

Report to: **Hub Committee**
Date: **22nd September 2015**
Title: **Write Off Report**
Portfolio Area: **Health & Wellbeing – Cllr L Samuel**
Wards Affected: **All**
Relevant Scrutiny Committee: Internal O&S

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

Author: **Lisa Buckle** Role: **Section 151 Officer**

Contact: **Ext. 1413 lisa.buckle@swdevon.gov.uk**

Recommendations:

The Committee notes that, in accordance with Financial Regulations, the s151 Officer has authorised the write-off of individual West Devon Borough Council debts totalling £65,532.49 as detailed in Tables 1 and 2.

The Committee approves the write off of individual debts in excess of £5,000 totalling £25,244.26 as detailed in Table 3.

1. Executive summary

The Council is responsible for the collection of: Sundry Debts including Housing Benefit Overpayments, Council Tax and National Non-Domestic Rates.

The report informs members of the debt written off for these revenue streams. Debts up to the value of £5,000 being written off by the s151 Officer, under delegated authority. Permission needs to be sought from the Committee to write off individual debts with a value of more than £5,000.

This report covers the period 1st April 2015 to 30th June 2015.

2. Background

The Council's sound financial management arrangements underpin delivery of all the Council's 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.

West Devon Borough Council's collection rates for 2014/15 were; Council Tax 97.6% & Business Rates 98.3%.

In the first quarter of 2015/16 the Council has collected £10,011,345 in Council Tax and £3,398,390 in Business Rates. The total collectable debt for 2015/16 (as at 30th June) for Council Tax is £33.9 million and for Business Rates is £10.9 million.

Debts are recovered in accordance with the Council's Recovery Policy which is published on our website.

3. Outcomes/outputs

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 £1,591,449. 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.

All debts, taxes and rates within the Service's control are actively pursued, and in most instances are collected with little difficulty. In cases where payment is not received on time, a reminder will be issued promptly to the debtor. If this fails to secure payment, a final reminder and/or a summons will also be issued and if necessary the debt passed to an appropriate collection agent such as the Civil Enforcement Agents or the Council's Legal Department in order to secure payment.

Sometimes, however, if the debtor is having difficulty making the payment, special arrangements are used to effect recovery, and this may mean extending the period of time to collect the debt.

In some cases pursuit of an outstanding debt is not possible for a variety of reasons, such as bankruptcy or liquidation and such cases with arrears under £5,000 are written off by the Section 151 Officer under delegated authority. Cases where the debt exceeds £5,000 must, however, be approved by the Committee prior to the debt being written off.

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.

The Service has access to Experian’s Citizenview database which is currently the most reliable means of tracing absconded debtors. Each case is checked against this system before a decision is taken to write off the debt. A periodic review of write offs against this system may also be carried out to resurrect debts where appropriate.

4. Proposed Way Forward

The Committee approves the write off of individual debts in excess of £5,000 totalling £25,244.26 as detailed in Table 3.

5. Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance	Y	The relevant powers for this report are contained within the following legislation; 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	Y	West Devon Borough Council debts totalling £90,776.75 to be written-off
Risk	Reputation Write Off	Any risk to reputation is managed carefully by prompt recovery of amounts due wherever possible. 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 The obvious risk of debtors subsequently being able to pay a debt which has been written off is mitigated by the activity outlined in issues for consideration. Any individual debt exceeding £5,000 is referred to members for consideration prior to write-off which accords with Financial regulations.

Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity		All enforcement action that is taken prior to this point is undertaken in accordance with legislation and accepted procedures to ensure no discrimination takes place.
Safeguarding		None
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder		None
Health, Safety and Wellbeing		None
Other implications		A bad debt provision is built into the financial management of the Authority

Supporting Information

Appendices:

Table 1 – Council debt under £5,000 written off by the Section 151 Officer

Table 2 – Non-Domestic Rate debt under £5,000 written off by the Section 151 Officer

Table 3 – Summary of items over £5,000 where permission to write off is requested

Table 4 – National & Local Collection Statistics re 2014 / 15 Collection Rates

Table 5 – Quarterly income in 2014 / 15 relating to all years

Table 6 – Previous Year Write Off Totals

Background Papers:

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)

Recovery Policy

Approval and clearance of report

Process checklist	Completed
Portfolio Holder briefed	Yes
SLT Rep briefed	Yes
Relevant Exec Director sign off (draft)	Yes
Data protection issues considered	Yes
If exempt information, public (part 1) report also drafted. (Committee/Scrutiny)	Yes

