each year.

Recommendations

5. That Full Council agree:
 - (a) the introduction of a minimum award value of £0.50 a week in line with Housing Benefit
 - (b) the introduction of a £5 a week tolerance on income increases and decreases before it affects a Council Tax Support award
 - (c) that personal allowances and premiums are uprated in line with those for Housing Benefit;
 - (d) that non-dependent deductions are uprated in line with the annual percentage increase in Council Tax;
 - (e) that the non-dependent income bands are increased by the same percentage as those applied to the national Council Tax Support scheme for pensioners;
 - (f) that the hardship scheme budget be set at £30,000 for the 2019/20 financial year;
 - (g) to note the recommendations of the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group attached at Appendix 1;

- (h) to note the scheme has been amended to reflect changes to the Prescribed Requirements;
- (i) that the 2019/20 Council Tax Support Scheme is adopted (published as a separate appendix);
- (j) to note that the proposed Council Tax Support Scheme has been reflected within the overall Council Tax Base.

Background

6. The South Somerset Council Tax Support scheme (CTS) was introduced on 1 April 2013 and has now been running for almost six years. Councils are required to review and set their CTS scheme each financial year. Applications to the CTS hardship scheme are monitored, along with the Council Tax collection rate and reported to members each quarter.
7. We carried out an extensive consultation process prior to the introduction of CTS in April 2013 and the scheme proposals were carefully and fully considered by the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group. Each year we have carried out further consultation and some additional changes have been made to the scheme. It was the view of the Scrutiny and Overview Task and Finish Group that all previously adopted proposals be retained.
8. The SSDC Council Tax Support scheme states that certain elements of the needs assessment may be uprated each financial year but does not specify the level of that uprating.

The Scrutiny Task and Finish Group originally considered what would be the most appropriate method of uprating certain figures used in calculating CTS awards and recommended the following:

- That while Housing Benefit (HB) still exists it would be appropriate for the CTS applicable amount figures (basic need allowance) to mirror those in the HB scheme
- That non-dependent deductions are uprated in line with the annual percentage increase in Council Tax
- That the non-dependent income bands are increased by the same percentage as those in the national CTS scheme for pensioners

These methods were adopted in the original scheme and have been retained.

Equality Impact Assessment

9. Councils have a legal responsibility to have due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 when setting a Council Tax Support scheme. There has been a High Court ruling that there was insufficient evidence that members making the decision to implement a CTS scheme had given due regard to the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) that had been attached to the council report in order that they could discharge their statutory obligation.

It is important that members have due regard to the PSED when making their decision on the various scheme proposals.

There are no equalities issues associated with recommendations (a) and (b) which are the only changes to the scheme.

Council Tax Support scheme 2019/20 (Year 7)

Proposal 1 – Introduce a minimum award of £0.50

10. In Housing Benefit the minimum weekly award is £0.50. Where weekly entitlement is in the range £0.01 to £0.49 no award is made.
11. Currently in the CTS scheme awards are made where entitlement is as little as £0.01 a week which leads to a total award of £0.52 for the financial year.
12. The proposal is to align the minimum award for CTS with the minimum award of Housing Benefit. This will remove the need for both the customer and the council to maintain their claim where entitlement is below £0.50 a week.
13. The council received 150 consultation responses for this proposal with 76% of respondents supporting it. Approximately 16% of respondents stated that they were in receipt of Council Tax Support.

2. What do you think about the above proposal?			
		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Strongly Agree	30.67%	46
2	Agree	46.00%	69
3	Disagree	15.33%	23
4	Strongly Disagree	8.00%	12

Proposal 2 – Introduce a £5.00 a week income change tolerance

14. Currently an increase or decrease of any value in a person's income will result in their Council Tax Support being reassessed, a new bill being issued and a change to their monthly instalments. If a customer has regular small changes to their income (e.g. in earnings) they could receive a new bill every month. This is disruptive for the customer and makes it difficult for them to budget.
15. The £5.00 income change tolerance will reduce the number of CTS recalculations which result in a new bill being issued and more stability for the customer's instalment payments. It will also reduce administration costs for the council.
16. The council received 149 consultation responses for this proposal with 90% of respondents supporting it. Approximately 16% of respondents stated that they were in receipt of Council Tax Support.

1. What do you think about the above proposal?			
		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Strongly Agree	40.94%	61
2	Agree	49.66%	74
3	Disagree	6.04%	9
4	Strongly Disagree	3.36%	5

Consultation

17. The Task and Finish Group reviewed the results of the consultation along with the comments made by respondents and were content to recommend that both proposals be adopted.
18. The full set of consultation results are set out in Appendix B

The 15% minimum payment

19. The SSDC CTS scheme requires all working age recipients of CTS to pay a minimum of 15% Council Tax. This level was set for the first year of the scheme.

The Scrutiny and Overview Task and Finish Group reviewed the minimum payment level when considering the 2017/18 and some research carried out to determine the possible impact of increasing it.

20. The evidence showed that those councils who had increased the minimum payment level had experienced a decline in their Council Tax collection rates and an increase in the level of Council Tax arrears. This leads to an increase in both the risk of bad debt and in resource demand for the recovery and enforcement of those debts. This risk is further heightened by Welfare Reforms that are impacting on the working age group, particularly Universal Credit. This has not changed and it was therefore determined that it would be counter-productive to increase the minimum payment level for 2019/20.
21. Consideration for reducing the minimum payment was considered when setting the 2018/19 scheme and was rejected as there was no evidence to suggest that there were widespread affordability issues across the district and such a small increase would be unlikely to make a material difference. There is no new evidence to suggest a change to these conclusions.

Cost of CTS scheme

Effect of caseload

22. The number of recipients of CTS had fallen consistently year on year in both the working age and pensioner groups until 2017/18. This has the effect of reducing the overall cost of the scheme. Details of the caseload reduction since the introduction of CTS are shown in the following table.

Financial year	Caseload count at beginning of year	Caseload count at end of year	Reduction in caseload
2013/14	11,925	11,568	357
2014/15	11,568	11,023	545
2015/16	11,023	10,411	612
2016/17	10,411	9,997	434
2017/18	9,997	9,939	48
2018/19	9,939	9,880 (30/11/18)	59

23. The scale of caseload reduction from 2017/18 onwards is smaller. With effect from 1 June 2017 we removed the requirement for recipients of Universal Credit to make a separate claim for Council Tax Support. It is likely that this has contributed to the smaller reduction in caseload as fewer people are missing out on Council Tax Support.
24. It has been identified that since the beginning of the financial year the average weekly award of CTS has fallen by 2.4% for employed working age cases. This suggests there has been a small

improvement in income levels for this group. The weekly award for other working age and pensioner cases are broadly unchanged.

Effect of increases in Council Tax

25. The cost of the scheme will increase where SSDC and other preceptors put up their share of the Council Tax.

Legislation Changes – Prescribed requirements

26. At the time of writing we are awaiting details of any changes to the prescribed requirements – these are elements of the scheme that are set by central government. Confirmation of any such changes will be sent to members along with a revised version of the scheme document once announced by government.

Hardship Scheme

27. A Hardship Scheme was set up as a safety net for households who could demonstrate they could not afford to pay their Council Tax contribution following the introduction of the SSDC Council Tax Support Scheme. The level of demand in 2018/19 suggests that a Hardship Scheme budget of £30,000 for 2019/20 should be sufficient. At the end of November 2018 we had allocated £12,295 with 71 of the 90 applications being successful. This spend is monitored monthly and reported to members each quarter.

Council Tax Collection Rate

28. It was anticipated that the in-year Council Tax collection rate would fall as a result of the introduction of the CTS scheme in April 2013. There were also a number of changes to Council Tax discounts and exemptions introduced from April 2013 which impacted on the in-year collection rate.

Financial Year	Collection rate	Change on previous year
2012/13	97.80%	
2013/14	97.40%	-0.40%
2014/15	96.88%	-0.58%
2015/16	97.24%	+0.36%
2016/17	97.73%	+0.49%
2017/18	97.80%	+0.07%

The in-year collection rate fell in 2013/14 and again in 2014/15. However, collection performance improved in 2015/16, 2016/17 and 2017/18 returning to pre CTS levels.

29. At the end of October 2018 the collection rate was 0.4% lower than October 2017. However, the number of taxpayers paying over the maximum number of instalments has risen to 15844, an increase of 2550 in the last twelve months. This is 20% higher than a year ago and 54% higher than two years ago. This increase makes accurate in-year collection rate comparisons, and end of year outturn predictions more difficult with higher levels of Council Tax payment expected during February and March 2019 than in the same period this year.

Risks

30. The continued risk is that demand could rise and the current reductions we are seeing in the number of recipients reverses with a downturn in the economy. There is also a risk that reductions in other

welfare support might result in an increase in entitlement to Council Tax Support. We will take any such changes into account when considering the Council Tax Support scheme for 2020/21 and beyond. It should be noted that the Task and Finish Group have previously raised concerns about the ability to make further reductions in the level of Council Tax Support in future years as the burden is placed solely on the working age recipients while the Government continues to protect pensioners.

31. Universal Credit (UC) awards are updated monthly where there is a change in the recipient's income. This happens on a regular basis for many UC recipients. The consequence of this is that as our current CTS scheme requires we recalculate their CTS entitlement this leads to frequent revised Council Tax bills being issued. This frequent recalculation can lead to fewer instalments being available to the CTS recipient which makes budgeting more difficult and risks late or non-payment. The measure to introduce a £5 income change tolerance will go some way to addressing this issue. A number of councils have already, or are introducing income banded schemes which gives a much wider variation in income change before it effects a recalculation of CTS. Although the managed migration of current Housing Benefit cases to Universal Credit has been put back to 2020, the natural migration (where a person has a relevant change in their circumstances) continues. As more CTS recipients move on to Universal Credit the benefit to the customer of an income banded scheme increases. This is something that perhaps ought to be considered for the future.

