

To register a question for Public Question Time please email your question to democracy@rossendalebc.gov.uk before 9am Monday 14th November.

Meeting of: The Council

Wednesday 16th November 2022 at 6.30pm or at the conclusion of Question Time and Public Engagement whichever is the later.

Venue: Council Chamber, The Business Centre, Futures Park, Bacup. OL13 0BB



The meeting will also be live streamed at the following link:

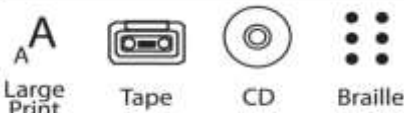
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCrLsMDOP7AYxik5pNP0gTIA/streams>

Supported by: Carolyn Sharples, Committee and Member Services Manager Tel: 01706 252422
Email: democracy@rossendalebc.gov.uk

ITEM		Lead Member/Contact Officer
A.	BUSINESS MATTERS	
A1.	Apologies for Absence	
A2.	To approve and sign as a correct record the minutes of 5 th October 2022.	
A3.	Urgent Items of Business To note any items which the Chair has agreed to add to the Agenda on the grounds of urgency.	
A4.	Declarations of Interest <i>Members are advised to contact the Monitoring Officer in advance of the meeting to seek advice on interest issues if necessary.</i> Members are requested to indicate at this stage, any items on the agenda in which they intend to declare an interest. Members are reminded that, in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000 and the Council's Code of Conduct, they must declare the nature of any personal interest and, if the interest is prejudicial, withdraw from the meeting during consideration of the item.	Clare Birtwistle, Monitoring Officer 01706 252438 clarebirtwistle@rossendalebc.gov.uk
B.	Communications from the Mayor, the Leader or Head of Paid Service To receive any communications from the Mayor, the Leader, or the Head of the Paid Service that they may wish to lay before the Council.	The Mayor, Councillor Cheetham, The Leader, Councillor A.Barnes and Neil Shaw, Chief Executive 01706 252447 neilshaw@rossendalebc.gov.uk
C.	ORDINARY BUSINESS	
C1.	Local Council Tax Support Scheme To consider the Local Council Tax Support Scheme	Councillor Hughes/ Adam Allen, Director of Communities 01706 252428 adamallen@rossendalebc.gov.uk

The agenda and reports are also available for inspection on the Council's website <https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/>. Other formats are available on request. Tel 01706 217777 or contact Rossendale Borough Council, Futures Park, Bacup, OL13 0BB

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C2.	Household Support Fund 3 To consider the Household Support Fund 3 report	Councillor Walmsley/ Karen Spencer, Chief Finance Officer 01706 252465 karenspercer@rossendalebc.gov.uk
C3.	'Ease the Squeeze' support package To consider the 'Ease the Squeeze' support package	Councillor A.Barnes/ Neil Shaw, Chief Executive 01706 252447 neilshaw@rossendalebc.gov.uk
C4.	Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) Update To consider the MTFS Update	Councillor Walmsley/ Karen Spencer, Chief Finance Officer 01706 252465 karenspercer@rossendalebc.gov.uk
C5.	Public Meeting Schedule To consider the public meeting schedule for 2023/24	Councillor Lythgoe/ Clare Birtwistle, Head of Legal 01706 252438 clarebirtwistle@rossendalebc.gov.uk



Neil Shaw
Chief Executive

Date Published:

8th November 2022

COUNCILLOR ANNE CHEETHAM, MAYOR

MINUTES OF: THE COUNCIL OF THE BOROUGH OF ROSSENDALE

DATE OF MEETING: 5th October 2022

PRESENT: The Mayor Councillor Cheetham (in the Chair)
Councillors Adshead, Ashworth, A. Barnes, Brennan, Foxcroft, Hodgkiss, Hughes, Johnson, Kenyon, Lythgoe, McInnes, McMahon, MacNae, Marriott, Morris, Neal, Oakes, Rigby, Rooke, Serridge, M. Smith, S. Smith, Thompson, Walmsley, Whitehead and Woods.

IN ATTENDANCE: Neil Shaw, Chief Executive / Head of Paid Service
Clare Birtwistle, Head of Legal Services / Monitoring Officer
Mandy Lewis, Director of Economic Development
George Taylor, Mayor's Attendant

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: 1 press
3 members of the public
By remote access (Zoom): 1 public observer.

A short silence was held as a mark of respect on the passing of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received for Councillors S. Barnes, Coogan, James Eaton, Janet Eaton, Pendlebury, Powell, Procter, Snowden and Steen.

2. Minutes

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 18th August 2022 dates be signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

3. Urgent Items of Business

There were no urgent items of business.

4. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5. Election of Councillors

The Chief Executive reported that the following persons had been elected councillors on 29th September 2022 and had each made the necessary Declaration of Acceptance of Office.

Resolved:

That it be noted that the following persons were duly elected at the by-election on 29th September 2022.

Name of Person Elected Ward

Scott Smith	Facit and Shawforth
Ann Hogkiss	Helmshore

The Mayor wished them well in their role as a councillor.

6. Communications from the Mayor, the Leader or Head of Paid Service

There were no communications from the Mayor or Head of Paid Service.

The Leader of the Council welcomed the new councillors to the meeting.

ORDINARY BUSINESS

7. Climate Change Strategy Update

The Council considered the Climate Change Strategy Update.

In response to questions from members it was confirmed that:

- There was a need to engage with the community to prevent vandalism where the tree plantings had taken place.
- Grants to business were making the businesses look at other measures to complement what was already happening.
- Consideration would be given to detailing the successes of the conference and how it was being measured.
- It was hoped to raise the level of ambition around cycling.
- The Leader of the Council would speak to the Director of Communities to regarding grants to see whether the lack of specification was a barrier.

