

Business Rates Consultation

Wednesday 28 January, 2015

In attendance

Representing Chesterfield Borough Council:

Cllr John Burrows, Leader of the Council and Exec Member for Regen
Huw Bowen, Chief Executive
Barry Dawson, Head of Finance
Martin Elliott, Committee and Scrutiny Coordinator
Steve Lomas, Business Rates Officer
Carolyn Szadura, Principle Revenues Officer

Representing the East Midlands Chamber of Commerce:

Andy Watterson

Summary of the meeting

The Chief Executive welcomed Andy Watterson, representing the East Midlands Chamber of Commerce to the meeting and outlined the process of the Business Rates Consultation process. The Chief Executive advised that Community Assembly members had been consulted regarding the setting of Council Tax and that by consulting with Business Rates payers, their views and comments can be fed into the process Business Rates setting.

The Head of Finance provided an overview of the Council's Budget situation and of the pressures on the budget including the reduction in the amount of the government grant received and the uncertainty regarding the cost of backdated Business Rates appeals. He advised that current budget forecasting was showing increasing budget deficits in future years, but Chesterfield Borough Council was addressing these with Great Place, Great Service programme.

The Head of Finance also explained that while Chesterfield Borough Council collects £14 million in Business Rates revenue only around £3 million is retained after tariffs have been applied. He also went through how the upcoming introduction of a Business Rates Pool for Derbyshire would increase the amount of Business Rates revenue retained by the Council.

The Chief Executive advised that Chesterfield Borough Council is focussed on the regeneration and economic development of the

borough and helping business to grow, and how being part D2N2 LEP, Sheffield City Region Combined Authority and the proposed Derby and Derbyshire Combined Authority provides a benefit to the Chesterfield economy.

Andy Watterson advised that Chamber of Commerce members were happy to pay their Business Rates, but were keen to see that the money was being spent wisely and that the local business community was being served well by Chesterfield Borough Council and its policies.

The Chief Executive noted that there is a need to inform the local business community more about the actual amount of the Business Rates income that is retained by the Council, and that much of the income raised goes elsewhere. The Leader and Executive Member for Regeneration agreed with this and that he would like Chesterfield Borough Council to retain more of the Business Rates income. In response to a question from Andy Watterson, the Head of Finance advised that Business Rates Pooling would increase the amount of Business Rates income retained and that it would benefit all member authorities.

The Principle Revenues Officer provided a summary of Business Rates collection topics including multipliers, payment schedules, transitional arrangements, SBRR and revaluation. It was also noted that the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in the last Autumn Statement that a full review of Business Rates would take place, and will report before the 2016 Budget.

Andy Watterson asked if local businesses and suppliers were favoured when the Council tenders for services. The Leader and the Chief Executive advised that Chesterfield Borough Council aims to use local suppliers where possible and that conditions are attached to planning decisions regarding the use of local labour, such as had been done in regard to the building of the new Queen's Park Sport Centre. The Leader advised that as budget pressures increase tough decisions will need to be made in the type and level of services that the Council will be able to provide, and that new ways of generating income will need to be looked at.

Andy Watterson of the East Midlands Chamber of Commerce thanked the Leader, Chief Executive and Officers for providing the update and for consulting the business community. The Leader advised that the local business community were welcome to come and talk to the Council at any time.