Financial Implications

32. If members agree the recommendations set out in this report there will be minimal financial implications associated with this report since the £5 income tolerance applies both to changes that would reduce and increase entitlement and over a period it is anticipated that this will be broadly cost neutral. The risk is that costs will ultimately be affected by any increase in council tax charges in 2019/20. We have made assumptions in this respect, and any differences between our assumptions and the preceptors' ultimate tax setting decisions will affect the surplus or deficit on the Collection Fund.

Council Plan Implications

33. Health and Communities - Support residents through national benefit changes including universal credit.

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

34. None associated with this report.

Equality and Diversity Implications

35. None associated with this report - The current EIA is attached at appendix 3 for information purposes.

Privacy Impact Assessment

36. None associated with this report.

Background Papers

37. The following background papers can be viewed on the council's website www.southsomerset.gov.uk

- Report to District Executive – January 2018 - Item 7
 - Report to District Executive – January 2017 - Item 8
 - Report to District Executive – January 2016 - Item 6
 - Report to District Executive – January 2015 - Item 8
 - Report to District Executive – December 2013 - Item 10
 - Report to District Executive – January 2013 – item 8
-



Monitoring SSDC Council Tax Support Scheme

Report and Findings of the Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group

December 2018

Chair's Foreword

As part of Central Governments Welfare Reform Bill in 2012:

- Council Tax Benefit was abolished; the responsibility of helping low-income households pay their Council Tax was transferred to Billing Authorities. This was delivered with the creation of a local scheme to be known as Council Tax Support (CTS). The scheme has to protect pensioners as they were previously in 2012/13 but provided councils with autonomy to create a new scheme for working age households.
- Central Government reduced the grant to help low-income households pay their Council Tax by ten percent in 2013.

At this time the Overview and Scrutiny Committee recognised the significance and potential impact this could have on the residents of South Somerset and commenced a Task and Finish exercise that worked in parallel with officers to develop a local scheme.

The Task and Finish group conducted a very thorough review and produced a report and recommendations¹ detailing:

- Specific recommendations that would form the basis of the new localised scheme
- Potential risks and mitigation measures
- Monitoring arrangements

Since the scheme was implemented in April 2013 Central Government have revised their funding arrangements. The grant that SSDC received to help low income households pay their Council Tax ceased to exist. From 2015/16 onwards the funding has been received as part of the Revenue Support Grant; no figure is prescribed or ring-fenced specifically for this purpose.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee have commissioned a Task and Finish review each year since the introduction of Council Tax Support (CTS). The Task and Finish group conduct specific monitoring work to ensure the scheme continues to be effective and balances the needs of support recipients and all South Somerset Council Tax payers. This report summarises the monitoring activity and work conducted since the last Task and Finish report in December 2017 and details recommendations for the Council Tax Support scheme for 2019/20.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the officers who supported us on this review for their on-going commitment and positive approach, helping the Task and Finish group to make informed decisions and produce this report.

Sue Steele

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chair

1

<http://modgov.southsomerset.gov.uk/Data/South%20Somerset%20District%20Council/20130117/Agenda/7%20Appendix%201%20-%20Report%20and%20Findings%20of%20the%20Overview%20and%20Scrutiny%20Task%20and%20Finish%20Group%2017-01-2013.pdf>

Task and Finish Group Membership

Councillor Sue Steele - Chair of Task and Finish Group
Councillor Carol Goodall
Councillor Anna Groskop
Councillor David Norris
Councillor Rob Stickland

All members worked collectively with the support of Jo Gale – Scrutiny Specialist and the Project Officer Group:

Ian Potter – Lead Specialist – Vulnerable People
Tamsin Gold – Benefits Team Leader
Mandy Stewart – Benefits Team Leader

The Work of the Task and Finish Group

The Task and Finish group met on three occasions and also worked remotely to carry out monitoring work to ascertain if the scheme remains effective - achieving the original ambitions of the group. They also considered options to reduce scheme costs, improve administration efficiency and the impact on Council Tax Support (CTS) recipients who are also in receipt of Universal Credit.

The ambitions of the original Task and Finish group were:

- Ensure the scheme is fair and has the minimum impact that is achievable, given the criteria set out by the Government, for all residents of South Somerset, not just those who are currently receiving Council Tax Benefit
- Ensure it has adequate measures to provide stability to the recipients of Council Tax Support. (Now referred to as Council Tax Support)
- Ensure the process is timely, well-evidenced, takes account of members views, any consultation and minimises risks to SSDC
- Ensure the new scheme is accessible and not too complex

The group worked to the above ambitions and added:

- Take account of national evidence and the experiences and learning of other Local Authorities.

The Task and Finish group in collaboration with officers agreed the following set of principles to underpin the original scheme:

- Everyone should contribute something towards the cost of local services through Council Tax
- All income should be included to ensure the scheme is fair
- Greater account should be taken of the total income of a household
- Provide incentives to encourage people into work or increase their hours
- Provide protection for those who may become vulnerable under the scheme 'Unable to afford basic shelter, food, water, heating and lighting and essential transport'
- Not penalise those that have already saved for the future (to a greater extent than the Council Tax Benefit scheme) This was modified in 2015 to reflect the disregarded threshold of Housing Benefit and to be fairer to Tax Payers who are not in receipt of Council Tax Support)

The group agreed the principles were still relevant and used these and the ambitions to provide criteria when considering all information, data and proposals for amendments to the scheme.

This year the group had no requirement to secure additional savings in terms of the cost of the scheme. The Task and Finish group have concluded for the last two years that it would not be possible to reduce the cost of the scheme whilst still achieving the above mentioned objectives and principles.

Over the last year, the group focussed its efforts on assessing:

- Effectiveness of the current scheme
- Elements of other authority schemes – the value and impact of these
- The impact of the full roll out of Universal Credit
- Potential impact of transformation in terms of staff resource and technical developments
- The customer experience
- Exploring reducing administration costs by modifying the scheme and capitalising on the introduction of improved technology

Effectiveness of the scheme

The group worked with the revenues staff to monitor the scheme based on the recommendations from the original task and finish group. There was no evidence to suggest the scheme was ineffective or causing any form of disproportional impact to any group. For a full breakdown of all the monitoring work, please see the Monitoring Section – page 8.

Elements of other authority schemes

Minimum payment

From April 2018, out of 326 local authorities across England 264 schemes include a minimum payment. The size of this minimum payment varies by area; in 45 councils, it is less than 10% of council tax liability and 136 councils it is 20% or more but less than 30%. For 23 councils it is 30% or more.²

Evidence collated by the National Policy Institute has proved a correlation between the higher the minimum payment (the greater the sum of money each tax payer has to pay as a base to the calculation of means tested support) the greater the value of Council Tax Arrears, please see Appendix 1 for more information relating to this.

SSDC Council Tax Support scheme has a minimum payment and has stayed at 15% over the last 6 years and has many similar additional features to other authorities, these include a Band Cap (where the maximum sum of benefit payable is calculated at particular band of property) and a savings limit, (where people of working age with savings over £6,000 will not be entitled for Council Tax Support).

Other Authorities have the following additional elements/variations included in their schemes:

A minimum award

This is where a minimum amount of Council Tax Support is applied; this was introduced by many authorities to reduce the cost of the scheme but it also prevents disproportional administration costs and potential delays to Council Tax collection. If an award of a few pence per week is given

²New policy Institute

and a change occurs this causes the re-calculation of the Council Tax Bill and the associated instalments. The change in their CTS can cause delays in instalments being taken due to the direct debit notification periods. Any delay can make the remaining instalments higher, making it difficult for some people to manage. The minimum award can reduce this. The group supported consulting on including a minimum award of 50 pence (in line with the Housing Benefit scheme) for the 2019/20 Council Tax Support scheme. The group recommended applying the same amount to make it easier for recipients of both Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support to understand.

Discount Based banded scheme

Since the Task and Finish report last year a growing number of authorities have moved away from the means tested (assessing income against needs level) approach and have introduced a discount based scheme that uses a system of income bands to decide what level of Council Tax Support a Council Tax Payer should be awarded.

For Example, (This is part of one of those schemes)

Household	Weekly Income Band	Discount
Single Person	£0.00 - £99.99	90%
Single Person	£100.00 - £199.99	85%
Single Person	£200.00 - £299.99	80%
Single Person	£300.00 - £349.99	70%
Single Person with 1 Child	£0.00 - £149.99	90%
Single Person with 1 Child	£150.00 - £249.99	85%
Single Person with 1 Child	£250.00 - £349.99	80%

This scheme is made up of a set of income bands with an income range, and a percentage discount is assigned to each income band. A non-dependant deduction is applied after the relevant discount percentage has been determined. It is still necessary to calculate the claimant and partner's weekly income in order to decide which income band the customer falls in.

The key benefit of the scheme is that where a person's weekly income changes and remains within an income band it is not necessary to amend their CTS award and issue a new bill. However an assessment of their new income level is still required.

This type of scheme will result in winners and losers at the point of change.

The group closely examined the impact this sort of scheme could have on SSDC current Council Tax Support recipients and it was felt the impact for some could cause people to become financially vulnerable. Whilst the group felt this could be mitigated against, the group were concerned about the effect the 'Cliff Edges' may have and consequently the amount of Council Tax paid.

The group agreed, there were too many unknowns with this type of scheme at present, and thought it best to wait for evidence to come forward from those Councils who have moved to the discount approach, specifically with regard to equalities, impact, Council Tax arrears and the associated cost of collection.

Fixed Periods

To reduce the administration costs and the frequency of changes that a customer has to manage some authorities have introduced fixed periods, so all changes in a given period, usually 3 or 6 months are processed at once.

