

REPORT OF CABINET

(Meeting held on 7 November 2018)

1. CIVIL ON STREET PARKING ENFORCEMENT AND TRANSPORTATION - AGENCY AGREEMENTS (MINUTE NO 44)

The Cabinet has rejected proposals from the County Council for revised agency agreements for on-street parking enforcement and traffic management. The new agreements would have applied from April 2020.

The County Council has reviewed the operation of their on-street parking arrangements as part of their programme to achieve savings and, following discussions with officers in the Borough and District Councils in Hampshire, proposed revised terms for the operation of the on-street parking enforcement agency with effect from 31 March 2020. In addition, in future, the Council would only be able to operate a traffic management agency if they also undertook the on-street parking function.

Details of the current arrangements and also the proposed terms of the new agency agreements are set out in Section 2 of Report item 4 to the Cabinet. The Cabinet has concluded that the proposed terms would place an undue level of risk on this Council arising from factors that would be outside this Council's control. Members are also concerned about the effect of the County Council's proposals on the cost and viability of small scale residents' parking schemes, such as those operating in this District. The current residents' schemes will cease and residents will face a significant increase in cost to secure an equivalent arrangement.

Members consider that the proposed arrangements are disappointing in the light of the success of the current arrangements, which have operated since 2002.

The 1.6 FTE staff allocated to the traffic management function will be entitled to TUPE transfer to the County Council should this Council cease to operate the agency. It is however anticipated that the 5.3 FTE reduction in the number of staff needed for parking enforcement will not be covered by TUPE and this Council will have to pay any costs associated with redundancy.

2. STRATEGIC FIRE SAFETY REVIEW (MINUTE NO 45)

The Cabinet has approved changes to the Council's existing fire safety policies to ensure that they remain robust to protect residents, staff and visitors to the Council's buildings. The new proposed overarching Strategic Fire Safety Policy is set out in Appendix 1 to Report Item 5 to the Cabinet. Detailed policies for the Council's buildings will be prepared in accordance with this strategic approach and will be approved by the relevant portfolio holder by March 2019.

As part of this first stage in the process an additional resource of £60,000 has been approved for use in Housing to allow the implementation of the improvements that are set out in Section 4 of Report item 5 to the Cabinet. Housing is the highest priority as, with people living and sleeping in the buildings, there is the greatest vulnerability.

3. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2019/20 (MINUTE NO. 46)

Insofar as it is empowered by law, the Cabinet has approved the recommendations of the Council Tax Reduction Task and Finish Group for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme to apply from 1 April 2019. The Task and Finish Group had considered a limited range of amendments to the current scheme, which is designed to assist vulnerable persons of working age in the District. The options are set out in Section 5 of Report Item 6 to the Cabinet. The necessary consultation exercise has been undertaken on the proposal that the main scheme should remain unaltered, but a de minimis rule should be introduced under which any change in entitlement of less than £1 per week should in future be disregarded. At present 30% of variations are under £1, but require a disproportionate administrative burden to implement. A saving of £10,000 per annum is expected. Only a limited number of responses had been received to the consultation, but these were supportive.

RECOMMENDED:

That, in so far as it is empowered to do so by law, the Council agrees that the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme with effect from 1 April 2019 be amended as set out in Option E in paragraph 5.1 of Report Item 6 to the Cabinet to introduce a de minimis rule to disregard changes of less than £1 per week.

4. COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNTS AND EXEMPTIONS, VOLUNTARY PAYMENT AND RELATED POLICIES (MINUTE NO. 47)

Insofar as it empowered to do so by law, the Cabinet has approved the recommendations of the Council Tax Reduction Task and Finish Group with respect to various council tax exemptions and discounts. They also considered the introduction of an empty homes premium and also a Voluntary Payment Scheme for Band H properties.

The current council tax discounts are set out in Section 2 of Report Item 7 to the Cabinet. The proposed changes, and the Task and Finish Group's conclusions on them, are set out in Section 3 of the Report.

