

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL
CABINET – 7 MARCH 2017
REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (RESOURCES, ENVIRONMENT AND
CULTURE)

BUSINESS RATES – LOCAL NEWSPAPER RELIEF

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 On 16 March 2016 the Chancellor announced at the Budget that the Government will introduce a £1,500 business rates discount for office space occupied by local newspapers, up to a maximum of one discount per local newspaper title.
- 1.2 This relief will be introduced from 1 April 2017 for a 2 year period under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and we will have discretionary powers to grant relief in prescribed circumstances.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 Cabinet agrees to adopt a policy to award £1,500 business rates discretionary rate relief to qualifying local newspapers that apply for the relief, for each of the next two financial years, based in the Welwyn Hatfield borough, under section 47(3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

3 Explanation

- 3.1 Rate relief for local newspapers will be introduced from 1 April 2017 for a 2 year period. The relief is seen as a temporary measure to support local newspapers through technology changes and is only applicable for the financial years 2017/18 and 2018/19. The level of relief available is £1,500 for office space occupied by local newspapers, up to a maximum of one discount per local newspaper title and per property, and up to state aid limits.
- 3.2 This relief is seen as a temporary measure to support local newspapers, given the numerous challenges faced by the industry with regard to the steady migration of services from print to digital. This relief will be delivered through local authority discretionary discount powers and is only available for two years to avoid dependency and administrative burdens on councils.
- 3.3 A written application will be required before relief can be awarded. The only local newspaper currently based in our borough is the Welwyn Hatfield Times, trading as Archant Community Media, based at Campus West. Their rates payable for the 2017/18 year will be £2,962.08, prior to the award of this relief.

Implications

4 Legal Implication(s)

- 4.1 Section 47 of the LGFA 1988 permits the billing authority to grant discretionary rate relief. This was amended by the Localism Act 2011 section 69 from 1 April 2012 which removed the previous restrictions of discretionary relief to only apply to charities and other organisations of prescribed types.

5 Financial Implication(s)

- 5.1 The cost of awarding relief to local newspapers in the borough will be £1,500 per annum for the next two financial years. Under the rates retention scheme Central Government have said the Authority will be fully reimbursed for any relief we grant to eligible properties.

6 Risk Management Implications

- 6.1 A risk assessment has not been prepared in relation to the proposal in this report as there are no significant risks inherent in the proposals.

7 Security & Terrorism Implication(s)

- 7.1 There are no security and terrorism implications with the recommendation in this report.

8 Procurement Implication(s)

- 8.1 There are none.

9 Climate Change Implication(s)

- 9.1 The proposals in this report will not impact on greenhouse gas emissions.

10 Link to Corporate Priorities

- 10.1 The subject of this report is linked to the Council's Corporate Priority: Engage with our communities and provide value for money.

11 Equality and Diversity

- 11.1 An initial impact assessment on awarding discretionary rate relief to local newspapers has been carried out and there were not any differential impacts identified.

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Title
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