Thanks was given to the officers who had worked on the strategy and it was agreed that Council would formally congratulate Viva PR for their work.

Resolved:

1. That Council note the progress in year two of the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan.
2. That Council agree the priority actions for the coming year.

Reason for Decision

In 2020, the Council made an ambitious commitment to play its part in reducing carbon emissions. The following two years have seen significant progress towards achieving this. Continued development of the outlined priorities will allow us to move forward further and even faster to ensure we reach our net zero ambitions by 2030.

Alternative Options Considered

None.

8. Introduction of charges for permits for kerbstones in cemeteries

The Council considered introducing charges for permits for kerbstones in cemeteries.

In response to questions from members it was confirmed that:

- Whitworth Town Council would need to give permission as burial authority.
- Charges would not be applied retrospectively.
- The fee was an administration cost.
- The purchase of a kerbstone was a choice.

Councillors Neal, Foxcroft and Rigby requested a named vote.

Members voted as follows:

Name	Vote
Cllr Adshead	For
Cllr Ashworth	For

Cllr Alyson Barnes	For
Cllr Brennan	For
Cllr Cheetham	Abstain
Cllr Foxcroft	Against
Cllr Hodgkiss	Against
Cllr Hughes	For
Cllr Johnson	For
Cllr Kenyon	For
Cllr Lythgoe	For
Cllr McInnes	For
Cllr McMahon	For
Cllr MacNae	For
Cllr Marriott	For
Cllr Morris	Against
Cllr Neal	For
Cllr Oakes	For
Cllr Rigby	Against
Cllr Rooke	For
Cllr Serridge	For
Cllr M. Smith	For
Cllr S. Smith	Against
Cllr Thompson	Against
Cllr Walmsley	For
Cllr Whitehead	For
Cllr Woods	Against
For:	19
Against:	7
Abstentions:	1

Resolved:

1. That Council approve the introduction of a £595 permit charge for kerbstones on graves at all four council owned cemeteries.
2. That Council approves amendment to the Council's Rules and Regulations relating to Cemeteries and the Memorials on Graves Guidance document to reflect the introduction of the kerbstone permit, the wording of such amendments to be delegated the Director of Communities in consultation with the Lead Member.

Reason for Decision

The introduction of a permit charge for kerbstones will help to ensure that families do have the option of having a kerbstone installation, but will ensure that it will be of high quality. The charge for the kerbstone permit will ensure that funding is in place to manage the scheme effectively, with any surplus contributing towards the funding gap in the Councils Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Alternative Options Considered

None.

9. Rough Sleeping Funding 2022/25

The Council considered the Rough Sleeping Funding 2022/25 report.

In response to questions from members it was confirmed that:

- The Council would be the lead authority and ensure the monitoring was carried out.

Resolved:

1. That Council accept Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities Rough Sleeping funding of £418,916 on behalf of Rossendale, Burnley and Pendle councils.
2. Council approve the continued appointment of Calico Homes to deliver the outreach service required under the terms of the agreement following a waiver of the council's contract procedure rules.
3. To delegate authority to the Director of Economic Development to enter into a framework agreement and service level agreements with Burnley and Pendle councils and Calico Homes and to ensure the legal agreements (including indemnities) are completed before receipt and distribution of funding.

Reason for Decision

This represents an opportunity to continue and build upon the work already delivered by the rough sleeping navigators to bring rough sleepers in from the streets, ensure that they do not return to the streets and those at greatest risk of becoming a rough sleeper do not sleep rough.

Alternative Options Considered

None.

(The meeting commenced at 6.42pm and concluded at 7.38pm)

Signed.....

(Chair)

Date

Subject:	Council Tax Support Scheme 2023/24	Status:	For Publication
Report to:	Council	Date:	16 November 2022
Report of:	Head of Customer Services & I.C.T.	Lead Member:	Housing and Customer Services
Key Decision:	<input type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	General Exception	<input type="checkbox"/> Special Urgency <input type="checkbox"/>
Equality Impact Assessment:	Required:	No	Attached: No
Biodiversity Impact Assessment:	Required:	No	Attached: No
Contact Officer:	Ian Walker	Telephone:	01706 252592
Email:	ianwalker@rossendalebc.gov.uk		

1. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That Full Council approve the Rossendale Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2023/24 as set out in this report.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Local Council Tax Support Scheme is subject to annual approval, by full Council.
- The Local Government Finance Bill states that an Authority must make any revision to its scheme, or any replacement scheme, no later than 11th March in the financial year preceding that for which the revision or replacement scheme is to have effect.
- If Rossendale did not pass a local scheme by the 11th March, then a default scheme would come into force, this would result in up to 100% relief for all working age customers, rather than the current 80%, the additional relief would have to be funded by Rossendale.
- It is proposed that the existing scheme of Council Tax Support be retained unchanged, except for upgrades to national benefit entitlements
- Adoption of the scheme by full Council before 11th March will meet the Councils statutory duty.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The national Council Tax Benefit scheme ended in March 2013 and was replaced by local schemes of Council Tax Support from the 1st April 2013. Individual authorities were granted the freedom to design and implement their own local schemes, with the exception that any local scheme could not leave any pension age claimants worse off than under the previous national benefit regulations.

The effect of these changes was a reduction in funding by approximately 20% for working age claimants and after consultation Rossendale adopted a local scheme, based on the previous Council Tax Benefit regulations, but with a 20% reduction in entitlement for working age customers.

The decision to continue with a Council Tax Support scheme based on the Housing Benefit / Council Tax Benefit regulations ensures that in practice the scheme remains effectively a means tested benefit.