There are advantages and disadvantages to this approach:

Advantages - Less processing work for staff to manage, fewer Council Tax Support notifications letters and Council Tax Bills to print and post out.

Disadvantages – People who have had a detrimental change to their income could be in a situation where they are unable to pay their Council Tax and fall into arrears by the time the fixed period change date comes around the person has already automatically received notifications of arrears that could cause stress and generate enquires.

If a person has had a positive change to their income they will become liable to pay more Council Tax (they would receive less Council Tax Support) in the situation where all changes are processed on bulk, once every 6 months for example from 1 April – 30 September, this would only leave 5 months of the financial year for instalments to be paid and potentially catch up any arrears. This could present a risk of needing to roll debt to a future year; this is referred to as stacking arrears in the Lord Ollerenshaw report³. Stacking arrears in itself can cause additional administration time having to be spent making financial agreements to clear multiple years' debt.

It is also worth mentioning that nationally about 39 per cent of food bank users were awaiting the outcome of a benefit application⁴, and therefore delays in processing reductions in income can have much wider implications and therefore should be considered carefully.

The group concluded again that there were risks to adopting Fixed Periods and felt it best to analyse the impact and learn from other authorities that have opted to pursue this before looking to potentially introduce it as part of the SSDC CTS scheme.

Change tolerance for income

This is where small changes to income will not be processed regardless of the income increasing or decreasing. This is all about reducing the administration for processing Council Tax Support and associated enquires, print and postage costs, and frequent changes to the customer's bill.

The task and finish group chose to explore this further, examining the frequency of changes in impact change bands notified to the Council and how best this could be explained simply to customers. The complexity arises as the amount would have to be the equivalent weekly amount and some people's income will be monthly or 4 weekly. Members supported including this in the consultation for 2019/20 scheme not just for the reduction in the administration but also for providing stability to customers. The fewer changes the less likely customers will miss instalments due to the recalculation of the Council Tax payable and associated instalments.

Impact of Universal Credit

At the beginning of this Task and Finish review SSDC was one of a few councils that was in an area where Universal Credit [Full Service was fully operational, meaning anyone who had a](#)

³

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/514767/Local_Council_Tax_support_schemes_-_review_report.pdf

⁴ University of Oxford and Trussell Trust Report on Foodbanks

relevant change in their circumstances moves across to Universal Credit, sometimes this is referred to as Natural Migration.~~the trickle transfer had been fully rolled out.~~

The decision has been taken to accept the Universal Credit (UC) claim form as claim for Council Tax Support, this has ensured people are claiming all that they are entitled to and prevents failure demand by stopping people getting into arrears and then staff helping them to claim retrospectively and making payment arrangements.

It is worth mentioning that some authorities are phasing in changes by operating two working age schemes, one for those in receipt of Universal Credit and one for those who are not. This is to take advantage of automation for Universal Credit cases. The group considered this approach but felt operating in effect three schemes could be difficult for both support recipients and staff. Also for staff, the timing of implementing this could be difficult when the structure of service delivery will be going through the transition phase of Transformation. The Group felt the risks around equalities performance and reputation was too great to consider for the 2019/20 CTS scheme. The group recommend next year a full assessment and comparison of operating a Discount Banded scheme compared to the 19/20 scheme is undertaken, the review must include the overall costs, customer journey and administration costs.

Potential impact of transformation in terms of staff resource and technical developments

The group assessed the timeframe of transformation and could see that the Council would be in the transition stage when the 2019/20 scheme would commence and therefore felt it would not be appropriate to introduce a major change unless there was evidence to show this was needed or that there would be significant benefit to the customer or the Council. There was no evidence of this.

The Customer Experience

Members of the group raised concerns in terms of the customer experience to apply and maintain the Council Tax Support award. The members said the complexity of the CTS award letters were of particular concern. The group were reassured talking to officers that the development of the customer account will improve the experience by using pop up text and providing summary information. sheets.

Proposals to amend the scheme this year

The group recommended the following proposals were put forward for public consultation and contributed to the explanation and examples to clearly show impact:

Proposal 1: Introduce a tolerance for small changes in income:

Currently each change in income requires a reassessment of the Council Tax Support award. This in turn leads to adjustments being made to the outstanding balance on the Council Tax account with notification letters and new bills being printed and posted out. Instalment arrangements are changed meaning there could be fewer instalments available to pay in the rest of the year. This could mean the instalments amount could go up which may affect a customer's ability to pay them.

This proposal would stop changes in the award of less than £1.00 per week causing adjustments to the outstanding balance. This would lead to customers receiving fewer award letters and Council Tax bills, and fewer changes to instalments

Example: Mr and Mrs A live with their adult son in a band B property. Their weekly Council Tax charge is £25.05.

Mrs A is working and earns £115.08 per week, adding this to the rest of their income they have applied for and been awarded Council Tax Support of £9.11 per week.

After a few weeks Mrs A's earnings reduce to £113.69 per week, the rest of their income has not changed, under the current scheme their Council Tax Support award would change to £9.39 per week. This change would produce a new award letter and a new bill, and depending on the timing an instalment may be missed. If this proposal is agreed the award would remain at £9.11 per week as the change of award from £9.11 to £9.39 is less than £1. No award letter, new bill will be sent, or instalment missed.

After a few more weeks Mrs A's earnings increase to £119.70 per week, the rest of the income has not changed, under the current scheme their Council Tax Support award would change to £8.19 per week. If this proposal is agreed the award would remain the same as the change of award from £9.11 to £8.19 is less than £1.

Currently the Council Tax Support scheme will calculate the amount of support you can get from 1 pence per week.

This proposal would not give any support less than below 50 pence per week. This is the same as the Housing Benefit scheme.

Example: Mrs B is a lone parent with 2 dependent children, she has a weekly Council Tax charge of £27.38. Mrs B gets a single person so the weekly charge is now £20.54.

Mrs B is working and receives Universal Credit the income work out how much Council Tax support she can get is £280.00 per week. She would get Council Tax Support of 42 pence per week, £21.90 for the year.

If this proposal is agreed then no Council Tax Support would be awarded.

The group reviewed the consultation feedback for the proposed amendments for those currently in receipt of CTS and those who were not and were satisfied there was overall support. There was no evidence to show any disproportional impact to specific groups. The group recommends the proposals are included in the 20019/20 scheme.

Monitoring

This chapter of the report summarises the monitoring activities the Task and Finish group undertook to establish the effectiveness of the current scheme and associated processes.

The group reviewed:

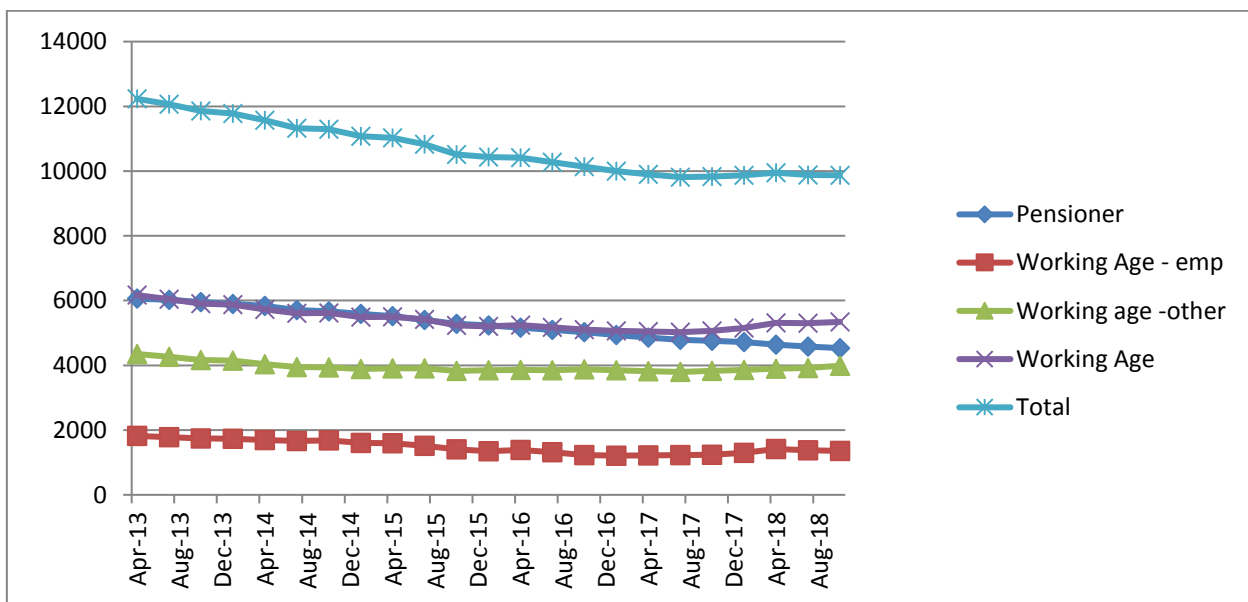
- The number of Council Tax Support recipients
- The Council Tax collection rate
- Cost of the scheme
- Council Tax Support Discretionary Hardship fund
- Council Tax Arrears where Council Tax Support is in payment

- Administration time to process claims
- Other Local Authority schemes
- Risk of external changes increasing the cost of the scheme
- Progress on recommendations detailed in December 2018 Task and Finish report

Equalities was considered throughout the entire review process

Number of Council Tax Support Recipients

The group reviewed the number of households in receipt of Council Tax Support with a breakdown of pensioner and working-age to assess the financial risk of the scheme to SSDC. (The greater the number of households in receipt of Council Tax Support, the greater the cost to SSDC. As pensionable age households are protected under the old Council Tax Benefit rules this carries a higher cost and therefore a greater risk of which SSDC has no control). The numbers and types of household in receipt of support since the Council Tax Support scheme was introduced are presented in the chart below:



