

Report to:

EXECUTIVE

Relevant Officer:

Steve Thompson, Director of Resources

Relevant Cabinet Member:

Councillor Lynn Williams, Leader of the Council

Date of Meeting:

25 February 2021

COUNCIL TAX 2021/22

1.0 Purpose of the report:

1.1 To consider proposals for Blackpool Council's level of Council Tax for 2021/22 and the General Fund Revenue Budget 2021/22.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

2.1 To consider all information received since the meeting of the Executive on 8 February 2021 including the Final Settlement Funding Assessment announced on 4 February 2021 and to determine whether or not to confirm the Executive's recommendation to Council regarding the General Fund Revenue Budget 2021/22.

2.2 To recommend to Council approval of a level of Blackpool Council's Council Tax for the year 2021/22 of £1,699.13 at valuation band D equivalent (an increase of 4.99% including the 3% Adult Social Care Precept).

2.3 To recommend to Council the level of net expenditure for the General Fund Revenue Budget 2021/22 of £149,062,000.

2.4 To note that the Police and Crime Commissioner for Lancashire's precept for the financial year 2021/22 at valuation band D equivalent was due to be agreed on 22 February 2021 and will be reported verbally at this meeting

2.5 To note that the Lancashire Combined Fire Authority will meet on the morning of 22 February 2021 to set its precept for the financial year 2021/22. This again will be reported verbally at this meeting.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

3.1 The Executive is required to consider the outcome of consultation meetings and surveys before finalising its Budget proposals.

The setting of the General Fund Revenue Budget and the level of Council Tax is consistent with the principles approved by the Executive at its meeting on 8 February 2021.

3.2 Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? NO

3.3 Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Not applicable – the report once approved will become the Council's new approved Budget

4.0 Other alternative options to be considered:

Although one of the eight guiding principles of the Council's Medium-Term Financial Sustainability Strategy 2016/17 – 2021/22 is "to keep Council Tax levels as low as possible", Government funding reductions alongside increasing service demands and inflationary pressures on the Council's Budget in 2021/22, prevent a Council Tax level any lower than the capped level being prudent or practicable.

The council tax level recommended balances all eight principles with the need to fund and maintain core services. Although the level of Council Tax at valuation band D that is recommended is £1,699.13, the profile of hereditaments in Blackpool with bands A and B comprising 74% of the total means that the average Council Tax payable per dwelling in 2021/22 is estimated at £892 or £1,052 gross of precepts.

5.0 Council Priority:

5.1 The report covers both of the Council priorities:

- "The economy: Maximising growth and opportunity across Blackpool"
- "Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience"

6.0 Background Information

6.1 At its meeting on 8 February 2021, the Executive considered a report of the Director of Resources that recommended to Council approval of a net expenditure for the General Fund Revenue Budget of £149,062,000 that would result in a level of Council Tax for the year 2021/22 of £1,699.13 at valuation band D equivalent. This is an increase of 4.99% including the 3% Adult Social Care Precept.

- 6.2 The Final Settlement of Blackpool Council's 2021/22 Settlement Funding Assessment was announced by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on 4 February 2021. There were no changes to the Provisional Settlement Funding Assessment of £63,420,000 for 2021/22.
- 6.3 As part of the final Local Government Finance Settlement, the threshold for 'excessive' Council Tax increases for 2021/22 was confirmed at 5%, an increase of 5% or more requiring a local referendum to be held. This 5% threshold includes the additional 3% allowed for expenditure on Adult Social Care and 2% for other expenditure. The level of Council Tax recommended in this report will not invoke this requirement.
- 6.4 Besides the ongoing dialogue with the trade unions throughout the budget-setting process, the Council has also undertaken two engagement exercises to seek comments and ideas on the Budget, one aimed at individual residents and staff, which attracted 290 responses, and the other aimed at stakeholder organisations, which received 15 responses. Both sought views on Council priorities and services at a broad level and asked for comments on ways in which the Council could save or generate money. This year additional questions were included seeking views on the importance of the Climate Emergency and the Council's response to the Covid pandemic in the budget setting process. Wider consultation has taken place via the Council's extensive corporate communication methods, which include media briefings. In addition, the Scrutiny Leadership Board considered the key Budget pressures, savings required and the Budget Engagement feedback at its informal meeting on 14 January 2021.
- 6.5 The Police and Crime Commissioner for Lancashire's precept for the financial year 2021/22 at valuation band D equivalent was due to be agreed on 22 February 2021 and will be reported verbally at this meeting.
- 6.6 The Lancashire Combined Fire Authority will meet on the morning of 22 February 2021 to set its precept for the financial year 2021/22. This again will be reported verbally at this meeting.
- 6.7 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

7.0 List of Appendices:

- 7.1 None.

8.0 Financial considerations:

8.1 As outlined in this report.

9.0 Legal considerations:

9.1 There is a duty for major precepting authorities to issue a precept for 2021/22 before 1 March 2021. For other local authorities including Blackpool Council there is a duty to set 2021/22 budgets before 11 March 2021.

9.2 Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 makes it a criminal offence for a Councillor in Council Tax arrears (with at least two months unpaid bills) to vote at a meeting of the Council, a Committee or of the Council's Executive where financial matters relating to Council Tax are being considered. It is also an offence if any such Councillor present, who is aware of the arrears, fails to disclose that they are in arrears of Council Tax.

10.0 Risk management considerations:

10.1 A Risk Analysis was produced for the General Fund Revenue Budget 2021/22 report to the Executive on 8 February 2021 - this remains applicable.

11.0 Equalities considerations:

11.1 Equalities considerations were outlined in the General Fund Revenue Budget 2021/22 report.

12.0 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations:

12.1 None directly although the setting of a balanced budget underpins the Council's sustainability agenda.

13.0 Internal/ External Consultation undertaken:

13.1 Consultation with the trade unions with regards to staffing issues has been embedded into normal working practices and has also met all formal consultation requirements.

13.2 Once specific proposals were published in January 2021, detailed consultations with all affected stakeholders - amongst them staff, service users and communities of interest/equality groups – have begun to take place.

- 13.3 Wider communication has also taken place via the Council's extensive corporate communication methods, which include website, social media, media briefings, press statements and interviews.
- 13.4 The broad budget position facing the Council has been reported to the community equality groups.

14.0 Background papers

- 14.1 Budget working papers and above consultation minutes and feedback.

15.0 Key decision information:

- 15.1 Is this a key decision? Yes
- 15.2 If so, Forward Plan reference number: 18/2020
- 15.3 If a key decision, is the decision required in less than five days? No
- 15.4 If **yes**, please describe the reason for urgency:

16.0 Call-in information:

- 16.1 Are there any grounds for urgency, which would cause this decision to be exempt from the call-in process? No
- 16.2 If **yes**, please give reason:

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

17.0 Scrutiny Committee Chairman (where appropriate):

Date informed: 17 February 2021 Date approved: N/A

18.0 Declarations of interest (if applicable):

18.1

19.0 Executive decision:

19.1

20.0 **Date of Decision:**

20.1

21.0 **Reason(s) for decision:**

21.1

22.0 **Date Decision published:**

22.1

23.0 **Executive Members present:**

23.1

24.0 **Call-in:**

24.1

25.0 **Notes:**

25.1