

Appendix B – Proposed Response to the Consultation

Question 1: What other, additional grants, beyond those set out in para 2.2.2, could the Government consider including in the multi-year offer?

We would urge the Government to consider including the Fire Revenue Grant within the multi-year offer. This grants represents a significant percentage of funding, especially for smaller fire and rescue authorities. Longer-term certainty would further aid planning and improve decision making.

Question 2: Do you agree with the proposed methodology for allocating funding for the improved Better Care Fund as outlined in paragraph 2.3.4?

No comment.

Question 3: Do you agree with the council tax referendum principles for 2017-18 proposed in paragraphs 3.2.1 to 3.2.2 for principal local authorities?

The Authority does not agree with the principles proposed for principal local authorities. The current principles allow for all shire districts and lower quartile Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) to raise council tax by up to £5. As noted on page 13 of the Consultation, the lowest charging district council for 2016/17 has a band D equivalent precept of £75.46. This is 26% higher than the band D equivalent for Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority (BMKFA), which is currently only £59.70.

The Police and Crime Bill will place a statutory duty on fire and rescue authorities to collaborate with police. Whilst this should lead to longer term savings, there will inevitably be significant up-front costs. As the Consultation stands, lower quartile PCCs could cover these costs by increasing council tax above the 2% limit, but this same freedom does not currently extend to fire and rescue authorities, which seems inequitable.

BMKFA has shown considerable restraint with regards to council tax. When lower quartile fire and rescue authorities were given the freedom to increase council tax by up to £5 in 2013/14, BMKFA was the only authority not to take up that option and instead chose to freeze council tax. BMKFA also took the decision to reduce council tax by 1% in 2015/16.

In the spending review in 2015, Greg Clark MP said "This is an historic settlement for local government. It makes local councils fully responsible to local people for their financing – rather than central government – something that local government has been campaigning for over a number of decades." This freedom appears to have been extended to shire districts, PCCs and authorities with responsibility for adult social care. However, fire and rescue authorities still appear to be restricted in their ability to raise council tax locally. Referendums are prohibitively costly for combined fire and rescue authorities due to the area covered.

We therefore ask the Government to consider an addition to the final settlement, that states 'fire and rescue authorities in the lowest quartile will be allowed increases of less than 2% or up to and including £5, whichever is higher'.

Question 4: Do you agree that referendum principles should be extended to larger, higher-spending town and parish councils in 2017/18 as set out in paragraphs 3.3.3 to 3.3.4?

No comment.

Question 5: Do you agree with the proposed approach to take account of the transfer of responsibilities to town and parish councils as outlined in paragraph 3.3.5?

No comment.

Question 6: Do you have any comments on the suggestion that referendum principles may be extended to all local precepting authorities as set out in paragraph 3.3.6? If so what level of principle should be set?

No comment.

Question 7: Do you have views on the practical implications of a possible extension of referendum principles to all local precepting authorities as set out in paragraph 3.3.7?

No comment.

Question 8: Do you agree with the methodology for calculating the revaluation adjustment to business rates tariff and top-up payments as outlined in paragraphs 3.4.1 to 3.4.8?

No comment.

Question 9: Do you agree that the methodology, as outlined in paragraphs 3.5.5 to 3.5.13, for calculating changes to the local share of business rates and tariff and top up payments is correct and does not adversely affect non-pilot areas?

No comment.

Question 10: Are you contemplating a voluntary transfer of funding between the Combined Authority and constituent authorities?

No comment.

Question 11: Do you have any comments on the impact of the proposals for the 2017-18 settlement outlined in this consultation document on persons who share a protected characteristic? Please provide evidence to support your comments.

No comment.