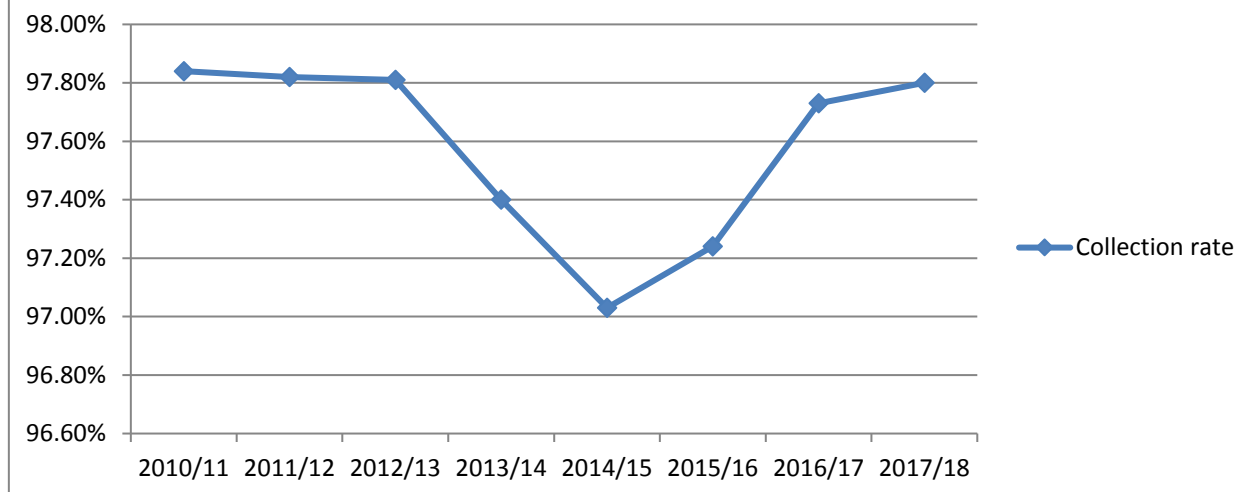
The Working Age has climbed over the last year, officers have put this down to the roll out of Universal Credit, and the removal of the requirement to make a separate claim for CTS which has ensured people are receiving the support they are entitled to.

Council Tax Collection rate

In the original Task and Finish report members recommended that Council Tax collection rates were monitored. (The collection rate is the proportion of all net collectable council tax that has been collected; this shows how much of a gap there is between what SSDC needs to collect and the amount actually collected). This was to assess if the Council has adopted appropriate methods to successfully collect Council Tax from new Council Tax payers and to prevent the authority from any financial risk; the monitoring is carried out every quarter and reported in the Medium Term Financial Plan Quarterly monitoring.

The chart below shows the annual collection rate since 2010 (3 years prior to the introduction of Council Tax Support) for all Council Tax as a percentage and includes the projected collection rate for this financial year. This is not specific for Council Tax Support Cases.

Council Tax collection rate



	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Average Collection rate for England⁵	97.3	97.4	97.0	97.0	97.1	97.2	97.1
SSDC Collection rate	97.82	97.81	97.4	97.03	97.24	97.73	97.8

The SSDC collection rate for this year is anticipated to be broadly in line with last year, we are unable to a specific comparison as more tax payers are choosing to pay over 12 months instead of 10.

Cost of the scheme

The cost of the Council Tax scheme since it has been in operation is detailed below:

2013/14 £9.359 million

2014/15 £8.882 million

2015/16 £8.219 million

2016/17 £8.496 million

2017/18 £8.417million

2018/19 £8.782 million (cost at end of Nov 2018) – the increase is mainly down to the size of the increase in the council tax charge for 2018/19 and the changes in working practices around Universal Credit claims that has resulted in the improved the take up of CTS.

The values are as at 31 March each year apart from current year. Each year the cost of the scheme falls throughout the year so 2018/19 is likely to finish the year at a lower cost than the cost shown at the end of November.

⁵ Department of Communities and Local Government

To date the scheme has been affordable whilst maintaining the objectives in the Council Plan and the ambitions of the Task and Finish group. The reducing costs and the improving collection rate are both reassuring and positive; however, it is very difficult to identify how much of this is due to good practice and how much is down to the improvement in the economic climate. The risk is always the potential downturn in the local economy and this is not possible to mitigate, it is just a case of adopting policy and working practices that achieve the best collection rate whilst protecting those who are financially vulnerable.

Discretionary Hardship

The original Task and Finish report recommended, creating a hardship fund for those people who are financially vulnerable and that awards are monitored in terms of identifying trends.

Discretionary Hardship figures, last year it was reported as below:

Year	No. of requests	Awarded	Not Awarded	Total paid £
13/14	171	121	50	11,292.82
14/15	152	115	37	11,581.32
15/16	163	136	27	14,551.14
16/17	152	128	22	16,540.95
17/18	107	84	23	14,211
18/19 (Nov 2018)	90	71	19	12,295

The Task and Finish group requested Benefit Officers conduct a review of the applications made to the Hardship Fund to identify if there were any trends, in terms of the numbers and age of people in the household and what type of income they were in receipt of to identify any trends. No trends were identified and the group were satisfied that the relatively low numbers of awards and the disparity to who they were awarded gave no indication the scheme was the cause of any financial vulnerability.

To date there have been very few applications compared to the numbers of households that are in arrears with their Council Tax. However having undertaken some analysis this year of cases in arrears there was only a very small proportion of cases that could get some help through Council Tax Support and Discretionary Hardship that hadn't already applied. SSDC working practices have already introduced best practice recommendations, and continue to learn from other authorities and consider guidance and evidence from external sources.

Members have requested monitoring of the hardship rewards continue. Monitoring this fund is the best internal way to identify real financial vulnerability, potential issues arising because of external changes and subsequent Council Tax collection problems.

Monitoring Council Tax Arrears

Council Tax Arrears arise when a resident falls behind with their Council Tax payments. The way that Councils pursue missed payments or incomplete payment varies. The standard procedure is for a Council to send two reminders about unpaid Council Tax before embarking on further collection and enforcement strategies. This may include asking for the entire year's liability to be paid in one instalment, making an application to the magistrate's court for a liability order, an attachment of earnings or benefits (where the Council collects Council Tax direct from the household's income or benefits that the Council itself administers). They may proceed with enforcement measures, such as debt collection by Collection Agents.

No evidence has come to light over the course of the last year to suggest that accounts with Council Tax arrears could be attributed to any patterns in household or income type and therefore could not be attributed to any disproportional impact of the SSDC Council Tax Support scheme.

Costs of collecting Council Tax

Whilst it is important that SSDC collect Council Tax to pay for local services, we have to be sure that we do not inadvertently spend too much Tax Payers money trying to do so, therefore making the scheme inefficient.

The SSDC collection costs with effect from April 2018 are:

- Up to and including the cost of issuing a summons - the cost of collection from 2nd reminder stage onwards is currently £50.00.
- The cost of the Liability Order is £21.75.
- The total charge is £71.75 – This is still far less than many other areas. The Charge is passed to the taxpayer to recover the additional costs the authority has incurred; this is fair to all taxpayers.

Administration time to process claims

This section of this report details the work to date of the Benefits Team and planned future work to reduce Administration costs.

To date the Benefits Team have:

- Removed the need for Universal Credit (UC) recipients to complete a separate application for Council Tax Support, this has been removed this year. Instead the Benefits team use the notifications received from the UC Service Centre. The claim now comes via the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and is automatically uploaded to the customer's Civica Electronic Document Management (EDM) record. Changes in the customer's Universal credit entitlement also come via the DWP and are automatically uploaded to the customer's Civica EDM account.
- Provided an on-line application form, approximately 90% of claim forms completed now use this method. This form will continue to be used by applicants who are not claiming UC, including customers who have reached the qualifying age for state pension.

Removing the need for UC recipients to make a separate claim and reducing the number of paper application forms has reduced costs across the following areas

1. Purchase of paper forms
 2. Postage costs where a paper form is issue
 3. Staff time in opening post and scanning paper forms
 4. Staff time on front desks handling paper forms and queries
 5. Staff time in indexing as applications and income updates for UC CTS cases can be auto indexed
- As part of the Transformation Programme, introducing new functionality that will enable data from online forms to be “pushed” automatically into the CTS software, removing a significant amount (estimated at 80-90%) of the current manual claim data entry for new claims and a proportion of data entry on changes (dependent on the type of change)

Planned future work to reduce Administration costs:

Implementing functionality to auto-populate a claim from our on-line form will enable us to make savings as there will be a reduction in staff time in entering data into the CTS software from the on-line application form. This is part of the new functionality with redesigned services in transformation and should be there from 29/01/19

E-billing / e-notifications – This will be available to customers who activate their personal online account which will be available from 29/01/19

All Council Tax bills are currently printed and despatched by an external supplier once a week, while Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support letters are printed and despatched daily by the Revenues and Benefits team. Once we have a customer online account we will be able to “post” bills and letters to the account and send a text message or e-mail to the customer to let them know that they have new correspondence from SSDC.

This will enable savings to be made in the following areas:

1. Printing and stationary costs
2. Postage costs
3. Staff time in packing letters throughout the year (new year letters/bills are despatched by external company)

It is worth noting it will take time for customers to move from receiving paper notifications to signing up for the customer online account, so not all of the savings can be realised from the outset.

The extent of auto-population, auto-processing and digital notifications that could be realised is substantial and limited only by the degree of success in moving customers from paper to digital application forms.

