

MINUTES OF EXTRAORDINARY ASSEMBLY

Monday, 14 January 2013
(7:05 - 7:47 pm)

PRESENT

Councillor N S S Gill (Chair)
Councillor J Davis (Deputy Chair)

Councillor S Alasia	Councillor J L Alexander
Councillor S Ashraf	Councillor A Gafoor Aziz
Councillor G Barratt	Councillor S J Bremner
Councillor P Burgon	Councillor L Butt
Councillor E Carpenter	Councillor J Channer
Councillor J Clee	Councillor H J Collins
Councillor R Douglas	Councillor C Geddes
Councillor R Gill	Councillor D Hunt
Councillor M Hussain	Councillor A S Jamu
Councillor I S Jamu	Councillor E Kangethe
Councillor G Letchford	Councillor M A McCarthy
Councillor J E McDermott	Councillor M McKenzie MBE
Councillor D S Miles	Councillor M Mullane
Councillor J Ogungbose	Councillor T Perry
Councillor B Poulton	Councillor H S Rai
Councillor A K Ramsay	Councillor L A Reason
Councillor L Rice	Councillor D Rodwell
Councillor T Saeed	Councillor A Salam
Councillor L A Smith	Councillor S Tarry
Councillor D Twomey	Councillor G M Vincent
Councillor L R Waker	Councillor P T Waker
Councillor M M Worby	

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor E Keller	Councillor E O Obasohan
Councillor C Rice	Councillor J Wade
Councillor J R White	

62. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest

63. Localising Support for Council Tax In England - Final Scheme

The Assembly received a report supported by a presentation from the Divisional Director of Finance setting out proposals to establish a local Council Tax support scheme from April 2013, a requirement of the Local Government Finance Act 2012, brought about as a consequence of the abolition of Council tax benefit. In future Council Tax support will be centrally funded by a fixed grant based on prevailing expenditure levels, but reduced by 10% nationally, which for 2013/14

represents a shortfall to the Council of £2.3m. The Act also makes provision for local authorities to reform Council Tax on empty homes premiums allowing greater flexibility on the level of discounts and exemptions that can be applied, and in so doing allowing additional income to be raised to offset the 10% cut in funding.

The presentation outlined the range of options available to the Council to establish a scheme to fund the shortfall, taking into account the government stipulation that any scheme must fully protect pensioners in terms that their Council Tax Support should not be reduced. This principle did not apply to working age Council Tax Support recipients and a contribution could be sought from them towards their Council Tax liability.

In debate Members raised concerns that many residents were already struggling financially and that the Council Tax Support change was not a policy this Labour Council would have chosen to implement but one which is unavoidable, brought about by the Coalition Government. In concurring with Members' concerns, Councillor Smith, Leader of the Council referred to the fuel buyout scheme the Council is promoting to assist residents with their fuel bills, which demonstrates the positive ways in which the Council is helping its residents in these tough economic times.

Members debated using the government's additional grant funding for year one to set the percentage contribution from working age Council Tax Support recipients at 8.5% but concluded that this option was not viable as the grant was insufficient to establish an 8.5% contribution and would create a funding shortfall that would have to be met by making cuts elsewhere in the budget.

Having considered the options available as set out in the report, and taking into account that the Council has already carried out an extensive consultation with affected residents:

The Assembly **resolved** to:

- (i) implement option 2 as set out in the report, whereby a 15% contribution would be required from working age Council Tax Support claimants and that this should form the basis of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham Council Tax Support Scheme from 1 April 2013, and
- (ii) agree the changes to empty property exemptions as set out in the report, similarly to take effect from 1 April 2013.

64. Calculation and Setting of the Council Tax Base for 2013/14

The Assembly received a report supported by a presentation from the Divisional Director of Finance on the calculation of the Council Tax Base for 2013/14 and information on powers available to the Council to set locally determined discounts.

In debating the matter, Members noted that this was the fifth year running that Council Tax had been frozen and how important this support was to the residents of the borough.

The Assembly **agreed that:**

1. in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by the London Borough of Barking & Dagenham Council as its Tax Base for the year 2013-14 shall be 39,955.66 Band 'D' properties, following approval of the Council Tax Support Scheme and new rules on empty properties set out in the report entitled 'Localising Support for Council Tax in England – Final Scheme' and presented to Assembly on 14 January 2013;
2. discounts and exemptions applied in calculating the tax base as recommended in the report named above and those prescribed by statute;
3. no locally determined discounts based on categories of property or occupier be awarded for 2013-14. This is consistent with previous decisions of the Council; and
4. there should be no award of reductions for prompt payment during 2013-14. This is consistent with previous decisions of the Council.

65. Business Rates Income Forecast 2013/14

The Assembly received a report supported by a presentation from the Divisional Director of Finance, setting out details of the changes in the collection of business rates from 2013/14, brought about by the Local Government Finance Act 2012.

Members noted that as a result of these changes, the Department for Communities and Local Government require local authorities to submit their business rates income forecasts by way of a return entitled the National Non-Domestic Rates Return 1 form and that the forecast be formally approved by the Council.

Following debate, the Assembly **agreed** the Council's business rates income forecast for 2013/14 as set out in the National Non-Domestic Rates Return 1 form in Appendix A to the report.

The meeting closed at 7.47 pm.