TABLE 1 SUMMARY OF WEST DEVON BOROUGH COUNCIL DEBT UNDER £5,000 WRITTEN OFF BY S151 OFFICER

TYPE OF DEBT	NUMBER OF CASES	REASON FOR W/OFF	Financial Year 2015/16			Totals for Comparison purposes			
			Quarter 1	Cumulative Total		Equivalent Quarter 2014/15		Grand Total 2014/15	
			Amount (£)	Cases	Amount	Cases	Amount	Cases	Amount
HOUSING BENEFIT	34	Overpaid Entitlement	14,329.49	34	14,329.49	12	8,241.99	107	47,706.29
COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT	-	Bankruptcy/DRO/IVA/CVA etc	-	-	-	2	3,067.36	5	6,617.23
	-	Deceased	-	-	-	-	-	1	755.04
	-	Other	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	4	Absconded	3,459.91	4	3,459.91	2	1,766.56	14	15,213.17
	5	Not Cost Effective to Pursue	8.27	5	8.27	1	1.00	27	2,263.49
	6	Uncollectable Old Debt	5,210.62	6	5,210.62	6	915.54	10	4,922.65
Total	49		23,008.29	49	23,008.29	23	13,992.45	164	77,477.87
COUNCIL TAX	26	Absconded	18,206.99	26	18,206.99	28	2,649.52	70	19,555.90
	12	Bankruptcy/DRO/IVA/CVA etc	16,801.93	12	16,801.93	17	15,686.17	36	33,436.79
	2	Deceased	3,029.31	2	3,029.31	2	92.76	11	2,725.90
	2	Other	1,943.44	2	1,943.44	5	1,688.08	11	3,414.68
	4	Small Balance	143.06	4	143.06	51	1,218.10	198	7,030.35
	-	Uncollectable Old Debt	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	-	Administration	-	-	-	1	1,108.21	1	1,108.21
Total	46		40,124.73	46	40,124.73	104	22,442.84	327	67,271.83
SUNDRY DEBTS	1	Small Balance	0.15	1	0.15	-	-	5	80.49
	-	Bankrupt/DRO/IVA/CVA etc	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	1	Not Cost Effective to Pursue	60.00	1	60.00	-	-	2	191.98
	-	Uncollectable Old Debt	-	-	-	-	-	1	435.00
	-	Absconded	-	-	-	-	-	1	180.00
	-	Other	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	2		60.15	2	60.15	-	-	9	887.47
Grand Total	97		63,193.17	97	63,193.17	127	36,435.29	500	145,637.17

**Breakdown of Absconded Council Tax Debt
(Some cases have debts over more than one year)**

Year	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10	2008/09	2007/08	2006/07	2005/06	Pre 2005/06	Total
Value	8.42	602.54	1,585.98	3,246.31	4,973.05	2,811.19	3,068.50	1,503.70	407.30	-	-	18,206.99
Number	1	4	4	10	10	7	5	2	1	-	-	44

TABLE 2 SUMMARY OF NON DOMESTIC RATE DEBT UNDER £5,000 WRITTEN OFF BY THE S151 OFFICER

TYPE OF DEBT	NUMBER OF CASES	REASON FOR W/OFF	Financial Year 2015/16			Totals for Comparison purposes			
			Quarter 1		Cumulative Total	Equivalent Quarter 2014/15		Grand Total 2014/15	
			Amount (£)	Cases	Amount	Cases	Amount	Cases	Amount
NON-DOMESTIC RATE	1	Bankruptcy/DRO/IVA/CVA etc	1,582.78	1	1,582.78	1	282.83	1	282.83
	-	Absconded	-	-	-	1	464.29	1	464.29
	-	Deceased	-	-	-	1	3,003.89	3	3,629.93
	-	Liquidation	-	-	-	3	1,189.26	5	6,472.58
	1	Other	756.54	1	756.54	1	502.00	4	1,925.76
	-	Small Balance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	-	Uncollectable Old Debt	-	-	-	-	-	2	1,009.40
	-	Administrative Receivership	-	-	-	2	1,168.00	4	3,914.33
Total	2		2,339.32	2	2,339.32	9	6,610.27	20	17,699.12

