

Finance & Parking Policy Development Advisory Group
9 MAY 2022

Present: Councillors: Tony Hogben (Chairman), Tony Bevis, Martin Boffey, Paul Clarke, Michael Croker, Ray Dawe, Brian Donnelly and Richard Landeryou

Apologies: Councillors: Matthew Allen, Nigel Jupp and Stuart Ritchie

15 **NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The notes of the previous meeting, held on 7 March, were agreed as a true record.

16 **UPDATE ON THE FORUM FOUNTAIN AND THE RESIDENTIAL MANAGEMENT CONTRACT**

The meeting received an update from the Property Management Team Leader on proposals for the Forum Fountain in Horsham. The proposal is to upgrade the fountain to make it compliant with Pool Water Treatment Advisory Group (PWTAG) requirements for an interactive splash pad of similar design. The existing fountain had been designed as a display feature only and interactive use led to a risk of increased bacteria levels. The estimated cost of £120,000 had been supported by the Town Centre PDAG. It was noted in discussion that the fountain had been switched off many times over the past 10 years as a result of the risks identified.

The meeting agreed that the proposal should be progressed and the budget of £120,000 will be recommended to the Cabinet for approval.

An update was also provided on the Residential Management Contract, which was due for retendering. The present contract, which covered Lintot Square and The Forum was carried out by RMG, at a cost of £45,000 per annum. The proposal was to enter into a 5-year contract based on a similar scope to the existing, which would give a total contract value in excess of £250,000.

Members advised that recent issues should be reviewed and the scope adjusted to consider these, but the proposed process for retendering was agreed.

17 **RURAL CAR PARKING UPDATE**

The Parking Strategy Officer provided an update on Rural Car Parking Improvements. The Council had originally approved a 6-year period of improvements commencing in 2018/19 at an allocated cost of £50k p.a. The meeting received advice on projects completed as part of this programme, including sites in Billingshurst, Henfield, Steyning and Storrington, with a combined cost to date of £450k.

Additional projects planned for the period to 31 March 2024 were expected to cost a further £648k.

It was also noted that the income received from annual parking discs in 2021/22 was now at an equivalent level to the pre-pandemic period albeit helped by price rises in that period.

18 **PARKING PERFORMANCE 2021/22**

An update on income and use of Parking facilities was provide by the Parking Strategy Officer. Income was significantly reduced in 2020/21 and this was attributable to the effects on travel and working patterns arising from the Pandemic. In 2021/22, these effects were less influential, and income rose, though remaining below the levels of 2019/20. The projection was that 2022/23 would be close to the pre-pandemic levels (around £4.2m). The most significant reduction in take-up was in Season Tickets which were 43% down in 2021/22 on 2019/20 levels and clearly reflect the significant changes in commuting behaviours, which was expected to continue and perhaps establish a new norm. Rural Season Tickets have remained stable throughout the Pandemic and Annual Parking Discs have stabilised to pre-pandemic levels following a slump in 2020/21.

Priorities for 2022/23 were:

- Reviewing season tickets in the light of parking habit changes to ensure that these are flexible and responsive to new behaviours and meet the needs of customers
- Continued review and assessment of charge / tariff levels
- Identifying further opportunities for efficiencies and innovation, including digital options, improved customer interfaces and enhanced marketing / promotion for added value and need-related focus.

The update was welcomed by the meeting and some points clarified through discussion.

19 **UPDATES ON FINANCIAL ISSUES**

The Interim Director of Resources provided an overview of financial issues for the Council, including:

- Business Rates Support. The Covid Additional Relief Fund (CARF) allocated £3.113m for local distribution and over 900 businesses in the District were mailed to encourage applications. Over 60 applications have now been received and eligibility will be determined in May / June. The Council will need to use the funding by September or return it.
- No changes were proposed for the business rates discretionary rate relief scheme in 2023/24. This will require approval by Cabinet in January 2023.

- Band A to D Council Tax households will have received a one-off energy payment of £150 as part of the national scheme to offset the impact of rising fuel and energy costs. £3.6m was paid out in April as part of this initiative. 11,000 band A to D homes not on direct debit will receive letters in May asking them to apply online.
- An additional £251k discretionary C-Tax funding is also due to commence as part of a West Sussex scheme with a November deadline.
- The Council Tax Reduction Scheme £150 local scheme (with WSCC) in 2022/23 was re-billed in April 2022.
- Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2023/24. The scheme, which assesses the amount that working age adults are required to pay towards their council tax is not proposed for change in 2023/24. This will require approval by the Cabinet in January 2023.

CTRS £150 local scheme in 2023/24. The meeting was advised that West Sussex County Council would not be funding this provision after 2022/23, which meant that a district decision was needed to take on the cost of continuation (around £434k at 2021/22 level) or reduce or terminate the offer.

The meeting was clear that this was an unacceptable cost to pick up locally but that views from the other local authorities should be sought before a final determination was agreed and to revisit this in the Autumn of 2022.

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DRAFT TRANSFORMATION FUND AND USE OF THE 2021/22 SURPLUS

The draft report to Cabinet on the Transformation Fund was presented for discussion. The final surplus on 2021/22 is around £2m largely due to setting a cautious budget during lockdown in January 2021. Projected additional costs in 2022/23, reflecting inflationary pressures across the board but especially in salaries are rising and the proposal was to set aside £1m as a counter inflationary measure. Additional, and less easily quantifiable costs, such as de-carbonisation may add significantly to that cost if targets are to be achieved.

£0.3m, the amount equivalent to the increase in income generated from the Council tax rise in 2022/23, was to be used to help support the vulnerable and those struggling with rising living costs.

The proposal also asked Council to top the Transformation Fund back up to £500k by using £107k from the surplus to help fund transformational projects to help the customer experience and efficiencies.

Discussions with the Royal British Legion over the Drill Hall were continuing slowly, and a further budget request to the end of the calendar year was sought.

The proposed requests were agreed.

21 **FORWARD PLAN**

The Cabinet Forward Plan was noted.

The meeting closed at 6.50 pm having commenced at 5.30 pm

CHAIRMAN