

Item No: 3.1.	Classification: Open	Date: 27 February 2013	Meeting Name: Council Assembly
Report title:		Setting the Council Tax 2013/14	
Wards or groups affected:		All	
From:		Strategic Director of Finance and Corporate Services	

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That council assembly note the Greater London Authority precept of £303.00 at Band D.
2. That the council tax for band D properties in Southwark be set at £1,215.14.
3. That no discount be applied to properties in the former parish of St Mary Newington.
4. That no discount be applied to properties in the former parish of St Saviours.
5. That the council tax for band D properties in Southwark be set for:

	Band D council tax £	Discount £	Net band D for the area £
the former parish of St Mary Newington	1,215.14	0	1,215.14
the former parish of St. Saviours	1,215.14	0	1,215.14
the remainder of the Borough	1,215.14	0	1,215.14

6. That the formal resolution for council taxes in 2013/14 (shown in Appendix A) be approved.
7. That the existing local 100% disregard scheme war disability and war widows/widowers pensions when calculating housing benefit should be continued in 2013/14.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

8. Under the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the council is required to determine the level of council taxes in the borough for 2013/14. This must be completed before 11 March 2013.
9. The 2011 Localism Act has made changes to the way that the budget is presented, so that instead of calculating a budget requirement, a council tax requirement is now required to be reported.
10. At the time of writing, the Greater London Authority intends to agree its precept on 25 February 2013. The estimated amount required from Southwark is £24.671 million - a demand on the band D council tax of £303.00. This is a 1.2%

reduction on the 2012/13 precept. Any changes to this will reported at this meeting.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

The council tax for Southwark services

11. The revenue budget for Southwark is £334.0m as shown in the Policy and Resources Strategy 2013/14-2015/16 report elsewhere on the agenda.
12. The total budget requirement is calculated after the contribution of £6.2m from reserves.
13. Southwark's council tax requirement for 2013/14 is then calculated as follows:

	£
Total Budget requirement	327,771,760
Less retained business rates	(57,175,620)
Less business rates top-up	(43,278,478)
Less revenue support grant	(152,150,265)
Less estimated 2012/13 collection fund deficit	(900,000)
Council tax requirement	<u>74,267,397</u>

14. The council tax requirement of £74,267,397 when divided by the 2013/14 taxbase for Southwark of 81,421.05, agreed by council assembly on 23 January 2013, gives a band D council tax requirement for Southwark services only of £912.14 for 2013/14. This is a nil increase to the 2012/13 council tax.
15. The council's total requirement, however has to include the amount required by the preceptor. The council has no control over the level of this precept.

Preceptor's requirements

16. The Greater London Authority consolidated budget is to be presented to the London Assembly on 25 February 2013. The estimated amount required from Southwark is £24.671million – a demand on the band D council tax of £303.00. This is a 1.2% reduction on the 2012/13 precept. If this changes at the meeting on 25 February, an addendum report will be tabled to this council assembly meeting.
17. The Mayor of London has committed to raise up to £625m from London Council taxpayers as a contribution to the 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games; the total precept contains £20 towards this contribution. The present forecast is that based on a continuing marginal increase in the council tax base, £625m would be raised by a Band D amount of £20 for 10 years to 2015/16, and approximately £8 in year 11 in 2016/17.

Council tax for Southwark in 2013/14

18. The council tax for a band D property is therefore:

Authority	Band D Tax 2012/13 £	Band D Tax 2013/14 £	Change %
Southwark	912.14	912.14	0.00%
Greater London Authority	306.72	303.00	(1.21%)
TOTAL BAND D TAX	1,218.86	1,215.14	(0.31%)

Full details of council taxes levels for all property bands are shown in Appendix A.

Differential council taxes

19. Under the council tax legislation, surpluses on special funds can be used to reduce the level of council taxes. This occurs in two areas of the borough.

