

Finance Sub-Committee

23 September 2015

Present: Councillor A McMullen (in the Chair)
Councillors SL Cox, S Graham and JA Wallace.

F17/09/15 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors K Bolger, J O'Shea and M Rankin.

F18/09/15 Substitute Members

Pursuant to the Council's Constitution the appointment of the following substitute member was reported:-

Councillor S Graham for Councillor J O'Shea

F19/09/15 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

Councillor S Graham declared a registerable interest in relation to any Housing related matters raised on the reports to be considered, as she was employed by a registered social landlord.

Councillor A McMullen declared a registerable interest in relation to the Welfare Reform – Quarterly Financial Update on Discretionary Housing Payments Fund, Local Council Tax Support Scheme and Local Welfare Provision Scheme Report (Minute F22/09/15) as he was employed by a communications provider.

F20/09/15 Minutes

Resolved that the Minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2015, be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

F21/09/15 2015/16 Financial Management Report to 31 July 2015

The Sub-Committee considered a report detailing the budget monitoring position as at 31 July 2015, including forecast outturn positions for 2015/16 for the General Fund, the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), school finances and the Investment Plan, including a summary of projects to be delivered in 2015/16. The report had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 14 September 2015.

As at 31 July 2015, the forecast year-end position for the General Fund Revenue Account was a pressure of £2.001m.

The HRA was forecast to have year-end balances at 31 March 2016 of £3.208m, which was £0.538m higher than budget. The higher than forecast balances were mainly as a result of higher opening balances due to the impact of previous years' financial performance (£0.422m). The forecast in-year surplus was an estimated £0.116m.

The report included an update in respect of work in progress with regard to 2015/16 school funding.

The Investment Plan for 2015-19, adjusted for reprogramming and variations approved by Cabinet was £247.895m. Variations of £1.088m for 2015/16 were proposed in the report. The report also set out planned delivery for 2015/16.

Members were given the opportunity to ask questions which were responded to appropriately. Officers undertook to provide responses to a number of the questions in writing.

It was **Agreed** that the 2014/15 Provisional Finance Outturn Report be noted.

F22/09/15 Welfare Reform – Quarterly Financial Update on Discretionary Housing Payments Fund, Local Council Tax Support Scheme and Local Welfare Provision Scheme (Previous Minute F6/06/15)

The Sub-Committee considered a report which provided an update on the three schemes that had been implemented or revised as a consequence of the welfare reform changes. The schemes were:

- Discretionary Housing Payment Fund,
- Local Council Tax Support Scheme, and
- Local Welfare Provision Scheme.

The Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) fund continued to provide much needed support to people in financial need who had a shortfall between their Housing Benefit and rent liability or required help with the moving costs to more affordable accommodation. The scheme was promoted well with partners and there continued to be a high number of claims made to it.

The report detailed DHP financial data for 2014/15 up to 31 August 2015. It covered outstanding claims, assessed claims, awards made, reasons for awards, reasons for refusal, reviews of decisions and the current position regarding available funding.

The DHP policy was reviewed on an annual basis by the Mayors Task Group which was made up of a number of partner organisations from the community and voluntary sector. The review ensured that the Fund continued to target those that were most in need. At the last meeting of the Task Group, the current financial position had been shared. Whilst the Group felt that current policy met the need of claimants, concern had been raised on the high demand on the scheme and a briefing note was currently being prepared detailing the consequences of the current position

The Council Tax Support Scheme which had replaced Council Tax Benefit in April 2013 continued to provide support on a means tested basis and helped those on low income pay their Council Tax. The number of claimants to the scheme had continued to reduce since April 2013.

As at the end of May 2015 the number of claimants to the scheme was around 21,000 split between 11,250 working age and 9,750 pensionable age. As at 28 February 2015 the amount of Council Tax Support awarded to claimants since 1 April 2015 was £15,052,641. This was lower than the forecast spend of £15,900,000 when the scheme was set for 2015/2016.

Council Tax collection for 2014/15 still held up, with a collection rate of 96.4%. Officers continued to work closely with all residents who had difficulty in paying, offering flexible payment arrangements and arranging access to debt advice and budget management where required.

There continued to be minimal adverse reaction to the scheme, and there had been no appeals to the Appeals Tribunal regarding the scheme.

The Scheme was reviewed on an annual basis. The 2016/17 review had started and the Scheme for 2016/17 would be implemented from April 2016.

The Local Welfare Provision Scheme delivered by the Authority, which had replaced Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans continued to provide support to those needing social care, supported housing or financial assistance because they had hit a crisis. The scheme was monitored closely to assess the demand against the resources available. The report provided statistics for the period 1 April 2015 to 31 August 2015.

Members were given the opportunity to ask questions which were responded to appropriately.

It was **Agreed** that the report be noted.