- 3.2 The rollout of DWP’s Universal Credit in Rossendale started on the 21st November 2018 and is currently scheduled to be completed by the end of 2024, this date may change. Around 38% of the current Council Tax Support Claimants are pensioner households who will not move to Universal Credit. Government has given an indication that pensioner household will be moved from legacy benefits, but no clear steer on how and when this will happen. Certainly no moves will begin before 2024. The other 62% who are not pensioner households will almost all eventually transfer over to Universal Credit. A small number of working age claimants who live in temporary or supported accommodation will also remain in the scope of Housing Benefit.
- 3.3 As Housing benefit is reduced, the case for a Council Tax support scheme based on Housing Benefit is eroded.

A number of authorities have begun to move away from Housing Benefit linked systems, although these remain in the minority nationally (around 20% of authorities). Any new scheme would need to be effective in both supporting vulnerable customers and protecting the council’s financial position. A significant amount of resource would be required to be able to model and create a new Rossendale scheme. It is not clear that there is any conclusive case for such a change at the present time, particularly if the end result was to maintain similar levels of support for customers as exist under the current system.

This is not being proposed for Rossendale at present. A detailed briefing on the potential options and issues involved has been circulated to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

4. DETAILS

- 4.1 The number of Council Tax Support claims changes daily, a snapshot taken of the November caseload is detailed below. There were 32,399 domestic properties in Rossendale based on the October return. Of these 507 were exempt from Council Tax, 119 2nd homes and 553 classed as vacant. This leaves 31,220 occupied and with a liability to pay Council Tax. 16.4% of these properties have residents with an entitlement to Council Tax Support.

Council Tax Support Caseload	2nd Adult Rebate Claims	2nd Adult Rebate (UC) Claims	Council Tax Support	Council Support (Universal Credit)	Total Claims (Pensioner, Working Age, Working Age Other)	Total Claims (Pensioner, All Working Age)
Pensioner Claims	10	0	1940		1950	1950
Working Age (employed) claims	0	0	148	263	411	3167
Working Age (other) claims	12	1	1301	1442	2756	
Total Claims By Type (2AR, CTS, CTS UC)	22	1	3389	1705	5117	5117

Council Tax Support caseload has been falling steadily for a number of years. During 2020 caseload rose due to issues associated with covid-19. The underlying fall in caseload has now resumed and has fallen each month since August 2020 with the exception of March 2022 when we saw a small increase. In the last 5 years caseload has fallen by 1014.

- 4.2 The cost of claims for 2022/23 is detailed in the table overleaf. As at the 1st October 2022, total Council Tax Support for 2022/23 was £4,933,012.34. The Council Tax Support scheme results in a loss of income from Council Tax collection. This year’s the Rossendale share is 13.72% which equates to £676,809.29. There is no specific grant, which covers Council Tax Support, which had been the case under the former Council Tax Benefit arrangements. The costs are therefore borne locally.

This snapshot shows that local costs have fallen by a little under £19k (676.8k as against £695.7k last year). It should be stressed that these are snapshot figures that can change with new claims or claims closed each day.

	Total Claims (Pensioner, Working Age, Working Age Other)	Total Claims (Pensioner, All Working Age)	Total Claims (All CTS)	Rossendale Council Share (13.72%)
Pensioner Claims	£2,182,533.50	£2,182,533.50	£4,933,012.34	£676,809.29
Working Age (employed) claims	£221,264.44	£2,750,478.84		
Working Age (other) claims	£2,529,214.40			

There are no local changes to the Rossendale scheme proposed for the current year. Nationally inflationary uprating to benefit entitlement levels and thresholds will be applied to the local scheme

5. RISK

The Local Government Finance Bill states that an Authority must make any revision to its scheme, or any replacement scheme, no later than 11th March in the financial year preceding that for which the revision or replacement scheme is to have effect.

If Rossendale did not pass a local scheme by the 11th March, then a default scheme would come into force, this would result in up to 100% relief for all working age customers, rather than the current 80%. The additional relief would have to be funded by Rossendale.

6. FINANCE

The current forecast assumes the continuation of the existing LCTS scheme, which is based on the 20% reduction in support levels. As such, maintaining the existing scheme will have no impact on the Council's financial forecast.

7. LEGAL

Under the Local Government Finance Act 2012, it is the duty of the Council to have localised Council Tax Support, in the form of a council tax reduction, each year.

8. POLICY AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

Consultation has been undertaken with Management Team and the Portfolio Holder. There has been no significant policy or equality changes to the scheme.

9. REASON FOR DECISION

Councils are required to set a Council Tax Support scheme annually, before the 11th March on the charge year, in this case 2023/24.

No conclusive case for significant amendment to the scheme has been identified at this time.

Background Papers	
Document	Place of Inspection
Council Tax Support Scheme 2022/23	https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/info/210150/benefits/10571/apply_for_council_tax_support

Subject:	Household Support Fund – Third Round	Status:	For Publication
Report to:	Council	Date:	16 November 2022
Report of:	Head of Finance	Lead Member:	Resources
Key Decision:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	General Exception <input type="checkbox"/>	Special Urgency <input type="checkbox"/>
Equality Impact Assessment:	Required: No	Attached: No	No
Biodiversity Impact Assessment:	Required: No	Attached: No	No
Contact Officer:	Jackie Flynn	Telephone:	01706 252532
Email:	jackieflynn@rossendalebc.gov.uk		

1. RECOMMENDATION(S)

Council approve:-

- 1.1 The suggested allocations and process for the Household Support Fund.
- 1.2 That all future minor amendments to the criteria and budget be delegated to the Head of Finance in consultation with the Portfolio Holder