TABLE 3 SUMMARY OF ITEMS OVER £5000 WHERE PERMISSION TO WRITE OFF IS REQUESTED

TYPE OF DEBT	NUMBER OF CASES	REASON FOR W/OFF	Financial Year 2015/16			Totals for Comparison purposes			
			Quarter 1		Cumulative Total	Equivalent Quarter 2014/15		Grand Total 2014/15	
			Amount (£)	Cases	Amount	Cases	Amount	Cases	Amount
NON-DOMESTIC RATE	1	Liquidation	9,559.16	1	9,559.16	1	18,128.27	1	18,128.27
	-	Administrative Receivership	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	-	Absconded	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	-	Bankruptcy/DRO/IVA/CVA etc	-	-	-	3	31,346.48	4	46,810.48
	-	Deceased	-	-	-	1	15,851.37	1	15,851.37
	-	Other	-	-	-	-	-	1	8,715.95
Total	1		9,559.16	1	9,559.16	5	65,326.12	7	89,506.07
HOUSING BENEFIT	1	Bankruptcy/DRO/IVA/CVA etc	5,898.04	1	5,898.04	-	-	-	19,443.12
	1	Overpaid Entitlement	9,787.06	1	9,787.06	-	-	-	6,045.46
Total	2		15,685.10	2	15,685.10	-	-	-	25,488.58
COUNCIL TAX	-	Bankruptcy/DRO/IVA etc.	-	-	-	1	5,265.60	-	-
	-	Absconded	-	-	-	-	-	1	5,265.60
Total	-		-	-	-	1	5,265.60	1	5,265.60
Grand Total	3		25,244.26	3	25,244.26	6	70,591.72	10	120,260.25

TABLE 4 NATIONAL & LOCAL COLLECTION STATISTICS RE 2014-15 COLLECTION RATES

	Council Tax			Non Domestic Rates		
	Collectable Debit i.r.o. 14/15 - £000s	Net Cash Collected* i.r.o. 14/15 - £000s	Amount Collected i.r.o. 14/15 - %age	Collectable Debit i.r.o. 14/15 - £000s	Net Cash Collected* i.r.o. 14/15 - £000s	Amount Collected i.r.o. 14/15 - %age
All England	24,793,215	24,052,365	97.0	23,510,378	23,066,362	98.1
Shire Districts	11,352,031	11,116,705	97.9	7,583,172	7,459,915	98.4
East Devon	85,274	84,274	98.8	32,297	31,805	98.5
Exeter	53,152	50,708	95.4	78,004	77,030	98.8
Mid Devon	43,470	42,492	97.8	15,179	15,023	99.0
North Devon	50,667	49,170	97.1	31,940	31,280	97.9
Plymouth	104,466	100,423	96.1	90,908	88,999	97.9
South Hams	58,325	57,352	98.3	29,491	29,082	98.6
Teignbridge	72,698	71,511	98.4	31,560	31,296	99.2
Torbay	65,837	62,871	95.5	37,440	35,772	95.5
Torrige	35,102	34,489	98.3	10,745	10,571	98.4
West Devon	32,794	32,008	97.6	10,658	10,481	98.3

* Net Cash Collected is total 2014-15 receipts net of refunds paid, in respect of 2014-15 only

TABLE 5 QUARTERLY INCOME IN 2014-15 RELATING TO ALL YEARS

	Council Tax Net Cash Collected* £000s	Non Domestic Rates Net Cash Collected* £000s
Quarter 1 - Receipts collected between April 2014 - June 2014	9,788	3,591
Quarter 2 - Receipts collected between July 2014 - September 2014	9,102	2,772
Quarter 3 - Receipts collected between October 2014 - December 2014	9,232	2,710
Quarter 4 - Receipts collected between January 2015 - March 2015	4,272	1,331

* Net Cash Collected is total receipts in 2014-15 net of refunds paid, irrespective of the financial year (previous, current or future years) to which they relate

TABLE 6 PREVIOUS YEAR WRITE OFF TOTALS

		2014 - 15	2013- 14	2012 - 13	2011 - 12
HOUSING BENEFIT	Under £5,000 cases	77,477.87	48,315.96	47,636.80	21,103.31
HOUSING BENEFIT	£5,000 or over cases	25,488.58	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total		102,966.45	48,315.96	47,636.80	21,103.31
COUNCIL TAX	Under £5,000 cases	67,271.83	33,385.96	199,475.48	133,748.27
COUNCIL TAX	£5,000 or over cases	5,265.60	15,940.10	25,924.46	5,658.27
Total		72,537.43	49,326.06	225,399.94	139,406.54
SUNDRY DEBTS	Under £5,000 cases	887.47	818.09	4,449.99	5,719.72
SUNDRY DEBTS	£5,000 or over cases	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total		887.47	818.09	4,449.99	5,719.72
NON DOMESTIC RATES	Under £5,000 cases	17,699.12	35,095.48	18,780.31	32,463.90
NON DOMESTIC RATES	£5,000 or over cases	89,506.07	38,882.41	26,680.71	55,949.62
Total		107,205.19	73,977.89	45,461.02	88,413.52
GRAND TOTAL		283,596.54	172,438.00	322,947.75	254,643.09