SMS – Text message reminders

In the last report this was scheduled to be introduced in December 2017, this was delayed. The team have now sent out initial SMS to customers whose details we hold were provided since 1 April 2017 to comply with GDPR. We can now proceed with sending SMS reminders. Where a customer has provided a mobile phone number as a method of contact a text message will be sent a few days ahead of when the statutory reminder notice will be sent. Where a taxpayer makes their late payment within a couple of days of the reminder text they will prevent the statutory reminder notice from being sent. The statutory recovery process can lead to the loss of the right to pay by instalments, a court summons and action by an Enforcement Officer (commonly referred to as a bailiff) and additional costs to the debtor. An informal reminder notice could prevent many cases from entering the statutory recovery process. This will reduce costs to SSDC; prevent the taxpayer from incurring further costs and fees consequently providing a better outcome for both parties.

The introduction of SMS reminder text messages will reduce the cost of collection, demand on resources and prevent the debtor from incurring additional costs and fees.

Last year's recommendations still in progress:

Recommendation	Progress
Providing a summary front sheet for Council Tax Support notification letters that detailed the sum owed/received and how to proceed	<i>Some of the information that would be provided on a summary will be available through customer's personal online accounts. If we were to revise the scheme to become income banded, letters would be discontinued, instead the relevant discount would appear on the council tax bill as with all other council tax discounts.</i>
Benefits Officers explore the potential of creating a consultative group who can meet to discuss the Council Tax Support scheme	<i>It is intended that this will be considered as part of the Customer insight and engagement work of the Transformation Programme</i>

Summary of Task and Finish Group's Recommendations

1. A Minimum Award of £0.50 is introduced.
2. Introduce a tolerance for small changes in income of up to £5.00 that will prevent a change to entitlement of up to £1.00 due to the income taper in the CTS means test of 20%.

That annual uprating's are implemented as usual:

- Personal allowances and premiums are uprated in line with those for Housing Benefit;
- Non-dependent deductions are uprated in line with the annual percentage increase in Council Tax;
- Non-dependent income bands are increased by the same percentage as those in the Prescribed Requirements relating to pensioners

The Task and Finish group who review the scheme for 2020/21 further consider feedback from those who have introduced:

- Fixed periods moving forward – benefit on not altering instalment plans and reduction in number of customer notices- help mitigate upset and reduce avoidable contact/response.
- An income banded scheme with specific focus on the customer experience, vulnerability, collection rates and stacking arrears

If changes to the scheme are agreed, letters must be sent to all Council Tax Support recipients' that will be affected as soon as possible. To give them time to prepare for managing the increase in their Council Tax Bill.

Cumulative Impact

The group has considered the cumulative impact of the above recommended measures and those in the existing scheme by reviewing case studies, should amendments to the recommendations be proposed additional analysis may be required.

Future monitoring

The Task and Finish group request monitoring of:

- Discretionary Hardship rewards continue
- Arrears for cases where Council Tax Support is being given, this is to best manage the scheme and have an effective and efficient approach to collection and recovery
- Costs of collecting Council Tax - It is important to ensure the balance is correct, whilst we must ensure we collect Council Tax to pay for local services, we have to be sure that we do not inadvertently spend too much Tax Payers money trying to do so, therefore making the scheme inefficient
- Other Local Authority schemes and National Best Practice to consider if the South Somerset scheme could be improved upon.

The group have also requested that the Revenues officers consider:

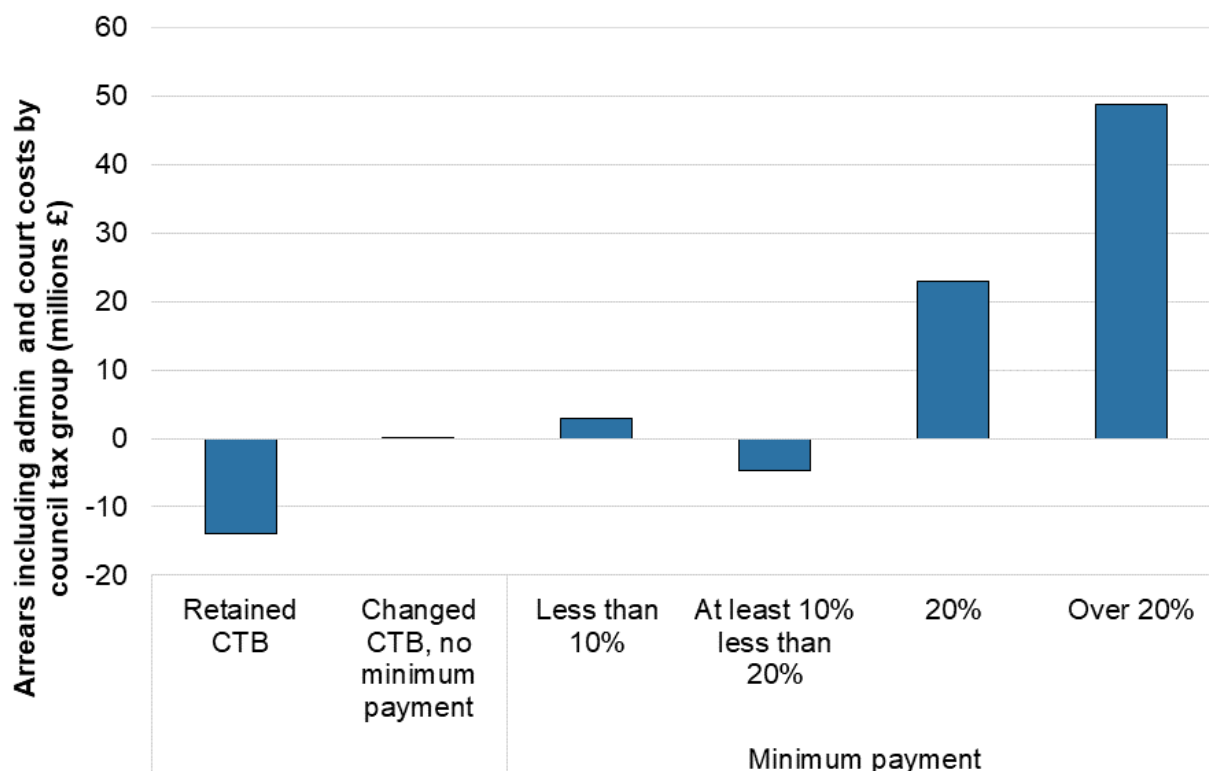
- Just about managing: Four million more people living on inadequate incomes in modern Britain - Research for the independent Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) which illustrates how different kinds of household are faring, against the Minimum Income Standard (MIS) and potentially use evidence to support decision making for those in receipt of CTS who request ~~around~~ Hardship funding.

Future Risks

- The risk is always the potential downturn in the local economy and this is not possible to mitigate, it is just a case of adopting policy and working practices that achieve the best collection rate whilst protecting those who are financially vulnerable.

Appendix 1

New policy Institute – <https://www.counciltaxsupport.org/impacts/>



The graph above takes into account the change in the council tax bases between the years to calculate the additional amounts of uncollected taxes in 2016/17 compared with 2012/13 the last year of CTB.

In 2016-17, local authorities would have collected £26.8bn in Council Tax if everyone liable for Council Tax paid in full- within this context, a small percentage point increase in uncollected tax represents a large sum.

The 67 Councils that had a minimum payment of over 20 per cent in 2016-17 had the largest overall increase in uncollected tax for that year. These councils had £48.6 million more in uncollected tax than they did in 2012-13. This group's arrears this year relative to 2012-13 is £4.2 million more than last year (when only 53 Councils were in this category).

Councils that abolished CTB but did not set a minimum payment saw no significant change between arrears this year compared to 2012-13 (the group overall had an increase of £10,000). Councils that retained CTB continued to have lower arrears this year than they did in 2012-13. This group's arrears declined by £13.8 million relative to their arrears in 2012-13.

Agenda Item 9

Appointment a new Member to represent SSDC on the Armed Forces Community Covenant

Director: Netta Meadows, Strategy & Support Services
Lead Officer: Angela Cox, Specialist – Democratic Services
Contact Details: angela.cox@southsomerset.gov.uk or (01935) 462148

Purpose of the Report

To agree to appoint a new a new Member to represent SSDC on the Armed Forces Community Covenant for the remainder of the Council year.

Public Interest

At the Annual Council meeting on 17th May 2018, Members formally appointed their representatives to various outside organisations for a period of 12 months to represent the Council's interests on those organisations. At that time, Councillor Carol Goodall was appointed to represent SSDC on the Armed Forces Community Covenant. Councillor Goodall has now indicated her intention to step down from the role.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Council appoint a new Member to represent SSDC on the Armed Forces Community Covenant for the remainder of the Council year.

The Armed Forces Community Covenant

The Somerset Armed Forces Covenant (SAFC) brings together charities, local authorities, other public sector organisations, businesses, communities, individuals and the military in a pledge of support between local residents and the armed forces community in Somerset. The pledge was signed on 20 February 2012.

The armed forces covenant:-

- encourages local communities to support their local armed forces community and vice versa
- promotes public understanding and awareness of issues that affect the armed forces community
- recognises and remembers the sacrifices made by the armed forces community
- encourages activities that help to integrate the armed forces community into local life

The Covenant is a promise from the nation to those who serve. It says we will do all we can to ensure they are treated fairly and not disadvantaged in their day-to-day lives. This includes offering injured servicemen and women and bereaved families extra support where appropriate. For more information about the national covenant visit www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/

Somerset has a long history of Armed Forces being based within our county such as RNAS Yeovilton and Norton Manor Camp. Local organisations, including councils, already have good

relationships with these bases and the charities that support in-service and ex-service personnel and their families.

The Somerset Armed Forces Covenant seeks to build on these relationships and local support, and provide a more consistent and complete approach. We work with the Armed Forces community on a range of priority areas within Somerset including: building communities; education, skills and employment; housing, benefits, health and welfare.

The Somerset Armed Forces Covenant is co-ordinated by Somerset County Council.