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- A third round of funding now totalling 320k has been made available via Lancashire County Council (LCC) to support families and individuals in hardship.
- The fund covers the period 01 October 2022 to 31 March 2023 inclusive and is aimed at supporting households in the most need, particularly those who may not be eligible for the other support that government has recently made available but who are never the less in need.
- The Fund is intended to cover a wide range of low income households in need, including families with children of all ages, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers and disabled people.
- Support which can make a quick but sustainable impact on energy costs is particularly encouraged; for example, insulation of hot water tanks, fitting draft excluders to a door, or replacing inefficient lightbulbs or white goods. The Fund can also be used to support households with the cost of food and water bills, essential costs related to energy, food and water, and with wider essential costs.
- The support can be delivered through a variety of routes including providing vouchers to households, making direct provision of food or goods, or issuing grants to third parties (with the exception of grants for advice provision). However part of the scheme must be delivered through an application process.
- This report proposes funding to partner organisations to enable them to support the most financially vulnerable along with payments to families, pensioners and individuals through an online application process.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 A total of £9m has been allocated to LCC as part of the third round of Household Support Funding. LCC have confirmed that they are allocating £320,000 of this to Rossendale Council. The Government has stipulated that whilst we can distribute funds to partner organisations to support households in need we must also operate at least part of the scheme on an application basis.
- 3.2 This funding covers the period 01 October 2022 to 31 March 2023 inclusive and must be spent by March 2023.

- 3.3 Support is not restricted to vulnerable households in receipt of benefits. Therefore, engaging with Homewise, Citizens Advice and the food banks will give households not in receipt of benefits, but who are struggling to afford energy and water bills, food, and other related essentials, the opportunity to access the funding.
- 3.4 The guidance states authorities have the flexibility to identify which vulnerable households are in most need of support and apply their own discretion when identifying eligibility.

4. DETAILS

- 4.1 A range of options for allocating the funding have been examined by officers. This exercise examined the information that the Council and its partners hold regarding financially vulnerable households in Rossendale.
- 4.2 Based on the research it is proposed to allocate the funds as set out below:

Item	Delivery	Cost
Affordable Warmth (boiler repairs etc)	Homewise	£50,000
Food Banks*	RAFT/Others	£65,000
Crisis Fund	Citizens Advice	£20,000
Emergency Payments - no recourse to Public Funds	RBC	£ 3,000
HSF 2 Legacy Payments	RBC	£ 1,000
Payments (online application)	RBC	£149,000
Administration (10%)	RBC	£32,000
TOTAL		£320,000

* The amounts distributed to foodbanks are broken down:-

Raft - £40,000 and £5,000 to each of the smaller foodbanks: Crawshawbooth, Trinity Baptist Church, Lighthouse Project, Rossendale Food Box project and Positive Start.

- 4.3 The funding allows for 10% to be used to support administrating the fund. This equates to £32,000 which will be retained to ensure that the fund is administered effectively in house.
- 4.4 To access funding through the application process, it is proposed the criteria will be:
- Applicants must be Rossendale residents
 - Recipients of Housing Benefit or Council Tax Support
 - Households with children under 5 years of age
- 4.5 Application will be through an on-line application process. Support will be given to individuals who have difficulty completing the on-line form.
- 4.6 This report proposes the following payments:
- The aim is to pay each household a minimum payment of £100, however this will depend on demand.
- As the fund is limited the proposal is to open an application window from 17th November – 16th December, making payments the following week.
- 4.7 Due to the level of funding available the criteria for the application process is targeted to ensure meaningful payments can be made to eligible applicants. The support provided to the food banks and Citizens Advice will ensure eligible members of the wider community can obtain some support. The Council has restricted its application process to families with pre-

school aged children as LCC are targeting low income families with school aged children through their free school meals offer.

5. RISK

All the issues raised and the recommendation(s) in this report involve risk considerations as set out below:

- The key priority with this funding is ensuring that it reaches those that are most in need. Previously the distribution through the BVRCVS was based on self-declaration, which was open to interpretation. For this round of funding the government has stipulated that an application process must be undertaken.

6. FINANCE

- 6.1 The Council will receive £320k Household Support Fund from LCC to deliver this scheme.
- 6.2 This report requests that any minor changes to the scheme be delegated to the Head of Finance in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

7. LEGAL

- 7.1 There are no particular legal implications arising from this report however this recommendation will provide a more robust process and structure to ensure that the assistance is given to those most in need.

8. POLICY AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The fund is targeted at the most vulnerable residents as instructed in the government guidance. Assistance will be given to individuals who need support completing the online application form.

9. REASON FOR DECISION

- 9.1 It is considered that given the constraints around identifying those most in need, the scheme outlined in the report provides the best balance of distributing funding rapidly to those in priority groups, whilst also ensuring that additional support is available for those most in need and in contact with food banks and the Citizens Advice.

Subject:	'Ease the Squeeze' support package	Status:	For publication
Report to:	Council	Date:	16 November 2022
Report of:	Chief Executive	Lead member:	Leader of the Council
Key Decision:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	General Exception	<input type="checkbox"/> Special Urgency <input type="checkbox"/>
Equality Impact Assessment:	Required:	No	Attached: No
Biodiversity Impact Assessment	Required:	No	Attached: No
Contact Officer:	Neil Shaw	Telephone:	01706 252480
Email:	neilshaw@rossendalebc.gov.uk		

1. RECOMMENDATION

That Council consider and approve the package of support proposed to address the current cost of living pressures for Rossendale residents.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The council acknowledge the significant financial pressure being experienced by many residents as a result of the significant increase in energy costs, inflation and associated price rises in 2022 and would like to provide appropriate support to alleviate this.
- The council is keen to complement the current support being offered by Government.
- The council is proposing to work with the local voluntary sector to provide a package of support to ease the financial pressures being experienced by residents.
- The package of support will be available until 31 March 2023.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1. The 'cost of living crisis' refers to the fall in real disposable income that the UK has experienced since late 2021. It is being caused predominantly by high inflation and a significant surge in energy costs outstripping wage and benefit increases. In February, May and September 2022 the Government announced a package of measures aimed at supporting individuals and businesses to lessen the impact of the financial pressures.

