

Finance & Parking Policy Development Advisory Group
27 JUNE 2022

Present: Councillors: Tony Hogben (Chairman), Martin Boffey, Paul Clarke, Michael Croker, Brian Donnelly, Nigel Jupp, Richard Landeryou and Stuart Ritchie

Apologies: Councillors: Matthew Allen, Tony Bevis and Ray Dawe
Absent: Councillors:

Also Present:

1 **NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The notes of the meeting held on 9 May 2022 were agreed.

2 **PROCUREMENT OF CONTRACTOR - HIGHWOOD**

The Head of Property & Facilities provided the meeting with a verbal update on the procurement of a contractor for the Highwood Village development, west of Horsham. The proposal is for a contractor to be appointed through a “Scape framework” process to carry out a zero-cost, zero-risk feasibility study. The process is that the contractor will provide the feasibility and if approved the Council will enter into a Pre Contract Services Agreement (PCSA) and then a construction contract. Cabinet approval will be required for the PCSA and construction contract stages. It was confirmed that this will be a fixed price contract and that a site start is expected in January 2023 and completed within 10-12 months. The proposal will be considered at the Planning Committee in August.

A number of questions were clarified and the meeting welcomed the progress being made.

3 **EXTENSION OF PARKING CHARGE INCREASES TO ADDITIONAL CAR PARKS**

The Interim Head of Parking introduced a paper, to be presented to Cabinet on 21 July, itemising specific extensions of parking charge increases to supplement those agreed in February. These are essentially rectifying anomalies in the original proposals that have come to light as the new team has developed understanding of the complexities. Specific proposals include the introduction of a 4-hour parking tariff in the North Street carpark, enabling the minimum full EV charge to be available, and an amendment to tariffs at Southwater Country Park to reflect the existing seasonal variations. Clarification was sought on a number of points and the meeting recognised the need for this adjustment to the previously adopted charging structure.

4 **FINANCIAL UPDATES:**

a Update on Grants and Payments

The Interim Director of Resources provided an update on the Energy Bill rebate process for 2022/23. A payment of £150 is available to households in Bands A to D and, during April and May £1.72m was paid out to all those on direct debit. 51% of the 11,500 non-direct debit paying households contacted have not yet responded and the next step will be to contact them again. Recipients have the choice of receiving a payment direct to a bank account or for it to be deducted from their next bill. The preferred option for the Council would be the former as it is less of a manual process and of those that have applied, 80% have opted for this.

A second strand of £150 rebates is discretionary, aimed at Band E to H Households is due to launch imminently. This is subject to a number of qualifying conditions, including receipt of Council Tax support, Severe Mental Impairment discount or exemption, or a disablement band reduction.

b Revenues and Benefits modified schemes approval

The meeting was then given an overview of the Housing Benefit audit and Modified Schemes. The audit of 2020/21 has been completed and overall the subsidy received by the Council will increase by £21,000 as a result. Testing identified an increase in the council's Local Authority overpayments error by £5,600. This is, however, still within the lower threshold allowed, so the Council will retain 100% subsidy.

A small increase (£9,582) is also incurred due to the voluntary disregarding of War Disablement Pensions and War Widow Pensions as part of the calculations for housing benefit. There are only a few cases where this applies but the Council will keep this under regular review. Cabinet and Council will need to approve these proposals in due course, and the PDAG was supportive of the approach.

It was noted that these and the preceding Rebate measures require a significant commitment of time and resources to execute. It was confirmed to the meeting that the Government's "New Burdens" funding was reimbursing the Council for the work and appears to be covering the additional workload adequately.

5 **FORWARD PLAN EXTRACT FOR THE FINANCE PORTFOLIO**

The June Cabinet Forward Plan was noted

The meeting closed at 6.12 pm having commenced at 5.30 pm

CHAIRMAN