

REPORT OF CABINET

(Meeting held on 5 July 2017)

1. NEW HOUSING FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE POLICY (DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS) (MINUTE 5)

The Cabinet has approved amendments to the Housing Financial Assistance Policy for disabled adaptations through Disabled Facilities Grants and for essential repairs for vulnerable home owners through Home Repair Loans. Additional funding is now available through the County Council's Better Care Fund as well as through this Council's Housing Revenue Account for disabled adaptations.

Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants are available to assist disabled adults and children to adapt their homes to increase their independence. These grants are available regardless of the tenure of the property. For adults the grants are means tested, but for children they are not. Over recent years this had been an increasing area of work, reflecting the local demographics. While the works that can be carried out to qualify for a mandatory grant are specifically defined in the legislation, there is scope for local authorities to offer discretionary grants, although to date money has not been available for this purpose. The Council has also had a limited budget for Home Repair Loans to vulnerable owner occupiers. These are discretionary, means tested, loans. They are interest free, but are recovered in full when the property is sold.

The Better Care Fund now allows greater discretion for local authorities to assist disabled residents to improve their health and wellbeing and to remain living independently in their communities. The funding is allocated to the County Council, and this Council's continued receipt of these funds is dependent on service delivery. A range of discretionary assistance will be offered in future and the proposed amendments to the Policy should allow this Council to make better use of the funding available to assist disabled and vulnerable residents. There will also be some work to promote greater awareness of the availability of this help.

A Surveyor's post, at 0.5 Full Time Equivalent, will be made permanent and in addition an occupational therapist will be employed, via a third party, on a case by case basis to assist with service delivery. At present there is a delay of up to 4 months, at the start of the process, waiting for assessment by an occupational therapist.

The changes to the policy are supported by Social Services and this Council's Tenant Involvement Group.

2. DIBDEN GOLF CENTRE

The Cabinet has adopted the recommendations of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel, which had appointed a Task and Finish Group to review the performance of Mytime Active at the end of the first 5 years of the 30 year contract to run Dibden Golf Centre. The Task and Finish Group had undertaken extensive research, including visiting the Golf Centre and meeting with representatives of the users; as well as with Mytime Active. Proposals for the rent to be charged for the next 5 years of the contract had also been developed and submitted to Mytime Active for consideration, and formed part of the Group's recommendations to the Panel.

The Group had been concerned that the investment programme for the first 5 years of the contract had not been fulfilled, having been underfunded by £211,300, and a number of repairs, for example to the fencing and road surfacing, were outstanding. Since the Group's visit to the site repairs have been carried out, and assurances have been received that there will be £558,800 investment in the Golf Centre over the next five years.

The Cabinet concur with the recommendation that, in future, there should be a more pro-active relationship between this Council and Mytime Active to monitor performance. The officers and the Chairman of the Task and Finish Group (Cllr W Andrews) will meet with Mytime Active on a quarterly basis, with the meeting being with the full Task and Finish Group every six months. The Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel will review performance on an annual basis. In addition, the officers will attend future user group meetings to assist and promote communications between them and Mytime Active.

The agreed rental for Dibden Golf Course has been fixed at £152,471 per annum from 27 April 2017 for the next five year period of the contract. It has also been agreed that the Council will not claim back the National Non Domestic Rate entitlement of £4,000 per year for 2017/18. This will be reviewed in future years, particularly should the golfing income increase by more than £10,000 in any one year.

3. ANNUAL PERFORMANCE AND PROVISIONAL OUTTURN REPORT 2016/17 (MINUTE 7)

The Cabinet has reviewed the Council's performance against the delivery of "Our corporate plan" over the last 12 months, as set out in Appendix 1 to Report Item 6 to the Cabinet, and also the provisional financial outturn position for the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and Capital Programme for 2016/17, as set out in Appendix 3 to the Report. The key delivery actions for 2017/18 have also been updated, and are set out in in Appendix 2 to Report Item 6 to the Cabinet.

The provisional outturn for the General Fund for the year shows an overall saving of £3.084 million against a budget of £17,192 million, with significant savings and rephasings also being made against the Capital Programme and the Housing Revenue Account.

Much of the focus for 2016/17 was on the achievement of the service reviews and key activities contained within the delivery plan, while maintaining frontline service delivery in support of the visions and priorities of the corporate plan.

4. RINGWOOD PROJECT (MINUTE 8)

The Cabinet has authorised the Section 151 Officer to approve an additional spend of £162,300 on this project. The proposed improvements to the gym and spin studio at the Ringwood Health and Leisure Centre have had to be amended to be compliant with planning permission and building regulations. In particular, an additional, internal, safe escape route in the event of fire now has to be provided. This has increased the cost of the project, as established through the procurement process, by £162,300. Time is critical in implementing this project to avoid loss of income and potential disruption to Ringwood School, which is a major user of the centre.

The Cabinet has welcomed this investment in Ringwood Health and Leisure Centre, which, over recent years, has not received the same level of investment as the Council's other centres. It is anticipated that this will assist the centre to operate more effectively in the locally competitive market, achieving additional income as well as providing a better service for local residents.

5. TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL OUTTURN REPORT (MINUTE 9)

The Cabinet received the annual report on the Council's treasury management strategy. This Council's treasury management function is now managed by the County Council's Investments and Borrowing Team, which allows access to a wider range of investment opportunities.

The report sets out the external and internal contexts within which the Council's borrowing and investment strategies are operating.

The Council's investment strategy reflects changes in the risk of unsecured bank and building society deposits and had sought to achieve an appropriate balance between risk and return. The Council's treasury advisers, Arlingclose, continue to provide support and advice, monitoring performance with respect to the Council's investment objectives.

It has been confirmed that the Council complied with its Prudential Indicators for 2016/17.

RECOMMENDED:

That the revised prudential indicators for 2017/18-2018/19, set out in Appendix 1 to report Item 8 to the Cabinet, be approved.

6. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2017 ONWARDS (MINUTE 10)

The Cabinet has been updated on revisions to the Medium Term Financial Plan which reflect a number of significant changes to the financial context since February, when this issue was last considered (minute 57 refers). Of particular note is that the Bill to reform local government funding, including the 100% retention of business rates, is now effectively suspended, with no plans for its introduction. The overall "Fair Funding" review will continue, but the Department of Communities and Local Government is reconsidering the issue of 100% retention. The Council's budgets will need to evolve as the Fair Funding review takes shape. To date the budget reflects good performance in the Business Rate Collection Fund with a surplus equivalent to £373,000. For the future, the budgets will need to reflect the loss of Revenue Support Grant by 2019/20 and the likely loss of New Homes Bonus as a reliable funding stream, and which will probably cease entirely by 2021/22.

The report to the Cabinet sets out progress against the budget stabilisation strategy and forecast budget deficit. In addition, five key action points have been identified for the period to 2022. These are:

1.	Aligning resources to the Council's corporate plan and essential services
2.	Continuation of partnering and collaboration with others to reduce costs and transform service delivery
3.	Continuing on our path to act more business-like with targeted additional income generation
4.	Aiming to maximise income from local government finance reform
5.	Encouraging channel shift and the use of digital interaction, transforming our approach to customer services

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) That the revised Medium Term Financial Plan, as outlined within Report Item 9 to the Cabinet and its Appendix 1, be adopted;**
- (b) That the reporting timeline set out in section 6 of Report Item 9 to the Cabinet be agreed; and**
- (c) That consideration of the Council's organisational business model and plans for options to support the Medium Term Financial Plan, as set out in Report Item 9 to the Cabinet, be progressed.**

**COUNCILLOR B RICKMAN
CHAIRMAN**