3.2. In the 12 months to July 2022 the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) is at 10.1%. The Bank of England forecast has inflation peaking at 13.1% in the fourth quarter of 2022. Inflation is expected to remain high for the next two years but this is difficult to predict accurately.

4. GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

- 4.1. The Government has introduced a number of measures to help individuals. This includes:
- A 'Energy Price Guarantee' – from October 2022 this will mean energy bill's for a typical UK household will be capped at £2,500 per annum, the cap was originally set to be in place for two years, but it will now be reviewed in six months. This is automatic and applies to all households.

- Energy Bill Discount - £400 off energy bills for households in from October. The discount will be applied in six instalments between October 2022 and March 2023.
- Cost of Living Payment - households on means tested benefits, including Universal Credit, Pension Credit and Tax Credits, will receive a payment of £650 this year, paid automatically in two instalments, one in summer and another in the autumn.
- Disability Cost of Living Payment - individuals on disability benefits will receive a one-off £150 payment in September to help with extra costs, such as for specialist equipment or transport.
- Pensioner Cost of Living Payment - in the winter months qualifying pensioners usually receive between £100 and £300 to help pay heating bills. This winter, they will also receive an extra one-off £300 Pensioner Cost of Living Payment, which will be paid as an automatic top-up to the Winter Fuel Payment.

4.2. The Government have announced its intention to support businesses. A six-month scheme for businesses and other non-domestic energy users (including charities and public sector organisations like schools) will be offered support. After this initial six-month scheme, the Government will provide on-going focused support for vulnerable industries (although these have not yet been defined).

5. 'EASE THE SQUEEZE' PROPOSED SUPPORT PACKAGE

5.1. The council has no statutory responsibility to support vulnerable people in the current cost of living crisis. However, the council has a long track record of seeking to alleviate the worst impact of poverty in specific circumstances and these have had a positive impact on local people, particularly some of the some vulnerable. This has included; hardship support through the Covid pandemic, financial grant support for Citizens Advice and local credit unions and signposting individuals to wider support through its Communities Team. However, the council is keen to do more in the current climate. The council is proposing to introduce the following specific measures:

5.2. **Energy rebate donation scheme** – some residents in receipt of the £150 energy rebate (from Spring 2022) and anticipated future energy rebates, feel they do not need it and may be prepared to donate it. The council will work with the voluntary sector to set up and promote a donation scheme to take receipt of residents' donations. These funds will be used to financially support activities in the overall package of support.

5.3. **Foodbank donation** – in 2022/23 the council has have already provided £43k to foodbanks (£20k to Raft and distributed £23k to smaller foodbanks). This contribution will be increased to a total of £103k to enable the foodbanks to better cope with an anticipated increased demand and lower contributions from the public and other organisations.

5.4. **Citizens Advice support** – in 2022/23 the council have already provided an annual grant of £35k, £21k for provision of a debt advisor and a further £37k towards their crisis management provision. It is proposed to contribute a further £20k for crisis management provision. This will make contribution of £113k in 2022/23.

5.5. **Affordable Warmth Fund** – the council received an allocation of £63k from the Government's Affordable Warmth Fund which provides funding to improve home energy efficiency such as insulation and central heating. The council is proposing to partner with

Homewise, our local Home Improvement Agency, to deliver the programme on our behalf. In addition the Council is contributing a further £50k towards this scheme.

5.6. As part of the overall approach the council has started signposting residents to energy efficiency, debt, hardship and other advice. This will enable residents to access a wider range of support and advice. The council will also promote all of this support under a media campaign across the Autumn and Winter to raise awareness of the support and advice.

6. RISK

6.1. If the additional financial support isn't provided there is a serious risk of some of Rossendale's most vulnerable residents being exposed to health risks if they reduce their residential heating in the coming months.

7. FINANCE

7.1. The package of support totals £328k.

Funding Breakdown	
	£
Foodbank Donations	102,950
Citizens Advice	112,575
Affordable Warmth Fund	112,587
Total Expenditure	<u>328,112</u>
Funded by	
Houshold Support Fund	209,950
Affordable Warmth Fund	62,587
RBC Own Funds	55,575
	<u>328,112</u>

7.2. In order to minimize the risk to the council's own financial position, the council has maximized the use of external funding to provide this package of support. The council's contribution remains as was approved in the February 2022 Medium Term Financial Strategy.

8. LEGAL

The report has no specific legal implications.

9. POLICY AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

The package of measures is aimed to help some of Rossendale's most vulnerable residents. It supports the wider strategic aim of the council to have 'healthy and proud communities'. Agreement to these measures is likely to reduce the exposure of vulnerable residents to health risks if they reduce their residential heating.

Background Paper	
Help for Households	https://helpforhouseholds.campaign.gov.uk/
HM Government	

Subject:	Medium Term Financial Strategy Update	Status:	For publication
Report to:	Council	Date:	16 th November 2022
Report of:	Chief Finance Officer	Lead member:	Resources
Key Decision:	<input type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	General Exception <input type="checkbox"/>	Special Urgency <input type="checkbox"/>
Equality Impact Assessment:	Required:	Yes/No	Attached: Yes/No
Biodiversity Impact Assessment:	Required:	Yes/No	Attached: Yes/No
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1. RECOMMENDATION(S)

Members note and consider the contents of this report.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.1 The report seeks to update Members on any changes to the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) assumptions and their impact over the medium term to the Council's forecast funding gap (ie annual financial resources compared to annual expenditure).

