

REPORT OF CABINET

(Meeting held on 4 October 2017)

1. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (MINUTE 32)

The Cabinet have been updated on developments within the Medium Term Financial Plan for 2017 onwards.

At the national level, although the Queen's Speech in the summer did not mention the future of local government finance, the Fair Funding Review is continuing and, through a number of factors, has the potential to generate significant change to the funding received from Government. In addition, the outcome of the 2018 pay claim is yet to be determined. The Government also maintains its commitment to balancing the budget by 2025, which the Institute for Fiscal Studies concludes will require further significant cuts in real public service spending per person. The proportion of the forthcoming cuts to be met by local government is currently unknown.

The Medium Term Financial Plan has been developed on the assumption of a further £1.776m reduction in funding by 2022 compared to 2017/18, but there is still considerable uncertainty. The Government's ethos that local taxes should pay for local services will shift future increases towards Council Tax, and the Medium Term Plan assumes an increase of £5 per annum per Band D property, which will have a significant cumulative effect on local Council Taxpayers in the longer term.

The further assumptions that have been incorporated into the Medium Term Plan are set out in Section 5 of Report Item 4 to the Cabinet, with the anticipated financial position summarised as Appendix 1 to the report.

The Council's developing Business Model, as set out in Section 6 of Report Item 4 to the Cabinet, focusses on aligning the services being provided with the Corporate Plan, a wider consideration of the best operational delivery model, maximisation of income and a move towards more efficient methods of customer interaction. Members have welcomed the intention to adopt a widely-based approach to closing the anticipated budget gap. The Council has a long history of working successfully with partner organisations and these relationships will be further strengthened in the future.

A draft resource plan has been developed for each portfolio, as attached as Appendices 2-7 of Report Item 4 to the Cabinet. These draft plans will be reviewed by the Budget Task and Finish Group and their recommendations will be reported to the Cabinet in due course.

The 2018/19 programme for asset maintenance and replacement is still under development, within a defined budget of £2.3 million, and will be subject to review by the Executive Management Team and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel. This will include year 1 of a 2 year ICT investment programme focussing on frontline service delivery.

RECOMMENDED:

That the actions and development of the plans for options to support the Medium Term Financial Plan, as set out in Report Item 4 to the Cabinet, be supported, to include a budgeted sum of up to £250,000 to be made available to drive forward the operational business model set out in Section 6 of the Report, designed to achieve the required savings.

2. NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATES POLICIES (MINUTE 33)

The Cabinet has adopted policies for rate relief for public houses and for supporting small businesses. The Government has issued Guidance, which was attached as Appendix A to Report Item 5 to the Cabinet, on three rate relief schemes to support businesses following the recent revaluation of rateable values. The 3 rate reliefs available are for public houses; small businesses and a discretionary relief scheme. The schemes for public houses and small businesses are relatively well defined and will support 120 public houses and 50 small businesses locally. The discretionary rate relief scheme has Government funding for 4 years. There is also Guidance on this scheme, but it is for billing authorities to decide on their own schemes. The local scheme will be considered by the Council Tax Reduction Task and Finish Group, which will make recommendations. Members have welcomed the support which is being given to local businesses, recognising the importance of local public houses to their local communities, and also the significant role that small businesses play in the local economy.

3. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME EXCEPTIONAL HARDSHIP PAYMENTS POLICY (MINUTE 34)

The Cabinet has adopted an Exceptional Payments Policy to assist residents who have applied for and are entitled to Council Tax Reduction, and who are experiencing exceptional financial hardship. Exceptional hardship payments are designed to provide short term assistance and all applicants will be expected to engage with the Council and take positive steps to help themselves.

The policy has been considered by and endorsed by the Council Tax Reduction Scheme Task and Finish Group.

Members have welcomed this new policy and consider that it is essential that the Council offers a safety net to meet the needs of the most vulnerable local residents. They also welcomed the flexible approach that was proposed.

4. DRAFT HOUSING STRATEGY (MINUTE 35)

The Cabinet has approved the overall approach and consultation arrangements for production of a housing strategy to cover the period 2018 – 2023. The draft housing strategy was attached as Appendix 1 to Report Item 7 to the Cabinet and the housing strategy delivery action plan as Appendix 2 to that report. The proposed consultation arrangements were set out in Appendix 3.

As the strategy is still in an early stage of preparation, any significant initiatives affecting housing, and in particular affordable housing, that come forward can be incorporated. This includes any initiatives that may arise from the Prime Minister's speech to the Conservative Party Conference on 4 October.

The housing strategy will influence and support the future planning and delivery of housing within the District, to facilitate a thriving housing market and address local housing needs. Delivery of a range of affordable housing choices can be achieved by the inclusion of appropriate policies in the Local Plan, which is currently under review. In addition it is suggested that the Council's new-build programme for council homes will continue to be a feature of the new housing strategy. The strategy will also seek to address the issue of affordability and, in line with the National Planning Policy Framework, lower cost home ownership and shared ownership options will be explored to provide a stepping stone between renting and moving into home

ownership. Research commissioned locally has established that starter homes in this District are relatively unaffordable, requiring an annual income in excess of £42,000 per annum.

All members of the Council are encouraged to respond to this consultation, at this early stage in the process, so that they may inform and influence the final document.

**COUNCILLOR B RICKMAN
CHAIRMAN**