In accordance with the requirements of the Constitution, Councillor Carol Goodall has given notice that she wishes to step down from being the SSDC appointed representative on the Armed Forces Community Covenant. This has created a vacancy for the representative which Members are being asked to fill at this meeting.

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications in taking this decision other than the travelling allowance paid to Members to attend official meetings which can be funded from the existing councillors' travelling and allowances budget.

Carbon Emissions Climate Change Implications

There are no specific environmental implications arising from the subject matter of this report.

Equalities and Diversity Impact

There are no specific equality or diversity implications arising from the subject matter of this report.

Background Papers

Council Agenda and Minutes of meeting held on 17th May 2018.

Agenda Item 10

Changes to the Council's Constitution following the Local Government Boundary Commission Review - New Ward arrangements between Area North and East Committees

Executive Portfolio Holder: Val Keitch, Leader, Strategy and Policy
Ward Member(s) Cllrs Jo Roundell Greene, Tony Capozzoli, David Norris
Director: Netta Meadows, Strategy and Support Services
Service Manager: Lisa Davis, Specialist Services Manager
Lead Officer: Angela Cox, Specialist – Democratic Services
Contact Details: Angela.cox@southsomerset.gov.uk or 01935 462148

Purpose of the Report

1. Following the final recommendations of the Local Government Boundary Review of South Somerset, several new Wards have been created. One new Ward has been created which crosses both Areas North and East and, in order to retain Area based working, it is proposed that the whole of the new Ward be encompassed within one Area Committee. This requires an amendment to Part 2, Article 10 of the Council's Constitution.

Public Interest

2. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is an independent body set up by Parliament whose main role is to carry out electoral reviews of local authorities throughout England. This electoral review was carried out to ensure that:
 - The wards in South Somerset are in the best possible places to help the Council carry out its responsibilities effectively.
 - The number of voters represented by each councillor is approximately the same across the district.

Recommendations

3. That Full Council:-
 - a. delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer to make the necessary changes to the Council's Constitution for the newly created Northstone / Ivelchester / St Michael's Ward (NIST) be wholly within Area East Committee for the purpose of Area Committee working from May 2019.
 - b. agree that a briefing paper be issued to the Parish Councils within the new Ward to explain their amalgamation and the implications of representation in a 3 member Ward.

Background

4. In May 2017 a review of South Somerset's electoral arrangements commenced with a review of the number of District Councillors. This review concluded that the Councils should retain 60 Councillors as the electorate forecasts projected 5 years ahead suggested that the councillor:elector ratio would increase from 2,196 electors at present to 2,290 in 2023.
5. The next stage was to invite proposals on a warding pattern to accommodate 60 Councillors. Submissions were made by the Liberal Democrat group, the Conservative group, an officers submission, individual District Councillors, Parish and Town Councils and local residents. In

January 2018, the Boundary Commission published their draft recommendations based on these submissions and invited comments on them.

- Following the consultation period, in May 2018, the Boundary Commission published their final recommendations. In these final recommendations, several Ward boundaries had changed and some Wards had been amalgamated. A the new three member Ward of Northstone / Ivelchester / St Michael's (NIST) was created which currently straddles two Area Committee boundaries.

The Ward of Northstone / Ivelchester / St Michael's (NIST)

- The newly proposed Ward of Northstone / Ivelchester / St Michaels (NIST) had not been considered previously in the consultation process and as such, had not been consulted upon. Both officers and Councillors questioned this and the Boundary Commission response was:-

“While geographically large, this ward will be well connected throughout by the A303 and A37. We acknowledge that some of the communities within this ward may feel that they have little in common. However, we will always endeavour to keep communities together and avoid splitting any parishes wherever possible. The Commission will, on occasion, place seemingly disparate communities within the same ward if necessary to achieve what we consider to be the best balance of our statutory criteria. The only other option would have been to create smaller district wards but divide parishes between them in order to secure good electoral equality.

Our proposals now largely follow as requested by the submissions received, the existing Ward Boundaries for Cary, Camelot, Blackmore Vale and Milborne Port. We acknowledge that our recommendations have brought together the existing Wards of Northstone, Ivelchester and St Michael's into a single ward, but, we have retained the wider external boundary lines for this area subject to a minor alteration in the south west which reunites the parish of Stoke-sub-Hamdon into a single ward.

The Commission did consider the warding pattern proposed by the Conservative group very carefully. However, we also received, what was in our opinion, a very strong and well evidenced submission from Yeovil Without Parish Council that did not support any warding pattern that would cross its existing ward boundaries.”

- The draft Order was laid in Parliament on 15 October 2018 for 40 days and was confirmed by Parliament on 30th November 2018.
- Currently, Area North Committee has 13 Councillors and Area East has 12 Councillors. If the new Northstone / Ivelchester / St Michael's Ward (NIST) was moved wholly within Area North, there would be 15 Councillors in this Area and it would leave 10 Councillors in Area East. To achieve a better balance of representation, it is proposed that the newly created Northstone / Ivelchester / St Michael's Ward (NIST) be wholly within Area East Committee for the purpose of Area Committee working from May 2019. There would then be 13 Councillors in Area East and 12 in Area North.

Current number of Councillors on each Area Committee

Area North	Area South	Area East	Area West
13	19	12	16

- Although the proposal will increase the geographical area of the Area East Committee, it does create a more equitable divide of Councillors across the four Area Committees.
- This may create some local issues for the residents of Chilthorne Domer, Montacute and Tintinhull in the current St Michaels Ward who would have to travel to the venue for Area East Committee meetings (currently at Churchfields in Wincanton) to speak to their Area Committee or hear a

planning application within their parish being determined. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed on this issue. The impact of the new Ward and Area Committee will also need explaining to the 3 affected Parish Councils in the current St Michaels Ward and the wider Parish Councils regarding representation by a 3 member Ward.

12. This proposal was presented to the Area East and North Committees in December and although some reservations were expressed at the size of the new Ward, both Committees agreed that the new Ward be wholly within Area East Committee for the purpose of Area Committee working from May 2019.

Financial Implications

13. There are no direct financial implications as a result of these recommendations.

Council Plan Implications

- To build healthy, self-reliant, active communities
- Supporting people and communities, enabling them to help themselves

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

14. There are no carbon emission or climate change implications associated with the recommendations of this report.

Equality and Diversity Implications

15. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and is attached to this report.

Privacy Impact Assessment

16. No personal data was involved in the compilation of this report or the review by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE)

Background Papers

17. Final Report of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE)
 18. Report and minutes of Area East Committee 12 December 2018
 19. Report and minutes of Area North Committee 19 December 2018
 20. Letter from Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) dated 07 June 2018 to Alex Parmley, CEO.
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SSDC Equality Analysis Template (2017)

Page 1: What is Equality Analysis?

Q1. Q1.1 Please describe the change that is the subject of this EqA i.e. the introduction of a new, or significant change to an existing, policy strategy, service or function .

Following the final recommendations of the Local Government Boundary Review of South Somerset, a new Ward has been created which crosses both Areas North and East. In order to retain Area based working, it is proposed that the whole of the new Ward be encompassed within one Area Committee.

Page 2: EQUALITY ANALYSIS (EA)

Q2. Q2.1 What information have you used to analyse the effects on equality, particularly in relation to protected groups?

The proposal to move the current St Michaels Ward into Area East Committee will mean that any Council related issue will be discussed at the Area East Committee meeting - currently held in Wincanton, rather than the Area North Committee meetings - currently held in Somerton.

The proposal will affect the residents of Chilthorne Domer, Montacute, Stoke Sub Hamdon, and Tintinhull who will have to travel a further 8 to 10 miles to attend their Area Committee meeting.

I have used the ward profile data on the Somerset Intelligence website, relating to the Population; Age; Adult Social Care; Health and Car Access of the residents of St Michaels Ward.

Q3. Q2.2 What has this information told you about the potential effect on equality, particularly in relation to the protected groups?

The usual resident population of St Michael's ward is 2,351 (mid 2016 estimates).

The St Michaels Ward has a higher than average population aged between 40 to 80 years and a lower than average population aged between 20 to 40 years.

The percentage of the population of the ward aged 65 years and above is 27.9% (655 people) which is higher than that for the District as a whole. This tells us that there are potentially a larger number of older residents who might be affected in terms of their ability to access Area Committee meetings in Wincanton once the ward has moved into Area East.

In terms of disability or long term limiting illness, the residents receiving adult social care within the Ward is significantly lower than that of the District. The number of people whose day to day activities are limited is consistent with that of the District, being 19% or 446 people. However the number of households with a car is higher than that of the District. This tells us that there may be more people with restricted ability to attend Area Committee meetings due to day to their day to day activities being limited.

Q4. Q2.3 The Equality Act Aims to: Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation Advance equality of opportunity Foster good relations With these three aims in mind, what is your assessment of the likely impact of the policy, strategy, service or function on the following?:

	Likely to benefit (Positive Impact)	Likely to disadvantage (Negative Impact)	No specific impact
People from different age groups		X	
Men or women			X
Women who are pregnant or have recently given birth			X
People who have undergone, are proposing or are undergoing gender reassignment			X
People with disabilities or carers		X	
People from different religions, belief or faith (including those with no belief)			X
People of different race or ethnicity			X
People who are lesbian, gay or bisexual			X
Marriage/Civil Partnership			X
People who are serving or have served in the armed forces and their families* (* this group is not protected by the Equality Act but are still potentially vulnerable or at risk of exclusion)			X

Q5. Q2.4 Where you have indicated a Positive or Negative Impact in Q2.3, please describe in more detail what the specific Impacts are.

The potential negative impacts for elderly and disabled residents would be in terms of their ability to attend an Area Committee meeting if moved to Wincanton due to it being a greater distance to travel than when the ward was in Area North. This would be particularly true for those who may rely on taxis for transport due to the costs being higher.