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The Council last updated its MTFS in February 2022 as part of its budget setting process. That MTFS at that time indicated a future annual funding gap of c£600k pa and the use of £56k from earmarked reserves to ensure a balanced budget for 2022/23.

3.2 The Council, along with the rest of the local government sector, is seeing an increasing financial pressure driven by the rapidly rising levels of inflation. This is a global phenomenon with a mix of causes which disproportionately impacts on those local authority areas with a relatively low wage economy. In addition to the inflationary pressures the Council is also subject to the ongoing financial impact of the empty homes scheme and associated legal claims.

3.3 The current economic situation is having a significant adverse impact on the council's overall financial position. Major issues are:-

- Based on the final pay award for 2022/23, pay inflation for council employees is expected to average 6.63%. This is against a budget of 2.5%. This equates to an additional budget requirement of c£260k pa. In addition, these pressures are compounded by the national recruitment challenges facing the local government sector. Like many authorities, a reducing pool of suitable candidates at all levels is being experienced. The Council is currently finding it difficult to recruit to a variety of roles, which in most cases results in the addition of a market supplement in order to attract suitable candidates. The balance between pay restraint, inflation, and maintaining vital services to our residents will continue to present a significant challenge.
- Goods and services are becoming more expensive to buy. General inflationary increases are being experienced across all contracts that are linked directly to RPI and CPI. The largest of which is the Revenues and Benefits contract with Capita, which is linked to CPI.
- Vehicle fuel and utility costs have increased significantly since the budget was set in February 2022.
- Following the Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) procurement exercise to appoint the Council's external auditor for the period 2023/24 to 2027/28. The PSAA advice is to estimate an increase of 150% on the total 2022/23 fees charged for 2023/24.

- Additional costs arising from the empty homes scheme and the ongoing legal claim.
- Rising inflation and interest rates is impacting on the capital programme. On average vehicle replacement costs are running c20% over and above the estimates included in the capital programme. Rising inflation is also having an impact on the construction industry - pushing up costs, increasing tender prices. In addition, as interest rates rise, so does the cost of borrowing which presents a longer-term risk. Affordability must remain the underpinning factor whilst balancing the need for investment in the borough. The capital programme must remain under review, with the need to assess each project in terms of priority and the potential reduction or deferment based on overall affordability.

3.4 In addition to the above pressures the impact of the council's capital contribution to the Levelling Up and UK Shared Prosperity fund projects will increase the council's requirement to borrow and thus increase interest costs.

3.5 Rising inflation has led to an increase in the Bank of England base rate, however this has not been reflected in the interest rates on offer from the banking institutions. The Council has been able to slightly increase its investment returns by depositing funds with the Debt Management Office (DMO) and Lancashire County Council (LCC) although available rates remain very volatile.

3.6 Historically, the draft Local Government Finance Settlement figures are published just before the christmas break. The lateness of the settlement announcement, combined with the uncertainty arising from the current political events, brings with it significant risk for the financial forecast. Members will be updated following announcement of the draft finance settlement later this year.

4. DETAILS

4.1 The current base revenue budget/cost forecast for the Council, together with anticipated funding is as follows:

Table 1

	2021-22 Outturn £000	2022-23 £000	2023-24 £000	2024-25 £000	2025-26 £000
Budget Approved Feb 2022	8,903	8,991	9,148	9,362	9,435
Additional in year pressures	210	1,515	1,157	1,348	1,528
Revised Budget Estimates	9,113	10,506	10,305	10,710	10,963
Estimated Funding:					
Council Tax (+1.99%)	5,867	5,985	6,104	6,225	6,349
Council Tax - growth in base	-	-	45	91	138
NNDR (Business rate: Base Line Funding)	2,180	2,180	2,180	2,180	2,180
Lower Tier Services Grant	93	98	-	-	-
Services Grant	-	150	-	-	-
New Homes Bonus	213	132	-	-	-
NNDR Retained / Pooling	493	500	500	200	200
Overspend funded from reserves	267	-	-	-	-
Resources	9,113	9,045	8,829	8,696	8,867
Surplus / (further savings required)	0	(1,461)	(1,476)	(2,014)	(2,096)

The key changes to the base budget estimate of £8,991 (2022/23) and £9,148 (2023/24) are shown in the tables below:

Table 2

2022/23 Additional In-Year Cost Pressures	
Service Area	£000
Additional Employee Related costs	260
Utility Costs	133
Vehicle Fuel	150
Empty Homes	600
Reduced Rental Income	70
Additional cost of submitting Levelling Up Bid	84
Audit Fee	55
Various (other inflationary increases/unachievable savings proposals)	239
Increased Investment Interest	(76)
Total	1,515

Table 3

2023/24 Major Forecast Changes	
Service Area	£000
Employee Related Costs	348
Utility Costs	130
Revenues & Benefits Contract Inflation	120
Insurance Inflation	40
Audit Fees Increase	118
Employer Pension Reduction	(156)
Total	600

