

Item 18:

Motions submitted for debate at the Council meeting on 17 March 2022

- (a) The following Motion has been submitted in the name of Councillor David Marsh:

Fair Taxation

This Council notes that:

- 1. The pressure on organisations to pay their fair share of tax has never been stronger.*
- 2. Polling from the Institute for Business Ethics finds that corporate tax avoidance is the number one concern of the British public when it comes to business conduct.*
- 3. Two thirds of people believe the Government and local councils should at least consider a company's ethics and how they pay their tax, as well as value for money and quality of service provided, when awarding contracts to companies.*
- 4. Around 17.5% of public contracts in the UK have been won by companies with links to tax havens.*
- 5. It has been estimated that losses from multinational profit-shifting (just one form of tax avoidance) could be costing the UK £17bn a year in lost corporation tax revenues.*
- 6. The Fair Tax Mark offers a means for business to demonstrate good tax conduct, and has been secured by a wide range of businesses across the UK, including FTSE-listed PLCs, co-operatives, social enterprises and large private businesses.*

Council believes that:

- 1. Paying tax is often presented as a burden, but it shouldn't be.*
- 2. Tax enables us to provide services from education, health and social care, to flood defence, roads, policing and defence. It also helps to counter financial inequalities and rebalance distorted economies.*
- 3. As recipients of significant public funding, local authorities should take the lead in the promotion of exemplary tax conduct; be that by ensuring contractors are paying their proper share of tax, or by refusing to go along with offshore tax dodging when buying land and property.*
- 4. Where councils hold substantive stakes in private enterprises, influence should be wielded to ensure that such businesses are exemplars of tax transparency and tax avoidance is shunned.*
- 5. More action is needed, however, as current and proposed new UK procurement law significantly restricts councils' ability to either penalise poor tax conduct (as exclusion grounds are rarely triggered) or reward good tax conduct, when buying goods or services.*
- 6. Local authorities can and should stand up for responsible tax conduct, doing what they can within existing frameworks and pledging to do more given the opportunity, as active supporters of international tax justice.*

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Council therefore resolves to:

1. *Approve the Councils for Fair Tax Declaration.*
2. *Lead by example and demonstrate good practice in our tax conduct, right across our activities.*
3. *Ensure IR35 is implemented robustly and contract workers pay a fair share of employment taxes.*
4. *Not use offshore vehicles for the purchase of land and property, especially where this leads to reduced payments of stamp duty.*
5. *Undertake due diligence to ensure that not-for-profit structures are not being used inappropriately by suppliers as an artificial device to reduce the payment of tax and business rates.*
6. *Demand clarity on the ultimate beneficial ownership of suppliers UK and overseas and their consolidated profit & loss position, given lack of clarity could be strong indicators of poor financial probity and weak financial standing.*
7. *Promote Fair Tax Mark certification especially for any business in which we have a significant stake and where corporation tax is due.*
8. *Support Fair Tax Week events in this area, and celebrate the tax contribution made by responsible businesses proud to promote responsible tax conduct and pay their fair share of corporation tax.*
9. *Support calls for urgent reform of UK procurement law to enable local authorities to better penalise poor tax conduct and reward good tax conduct through their procurement policies.*

(b) The following Motion has been submitted in the name of Councillor Steve Masters:

Government proposal on asylum seekers to Rwanda

“This Council is concerned that the Government plans to send asylum seekers to Rwanda.”

Council notes:

West Berkshire has a creditable record when it comes to welcoming refugees from across the globe – from as far back as the Ugandan expulsions and families fleeing the Balkan conflict, as well as Syrians, Hong Kong residents and Afghan nationals in recent years.

The outpouring of support and compassion from the people of West Berkshire for individuals and families displaced by the war in Ukraine.

West Berkshire draws huge strength from the contribution of migrants and refugees who make the district their home. This council works with the migrant and refugee support networks and other partners in the sector and should be proud of what is being done.

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The main concerns are:

People who cross the Channel seeking refuge and asylum will be taken to an RAF base in Yorkshire before being sent 4,500 miles away to Rwanda for "processing"; and

Offshoring asylum processing for those who have fled war, violence, famine and persecution is inhumane and cruel. This plan violates the principle of the UN Refugee Convention, of which the UK was a founding signatory, which states that we must "grant people a fair hearing on UK soil".

Council therefore resolves:

To write to the Government to request an end to the proposed offshoring of people seeking refuge and to demand an end to the deal with Rwanda.

To offer support where we can to ensure that all refugees are treated with dignity and given the opportunity to make a positive contribution to the economy and cultural life of West Berkshire.