Q6. Q2.5 What actions will be, or have been taken to either mitigate any negative impacts or create a positive impact as identified in Q4?

Although the ward has a higher number of older residents and residents with limited day to day activity, attendance at an Area Committee meeting would still require travel by car, whether the meeting was held in Somerton in Area North or in Wincanton once moved into Area East.

It is acknowledged that this proposal to move the St Michaels Ward into Area East would be less convenient for those residents but that is outweighed by the benefits of achieving a better balance of committee membership across the district.

Although it would be less convenient for residents to travel to Wincanton to attend an Area Committee meeting, the higher than average vehicle ownership in the ward suggests that residents would be able to attend utilising their own or a friend/neighbour's transport.

In view of the increased area/size of the Area East Committee consideration can be given to holding the occasional Area Committee meeting in a venue to the West of that Area.

Q7. Q2.6 If there is a need to review the EqA, when do you propose to do this?

* 01/11/2019

Q8. Q2.7 How will you monitor the impact that the decision or policy has had on protected groups?

We keep a note of public attendance at our committee meetings and if there was an issue to be discussed relating to the St Michaels Ward area, we can gauge by the attendance (or lack of it) if the decision has had an impact.

Page 3: Quality Check / Approval Log

Q9. Q3.1 Date and name of Officer Completing the EqA

* 31/10/2018

Name of Officer Completing the EqA and Date Completed

Angela Cox

Q10. Q3.2 Date and name of the Line Manager/Senior Manager approving the EqA

* 05/11/2018

Name of the Line Manager approving the EqA

Lisa Davis

Q11. Q3.3 Date and Name of the Equality Coordinator signing off the EA

* 05/11/2018

Name of the Equality Coordinator

David Crisfield

Q12. Q3.4 Any Comments

No Response

Map referred to in the South Somerset (Electoral Changes) Order 2018
Sheet 1 of 1

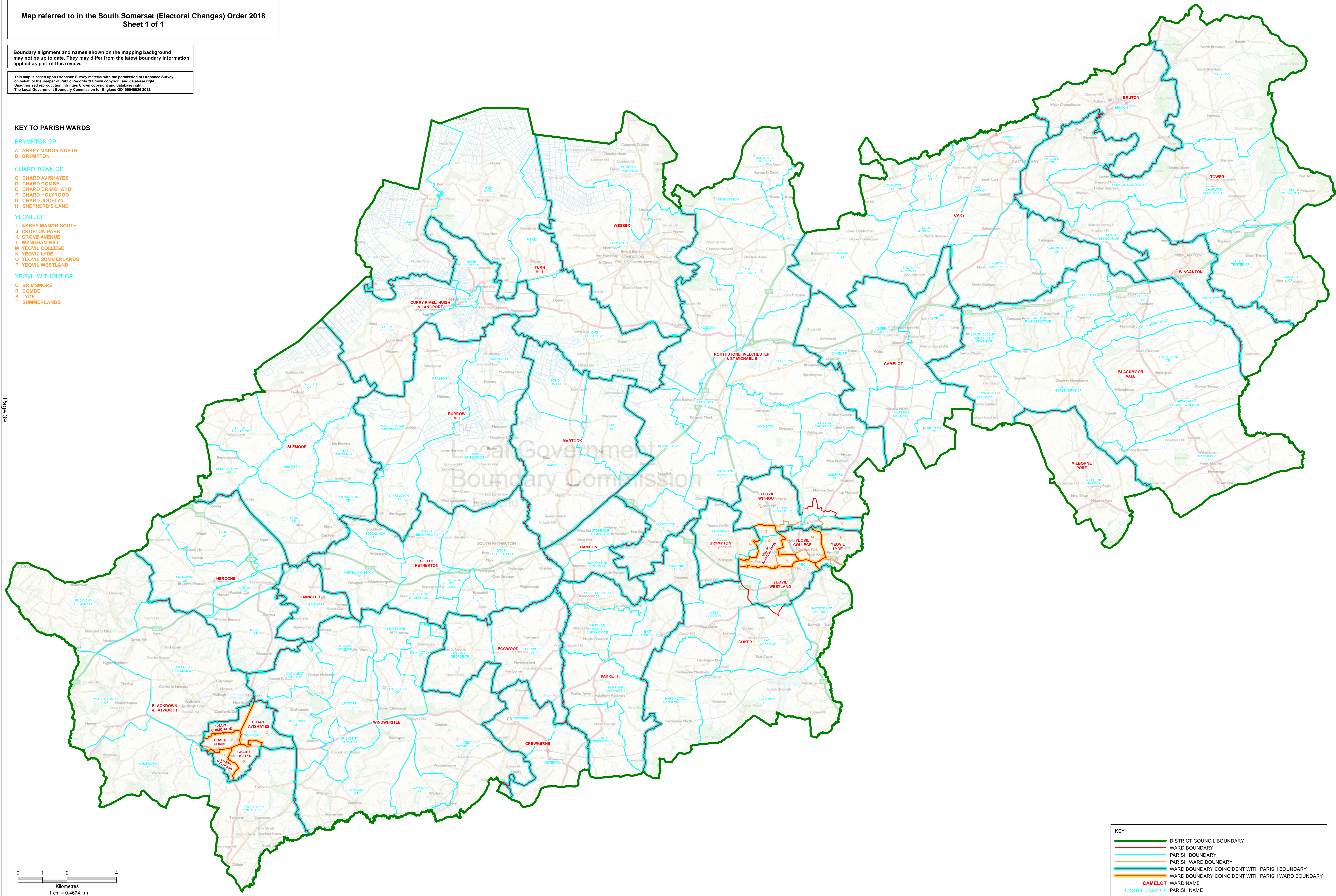
Boundary alignment and names shown on the mapping background may not be up to date. They may differ from the latest boundary information applied as part of this review.

This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Keeper of Public Records © Crown copyright and database right. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and database right. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England GD10048926 2018.

KEY TO PARISH WARDS

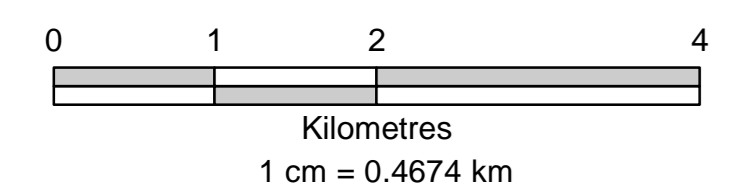
- BRYMPTON CP
- A ABBEY MANOR NORTH
- B BRYMPTON
- CHARD TOWN CP
- C CHARD AVISHAYES
- D CHARD COMBE
- E CHARD CRIMCHARD
- F CHARD HOLYROOD
- G CHARD JOCELYN
- H SHEPHERD'S LANE
- YEovil CP
- I ABBEY MANOR SOUTH
- J CROFTON PARK
- K GROVE AVENUE
- L WYNDHAM HILL
- M YEovil COLLEGE
- N YEovil LYDE
- O YEovil SUMMERLANDS
- P YEovil WESTLAND
- YEovil WITHOUT CP
- Q BRIMSORE
- R COMBE
- S LYDE
- T SUMMERLANDS

Page 39



KEY

- DISTRICT COUNCIL BOUNDARY
- WARD BOUNDARY
- PARISH BOUNDARY
- PARISH WARD BOUNDARY
- WARD BOUNDARY COINCIDENT WITH PARISH BOUNDARY
- WARD BOUNDARY COINCIDENT WITH PARISH WARD BOUNDARY
- CAMELOT WARD NAME
- CASTLE CARY CP PARISH NAME



Agenda Item 11

Report of Executive Decisions

Portfolio Holder: Val Keitch, Leader of Council
Director: Netta Meadows, Director (Strategy & Support Services)
Lead Officer: Angela Cox, Democratic Services Specialist
Contact Details: angela.cox@southsomerset.gov.uk or (01935) 462148

This report is submitted for information and summarises decisions taken by the District Executive and Portfolio Holders since the last meeting of Council in December 2018. The decisions are set out in the attached Appendix.

Members are invited to ask any questions of the Portfolio Holders.

Background Papers

All Published

Val Keitch, Leader of the Council
Angela Cox, Democratic Services Specialist
angela.cox@southsomerset.gov.uk or (01935) 462148

Appendix

Portfolio	Subject	Decision	Taken By	Date
Strategic Planning (Place Making)	The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 - Fees for arranging for the provision of boarding for cats and dogs	The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning (Place Making) in consultation with the Director - Service Delivery and the S151 Officer, has agreed that the fees for the provision of boarding for cats or dogs under the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 be set as per the tables outlined in the report - please see Portfolio Holder report at this link:- http://modgov.southsomerset.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=865	Portfolio Holder	07/12/18
Leader of the Council	Corporate Peer Challenge: Follow Up Visit	District Executive is asked to note the findings of the Peer Challenge Follow up Team, as set out in their report attached at Appendix 1.	District Executive	09/01/19
Strategic Planning (Place Making)	A303 Sparkford to Ilchester Dualling Scheme – Local Impact Report	District Executive is asked to: a. note the report and its contents; b. approve delegation of the Local Impact Report (LiR) to the Lead Specialist, Strategic Planning, Strategic Planning Portfolio Holder and Property, Climate Change and Income Generation Portfolio Holder; and c. agree that the Council submit a Written Representation to the Examining Authority and give delegation of the contents of that Written Representation to the Leader of the Council, Strategic Planning Portfolio Holder and Property, Climate Change and Income Generation Portfolio Holder and the Ward Members for Camelot and Ivelchester.	District Executive	09/01/19
Leisure and Culture	Assessing Needs and Opportunities for Indoor and Outdoor Sports Facilities in South Somerset	District Executive is asked to: a. note and comment on the emerging issues from the draft Needs Assessment. b. encourage Members to attend the upcoming workshop on 24th January 2019 at 5.00pm to share their reactions and to participate in a prioritisation exercise.	District Executive	09/01/19
Finance and Legal Services	2019/20 Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan Update	District Executive is asked to: a. note the current estimates and next steps in respect of the draft Medium Term Financial Plan and Capital Programme.	District Executive	09/01/19