- 4.2 The assumptions set out in the forecast are the latest best estimates however, work is ongoing in regard to preparing the detailed budget for 2023/24. Key assumptions to date are:
- Average pay award in 2022/23 now 6.64% (in line with the final pay award), 3% in 2023/24 and 2% pa thereafter
 - Assumes an annual staff vacancy saving of £200k pa
 - General price inflation – a freeze on all general revenue expenditure with the exception of pay, utility budgets and contractual increases
 - Employers Pension Contribution – 17.6% (2022/23), the results of the triennial pension review for the period 2023/24 to 2025/26 have reduced the pension contribution to 14.6%.
 - Employer National Insurance Contributions –The increase of 1.25% to the Employers standard rate announced by Government for 2022/23 is reversed from November 2022, therefore the rate is reducing back to 13.8%. The average rate for the Council is 8.2% in 2022/23 and 7.7% in 2023/24
 - Council Tax increase – assumes 1.99% pa, this is the maximum the Council Tax Principles will allow for 2022/23. The Principles for 2023/24 are announced as part of the finance settlement in late December.
 - NNDR baseline – in previous years the baseline has increased by inflation (CPI) however in 2021/22 and 2022/23 the baseline was not increased. Therefore the assumption is for the baseline to remain static throughout the life of the forecast
 - Assumes a £500k pa pooling gain, based on current 2022/23 forecasts.
- 4.3 The statutory date for calculating the Council Tax base is 30th November – once calculated the estimated Council Tax income will be updated to reflect the revised base.

- 4.4 Following the appointment of the new Chancellor of the Exchequer and the subsequent announcement of potential cuts to public funding, table 1 above does not include any Government funding other than the NNDR base line.
- 4.5 In respect of 2023/24, early forecasts show that the gap between resources and pressures will be in the region of c£1,476k and will rise in subsequent years. This is caveated on the basis of an extremely uncertain financial environment and subject to resources from government which are yet to be advised.
- 4.6 Following the sign off of the 2017/18 accounts and the significant changes arising from that process early indications of the impact this will have on the council's level of available reserves are shown below.

Table 4

Reserves	31/03/2021 To/(from) 31/03/2022 Commitments				Balance available
	£	£	£	£	£
General Fund Reserve	1,000	-	1,000	-	1,000
Employment & Transport	388	(118)	270	(270)	-
Leisure Reserve	55	(9)	46	(20)	26
Director Invest Reserve	74	-	74	-	74
Directorate Reserves	974	521	1,495	(900)	595
Vehicle Repairs & Replacement	189	-	189	(189)	-
Transitional Reserve	1,553	587	2,104	(133)	1,971
Business Rates Retention	4,614	(2,298)	2,316	298	2,614
Planning Strategy	113	(48)	65	(65)	-
Rawtenstall Bus Station	517	-	517	(517)	-
Response & Recovery	1,389	(580)	809	(461)	348
	10,866	(1,945)	8,885	(2,257)	6,628

Please note the figures above are still draft as the 2022/23 year end procedures are still ongoing.

- 4.7 The Council has a duty to identify, mitigate and budget for emerging risks which pose a risk to its financial resilience and stability, this is a principle of the Financial Management Code. Financial resilience describes the ability of local authorities to remain viable, stable and effective in the medium to long term.
- 4.8 The council continues to face a funding gap for the future. Therefore the council must continue to give consideration to:
- The future levels of Council Tax
 - Maximising the returns from business rates revenue
 - The council's ability to support non-statutory activities and partner/community organisations
 - The future quality and standard of statutory service provision
 - Any future efficiencies within services and ensuring support services are appropriate
 - The council's ability to exploit new revenue generating opportunities
 - Treasury management initiatives and maximising the strength of the council's balance sheet resources
 - Ensuring any contract renewals are to the best advantage of the council
- 4.9 Corporate Management Team (CMT) is working with services areas and Cabinet to identify areas where efficiency savings can be achieved and seeking opportunities to generate additional income. However, due to the current economic climate the size of the funding gap

will soon exhaust the Council's reserves, and in the longer term will be difficult to bridge without significantly reducing the level of services provided to residents or some level of Government funding, therefore it is recommended that the Council continues to make representation to government outlining the pressures being faced in Rossendale and across the sector.

5. RISK

- 5.1 Council Tax – If the level of Council Tax support claims increase as a result of the current economic climate or the level of Council Tax bad debt increases, this will have an adverse impact on the income the Council receives. The figures assume the Council increases Council Tax by 1.99% pa, this is currently the maximum allowed by Government.
- 5.2 Reserves – The level of reserves is still an estimate until the external auditors sign off the proposed amendments to the previous years accounts and the 2021/22 year end process is finalised. An ongoing reliance on reserves to manage the medium term budget is unsustainable.
- 5.3 Resources – The level of Government funding beyond 2022/23 is unknown. The Government Finance Settlement for 2023/24 is expected in December 2022.
- 5.4 Inflation – The expenditure figures include estimated inflation based on current known rates, should the inflation rate increase significantly they may require re-assessing.
- 5.6 Pay – 2023/24 includes an estimated pay award of 3% and 2% pa for 2024/25 onwards.
- 5.7 Capital - Members need to be aware of the impact the increased number of capital schemes and expenditure will have on the MTFS in future years. Capital expenditure has to be paid for through the revenue budget spread across the life of the asset, this is called the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP). The Councils £1.8m contribution to the LUF project will impact the MTFS by an MRP cost to revenue of c£45k pa for 40 years (estimated life). This does not include the cost of borrowing.
- 5.8 Empty Homes Scheme - The project continues to have a significant adverse impact on the council's financial position with several legal claims ongoing. The project team continue to closely monitor the scheme, manage the project risks and challenge the claims where possible thereby reducing the scale of the liability, but the scale of this is very limited given the overall scale of both current works and the nature of the property leases. The scheme is due to end in December 2024.
- 5.9 Rossendale Leisure Trust - Whilst the Leisure Trust is now trading normally the membership and income levels have not yet fully recovered to pre-pandemic levels. In addition the increase in the minimum wage, the increasing energy costs and the current economic climate are impacting adversely on the Trust. The Trust is estimating an income shortfall of c£650k in 2022/23. The Trust and the council need to continue to work together to control the losses wherever possible. This is a risk for the council in that it provides the day-to-day cashflow for the Trust, and also in respect of the ongoing delivery of leisure services across the borough. It is critical that the Trust remains financially sustainable and financially independent of the council.

