

Finance and Assets Policy Development Advisory Group
19 MAY 2021

Present: Councillors: Paul Clarke (Chairman), Matthew Allen, Tony Bevis, Michael Croker, Brian Donnelly, Frances Haigh, Nigel Jupp, Richard Landeryou and Gordon Lindsay

Apologies: Councillor: Stuart Ritchie

Also Present: Councillor: Ruth Fletcher

23 **NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The notes from the previous meeting on 1 March were received.

24 **REVENUES & BENEFITS: COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME**

The Revenues & Benefits Operations Manager briefed the group on the Council Tax Reduction (CTR) Scheme, including details of the Government's additional £150 discretionary means support to working age residents during 2020/21. The Council Tax Reduction scheme had seen increased applications during the pandemic.

Additional funding had enabled the extra £150 discretionary scheme to continue in 2021/22. This along with a number of factors had led to an increased collection rate at year end. This informed the recommendation that the CTR Scheme should remain unchanged for 2022/23 because there is limited information on the post-COVID situation.

The advice from the PDAG to the Cabinet lead was to continue with the scheme unchanged for 2022/23.

25 **REVENUE & BENEFITS: BUSINESS RATES CHARITABLE RELIEF POLICY**

The Revenue & Benefits Officer briefed the group on details of the discretionary business rate relief schemes which were available to Councils. Details were provided on 6 different schemes, however the scheme designed for charities and not for profit organisations was highlighted to the group because there had been complaints about charities having to make a contribution.

Registered charities, including amateur sports clubs and not for profit organisations are currently automatically eligible for an 80% discount on business rates. The Council currently has discretion to award a further 15% discount as discretionary rate relief if the business is assessed as eligible, up to a maximum of £8,000. This policy had not changed for many years. The group were invited to consider whether the Council should offer a fuller discretionary

relief for eligible charities and begin consultation on this change. There were differing views from the Group but the balance of opinion was to go to consultation in summer 2021 on full relief for charities.

Councillors were reminded that because one year's notice has to be given if the policy is changed in February 2022 the change will not come in until April 2023.

26 **REVENUE & BENEFITS: BREATHING SPACE DEBT MORATORIUM**

The Revenue & Benefits Officer provided an update on a Central Government scheme which introduces breathing space for individuals who have fallen into debt, in order for them to resolve their issues and seek debt advice.

The recent legislation introduces a statutory requirement to provide a 60 day breathing space, or until an individual has recovered from mental health issues, if a referral was triggered via a debt advisor.

A second aspect of the new legislation was a statutory repayment plan, set to be introduced in 2022.

27 **USING THE TRANSFORMATION FUND IN 2021/22**

The Head of Finance and Performance briefed the group on the Transformational Fund 21/22 report going to Cabinet in June. The report included details of where the funds had been spent throughout the past year.

The report recommended approval to top the transformation fund up to £0.5m and delegation to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to spend on transformation projects in 2021/22. Members of the PDAG asked for the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets to be added to the list of consultees on the use of the reserve.

28 **SALE OF COMMERCIAL PROPERTY INVESTMENT**

The Head of Property & Facilities briefed the group on a potential sale of a commercial property investment and provided information on the development potential for the site. The PDAG supported the sale in the circumstances described.

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

The Forward Plan Extract was noted by the Group.

The meeting closed at 7.00 pm having commenced at 5.30 pm