The Cabinet agreed that, in line with Government aspirations to bring empty homes back into use, a premium payment should be introduced, initially at 50% from 1 April 2019, with the potential to increase the premium, after a review, to 100% from 1 April 2020. It is recognised that the property's owner can avoid the premium by partly furnishing the property and declaring it as a second home. The premium does however make a statement about the importance of homes being used.

The Cabinet is also sympathetic to the objective of providing support to persons leaving the care system, the Children's Society having recommended that such young adults should be exempt from council tax payments up to the age of 21. However, the Council's existing Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Exceptional Hardship Policy already provide a greater level of assistance, should the young person be in need.

Insofar as it is empowered to by law the Cabinet has also approved two policy documents that bring together the Council's existing policies into a National Non-

Domestic Rate Relief Policy and a Fair Collection and Debt Recovery Policy as attached as Appendices 1 and 2 respectively to Report item 7 to the Cabinet.

The Cabinet concurred with the Task and Finish Group that the introduction of a voluntary additional payments scheme in respect of Band H properties was not a viable option. The return was likely to be small in comparison to the additional administrative costs, and such a scheme could deter alternative charitable donations.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) ***That, insofar as it is entitled to do so by law, the Council approve the discretionary discounts to and premiums on council tax as set out in options A to E in paragraph 3 of Report Item 7 to the Cabinet;***
- (b) ***That, insofar as it is entitled to do so by law, the Council approve the Local Non-Domestic Rate Relief Policy, and the Fair Collection and Debt Recovery Policy, attached as Appendices 1 and 2 to Report item 7 to the Cabinet.***

5. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2018 ONWARDS (MINUTE NO. 48)

The Cabinet has been updated on the latest projections for the Council's financial position for the period to 2022/23.

Prior to the Chancellor's Autumn Statement, the Prime Minister had already made 2 key announcements that affected the Council's finances, removing the borrowing cap on local authority Housing Revenue Accounts and suggesting that times of austerity were over. The Autumn Statement had not however included any measures that would assist District Councils.

The provisional financial settlement for 2019/20 should be announced on 6 December 2018. The Medium Term Plan currently makes the assumption that negative support grant of £612,000 will apply in 2019/20, but it is hoped that the Treasury will respond to the pressure from local government to improve this position. Together with the provisional financial settlement the Council should also hear if the bid for the Hampshire Wide Business Rates pilot has been successful. Any benefits arising from the success of that bid will be included in the next Medium Term Plan.

The 3 yearly actuarial review of the Hampshire Pension Fund will take place in 2019/20. For the period 2017/18 - 2020/21 the Council's employee contributions are increasing by 1% per annum. Current financial indications suggest that future increases will not be necessary, or at least of a much lesser degree.

Since August the budget deficit position for 2019/20 has been reduced to £109,000, as set out in Table 2 to Report item 8 to the Cabinet. The projected budget shortfall over the period to 2022/23 has also improved, having been reduced from £1.35 million to £1.136 million. It is proposed to further eliminate this budget gap through savings from the review of the delivery of Leisure and the generation of additional commercial and residential property income. Any shortfall will be met from reserves, to maintain flexibility to develop further plans. Further details are set out in Appendix 1 to Report Item 8 to the Cabinet.

Members have also been updated on the ICT investment and asset maintenance and replacement programmes. The Cabinet has approved the overall asset management and replacement programme budget, in advance of consideration of the full programme by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel, to allow initial preparatory works to begin. The parameters of the bids under this programme have been set in the context of a £1.7 million fund being available, which is a reduction of £300,000 on the 2018/19 budget.

Members have also been updated on the projected use of General Fund reserves in 2018/19. The reserves will support the capital and asset maintenance and replacement programmes.

The annual review of the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan will be considered by the Cabinet in February 2019.

**COUNCILLOR B RICKMAN
CHAIRMAN**