6. FINANCE

The financial implications are contained within the main body of the report.

7. LEGAL

Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 requires the Council to make arrangements for the proper administration of its financial affairs. The Council's section 151 officer has established financial procedures to ensure the council's proper financial administration including procedures for budgetary control.

8. POLICY AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

N/A

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 This forecast update is subject to a high-level of risk regarding the current economic position. There are a number of significant risks outside the council's control which remain a major concern including the current economic crisis and the uncertainty of Government funding levels. This update reflects changes such as the current offer of the pay award for 2022/23 and anticipated changes in the next financial year. The level of Government funding from 2023/24 is unknown as is the outcome of the next triennial pension review. The uncertainty means these figures could be subject to substantial change. Members will be kept updated on latest financial projections and local Government Finance announcements and risks as they transpire.
- 9.2 The Council carefully considers and monitors the MTFs and the risks as set out in this report and in the Corporate Risk Register. The Council has a risk management strategy in place to identify and evaluate risks. Risks are identified, potential impacts are highlighted and controls and mitigations are set in place. The Council monitors and reports to Cabinet Members and Audit and Accounts Committee during the year.
- 9.3 The Council currently holds a number of earmarked reserves, these are funds set aside for funding future liabilities, however they are being used to fund the shortfall between how much the Council spends and how much funding the Council receives. Based on the estimates detailed in section 4 above, if no further savings/efficiencies or additional income is generated these reserves will be exhausted over the life of the current forecast.
- 9.4 The Council must identify and deliver further efficiencies/savings and generate additional income in order to achieve balanced budgets over the short to medium term in order to ensure long-term sustainability for the Council.

Background Papers	
Document	Place of Inspection
2022/23 Council Budget	2022/23 Council Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy

Subject:	Public Meeting Schedule	Status:	For Publication
Report to:	Council	Date:	16 November 2022
Report of:	Committee and Member Services Manager	Lead member:	Environment and Corporate Services
Key Decision:	<input type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input type="checkbox"/>	General Exception <input type="checkbox"/>	Special Urgency <input type="checkbox"/>
Equality Impact Assessment:	Required:	No	Attached: No
Biodiversity Impact Assessment:	Required:	No	Attached: No
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1. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That Council agree the Public Meeting Schedule containing dates of public meetings for 2023/2024 as detailed at Appendix A.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- To ask members to consider and agree the public committee meeting dates for 2023/2024.
- To inform and publicise public meetings for 2023/24.
- To enable councillors to be aware of key dates.

3. BACKGROUND

The Council is required to agree an annual meeting schedule.

4. DETAILS

4.1 The proposed schedule of public meetings for 2023/2024 is attached at Appendix A for consideration and approval.

4.2 Early approval of the meeting schedule assists with:

- enabling councillors to plan their workloads for the coming year
- informing potential election candidates of expected committees and training dates
- informing partner organisations of councillor availability to attend other meetings
- enabling deadlines and lead-in times to be communicated to the relevant teams

4.3 Consultation has taken place with relevant managers, CMT, portfolio holder, Cabinet members and group leaders.

5. RISK

All the issues raised and the recommendation in this report involve risk considerations as set out below:

- A meeting schedule is required in order to provide good customer service, promote local democracy and encourage public participation and involvement in the decision making process.
- Decisions made at any unscheduled or unpublicised meetings would be breaking the statutory legal requirements, thus making the Council open to legal challenge.

6. FINANCE

There are no specific financial implications arising from this report.

7. LEGAL

There are no specific legal implications identified as arising from this report, other than the need to meet Access to Information requirements for public meetings that take place during the municipal year.

8. POLICY AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

There are no identified equality impacts or policy implications for the Council arising from this report.

9. REASON FOR DECISION

To agree a committee schedule in order to ensure that the Council can effectively conduct its business.

No background papers

Appendix A

Draft version 1.1 issued 26/08/2022 Rossendale Borough Council – Public Meetings Timetable 2023/24

All the meetings below are held at 6.30pm in the Council Chamber unless otherwise stated on the agenda.												
Meeting	May 2023	June 2023	July 2023	Aug 2023	Sept 2023	Oct 2023	Nov 2023	Dec 2023	Jan 2024	Feb 2024	Mar 2024	Apr 2024
Full Council	19 AM	28			13		15			28 B	20	
Cabinet			18			18		6		7 B	13	
Development Control	23	27	25		5	10	14	5	16	6	19	
Overview and Scrutiny		12	10		26		13		15	5 B	11	
Licensing			4			17					5	
Audit and Accounts			26		27		29				6	

AM = Annual Council Meeting

B = Budget Meeting

E = Extraordinary meeting

S = Special

Community Partnership Meetings are held in a local area venue and usually start at 6.30pm. Please note that these are <u>not</u> Council meetings and dates may be subject to mid-year changes.												
Meeting	May 2023	June 2023	July 2023	Aug 2023	Sept 2023	Oct 2023	Nov 2023	Dec 2023	Jan 2024	Feb 2024	Mar 2024	Apr 2024
Bacup		29				26				22		
Haslingden		8				3				8		
Rawtenstall		26				5				1		
Whitworth		20			26				23			