

Rother District Council

Report to:	Cabinet
Date:	28 March 2022
Title:	Financial Stability Programme – Progress Report
Report of:	Antony Baden – Finance Manager
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Kevin Dixon
Ward(s):	All
Purpose of Report:	To note the progress of the Financial Stability Programme and updated timetable and approve the merger of two workstreams and approach to be adopted.
Decision Type:	Non-Key
Officer	
Recommendation(s):	It be RESOLVED : That: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) the report be noted;2) the Financial Stability Strategy and the Protecting Discretionary Service Strategy be merged into a single project; and3) the approach to the devolvement of those services laid out in paragraph 5 be approved.
Reasons for Recommendations:	To approve the merger of two workstreams and approach to be adopted to provide clarity for the Council's key stakeholders.

Introduction

1. This report updates Members on the progress of the Financial Stability Programme (FSP) adopted by the Council in March 2021 under the direction of the FSP Board. Members will recall the programme sets out how the Council might achieve savings and income targets of up to £2.2 million in its Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and achieve the financial stability set out in the Corporate Plan.

The Protecting Discretionary Service and Financial Stability strategies

2. On the 28 June 2021 Cabinet adopted a Protecting Discretionary Services strategy (minute CB21/14), which agreed the Council's approach of transferring community assets to other organisations in order to support the delivery of discretionary services. The strategy shares many of the common goals of the FSP. It is therefore proposed that the Financial Stability Strategy and the Protecting Discretionary Service Strategy be combined into a single project.

3. The project would be managed alongside the other Corporate projects and report to the existing Corporate Programme Board (CPB) meetings. As a result, the CPB would consist of the following Members:
 - Cllr Prochak - portfolio holder for Environment and Place
 - Cllr Dixon - portfolio holder for Finance, Performance Management, Procurement and Social Value Policy
 - Cllr Oliver - portfolio holder for Strategy and Transformation
 - Cllr Bayliss portfolio holder for – Economic Development and Regeneration

Progress since the last update to Cabinet

4. Since the last progress report to Cabinet on the 4 October 2021 several proposals have already been identified for action. Officers are working with Members and focusing on those generating the highest level of saving to the Council, e.g.
 - Supply and Maintenance of Public Conveniences (approximate full operational cost £500k per annum)
 - Operation of subsidised / free car parks (approximate full operational cost £91k per annum)
 - Grounds Maintenance - (approximate full operational cost £880k per annum)
5. Please note the above operational costs include support administration costs and should not be taken as a reflection of potential savings.
6. The options being considered include:
 - a. Public Conveniences, to either/or:
 - i. Devolve to town and parish councils, including further options to refurbish by RDC before devolving;
 - ii. Devolve to town and parish councils providing town and parish councils with funding to refurbish maybe through CIL funds
 - iii. Retain, refurbish and introduce charges
 - iv. If the parish or town council and the community agree that the facility is not required, then redevelop or demolish.
 - b. Car Parks that are a net cost to the Council, to either/or:
 - i. Devolve to town and parish councils, or other suitable groups
 - ii. Retain and investigate introducing charging in sites that are currently free to use;
 - iii. Re-purpose if the facility is not needed by the community
 - c. Grounds Maintenance to either/or:
 - i. agree a programme of devolvement with Bexhill, Battle and Rye Town Councils;
 - ii. continue with a service contract managed by RDC, but with a minimum specification at lowest cost

Consultation

7. Preliminary discussions have already taken place with Bexhill on Sea Town Council regarding the options laid out in paragraph 5. Further consultation will take place with all Town and Parish Councils affected by these proposals.

Resources

8. As previously reported, delivering any proposals would require an increase in the staff and to this end the post of Income Generation Manager was established, to be funded from the £750,000 earmarked reserve approved by Council. Recruitment to this post was unsuccessful however, and in view of the proposal in paragraph 2, it would be more effective to reassign this post as a project management role in order to maintain a clear focus and drive on achieving the aims of the newly formed project.
9. To support the various project work outlined in paragraph 5 above it is proposed that appropriate resources would be seconded into the relevant project team from existing service areas as required. However, it should be noted that most of this work is contained within neighbourhood services whose resources are already under considerable pressure completing business as usual work. Furthermore, we are approaching the summer season which always increases workloads.

Timetable

10. A project plan is currently being developed by the Council and Bexhill on Sea Town Council setting out the key milestones in terms of decision-making to align with the budget setting process.

Conclusion

11. Good progress has been made in identifying proposals to help reduce the Council's financial gap between its income and expenditure. The next financial year will be critical in ensuring that these proposals are delivered.

Environmental Implications

12. It is expected that some proposals, particularly around grounds maintenance and public conveniences, will have a positive impact on the Council's carbon footprint.

Other Implications	Applies?	Other Implications	Applies?
Human Rights	No	Equalities and Diversity	No
Crime and Disorder	No	External Consultation	Yes
Environmental	Yes	Access to Information	No
Risk Management	No	Exempt from publication	No
Chief Executive	Malcolm Johnston		
Report Contact Officer:	Antony Baden		
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Appendices:	None.		
Relevant Previous Minutes:	None.		
Background Papers:	None.		
Reference Documents:	None.		