Portfolio	Subject	Decision	Taken By	Date
		b. approve in principle the changes to budget estimates in respect of pressures and savings included within the report (para 14).		
Finance and Legal Services	Council Tax Support Scheme 2019/20	District Executive is requested to recommend to Council: (a) the introduction of a minimum award value of £0.50 a week in line with Housing Benefit; (b) the introduction of a £5 a week tolerance on income increases and decreases before it affects a Council Tax Support award; (c) that personal allowances and premiums are uprated in line with those for Housing Benefit; (d) that non-dependent deductions are uprated in line with the annual percentage increase in Council Tax; (e) that the non-dependent income bands are increased by the same percentage as those applied to the national Council Tax Support scheme for pensioners; (f) that the hardship scheme budget be set at £30,000 for the 2019/20 financial year; (g) to note the recommendations of the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group attached at Appendix 1; (h) to note the scheme has been amended to reflect changes to the Prescribed Requirements; (i) that the 2019/20 Council Tax Support Scheme at Appendix 2 (to follow) is adopted; (j) to note that the proposed Council Tax Support Scheme has been reflected within the overall Council Tax Base.	District Executive	09/01/19
Finance and Legal Services	Council Tax Discount Review Executive Portfolio	District Executive is asked to: a. Approve the use of the Councils local discretionary powers to implement a Care Leavers Discount from April 2019. b. Approve that the additional amount to fund the Care Leavers discount is added to the budget which currently funds Council Tax Discretionary reductions. c. Approve the increase in the Empty Home Premium on empty properties to the maximum percentage, as detailed in the Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018.	District Executive	09/01/19
Finance and Legal Services	Business Rates Relief	District Executive is asked to:	District Executive	09/01/19

Portfolio	Subject	Decision	Taken By	Date
		<p>a. Approve the use of the Councils local discretionary powers to implement Retail Rate Relief from April 2019 for two years;</p> <p>b. Approve the use of the Councils local discretionary powers to extend the Business Rate Relief Scheme for Local Newspapers for the 2019/20 financial year;</p> <p>c. Approve the use of the Councils local discretionary powers to extend the doubling of the Rural Rate Relief for the 2019/20 financial year and future financial years until the primary legislation has been changed.</p>		
Transformation	SSDC Transformation Programme – Progress Report Executive Portfolio	District Executive is asked to note and comment on the report.	District Executive	09/01/19
Strategy and Policy	Notification of an Urgent Executive Decision - Short term funding facility required to SSDC Opium Power Ltd to accommodate VAT cashflow during VAT reclaim period	That Council note the urgent executive decision made by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Council Leader and Portfolio Holder for Property, Climate Change and Income Generation to use short term funding facility required to SSDC Opium Power Ltd to accommodate VAT cashflow during VAT reclaim period.	District Executive	09/01/19

Agenda Item 12

Audit Committee

This report summarises the items considered by the Audit Committee on Thursday 22nd November:

38. Annual Audit Letter (Agenda Item 6)

The Finance Specialist presented his report to letter. He advised that the report included a copy of the external Annual Audit Letter. He explained that the letter summarised key findings from work carried out by the external auditors. It also confirmed the fees charged for the audit.

He drew members attention to point 4 of the report which summarised the contents of the letter and further advised that the auditors provided a positive unqualified opinion in respect of the 2017/18 Statement of Accounts.

One member pointed out a mistake on page 9 of the agenda. Under the heading 'Working with the Council', he suggested that the second bullet point should read "We also shared our thoughts on leadership reports", rather than reading "We also shared our thought leadership reports".

In response to a question from a member, the Finance Specialist advised that the report stated that the pension fund was in a good state.

RESOLVED: that members noted the report and the contents of the Annual Audit Letter.

39. Risk Management Update Report (Agenda Item 7)

The Chairman explained that he had found the agenda report difficult to read as the agenda had been printed in black and white. He pointed out that the risk diagrams could not be read when not printed in colour. The Case Services Officer agreed to ensure that reports which included risk diagrams would be printed in colour in the future. However, the Director – Strategy and Support Services, pointed out that other ways to visually present risk would be investigated in coming months.

The Procurement Specialist presented his report to members.

He advised members that progress had been made on developing a group of 'risk champions' and stated that nominations of staff from different services had been identified. He also advised that the first risk workshop had been scheduled for the following week and summarised the training which would be provided at the workshops. He also explained the support that the risk champions would be given to enable them to offer support and advice to risk owners.

He advised members that following these workshops, a new draft risk register would be developed and would be presented to the Audit Committee in the New Year. This would run in line with developing the current TEN system.

He explained that the current critical risks were being reviewed.

RESOLVED: that members noted the report and the progress which has been made on the work plan as presented at the Audit Committee on 25th October 2018.

40. Audit Committee Forward Plan (Agenda Item 8)

Members noted the Audit Committee Forward Plan.

Cllr Derek Yeomans,
Chairman of Audit Committee

Agenda Item 13

Scrutiny Committee

This report summarises the work of the Scrutiny Committee since the last report to Full Council. The Committee met on 4 December 2018 and 8 January 2019 to consider:

4 December 2018

Reports to be considered by District Executive on 6 December 2018

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 6 December 2018 and made comments as detailed below. Responses to most of the comments were provided at the Scrutiny Committee by the relevant officer or Portfolio Holder.

Somerset Waste Partnership Annual Report and Draft Business Plan 2019-2024 (Agenda item 6)

- Scrutiny were content that the recommendations go forward but noted for future reporting that there were several acronyms in the report which were not defined.
- Members sought clarity or reassurance on some specific points including:
 - Page 11 – recycle risk – that careful budget monitoring would take place
 - Page 13, paras 1.2.2 and 1.2.3 – are SWP financially contributing to the development of the Resource Recovery Centre at Avonmouth? and do SWP have any control of the facility?

Heart of the South West (HotSW) – Joint Committee – Council Update (Agenda item 7)

- Page 33, para 3.3 – Members queried if we are confident that the aerospace sector within South Somerset is being supported through the LEP.
- Members noted the timescales regarding the Local Industrial Strategy and acknowledged there is no direct input by local authorities. It was felt that local authorities needed to be kept informed at an early stage so that could scrutinise.
- Page 32 – e – Members asked when the Housing Task Force were anticipating reporting back on the packages.
- Page 37 – Points 1 and 6 – Some members noted that the appendix referred to the Great South West Partnership, but there had been little reference to it elsewhere. For future reporting it was also noted that some acronyms such as WECA were not defined.

Commercial Assets Update Report (Agenda item 8)

- Para 17 - With regard to the paragraph under Marlborough Residential Development, a member asked if clarification could be provided around whose local contractors were being used – is it the Marlborough or SSDC area, and if it is SSDC has the carbon footprint been considered?
- Some members were surprised how few schemes in the South Somerset area had been considered given that SSDC is focussed on improving the local economy and reducing environmental impact.
- One member thought the income target was 3.5 million not 2 million and clarity was sought regarding the figure.
- Page 46 - A member asked if he could be updated regarding Amphora House as he was aware several businesses had bid for the property but it was still empty.

Draft Economic Development Strategy (2019-2028) (Agenda item 9)

- Page 55, para 15 and Page 56, para 18 – some members felt the wording was a little ambiguous, and it would have been useful to indicate how many businesses had engaged or responded rather than detailing those who had been invited.
- The Strategy (supplement) – one member felt wording for some of the Year One Key Milestones under the Priority Themes could be a little more specific rather than general statements. It was also noted that it would be good to cross refer to the Regeneration Boards and project where appropriate.
- Some members queried how the actions would be performance monitored, and how would it be known how successful year one has been?

The ‘Making’ of the East Coker Neighbourhood Plan (Agenda item 10)

- Members were content with the recommendation. (During discussion some comments were raised about the process and Neighbourhood Plans in general which were addressed by the Strategic Planning Specialist)

District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda item 11)

- No comments.

Task and Finish reviews

Council Tax Support Scheme 2019 – The Task and Finish report is included in this agenda as an attachment to Council Tax Support Scheme 2019/20 report.

Homefinder Somerset Plain English Policy – All Councils have postponed work on this primarily due to Transformation type related activities.

Customer Accessibility – Good progress is being made with the new website and customer account. Once at a stage for testing the Task and Finish Group will be involved, considering layout, function and terminology.

Rural Allocations Policy – This has now been picked up by the Strategy and Commissioning Team who have looked at the work of the previous Task and Finish Group.

Scrutiny Work Programme

The Scrutiny Specialist noted that the report regarding planning pre-application charges would be delayed as the Income & Opportunities Manager would be looking at fees and charges across the authority, which would be a large piece of work and take some time to complete.

During discussion it was agreed to remove some items from the Work Programme:

- Increased Joint Working Between Police Forces – the member who had put the item forward suggested that it be removed as several mergers of neighbouring forces were no longer being progressed.
- Review of Rural Economy Task and Finish – a member suggested that this be removed from the work programme as it was reflected in the new Economic Development Strategy.

8 January 2019

A summary of the Scrutiny meeting held on 8 January will be reported to the next meeting of Council.

Cllr Sue Steele
Chairman of Scrutiny Committee

Agenda Item 16

Date of Next Meeting

Members are asked to note that the next scheduled meeting of the Full Council will take place on **Tuesday, 26th February 2019** in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil **commencing at 7.30 p.m.**

This will be the Council budget and Council Tax setting meeting.
