

COUNCIL
8 December 2021
CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation to Council made at the Cabinet meeting held on 25 November 2021

a) Update on the Council's financial position and Medium-Term Financial Strategy update

The Cabinet report gave an update on the Council's financial position under the ongoing impact from COVID-19 in 2021/22 and how the Medium-Term Financial Planning scenarios and assumptions have changed since the budget was set in February 2021 and since the update in September 2021.

There is still a high level of uncertainty as the economy recovers from the pandemic. Factors of particular concern include the increase in unemployment as furlough ends in the hospitality and leisure sectors, the risk of further variants and another local or national lockdown, implications from the Brexit agreement, Government's plans for the reform of business rates and the potential introduction of price limits on garden waste. The Council has kept high levels of reserves and therefore is able in the short term to make considered decisions.

Cabinet considered details, as set out in the report, including: the revised interim Medium-Term Financial Strategy; expenditure pressures; income pressures; and updates on budgets and funding.

RESOLVED

- i) To note the changes in the Council's financial position in 2021/22 and the medium-term.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

- ii) That the charges from 1 April 2022 for the garden waste subscription service are increased from £42 for the first bin to £44 and for any subsequent bin increased from £33 to £35.
- iii) To approve the creation of a £2,500 revenue budget for a short breaks funding grant from West Sussex County Council and matching expenditure in the 2021/22 leisure services budgets.
- iv) To approve the creation of a £99,271 revenue budget for Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) grant funding from West Sussex County Council and matching expenditure in the 2021/22 environmental health service budgets.
- v) To approve the creation of a £139,000 revenue budget for Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) grant funding from West Sussex County Council and matching expenditure in the 2021/22 housing services budgets.
- vi) To approve the creation of a £78,946 revenue budget for Winter 2021 COVID-19 rent arrears financial support grant funding from Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities and matching expenditure in the 2021/22 housing services budgets.

- vii) Subject to the safety net being put in place, to approve the Council joining the West Sussex Business Rates pool in 2022/23.

REASON

- i) The Council needs to acknowledge the effects of the local situation occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic and the continued impact this is having on its financial position both in the short and medium-term. This has moved the council from what has been a long-term healthy financial position to one with predicted deficits. However, given the level of uncertainty in the projections, the economy and proposed Government action the report does not recommend direct action to reduce expenditure at this stage.
- ii) The costs of running the garden waste service increase by inflation, and this price increase is passing this cost onto users of the service.
- iii) The short breaks grant will be spent on a Family Fun Day at Chanctonbury Leisure Centre for disabled children and young people before the end of March 2022. This will form an additional part of the Reaching Higher project.
- iv) The COMF grant will be spent preventing health inequalities and on COVID-19 risk management.
- v) The housing COMF grant will be spent on a range of interventions and housing solutions to support those affected by homelessness and risk of homelessness associated with COVID-19.
- vi) The Winter 2021 COVID-19 rent arrears financial support grant will support low-income private renters with COVID-19 related arrears to avoid eviction or find a new home.
- vii) Joining the West Sussex business Rates pool should benefit the County and therefore the district by retaining locally generated business rates, using it to further support the economic regeneration of the wider West Sussex area.

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b) Community Advice Partnership Agreement

The Community Advice Services Contract expires on 31 March 2022. The current contract was procured by West Sussex County Council with the support of each District and Borough Council. It is proposed that all district and boroughs within West Sussex again enter into a partnership contract (also referred to as Inter-Agency Agreement) to collectively procure and fund the service into the future.

The existing service is funded through the Council's annual strategic grant budget and set within annual budget setting. The annual funding committed to the joint service will be £93,000 per annum uplifted annually in line with the consumer price index calculated on the anniversary of the agreement.

These services and the work of Citizens Advice as the existing provider of the service has demonstrated year on year the positive impact advice services provide.

RESOLVED

- i) To approve the procurement of a partnership contract/inter-agency agreement with West Sussex County Council and the other West Sussex District and Borough Councils for Community Advice Services for the provision of an independent and comprehensive information and advice service for up to seven years from 1 April 2022.
- ii) Delegate to the Cabinet Member for Community & Wellbeing the authority to enter into the partnership contract/inter-agency agreement subject to contract approval by the Monitoring Officer.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

To approve a budget contribution of £93,000 for up to 7 years, uplifted annually in line with the consumer price index calculated on the anniversary of the agreement, subject to satisfactory service reviews in line with Horsham District Council's corporate priorities and the availability of Horsham District Council funding.

REASON

To enable community advice services to continue to be delivered for residents of the Horsham District, therefore protecting the quality of life of those who live in, work in and visit our district.