

FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE CABINET ADVISORY BOARD

Tuesday, 7 September 2021

Present: Councillor Tom Dawlings (Chairman)
Councillors Scott (Vice-Chairman), Holden, Simmons, Chapelard, Hickey, Everitt,
Goodship, Hall, Scholes and Knight

Officers in Attendance: Lee Colyer (Director of Finance, Policy and Development (Section 151 Officer)), Sheila Coburn (Head of Revenues and Benefits), Clare Hazard (Accountancy Manager), Jane Clarke (Head of Policy and Governance) and Caroline Britt (Democratic Services Officer)

Other Members in Attendance:

APOLOGIES

FG28/21 There were no apologies.

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

FG29/21 There were no disclosable pecuniary or other significant interests declared at the meeting.

NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS WISHING TO SPEAK

FG30/21 There were no visiting Members.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING DATED 13 JULY 2021

FG31/21 No amendments were proposed.

RESOLVED - That the minutes dated 13 July 2021 be approved as a correct record.

FORWARD PLAN AS AT 25 AUGUST 2021

FG32/21 No amendments were proposed.

RESOLVED - The Forward Plan as at 25 August 2021 be noted.

DRAFT COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2022/23

FG33/21 Sheila Coburn, Head of Mid Kent Revenues and Benefits Partnership introduced the report set out in the agenda.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- The new scheme had not resulted in a change in collection rates. However, Covid had had an effect on collection rates.
- The Council was unable to take any recovery action during the last financial year because the Courts would not give the Council any court time. Court time had been allocated for this financial year but it was still very restricted. As such the Council had decided to use this time for higher amount cases, rather than the relatively small amounts of those on Council Tax support.

- The cases would be heard at Sevenoaks or Medway. Courts were only accepting those with prebooked appointments which limited the number of cases that could be heard.
- The scheme now benefited from online application forms which were much easier to complete. The Council was also now looking to be able to automatically update any changes to Universal Credit directly onto the system which would then calculate whether there would be a change in band for the recipient.
- The Labour Group maintained their concern about cuts in benefits and support for the most vulnerable and therefore did not support the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.
- It was noted that lower paid workers had received a large amount of support over the last year. Additionally, there had been record increases in wages – 7% rise in the last 12 months. This was to be welcomed.
- The £20 increase in Universal Credit was a scheme introduced during the pandemic which was now coming to an end. It was not a cut in benefits.
- Those in receipt of Universal Credit paid a minimum of 20% Council Tax. The income banded scheme was only for those who were earning. Those who were not earning or were in receipt of statutory benefits would receive 80% of the total amount (and pay only 20%).
- It was noted that the Council Tax Reduction Scheme came into effect prior to the additional Universal Credit support introduced during the pandemic.

RESOLVED – That the recommendations to Cabinet as set out in the report be supported.

REVENUE MANAGEMENT REPORT - QUARTER 1

FG34/21 Clare Hazard, Accountancy Manager introduced the report set out in the agenda.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- The £486k support grant had already been received from Government.
- The £262k towards the cost of new burdens had also been received.
- The estimated £570k towards sales, fees and charges had not been received. The claim form needed for this had not been released so timing for this payment was not yet known.
- The overall assessment for Quarter 1 was good news. However the shortfall needed for next year was unlikely to receive any additional funding support from Government so it was predicted there would be financial difficulties for the Council going forward.

RESOLVED – That the recommendations to Cabinet as set out in the report be supported.

CAPITAL MANAGEMENT REPORT - QUARTER 1

FG35/21 Clare Hazard, Accountancy Manager introduced the report set out in the agenda.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- Appendix D provided a breakdown of the overall Capital Programme to 2024/25.
- The second table in Appendix D explained how the Capital Programme would be funded.
- Approval had been given to use up to £3,348,000 from the Public Works Loan Board but as yet it had not been allocated. It was therefore a potential source of funding rather than a Quarter 1 outturn.
- Of the £77k of S106 funding due to expire in 2021/22, £51k was included in the Capital Programme, the remaining amount had been allocated to two smaller schemes (not part of the Capital Programme) and it was expected the money would be spent this year.
- Details of the S106 money due to be allocated to Goudhurst (£3,000) would be reverted after the meeting.

RESOLVED – That the recommendations to Cabinet as set out in the report be supported.

TREASURY AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATOR MANAGEMENT REPORT - QUARTER 1

FG36/21 Clare Hazard, Accountancy Manager introduced the report set out in the agenda.

RESOLVED – That the recommendations to Cabinet as set out in the report be supported.

PERFORMANCE SUMMARY QUARTER 1

FG37/21 Jane Clarke, Head of Policy and Governance introduced the report set out in the agenda.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- Complaints were not included as part of the Performance Summary Report. A complaints report would be included in Quarter 2 (December Cabinet cycle).
- The temporary accommodation performance indicator was underperforming. This was due to the pandemic as the Council was still housing people as part of the 'everyone in' scheme.
- The 'everyone in' scheme had finished but the Council continued to accommodate those in need.

RESOLVED – That the recommendations to Cabinet as set out in the report be supported.

URGENT BUSINESS

FG38/21 There was no urgent business.

DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

FG39/21 The next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday 12 October 2021 at 6:30pm.

NOTES:

The meeting concluded at 7.08 pm.

An audio recording of this meeting is available on the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council website.