

Finance & Parking Policy Development Advisory Group
7 NOVEMBER 2022

Present: Councillors: Tony Hogben (Chairman), Matthew Allen, Tony Bevis, Martin Boffey, Paul Clarke, Michael Croker, Ray Dawe, Brian Donnelly, Nigel Jupp and Stuart Ritchie

Apologies: Councillors: Richard Landeryou

Also Present: Ruth Fletcher

6 **NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The notes of the meeting held on 27 June were received.

7 **PARKING**

The Parking Manager briefed the group on the current fees charged for advertising in the Council's carparks. Market research showed that HDC charges were significantly lower than the average charged by other local authorities and private sector companies. The group were advised that initial enquiries with local business showed that there would be sufficient interest to pursue this income stream. It was therefore proposed that current advertising rates be increased from the beginning of next year.

The Cabinet Member stated that, if agreed, this increased income stream would be reflected in next year's budget. The group were supportive of the proposal.

8 **LONDON ROAD CAR PARK**

The Head of Property & Facilities briefed the group on the business case for using this decommissioned carpark for an affordable housing scheme of 11 2-bedroom flats with parking. The flats would be offered to people on the Council's housing register.

The housing would be paid for from S106 developer contributions and run by Horsham District Homes Holdings Ltd, the Council's Local Authority owned housing company.

The group were advised of alternative disposal options and noted that a higher value from the site could be obtained if it were to be sold for market housing. However, the proposed affordable housing would bring significant social and economic benefits and was therefore recommended.

The group were broadly supportive of the scheme. After discussion, it was suggested that the proposed design be reassessed to explore ways of optimising the site further. The Head of Property & Facilities said that he would ensure that the potential of the site is maximised. He also noted points raised

regarding parking options and the possibility of changing the housing mix to include some 1-bedroom units.

The group were fully in support of using the land for Affordable Housing. The business case would be considered by Cabinet on 24 November

9 **HIGHWOOD COMMUNITY HALL**

The Head of Property & Facilities explained budget options for the building of the new community hall for Highwood. Because of an increase in building costs caused by the unexpected rate of inflation, it was necessary to either increase the budget or reduce the extent of the works by making the building smaller.

There was also an additional cost for the proposed provision of changing facilities for the sports pitches, and some additional parking to the north to accommodate match-day parking at the weekends.

The majority of the group were of the opinion that the community hall should not be reduced in size and that both the changing facilities and parking area should be included in the scheme. The Cabinet Member confirmed that any increase in cost of the scheme would be included in the forthcoming Cabinet paper requesting budget.

10 **BUDGET AND MTFS**

The Director of Resources briefed the group on the current budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy, which would be taken to Cabinet on 24 November. There had been a number of changes since the version in September caused by unforeseen changes with the national picture, including an increase in interest rates and inflation.

The group noted the reasons for the increase in net expenditure, including the staff pay settlement and increases in the cost of HVO fuel used by Council vehicles. The budget therefore proposed some increases to income streams from higher fees and charges as well as more investment income from the rise in the Bank of England interest rate. There were areas of uncertainty, and things would be clearer after the Government's Autumn Statement on 17 November.

The Cabinet Member stated that the Council was able to produce a reasonably balanced budget at this time because of its previous prudent strategies.

11 **REVENUES AND BENEFITS**

The Director of Resources gave an update on the Energy Bill Rebate 2022/23. The rebate would provide £150 for households in receipt of certain benefits including Council Tax Support, carers allowance, severely mentally impaired discount and disabled band reduction. This rebate has been applied to 663 households in the district.

The group were advised that £151,000 of the government funding remained, which could be distributed at the Council's discretion. This needed to be done efficiently as the payment deadline was the end of November.

The group noted the possible options for distributing the remaining rebate to different categories of claimants. The Director of Resources agreed that the final decision could be made after the Autumn Statement on 17 November as this would inform the best course of action.

Cabinet Member agreed to discuss the options with the Cabinet Members for Housing & Public Protection and Community Matters to see where the funding might bring the most benefit.

12 **BANK CONTRACT EXEMPTION**

The group were briefed on the proposed Cabinet Member delegated decision that the procurement of the banking contract from April 2023 for five years be exempted from the requirement to seek out bids to supply operational banking service. The Cabinet Member advised that possible savings in tendering for banking services would not justify the resources required to carry out the tender process. Councillor Stuart Ritchie, Chairman of Audit Committee, agreed that it would be very unreasonable to change the current satisfactory banking arrangements.

13 **PAYMENT ACCEPTANCE FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT CALL-OFF AWARD**

The Director of Resources briefed the group on the procurement of the merchant acquiring service after a comprehensive tender process. This service allows card payments to be taken by the Council. The current contract had been agreed in 2018 and since then a new policy framework was in place. It was therefore advisable to re-procure using the new framework.

The recommendation to award the contract to the preferred contractor would be taken to Cabinet on 24 November.

14 **FORWARD PLAN EXTRACT FOR THE FINANCE & PARKING PORTFOLIO**

The forward plan extract was noted.

The meeting closed at 6.50 pm having commenced at 5.30 pm

CHAIRMAN