

**COUNCIL BUSINESS  
COMMITTEE**

6.00 P.M.

10TH NOVEMBER 2011

**PRESENT:-** Councillors Richard Newman-Thompson (Chairman), Roger Mace (Vice-Chairman), Janet Hall, Sylvia Rogerson and David Whitaker

Apologies for Absence

June Ashworth

Officers in attendance:-

Debbie Chambers  
Adrian Robinson  
Jenny Kay

Democratic Support Manager  
Head of Revenues and Benefits  
Democratic Support Officer

**16 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting that took place on 15<sup>th</sup> September were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**17 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIRMAN**

The Chairman advised that he had agreed to an item of urgent business - Technical Reforms of Council Tax, Consultation Response. The reason for urgency was that the deadline for response to the consultation was before the next meeting of the committee.

**18 TECHNICAL REFORMS OF COUNCIL TAX, CONSULTATION RESPONSE.**

*(During the discussions on this item Councillor Mace declared a personal interest as the owner of a second home.)*

The Head of Revenues and Benefits presented a report which informed the Committee of a Government consultation on proposals to give billing authorities greater discretion over the reliefs from Council Tax available in respect of second homes and some empty properties together with other potential reforms to the council tax system.

Members were advised that the consultation detailed proposals to make changes to :

- Empty and Exempt Dwellings
- Second Homes
- Empty Homes Premium
- Statutory Instalment Scheme
- Information to be supplied with demand notices
- Solar panels on domestic properties
- Double taxation on annex properties

It was reported that currently there were 23 classes of exemptions for Council tax

relating to empty properties and the proposals focused on Class A (vacant dwellings where major works were being undertaken, Class C (empty properties substantially unfurnished) and Class L, (repossessed properties).

The main change was the proposal to remove the statutorily prescribed exemption periods and replace with discretionary categories giving billing authorities the power to charge between 0% and 100% from the date the property became empty.

A further proposal related to the requirement for financial information at annual billing time to be produced on the website and available in hard copy only to those requesting it. Members went on to discuss the proposals. It was suggested that the Council should continue to send the information out in Your District Matters, the Council's quarterly magazine. It was agreed that Officers would check whether this was planned for next year.

It was agreed that Officers would investigate how many households in the district had internet access and circulate this to the Committee.

With regard to the draft consultation response that had been prepared, it was agreed that any comments would be forwarded to the Head of Revenues and Benefits before 15<sup>th</sup> December in order to meet the response deadline of 29<sup>th</sup> December 2011.

***Resolved :***

- (1) That in view of timescales that do not match the committee's timetable, arrangements be put in place for Members to feedback any further comments by e-mail to the Head of Revenues and Benefits before 15<sup>th</sup> December 2011 in order to meet the consultation deadline of 29<sup>th</sup> December 2011.
- (2) That officers investigate how many households in the district have internet access and circulate this to the Committee.
- (3) That officers check with Community Engagement whether the budgetary information for 2012 council tax bills was to be included in Your District Matters, the Council's quarterly magazine.

**19 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

It was noted that Councillor Roger Mace had already declared a personal interest in respect of agenda item 17 as the owner of a second home.

**20 REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES – BOUNDARY COMMISSION CONSULTATION ON INITIAL PROPOSALS**

The Democratic Services Manager presented a report detailing a consultation on a review of Parliamentary Constituencies by the Boundary Commission.

Members were informed that the Boundary Commission for England was currently conducting a review to significantly reduce the number of constituencies in England which had been agreed by Parliament.

It was reported that the proposals would see Morecambe and Lunesdale constituency

increase to include 20 Lancaster district wards taking in Lower Lune Valley ward. The Lancaster and Fleetwood constituency would be replaced with a Lancaster constituency, which would comprise of the remaining 8 Lancaster district wards, 10 Wyre Borough wards, 2 rural Preston wards and 5 Ribble Valley Borough wards.

Concern was expressed over the number of local authority areas covered by the proposed Lancaster constituency. Members acknowledged that an election would be very challenging to administer if a constituency was made up of wards from 4 district councils.

Members considered the draft response that had been prepared.

***Resolved :***

That Council Business Committee endorse the draft response to the consultation on proposed Parliamentary Constituency boundaries for submission to the Boundary Commission for England, noting that the response focuses only upon the Council's administrative role in Parliamentary elections.

**21 APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES AND CHANGES TO MEMBERSHIP**

There were no appointments or changes to membership submitted.

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Chairman

(The meeting ended at 6.58 p.m.)

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact  
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or email [jkay@lancaster.gov.uk](mailto:jkay@lancaster.gov.uk)**