

Executive – 6 September 2007

WRITE-OFF REPORT

Report of the Head of Financial Services

Statutory powers: Section 151 Local Government Act 1972
Section 44 Local Government Finance Act 1988 –
(Non Domestic Rate)
Section 14 Local Government Finance Act 1992 –
(Council Tax)

Financial implications: Debts totalling £67,892.27 to be written-off.

Purpose:

The Housing Advice, Benefits & Council Tax Service is responsible for the collection of Sundry Debts including Housing Benefit Overpayments, Rents, Council Tax and Non - Domestic Rates.

The report informs members of the individual debts for all revenue streams, up to the value of £3,000, written off by the Head of Finance under delegated authority; and for those debts in excess of £3,000 for which permission to write off is sought.

The Council's sound financial management arrangements underpin delivery of all the Councils priorities, including the commitment to providing value for money services. This report forms part of the formal debt write-off procedures included in these financial arrangements.

Members have requested that this information be presented in a composite report rather than for each individual revenue stream.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

- 1. notes that, in accordance with Financial Regulations, the Head of Financial Services has authorised the write-off of individual debts totalling £34,529.85 (as detailed in Table 1);**
- 2. considers the write off of individual debts in excess of £3,000 (as detailed in Table 2).**

(THIS REPORT COVERS THE PERIOD 1.4.07 - 30.6.07)

The issues

1. In accordance with good financial management principles the Council has, for the revenue streams detailed in this report, made a total bad debt provision of £1,000,000. This provision recognises that a proportion of the authority's debts will

prove irrecoverable and ensures that the value of debtors within the authority's accounts is a fair reflection of the amount that will eventually be recovered.

2. All debts, taxes and rates within the Service's control are actively pursued, and in most instances are collected with little difficulty. Sometimes, however, officers find themselves in the position where special arrangements are needed to effect recovery, and this may mean extending the period of time to collect the debt or ultimately instigating enforcement proceedings to secure payment.
3. In some cases further pursuit of the debt is not possible for a variety of reasons, such as bankruptcy or liquidation and such cases with arrears under £3,000 are written off by the Head of Finance under delegated authority.
4. Cases where the debt exceeds £3,000 must, however, be approved by Executive prior to the debt being written off.
5. Members are reminded that a record is kept of debts written off, together with the reason for doing so, so that if there is a realistic chance of recovery in the future a debt may be resurrected and pursued again.

Risk Assessment

Risk	Mitigation
Financial risk	The obvious risk of debtors subsequently being able to pay a debt which has been written off is mitigated by the activity outlined in 5. Any individual debt exceeding £3,000 is referred to members for consideration prior to write-off which accords with Financial regulations.
Impact on Reputation	Any risk to reputation is managed carefully by prompt recovery of amounts due wherever possible, but this risk is also mitigated by taking a balanced view and ensuring that resources are not expended on debts which are not cost effective to pursue.

Conclusion

We would wish to reassure Members that every effort is made to collect all debt owing to the Council, and that the decision to write off any amount is not taken lightly.

Tracy Winser
Head of Customer Services

John Foxworthy
Head of Finance

Executive
6 September 2007

TABLE 1**SUMMARY OF CASES UNDER £3000 WRITTEN OFF BY THE HEAD OF FINANCE**

TYPE OF DEBT	NUMBER OF CASES	REASON FOR W/OFF	TOTAL
HOUSING BENEFIT	22	Official Error	£8694.31
	4	Not cost effective to pursue	£72.93
	3	Absconded	£2848.89
	1	Deceased	£313.50
	30		£11929.63
NON DOMESTIC RATE	1	Absconded	£75.88
	2	Liquidation	£1052.43
	2	Other	£2920.02
	5		£4048.33
COUNCIL TAX	9	Absconded	£2329.16
	9	Bankruptcy	£4682.49
	3	Deceased	£2947.17
	4	Other	£3553.14
	18	Small balance	£51.73
	43		£13563.69
SUNDRY DEBTS	3	Absconded	£1306.47
	5	Bankruptcy	£1828.97
	5	Other	£1852.76
	13		£4988.20
TOTAL	91		£34529.85

TABLE 2**SUMMARY OF CASES OVER £3000 WHERE PERMISSION TO WRITE OFF IS REQUESTED**

TYPE OF DEBT	NUMBER OF CASES	REASON FOR W/OFF	TOTAL
NON DOMESTIC RATE	2	Bankruptcy	£13402.04
	2	Liquidation	£19960.38
TOTAL	4		£33362.42