The Former Parish of St. Mary Newington – Walworth Common Estate (subject to approval)

20. Due to the continuing low interest rates, there will be no balance available on this account at 31 March 2013 to reduce the level of council tax for this area. Therefore for 2013/14 council tax will be the standard £1,215.14 for a band D property in this area.

The Former Parish of St. Saviours – Borough Market

21. There has been no surplus declared by Borough Market, consequently there will be no balance available on this account at 31 March 2013 to reduce the level of council tax for this area. Therefore for 2013/14 council tax will be the standard £1,215.14 for a band D property in this area.

Housing benefit – Local scheme

22. For the purpose of calculating housing benefits, local authorities are allowed discretion in disregarding war disability pension and war widows' pensions above the fixed disregard required by law (currently £10.00).
23. The council's local schemes, like most schemes in London, currently disregards the whole of these pensions for the calculation of benefits. Benefit expenditure under the local schemes does not qualify for subsidy. There are currently some 24 people receiving the disregard at an estimated cost of £32,944. Housing benefit expenditure under the local scheme for 2013/14 attracts subsidy at 75% capped at 0.2% of the total benefit cost to the authority.
24. The council is required to disregard the first £10.00 of war disability pension and war widows' pensions, but can disregard the total pension. The level of pensions for 2013/14 will be £128.52 for standard war widows'/widowers' pensions and £170.08 for war disablement pensions. It is considered that the withdrawal of the local scheme focused on this small number of people would cause undue hardship, and it is therefore recommended that the full disregard of these pensions should continue in 2013/14. An amount of £8,236 to enable this has been allowed for in the 2013/14 budgets.

25. Universal Credit is an integrated working-age credit that will provide a basic allowance with additional elements for children, disability, housing and caring. It will support people both in and out of work, replacing Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit, Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance and income-related Employment and Support Allowance
26. As Housing Benefit will be replaced by Universal Credit, 2013/14 may be the last year in which this discretion around housing benefit may be exercised by the council. However, the war disability and war widows'/widowers' pensions are to be exempt from the cap on the maximum award of Universal Credit.

Community impact statement

27. The community impact implications of both the budget requirement and the increase in council tax levels are addressed in the Policy and Resources Strategy 2013/14-2015/16 – revenue budget elsewhere on this agenda.
28. It is considered that the withdrawal of the local scheme for disregarding war disability pension and war widows' pensions above the fixed disregard required by law would cause undue hardship for the small number of people affected.

Consultation

29. The council consults with relevant stakeholders with regard to the wider Policy and Resources Strategy process. The council has complied with the requirements of Section 65 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 by consulting with business rate payers on spending plans for the forthcoming year.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Director of Legal Services

30. Council assembly is being asked to agree the formal resolution setting the council tax for 2012/13, and approve the local scheme for housing benefit and council tax benefit in 2012/13 that must be approved annually. Local Government Finance Act 1992 s.30 (the LGFA 1992) requires that the Council Assembly sets an amount of council tax for each financial year and for each category of dwellings in its area. The amount is calculated by taking the aggregate of the calculations made by the authority under Sections 31A, 31B and 34 to 36 of the LGFA 1992 together with the precept issued to the authority by the Greater London Authority. Preceptors must issue their precepts before March 1 preceding the financial year to which they relate.
31. Once the authority has set the amount of council tax relating to the different geographical areas of the borough (under Section 30 LGFA 1992), the amounts for each valuation band are then calculated according to the ratios set out in Section 5 of the LGFA 1992. That council tax requirement (required by Sections 31A, 31B and 34 to 36 of the LGFA 1992) is also to be agreed by Council Assembly.
32. Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 requires the chief finance officer (Finance Director) to report to the authority when it is making the calculations required by sections 31A, 31B and 34 to 36 of the LGFA 1992 on (a) the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the calculations, and (b) the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves. That information is set out in

the Policy and Resources Strategy – 2012/13 Revenue Budget included elsewhere on this agenda.. The authority is required to have regard to the chief finance officer’s report when making the calculations.

