

EXECUTIVE

A meeting of the Executive was held on Wednesday 4 October 2023.

PRESENT: Mayor C Cooke (Chair), Councillors P Gavigan, T Furness, P Storey, J Thompson, Z Uddin and N Walker

PRESENT BY INVITATION: Councillor M Storey (Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Board)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor J Ewan

OFFICERS: S Bonner, C Benjamin, M Brown, R Brown, G Field, C Heaphy, R Horniman, D Middleton, M Nath, J Savage, E Scollay and J Tynan.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: None.

23/23 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The Monitoring Officer advised Executive there was no requirement for Members to declare a pecuniary interest for agenda item 5, Local Council Tax Support 2024/2025 Consultation. As such there were no declarations of interest received at this point in the meeting.

23/24 **MINUTES - EXECUTIVE - 6 SEPTEMBER 2023**

The minutes of the Executive meeting held on 6 September 2023 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

23/25 **TOWN CENTRE FUNDING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY**

The Mayor and Executive Member for Adult Social Care and Public Protection submitted a report for Executive's consideration.

The purpose of the report was to review a previous Executive decision and propose an alternative delivery plan utilising the revised funding envelope. The report also reviewed specific savings identified during the 2023/24 budget setting process as well as requesting consideration was given to these service areas when setting the medium to long term financial plan.

This report reviewed the decision of Executive on the 18 October 2022 regarding the Town Centre Strategy (targeted support) Report. It also reviewed some savings proposals set as part of the 2023 budget.

The Town Centre Strategy (Targeted Support) report approved by Executive on October 2022 recommended the use of UKSPF and the IGF to make several interventions into the town centre. This was set out in Table 1.0 in the report.

At the time the report was agreed it was assumed that there was revenue grant available within the IGF. It was subsequently confirmed there was only capital grant available, meaning it could not be used to fund revenue activity. Therefore, the level of activity set out in Table 1.0 was limited with the delivery plan requiring revision to reflect this change. This revision also needed to take account of the new strategic direction as well as reflecting the fact some activity has been completed and others were due to be completed.

The impact of savings agreed at Full Council on 27 February 2023 also needed to be considered when reviewing the delivery plan and how grant funding could legitimately be maximised in line with grant conditions to deliver on the new strategic priorities.

ORDERED that Executive:

1. Approve the revision to the approved street lighting saving – lighting levels will remain and funded via un-ringfenced grant to the end of 2023/24
2. Approve the revised delivery plan and funding as presented in table 2.0.
3. Note that the arrangements apply to 2023/24 financial year only, with the exception of £260,000 of UKSPF grant funding being available within financial year 2024/25, and future levels of delivery will be considered as part of 2024/25 budget process to be approved by Council in February 2024
4. Note and accept the Police and Crime Commissioner grant described at paragraph 13
5. Approve the establishment of a further 10 FTE wardens on a 12 month fixed term contract over 2023/24 and 2024/25 financial year.

OPTIONS

It could have been agreed not to fund the activities outlined and use some of the grant for other purposes. However, this would have significantly affected the ability of those services to operate which were a priority for the Mayor and Executive.

REASONS

To ensure that the town centre was supported within the funding available whilst protecting the savings requirement of the authority and ensured that the wider town was supported in respect of community safety.

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LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT 2024/25 CONSULTATION

The Executive Member for Finance and Governance submitted a report for Executive's consideration.

The purpose of the report was to request permission to undertake a consultation (a requirement of schedule 1A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992) with both the public and the major precepting authorities in respect of proposed changes to the Council's Council Tax Reduction (CTR) Scheme with effect from 1st April 2024.

Executive approval was required to commence consultation on changes to the 2024/25 scheme ahead of the final decision being made by Council at the budget setting meeting on 28 February 2024.

Council Tax Reduction (CTR) was introduced by Central Government in April 2013 as a replacement for the Council Tax Benefit scheme that was administered on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). As part of the introduction, the Government placed the duty to create a local scheme for working age claimants with Billing Authorities.

Middlesbrough Council, as the billing authority, had a statutory requirement to revise or make a CTR scheme by no later than 11 March each year, approved by Full Council decision.

ORDERED that Executive approves the consultation as per Option two in the report, as required by the Local Government Finance Act 1992, with the following:

- I. the public; and
- II. the major precepting authorities (Fire Authority and Police and Crime Commissioner).

OPTIONS

<u>OPTION</u>	<u>Cost</u>	<u>Proposed?</u>	<u>Reason</u>
1. No Change	£0	No	Existing scheme counts allowance for childcare costs in Universal Credit as income, disadvantaging some taking paid employment.
2. 90% amended: Care Leavers into Collection Fund with current level of support maintained;	£21k	Yes	Improves the support and fairness the current scheme whilst remaining affordable for the council. NB only childcare cost element will be subject to consultation.

And for those in receipt of Universal Credit, disregard as income the childcare costs element.

3. 95% scheme	£3.15m	No	The council is unable to meet this additional cost within the current budget position.
4. 100% scheme	£4m	No	The council is unable to meet this additional cost within the current budget position.
5. 90% with band uplift	£442k	No	The council is unable to meet this additional cost within the current budget position.

Option 1 was to leave the existing scheme in place. This was not recommended because the existing scheme counts allowances for childcare costs in Universal Credit as income, disadvantaging some people who took paid employment.

Options 3 and 4 enhanced or increased the scheme, e.g., to a 95% or 100% maximum discount scheme respectively. This was not recommended because the associated cost (c£3.15 million for a 95% scheme and c£4 million for a 100% scheme) would have been substantial and ultimately present an increased cost to the General Fund budget, a pressure that was considered to be unaffordable given the Council's current strained financial situation.

Option 5 provided an uplift in the amount of Council Tax Reduction awarded for those in the lower discount brackets, whilst maintaining a maximum support level of 90%. The c£442k cost of this option, however, was also considered to be unaffordable in the Council's current financial situation.

REASONS

The proposed changes would further assist low-income households and support the collection of council tax whilst remaining affordable for the Council to provide.

Any changes to the existing scheme, excluding the technical adjustment referenced in the report, were subject to full consultation which would run from 9 October 2023 for four weeks and would inform the scheme from 1 April 2024 (with exception of the care leavers).

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ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED.

None.

All decisions will come into force after five working days following the day the decision(s) was published unless the decision becomes subject to the call in procedures.