



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

MINUTES

Cabinet

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a virtual meeting of the **Cabinet** held on **Monday 14th December, 2020**,

Members Present: Councillors Rachael Robathan (Chairman), Heather Acton, Timothy Barnes, Melvyn Caplan, Matthew Green, David Harvey, Tim Mitchell, Andrew Smith and Paul Swaddle, OBE

1 MEMBERSHIP

1.1 It was noted that there were no changes to the membership.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 There were no Declarations of Interest.

3 MINUTES

3.1 **RESOLVED:** The Leader, with the consent of the Members present, signed the minutes of the meetings held on 28 October 2020 as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

4 COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNTS (INCLUDING COUNCIL TAX LOCAL REDUCTION SCHEME) AND COUNCIL TAX BASE REPORT

4.1 Councillor Melvyn Caplan, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property & Regeneration, introduced the item. He explained that the proposal set out in the report is to retain the same Council Tax Reduction Scheme in 2021-22 as in previous years so that those residents who are least able to pay would not be liable for Council Tax under the scheme. He considered this to be especially important given the difficulties that have arisen from the coronavirus pandemic. This was supported by the chairman.

4.2 Councillor Caplan stated that there were no changes proposed to the Council discounts for second homes which would remain at 0%. It was also proposed to continue to charge a Long Term Empty Property Premium at the maximum percentage allowed for by the relevant legislation, which for 2021-22 is a 300% increase for a property that has been empty for over 10 years. He believed that this is a right and proper approach to discourage residential

properties from remaining empty. This was echoed by the chairman who stressed that she did not wish to see any empty properties in Westminster given the stress on housing demand.

4.3 Gerald Almeroth, Executive Director for Finance & Resources, advised Cabinet that the taxbase for 2021-22 had risen by 0.84% since last year which is the equivalent of an additional 1000 Band D dwellings up to November 2020. This should yield approximately an additional £500,000 in revenue in 2021-22.

4.4 **RESOLVED:**

That the Cabinet recommended:

1. That the Council approve the following recommendations for the financial year 2021/22:-
 - (i) that the Council Tax discount for second homes remains at 0%
 - (ii) the Council Tax discounts for empty properties, including the discounts that replaced the previous Class A and C Council Tax exemptions, remain at 0%.
 - (iii) that a Long-Term Empty Property Premium continues at the maximum percentage allowed for by the current legislation, which is for 2021/22:
 - Properties empty between 2 years - 5 years: 100% Increase
 - Properties empty between 5 years – 10 years: 200% Increase
 - Properties empty over 10 years: 300% Increase
 - (iv) that the Director of Revenues & Benefits be given delegated authority to determine any individual local discount applications received from Council Taxpayers during the 2021/22 financial year under section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
2. That the Council approve the same Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2021/22 which has operated successfully since 2013/14. The scheme is based on the Default Scheme Regulations, updated to reflect changes made via the Prescribed Requirements Amendment Regulations and with War Disabled Pensions, War Widow, Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation scheme payments disregarded in full when calculating a claimant's income.
3. That the Council resolve that the Council Tax Base for 2021/22 for the Whole City is 133,817.98 equivalent Band D properties, for Montpelier Square alone 100.40 equivalent Band D properties and for Queen's Park 3,514.63 equivalent Band D properties.
4. That the Council resolve that the figures set out in paragraph 2.3 of the report for the Council Tax Base for 2021/22 be used by the Council to make a determination pursuant to the requirements of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

Reasons for Decision

1. The taxbase decision is sought in order that the Council complies with the requirements of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
2. The retention of the same levels of Council Tax discount, for empty properties and second homes will continue to deliver additional Council Tax income for the Council without disadvantaging any vulnerable members of the community.
3. The recommendation to allow the Director of Revenues and Benefits to continue to determine any individual local discount claims will enable assistance to be given to individual Council Taxpayers if required, especially as there is no longer the ability for taxpayers to claim Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) in relation to their Council Tax liability. This will also provide the mechanism for granting the local Council Tax discount for Care Leavers and other vulnerable Council Taxpayers.
4. The Council's proposed Council Tax Reduction Scheme will mean that the level of Council Tax support provided to the borough's working age claimants will effectively mirror that previously provided under the national Council Tax Benefit scheme.
5. The recommendation to set the Long-Term Empty Property Premium at the new maximum allowed for within current legislation aligns with the Council's City for All agenda and the Council's aim of a fairer Council Tax system for all residents.

5 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SAFEGUARDING ADULTS EXECUTIVE BOARD 2019-20

- 5.1 Councillor Tim Mitchell, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health, introduced the item. He welcomed the sixth annual report which highlighted how the SAEB and member agencies have addressed the priorities of securing the safety of residents who are at most at risk of harm from others, or through self-neglect during 2019/20.
- 5.2 Councillor Mitchell wished to put on record his thanks to Aileen Buckton, Independent Chair of the SAEB for her work which he considered to be very important. He also expressed thanks to Bernie Flaherty, Bi- borough Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Health Services and Louise Butler, Strategic Lead in Professional Standards & Safeguarding, and her team for their safeguarding work. This was supported by the chairman who commented that one of the most important responsibilities of the Council is to look after its vulnerable people.

5.3 **RESOLVED:** That the report be noted and that the strategy and the emerging themes informing its current work be endorsed.

The Meeting ended at 7.16 pm

CHAIRMAN: _____ **DATE** _____