Restrictions on Voting Under Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992

33. Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act applies at any time to a member of an authority, if at that time the member is due to pay council tax payments which have remained unpaid for at least two months.
34. The payments to which the section applies are any type of either sole or joint and several liability for council tax, and any failure to pay any agreed sum of council tax. Therefore members are advised that this section is likely to apply to them if they are currently two months in arrears of any amounts of council tax, even if they have made any special contractual arrangement with the council to pay off the arrears.
35. If this section applies to any member, he/she at the relevant meeting and as soon as practicable after its commencement, must disclose the fact that the section applies and not vote on any question with respect to this matter.
36. The relevant meetings are those at which any of the following are the subject of consideration, namely:

- (a) “any calculation required by chapter 111, 1V, V of part 1 of the 1992 Act”.

The only calculations likely to be made by this authority are those under chapter 111 of part 1 of the act, (chapter 1V relates to precepting and chapter V limitations on council tax (i.e. capping)

The chapter 111 calculations include the calculation of the budget requirement, basic amount of tax, the additional requirements because of the special trust funds, the calculation of the tax for the different valuation bands and the basic amount of council tax to be set under Section 30.

- (b) “Any recommendation, resolution or other decision which might affect the making of any such calculation”

This is an extremely wide wording and would extend well beyond merely setting the budget. It applies to virtually any matter where the financial implications directly or indirectly might affect the calculations concerning the council tax. It would therefore apply to decisions concerning the level or extent of services as well as the expenditure, receipt or forgoing of any money.

- (c) “the exercise of any function under Schedules 2-4 of the 1988 and 1992 Act”

The functions under either the 1988 or 1992 Acts concern the administration and the enforcement of community charge and council tax respectively.

37. Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 makes it a criminal offence for a member to vote when prohibited from doing so or to fail to make the necessary disclosure. There is a statutory defence, with the onus of proof on the member, to prove that he did not know that the section applied to him or her at

the time of the meeting or that the matter in question was the subject of consideration at the meeting. Prosecutions shall not be instituted except by or on behalf of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Housing & Council Tax Benefits - Local Schemes

38. Council assembly is also being asked to agree the continuation of the disregard of war disablement pensions and war widows' pensions for benefit purposes.
39. By virtue of Section 139 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 (as amended by the council tax legislation (the Local Government Finance Act 1992) the authority may modify any part of the housing tax benefit scheme administered by the authority (although the original scheme is determined by the Secretary of State),
- (i) So as to provide for disregarding, in determining a person's income the whole or part of any war disability pension or war widows' pension payable to that person or to his partner or to a person whom he is polygamously married.
 - (ii) Any such modifications may be adopted by resolution of the authority, and the authority may also by resolution revoke or vary such resolution to such an extent as it may be prescribed.
40. The council is required to make this decision annually.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Council Tax Base 2013/14. This document is available on this web page: http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/b50004438/Supplemental%20Agenda%20No.1%20-%20Council%20Tax%20Base%20201314%20Wednesday%2023-Jan-2013%2019.00%20Council%20Assembly.pdf?T=9	160 Tooley Street London SE1P 5LX	Norman Lockie 020 7525 0928
Policy and Resources Strategy 2013/14-2015/16 – revenue budget	160 Tooley Street London, SE1P 5LX	John Braggins 020 7525 7489

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix A	2013/14 Formal Resolution
Appendix B	2013/14 Council Tax - Changes From 2012/13

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Duncan Whitfield, Strategic Director of Finance and Corporate Services	
Report Author	Jennifer Seeley, Deputy Finance Director	
Version	Final	
Dated	14 February 2013	
Key Decision?	Yes	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments sought	Comments included
Director of Legal Services	Yes	Yes
Strategic Director of Finance and Corporate Services	Yes	Yes
Cabinet Member	Yes	No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	14 February 2013	