



<b>Report of:</b>	<b>To:</b>	<b>Date</b>
Resources Portfolio Holder	Council	1 December 2022

## **Executive Report: Resources Portfolio Holder**

### **1. Purpose of report**

- 1.1** To inform Council of progress on key objectives and the current position on issues within the Resources Portfolio, as set out below.

### **2. Finance**

- 2.1** The budget preparation for 2023/24 is progressing well. The Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) was approved by Cabinet on 19 October. Any relevant policy changes in the Chancellor's Autumn Budget will now be incorporated into these forecasts as will the Local Government Finance Settlement announcement due later this month.
- 2.2** The Portfolio Holder's proposals for any changes to fees and charges were considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 21 November and individual Portfolio Holders have been presented with the relevant feedback prior to the final report being issued.
- 2.3** Wyre has opted to remain in the 50% Lancashire Business Rates Retention Pool for 2023/24, as have all the other existing members. The pool allows us to retain the levy payment we would have previously paid over to Central Government, less a 10% contribution to Lancashire County Council. Final confirmation of the pooling arrangements is expected later this month as part of the announcement of the Local Government Finance Settlement.
- 2.4** As of 14 October the council became a debt free authority again. The opportunity to make early repayment of the remaining two Public Works Loans Board loans totalling £1,552,000 at a discount of £70,864 was taken, meaning the Principal repaid was just £1,481,136. Previously early repayment would have cost the council a premium in excess of £1m which would not have represented good value for money. However, the unusual economic conditions experienced in October meant that this position was significantly improved. Early repayment also means that future aggregate interest payments of £1,950,689 (2022/23 to 2057/58) will no longer be due. A final interest payment of £37,062 for 2022/23 was paid instead.

### **3. Governance and Business Support**

- 3.1** The 2022/23 pay award has been agreed for the majority of staff, with just the Chief Executive's pay award agreement outstanding. The headline changes mean that £1,925 will be added to each pay band effective from 1 April 2022 and staff will receive an extra day's annual leave from 1 April 2023. This means that those on the lowest pay will see the highest % increase and it will alleviate some of the imminent concerns around the planned National Living Wage increases.
- 3.2** The pay award equates to approximately a 7% increase on our pay line overall this year which is reflected in the October MTFP update. It is hoped that negotiations on the 2023/24 pay award will commence shortly with an outcome known prior to the end of the financial year.

### **4. Contact Centre and ICT**

- 4.1** The ICT services Manager has successfully bid for £150,000 of Local Digital Cyber Funding from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. This funding can be spent over the current and future years and will help us to improve our cyber resilience measures.
- 4.2** Following Cabinet approval in October, we are now in a consultation period with residents and other council tax preceptors regarding reducing the minimum council tax contribution from 8.5% to 0% under our localised council tax reduction scheme (LCTS). This, if implemented will reduce the council tax bills of approximately 5,300 working-age council tax payers who currently claim LCTS.
- 4.3** Under the Council tax Discretionary Energy Rebate Fund (DERS) Wyre was awarded £260,200. The closing date for allocation of the funds was 30 November 2022. At the time of writing this report £37,050 had been used to award a £150 payment to 247 council tax payers living in properties falling under council tax bands E-H and claiming LCTS. A further £180,000 had been pooled with Household Support Funding (Tranche 2) to help finance the £90 payments to pension-age LCTS claimants and £50 payments to working-age LCTS claimants. The balance of the remaining funding will be used to make payments to some of those residents who are liable to pay council tax, but exempt from paying because either everyone in the household is disregarded for council tax purposes (e.g. Severely Mentally Impaired, under 18 years of age, students), or they receive a 25% discount because their partner is disregarded for council tax purposes due to having a severe mental impairment, or holding student status.
- 4.4** We expect confirmation soon of a further award of £430,000 in Household Support Funding (HSF) (Tranche 3) provided by the Government (via LCC). We are currently working out how to distribute the money, with the intention being to award some funding to residents who haven't previously received any HSF. This includes residents in receipt of Housing Benefit, but not LCTS or Universal Credit (approximately 300 cases) and council tax payers who have a council tax exemption in place (approximately 300 cases), so don't have to claim LCTS. These exemptions are awarded to cohorts such as the

severely mentally impaired, students and households occupied solely by under 18s. For residents living in HMO's who aren't liable to pay council tax in their own right, but nevertheless have their own gas and electricity meters for which they have prepayment accounts, we are planning to visit and complete a simple application form with them, after which a Post Office Payout or food voucher will be provided.

## **5. Comments and questions**

- 5.1** In accordance with procedure rule 11.3 any member of Council will be able to ask me a question or make a comment on the contents of my report or on any issue, which falls within my area of responsibility. I will respond to any such questions or comments in accordance with Procedure Rule 11.5.