

Business Rates Consultation

1st February 2018

In attendance:

Representing Chesterfield Borough Council

Councillor Tricia Gilby, Leader of the Council

Huw Bowen, Chief Executive

Kevin Hanlon, Director of Finance and Resources

Carolyn Szadura, Revenues Manager

Joel Hammond-Gant, Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

Representing East Midlands Chamber of Commerce

Nick Chischnick

Representing Citizens Advice, Chesterfield

Julie Astell

Summary of the meeting

The Chief Executive welcomed to the meeting Nick Chischwick, representing the East Midlands Chamber of Commerce (CoC); and Julie Astell, representing Citizens Advice Chesterfield.

Prior to the meeting, the Revenues Manager had distributed information handouts detailing key information for non-domestic ratepayers for 2018/19. The document provided an overview of payment instalments, business rate multipliers, revaluation, transitional arrangements, as well as detailed information on different rate reliefs.

The Director of Finance and Resources began the meeting with a presentation summarising the background information on Business Rates and how the Council looks to support local businesses through a proactive approach to administering Business Rate reliefs.

Nick Chischwick asked what the proportion of businesses in Chesterfield that are in receipt of form of Business Rate relief is. The Revenues Manager noted that almost half of all businesses in Chesterfield are in receipt of some form of Business Rate relief. The Director of Finance and Resources added that the Council had administered all its planned

reliefs for 2017/18 by October 2017, which helped to support 48 pubs and 213 other businesses across the Borough.

It was advised that the Council was part of a successful bid submitted by a pool of authorities across Derbyshire to take part in a Business Rates Retention Pilot in 2018/19. Through the pilot scheme, the Council will be able to retain the growth on 100 per cent of Business Rates in 2018/19.

Nick Chischwick asked what methods of communication the Council uses to relay information and messages on Business Rate relief to businesses of different sizes across the Borough.

Huw Bowen advised that the Council tries to take a proactive approach in supporting businesses and raising awareness of the relief entitlements by advertising on the Council website, printing clear information on receipts issued in March, and by making direct contact with a new business moving into a premise.

Nick Chischwick informed that the CoC has over 4000 members comprising of local authorities, businesses, social enterprises and more, all of which they are able to support in different ways. It was advised that the CoC could support the Council in raising awareness on Business Rate relief entitlements and helping to reach a wider audience.

Huw Bowen and Councillor P Gilby stated that this support would be useful, in particular for helping to get relevant information to smaller businesses or those that may not receive notices from the Council via mainstream media.

Huw Bowen and Kevin Hanlon emphasised that the Council is striving to become self-financing by 2020, to ensure that high quality services can continue to be delivered despite growing resource pressure. A significant financial review is expected to be ongoing until 2019 to make certain that the Council can put a robust, sustainable and long-lasting financial strategy in place.

In addition, it was noted that the Council has put a greater emphasis on implementing a more commercial approach to providing and its services; part of the Council's vision to become self-financing.

Councillor P Gilby stated that the Council works hard to support its local businesses both through the administering of Business Rate reliefs and through the work carried out by its Councillors and Cabinet Member for Town Centres and Visitor Economy. Where possible, the Council will lobby and stress the need for a more progressive strategy to be put in place by central Government to ensure a fairer distribution of Business Rates across the country.

Huw Bowen discussed the work being undertaken by the Council to help to get more Chesterfield people skilled and into work. The Economic Growth service is carrying out significant work to improve the local skills base to ensure that they can take advantage of the new job opportunities that will be made available as part of larger, longer term economic development strategies such as Peak Gateway and HS2.

Nick Chischwick informed that the CoC could be supporting the Council on its economic growth and development strategies on a day-to-day basis, and encouraged the Economic Growth team to work more closely with them on a day-to-day basis to allow the CoC to support the policies and projects that the Council is undertaking.

Huw Bowen reported that the Council supports the local Chesterfield supply chain through 'meet the buyer' events, at which local suppliers are encouraged to attend and network and distribute business cards to local developers.

Julie Astell asked how the Council notifies local suppliers about these events. Huw Bowen advised that all usual media channels are used to raise awareness for these events.

Nick Chischwick stated that the CoC would be able to support awareness raising for these events through its sector-specific forum meetings. This would help to relay information to sectors that are traditionally more difficult to contact, for example, manufacturing and engineering.

Nick Chischwick asked if Town Centre Forum meetings still take place, and what the membership/attendance at meetings is. Huw Bowen informed that they are still in operation and that more information on future meetings would be shared outside of the meeting. Councillor Gilby advised that the membership is fairly open for the meetings although mainly retailers attend.

