

ROSC – Scrutiny sub-committee

16 November 2016

In Attendance:

A Chesterman
G Michaelides
N Pace

S Hulks
K Ng
T Neill
F Cantel

Apologies were received from S Roberts.

FC had provided answers to the questions put forward at the last meeting and also commented on some of the issues that might arise if a decision was made to adopt another method of debt collection. A copy of his paper is attached (Appendix I).

FC commented that it was difficult to obtain information from the Enforcement Agents. They provided records to show an amount of income, but this would not be split by year.

Members were advised that current year debts were treated as priority with arrears secondary as sometimes clients would find it difficult to pay both current and arrears at the same time.

FC said that the comparison between Welwyn Hatfield and Luton was difficult as they were very different areas with different levels of debt and arrears. For example, Luton had a gross council tax bill of £21.8m compared to Welwyn Hatfield's £4.7m and the arrears were a lot higher than expected. This obviously meant that there was potential for a lot of easy income for Luton.

Arrears can go back to 1993 and it was thought that Luton may not have collected a lot of their arrears previously which gave them a good target to aim for. Also, liability orders can still be chased for six years.

GM commented that, based on the evidence and additional figures provided, it appeared that there would be little benefit in adopting the Luton system.

It was acknowledged that there needed to be rules and principles in place but there should also be consideration of an individual's problems.

Members were advised that the Enforcement companies now had welfare teams whose job it was to speak to debtors and to try to work with them to reach an acceptable outcome.

FC commented that, should Welwyn Hatfield adopt the Luton method of additional phone calls to debtors, this would result in a delay in collection and might result in a higher risk of the person disappearing.

It was also acknowledged that Clive Jones had presented the information to the sub-committee as a way of promoting the work they did and bidding for Welwyn Hatfield's business.

FC agreed to provide details of the number of clients who had debts below £100 who had been referred to enforcement.

Members discussed the information provided from officers, Luton and Sopra Steria and they compared the level of debt and the numbers between Welwyn Hatfield and Luton and they felt that, whilst the Luton system was extremely good, it was possibly not the best fit for this council.

It was agreed that FC would provide the additional information as requested and Members would ask any additional questions that they had. SH would amend the draft report to reflect the latest thoughts and comments and this would be circulated. At which time, it would be decided whether an additional meeting was required.