

REPORT OF CABINET

[\(Meeting held on 16 February 2022\)](#)

1. REPORT ON PROPOSED CLIMATE CHANGE AND NATURE EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN AND THE ROLE THE COUNCIL WILL PLAY GOING FORWARD (MINUTE NO 64)

The Cabinet, having endorsed the strategic actions of the Council's emerging Climate Change and Nature Emergency Strategy, is recommending the endorsement of proposed governance arrangements.

Following the Cabinet and Council's declaration of a Climate Change and Nature Emergency in October 2021, work has been ongoing to develop an action plan, placing climate and nature at the heart of all activities across the Council. The Cabinet has considered the resources needed to develop and deliver the strategy, including the ongoing updates and monitoring necessary to deliver the ambitions.

The Action Plan, which can be viewed in full as part of Cabinet Report 4 of the Cabinet Agenda, places the current and planned initiatives into the following seven themes:-

- Nature
- Travel and Transport
- Housing
- Waste and Sustainable Resources
- Energy
- Health
- Organisational

The Council will need to continue to ensure that reducing green house gas emissions and increasing climate resilience of its own assets and the wider district area is central to the work of the organisation and embedded within the delivery of key objectives in all services.

While the Council has a long track record of undertaking measures to reduce its environmental impact, as illustrated in the October 2021 report to Cabinet, the Climate Change & Nature Emergency Strategy and Action Plan sets a strategic framework for further measures and ensures that the 'golden strand' of sustainability set out within the Corporate Plan is delivered.

The 2050 net zero commitment is shared by all the main political parties in the United Kingdom. The Council will now need to focus on what is right for the UK, the New Forest and in accordance with the emerging Government position with regard to climate, nature and sustainability.

RECOMMENDED:

That the governance arrangements outlined in the Cabinet Report be endorsed, with relevant issues being addressed through each Overview and Scrutiny Panel and the establishment of a cross-cutting officer board to oversee delivery.

2. MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES – SCHEME TO APPLY FROM 1 APRIL 2022 AND INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL (IRP) (MINUTE NO 65)

The Cabinet is recommending to Council the adoption of a scheme of Members' Allowances for 2022/23, alongside the arrangements for two reviews of the scheme during 2022/23 and from 2024 onwards. The Cabinet is also recommending that a pay

award is implemented for councillors in line with the current offer of 1.75%, should no agreement be reached with the National Joint Council before the end of the financial year.

No other changes to the scheme are proposed. Indeed, no changes are possible without a recommendation from the Independent Remuneration Panel.

Due to significant changes over recent years and future structural changes in the make-up of the Council as it reduces to 48 members from May 2023, it is felt appropriate to take the opportunity to refresh the Independent Remuneration Panel.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) That the current scheme of members' allowances be made as the scheme to apply from 1 April 2022;***
- (b) That the Independent Remuneration Panel as outlined at paragraph 5 of the Cabinet report, be appointed for a four year period commencing 1 March 2022;***
- (c) That the Panel's terms of reference be agreed as set out in Appendix 1 of the Cabinet report; and***
- (d) That the current offer of 1.75% (which has already been implemented for staff this year) be applied to members' allowances for 2021/22, before the end of this financial year, should no agreement be reached with the National Joint Council (NJC).***

3. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT AND HOUSING PUBLIC SECTOR CAPITAL EXPENDITURE PROGRAMME 2022/23 (MINUTE NO 66)

The Cabinet, having approved the proposed planned maintenance and improvement works programme for 2022/23 – 2024/25 is recommending the Housing Revenue Account Budget to Council.

The proposed budgets for 2022/23 were considered by the Tenant Involvement Group on 20 January 2022 and by the Housing and Homelessness Overview & Scrutiny Panel on 19 January 2022. Their comments are set out in Sections 12 and 13 of the Cabinet report.

Housing Authorities and Registered Providers face on-going challenges to maintain the continuation of high-quality services to their tenants, ensuring that buildings are safe and free from hazards and gearing up to deliver greater energy efficiency measures in the retrofitting of their stock, as well as delivering more affordable homes.

Tenants, too, are facing challenges over rises in the cost of living and increases in energy bills. The proposal to increase rents in line with the Government's current recommendation is considered to strike the right balance to ensure that the Council continues to provide high quality services to tenants and that the necessary programmes of maintenance and repairs to council housing stock are undertaken, as well as delivering new affordable council homes for the District.

Despite these challenges, including against a backdrop of rising prices, the Cabinet is pleased to note that the tenant representatives have stated that the recommendations contained in the Cabinet report are fair and the rent levels represent good value for money, with resources reasonably allocated.

Cabinet also welcome the proposed additional resource for greater engagement with tenants.

Cabinet would like to take this opportunity to encourage any tenants who are suffering financial hardship to come forward to the Council, as there is a comprehensive suite of support measures that can be considered and offered where appropriate.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) That the HRA budget, as set out in Appendix 1 of the Cabinet report, be agreed;**
- (b) That from 03 April 2022, an increase in rents of 4.1% from the 2021/22 weekly rent level, in accordance with Government guidelines, be agreed;**
- (c) That from 03 April 2022, an increase in service charges of 3.1% from the 2021/22 weekly service charge level, be agreed; and**
- (d) That a Housing Capital Programme to 2024/25, as set out in Appendix 4 of the Cabinet report, be agreed.**

4. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN AND ANNUAL BUDGET 2022/23 (MINUTE NO 67)

The Cabinet, having considered the development of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) is recommending General Revenue and Capital Budgets for 2022/23, alongside the Band D Council Tax.

The MTFP sets out the Council's forecast for the period up to 2025/26 and continues to show a deficit of £1.895m, although the Cabinet remain confident that this will be addressed over the period. Against that backdrop the Government settlement for 2022/23 is again a single year settlement adding to longer term uncertainty.

The Levelling up White Paper, released on 2 February, makes it even more likely that ministers will be restarting the local government funding reforms in Spring of 2022. This means that the Fair Funding review and so Business Rate Reset will be under consideration again, with the potential to impact on 2023/24. The Council has protected itself against any immediate financial challenge that might come about as a result, through the inception and accumulation of a Budget Equalisation Reserve. It is business rate growth of c£2m as included within the Council's MTFP each year until the start of 2025/26 that is most at risk in any revised finance settlement formulae. Transitional funding is expected, but quantum and longevity are yet to be determined.

Within the MTFP, the positive financial returns associated with the Council's commercial strategy are noted, which are in addition to the overriding principles of fostering economic activity within the District.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) That there is a General Fund Net Budget Requirement in 2022/23 of £20,674,420, as set out in Appendices 5a - d of the Cabinet report;**
- (b) That the budget is set in accordance with the fees and charges as agreed by the Portfolio Holders and published in the lead up to the final budget approval and adoption;**
- (c) That the New Forest District Council Band D Council Tax for 2022/23 shall be £188.36;**

- (d) That the General Fund Capital Programme for 2022/23 of £17.174m, as set out in Appendix 6 of the Cabinet report be approved;***
- (e) That the Section 151 Officer and Chief Executive, working in consultation with the Leader and appropriate Portfolio Holder (depending on the nature of the item), have delegated approval to allocate budget from the 'Corporate Plan Delivery' funds made available within this budget to Services to achieve the objectives as laid out within this report; and***
- (f) That the site licence fees and service charges at Stillwater Park be increased by 4.9% in line with RPI inflation.***

**COUNCILLOR E HERON
CHAIRMAN**