

Report of:	To:	Date
Councillor David Henderson, Resources Portfolio Holder	Council	20 April 2023

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** Members should now have received their council tax bills for the 2023/24 financial year reflecting this Council's decision to increase its element of the bill by just £5 on a Band D equivalent property to £219.74 or just 60p per day.
- 2.2** Whilst the total band D council tax (excluding parish precepts) is now £2,128.17, I wish to remind members that the Wyre element is just over 10% of the charge with the costs of Lancashire County Council (74%), the Police and Crime Commissioner (12%) and the Fire Authority (4%) all contributing to the final bill that drops through our residents' letterboxes.
- 2.3** 2023/24 sees a one year settlement deal for the fifth year running and our forecasts contain a higher level of uncertainty than previously experienced as a result. Our most recent financial projections in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) indicate a gap between expenditure and income of £3.7m in 2027/28.
- 2.4** This year, we expect consultation on the future of New Homes Bonus and we anticipate that more detail will be available in late summer with the next round of settlement figures available in December. Realistically this will be when we know the impact on Wyre in sufficient detail to be able to accurately update the MTFP. A briefing will be provided to Members later in the year to accompany the MTFP report in October.

3. Governance and Business Support

- 3.1** Unions have rejected the National Employers offer of a £1,925 increase on NJC pay spines 2-43 and a 3.88% increase on those on spinal point 44 and above but below Chief Officer grades. This offer would achieve a 9.42% increase for our lowest paid staff with everyone receiving a minimum of 3.88%. Unions will now be balloting for industrial action which means it is unlikely that any agreement will be made within the first half of 2023.
- 3.2** The annual gender pay gap has been completed for the financial year ending 31 March 2022 and submitted to gov.uk. The council reported a mean pay gap of 0.1% and median pay gap of 0% which is a very positive result for Wyre. This means that females are paid largely the same as males, in addition there is an even distribution of males and females in each salary quartile.
- 3.3** Work is continuing at pace in preparation for the May Elections. A major change is the new requirement for electors to provide photo ID when voting in person at polling stations. This does not apply to postal voters yet. Acceptable forms of ID include a passport, driving licence, blue badges and bus passes. Electors without qualifying photo ID can apply for a Voter Authority Certificate. Information regarding the changes is being publicised widely including on the council website, and in council communications including Wyre Voice and an additional signature Footer in public emails. Enquiries from electors received so far are evidence that the messages are filtering through. Extra training will be provided to Polling station staff and inspectors regarding the new requirements. From October 2023 Voter ID requirements will also apply to any General Election.
- 3.4** On Sunday 23 April there will be a national test of the UK Emergency Alerts service. This is a new UK government service that will warn you if there's a life-threatening emergency nearby, for example, severe flooding or a fire. Mobile phones / tablets will make a loud siren-like sound, vibrate and may even read out the alert. The alert will include a phone number and/or a link to the gov.uk website for more information. You can opt out of emergency alerts, but it is recommend that you keep them switched on for your own safety.

4. Contact Centre

- 4.1** Following a successful request to Lancashire County Council (LCC) for additional Household Support funding (HSF), the third tranche of the funding was increased from £430,000 to £573,000. The funding was allocated largely to various cohorts of Wyre council tax payers identified as needing additional financial support to meet the increased costs of living. The recipients of the payments included single parents and families receiving Localised Council Tax Support (LCTS), those with household members suffering from physical disability or from Severe Mental Impairment, and single household adults aged under 25 who haven't previously received any additional support from the HSF. Funding was also provided to some of the tenants living in homes in multiple occupation as they are not liable to pay council tax and

therefore did not qualify for council tax energy rebate payments or previous HSF payments.

- 4.2** During the third round of HSF funding over 6,500 payments of between £50 and £200 were made in the form of supermarket vouchers. In addition, payments were made to three food banks totalling £41,000, with a further £10,000 being contributed to a domestic violence charity to help it meet its increased energy and food costs and £13,831 to the YMCA to help fund its warm hubs scheme.
- 4.3** In total, during the three rounds of HSF funding to date, the council has made over 15,500 payments, with a total value of around £1.2m.
- 4.4** A fourth HSF scheme is due to commence shortly and will run until 31 March 2024, or until the funding is exhausted. At the time of writing we have not been advised as to how much funding we will be allocated. The intention is to use some of the funding to provide additional support to those families whose household incomes are above the levels that allow them to claim social benefits, but are still struggling with the increased costs of living.
- 4.5** The council were provided with £138,017 in Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) funding by the Government in 2022/23. The funding is to help people claiming housing costs through Housing Benefit or Universal Credit with any additional costs they may face in the form of things like the removal costs when downsizing to a more suitable, property for their households needs, or for meeting bond or rent in advance requirements. The funding for 2022/23 has been fully allocated to 214 successful applicants from a total of 461 applications received.
- 4.6** Council tax (52,133) and business rate (4,067) bills for 2023/24 were sent out in March to Wyre households and businesses. Following the removal of the requirement for working-age LCTS claimants to pay a minimum of 8.5% of their council tax bills, over 5,000 working-age households on the lowest incomes saw a reduction in the amount of council tax they have to pay for 2023/24.
- 4.7** In addition, the 2023/24 council tax bills of LCTS claimants who were claiming LCTS on 1 April 2023 and aren't in receipt of maximum LCTS, so still have a bill to pay, have been further reduced by up to £25 via the Council Tax Support Fund announced by the Government on 23 December 2022. In accordance with the terms of the scheme, any LCTS claimant's council tax bill for over that amount was reduced by the full £25 and any bills for less than £25 were reduced by the amount outstanding.
- 4.8** As a result of the removal of the minimum 8.5% council tax payment from LCTS claimants and the additional reduction of up to £25 via the Council Tax Support Fund, 1,464 working-age LCTS claimants have received a "zero to pay" council tax bill for 2023/24.

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.