

Finance and Assets Policy Development Advisory Group
13 JANUARY 2020

Present: Councillors: Ray Dawe (Chairman), Matthew Allen, Tony Bevis,
Paul Clarke, Brian Donnelly, Richard Landeryou, Gordon Lindsay and
Stuart Ritchie

Apologies: Councillors: Frances Haigh
Absent: Councillors: Nigel Jupp

13 **NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The notes of the meeting held on 4 November 2019 were received.

14 **COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME (CTRS)**

The LGSS Revenues & Benefits Operations Manager gave a presentation to the Group on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, which was a locally administered means-tested scheme that provided financial support for people on low incomes.

A report recommending that the scheme remains unchanged for 2020/21 would be considered by Cabinet on 23 January and, if agreed, taken to the Council meeting on 12 February.

The anticipated adverse impact of Universal Credit on the ability of those on the scheme to make regular council tax payments had not materialised. The Group were also advised that the current scheme achieved a good balance between contributions and recovery costs. The CTRS would continue to be reviewed on an annual basis.

The Group agreed that the scheme should remain unchanged.

The Head of Finance confirmed that central government had gradually withdrawn its funding of the CTRS. The Operations Manager agreed to advise the Group of the annual cost of the scheme to the Council.

The Operations Manager also briefed the Group on a proposal from the Environmental Health department to increase the premium on council tax charged to owners of properties left unoccupied for over five years. This would be administered by Revenues & Benefits and apply to approximately 60 properties in the district.

The Cabinet Member asked for further information to demonstrate how effective the strategy was in returning properties to occupancy. The Operations Manager agreed to supply further information to the Group.

15 **BUDGET 2020/21**

The Head of Finance gave a presentation on the Budget for 2020/21. This was based on revenue assumptions, income and savings and included a £826,000 surplus. This surplus would contribute towards savings in future years up to 2023/24 when the budget was less certain and additional savings and income generation would be required.

The presentation also highlighted some risks, including financial uncertainties relating to government funding. The Group noted the expected reduction in Business Rates baseline funding from the government, and the loss of recycling credits from West Sussex County Council. Bids for new capital schemes and changes to previously approved schemes and their impact on the capital budget for 2020/21 were also noted.

The Group were supportive of the proposed budget, which would be presented to the Cabinet meeting on 23 January along with the Medium Term Financial Strategy, which had been considered by the PDAG at a previous meeting.

The Cabinet Member reminded the Group that a quarterly financial performance report was available to all Councillors as part of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee agenda.

16 **EXTENDING ULTRAFAST BROADBAND PUBLIC CONNECTIVITY**

Director of Corporate Resources gave a presentation to the Group about expanding the fibre network the Council uses in Horsham. This would build on the existing full fibre provision of the public service sites owned by the Council.

The Director of Corporate Resources advised that local authorities across the county were working together on this project, which would be funded through the Business Rate Retention scheme that all West Sussex districts, boroughs and County had signed up to.

The Cabinet Member emphasised the major benefits this proposal would bring and advised that a number of neighbouring local authority Leaders had already confirmed their commitment. The Group were in support of the proposal, which would be considered by Cabinet on 23 January.

17 **FORWARD PLAN EXTRACT FOR THE FINANCE AND ASSETS PORTFOLIO**

The Group noted the Forward Plan extract for the Finance & Assets portfolio.

The meeting closed at 6.32 pm having commenced at 5.30 pm

CHAIRMAN