

Minutes

Policy Review Committee

Venue: Committee Room

Date: 14 July 2015

Time: 5.00 p.m.

Present: Councillors J Deans (Chair), M Hobson (Vice Chair), K Arthur, K Ellis, D Hutchinson, R Packham and Mrs J Shaw-Wright.

Apologies for Absence: None

Officers Present: Rose Norris - Executive Director, Gillian Marshall – Solicitor to the Council, Chris Watson – Policy Officer, Glenn Shelley – Business Manager, Tammy Fox – Benefits and Taxation Officer and Janine Jenkinson - Democratic Services Officer.

2. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED: To receive and approve the minutes of the Policy Review Committee held on 16 June 2015 for signature by the Chair.

4. CHAIR'S ADDRESS

There was no address from the Chair.

5. PR/15/4 - NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATES TRANSITIONAL RELIEF SCHEME

Tammy Fox, Benefits and Taxation Officer presented a report that set out the details of the National Non-Domestic Rates Transitional Relief Scheme.

RESOLVED: To recommend to the Executive that the Transitional Relief Scheme, as set out in Appendix A of the report be approved.

6. PR/15/5 - NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATES DISCRETIONARY RELIEFS

The Committee was advised that local authorities had the power to grant Discretionary Rate Relief to organisations that met certain criteria.

Overall, the Discretionary Rate Relief Policy had worked well and those organisations entitled to relief had continued to benefit. However, experience had shown that there were some changes that could improve administration and transparency.

Councillors were asked to consider a revised Policy, as set out in Appendix A of the report.

The Benefits and Taxation Officer was asked if the three months Business Rate Relief for unoccupied shop premises could be extended in order to encourage landlords to let premises to businesses as well as charity shops. In response, the Benefits and Taxation Officer reported that the Council had no discretion in relation to premises valuations, as these were set by the Valuation Office Agency (VOA). Therefore, the three month exemption could not be extended unless the use of the premise changed and the premise was re-evaluated by the VOA.

The Committee also discussed the 80% Mandatory Relief available to charities.

RESOLVED:

- I. To approve the following changes to the Council's Discretionary Rate Relief Policy:**
 - **S44a relief (part occupation of premises) be added to the Policy; and**
 - **The award cap relating to rateable values be removed.**
- II. To recommend that the Executive consider charity shops' compliance with the Discretionary Rate Relief scheme.**

7. PR/15/6 – REVIEW OF THE LICENSING POLICY

Gillian Marshall, Solicitor to the Council presented a report that set out the scope and timetable for the review of the Licensing Policy.

The Committee queried the licensing responsibilities of alcohol wholesale and retail businesses.

The Solicitor to the Council was asked how the sale of alcohol to people under the age of 18 was monitored. In response, the Committee was advised that appropriate conditions, prohibiting the sale of alcohol to people under the age of 18 years old, were attached to any licence granted. As young people often looked older than their actual age, the Council encouraged licensees to adopt a 'Challenge 21' Policy in order to be certain that no sales of alcohol to people underage took place. The Solicitor to the Council explained that The Trading Standards Institute was responsible for enforcement and often carried out test purchase sales to monitor the sale of alcohol.

Councillors were advised that the Licensing Authority would work closely with all Responsible Authorities, particularly North Yorkshire Police, North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service and North Yorkshire Trading Standards to ensure the promotion of the Licensing Objectives.

RESOLVED:

- I. To note the proposals for the review of the Licensing Policy.**
- II. To include a section in the Policy on the licensing responsibilities of alcohol wholesale/retail businesses.**
- III. To include a section in the Policy regarding the Council's joint partnership working on enforcement to promote the Licensing Objectives.**

8. PR/15/7 - WELFARE REFORM – SIX MONTHS UPDATE

Glenn Shelley, Business Manager presented a report that provided a six month review detailing the impact of the Welfare Reform changes in Selby.

The Government was committed to reduce spending on working age benefits by £12 billion over the course of the new Parliament. Officers would monitor the situation closely, as it was expected to have a very noticeable impact on residents, tenants and Council services as a whole. There was not yet sufficient detail to model the impact with any degree of certainty.

Referring to the minutes of the previous meeting held on 16 June 2016, it was highlighted that it had been agreed that information in relation to the Council's approach to debt collection would be incorporated into the Welfare Reform report; however, it was noted that this information had not been provided in the report.

In relation to the tables presented in 2.1.4 and 2.1.5 of the report, showing the number of people affected by the Spare Room Deduction and rent arrears information, Councillors asked if historical data could be provided to allow the Committee to monitor any long term trends.

The Committee noted that under Universal Credit, all claimants would have their housing costs paid to them directly, rather than to the landlord, as at present. The Business Manager explained that this could potentially have a significant impact on the Council, because for the first time, a number of tenants would have discretion over when and if to pay their rent. Officers would monitor this closely and tenants would be offered any advice/support needed.

In addition, the Committee asked what impact the Government's recent announcements regarding the Living Wage would have on Selby residents. The Benefits and Taxation Officer explained that forecasting work would be carried out and information would be available to Councillors in the future.

In relation to Spare Room Deductions and how this affected parents that had joint custody of a child, the Benefits and Taxation Officer explained that a child was deemed to live at the address of the parent in receipt of Child Benefit. Therefore, any Spare Room Deduction would be applied to the parent not receiving Child Benefit.

In response to a query regarding what type of advice Community Officers were able to provide to Council tenants, the Business Manager explained that where necessary Community Officers visited tenants to help them with queries and to ensure they were receiving all the support available.

The Benefits and Taxation was asked how many residents paid Council Tax and how many residents were in receipt of Council Tax Benefit.

RESOLVED:

- I. To note the report.**
- II. To include the following information in the next Welfare Reform report:**
 - **The Council's approach to debt collection.**
 - **Forecast information regarding the impact of the Living Wage on Selby residents.**
 - **Historical data in relation to the number of people affected by the Spare Room Deduction and level of tenant rent arrears.**
 - **The number of residents that paid Council Tax and the number of residents in receipt of Council Tax Benefit.**

9. PR/15/8 - WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16

The Chair reported that he had received requests to include the following items on the Committee's Work Programme:

- Tenancy Fraud – to consider the Council's policies and procedures to prevent tenancy fraud.
- Taxi Driver Licensing – to look at how taxi driver licenses were granted and to consider if Councillors should receive a weekly list of the applications approved.

The Chair reported that he had spoken to the Solicitor to the Council regarding the Taxi Driver Licensing Policy and he had been reassured that the Policy had been reviewed last year and was considered to be working well. It was therefore felt that a further review at this time was unnecessary.

RESOLVED:

- I. To note the Work Programme 2015/16.**
- II. To add an item regarding tenancy fraud to the Work Programme for the meeting scheduled to be held on 19 January 2016.**
- III. Not to include an item regarding Taxi Driver Licensing Policy on the Work Programme 2015-16.**

The meeting closed at 5:52 p.m.