

Agenda

Meeting name	Meeting of the Cabinet
Date	Wednesday, 22 April 2020
Start time	4.00 pm
Venue	This meeting will be held by remote access - details below
Other information	This meeting is open to the public

Members of the Cabinet are summoned to the above meeting to consider the following items of business.

Edd de Coverly
Chief Executive

Membership

Councillors J. Orson (Chair)
R. de Burle
A. Pearson

L. Higgins (Vice-Chair)
A. Freer-Jones

Quorum: 3 Councillors

Meeting enquiries	Democratic Services
Email	democracy@melton.gov.uk
Agenda despatched	Tuesday, 14 April 2020

No.	Item	Page No.
	<p>REMOTE MEETING JOINING INSTRUCTIONS THIS MEETING WILL TAKE PLACE AS A REMOTE MEETING - WEBINAR DETAILS BELOW:</p> <p><u>Zoom webinar:</u> When: 22 April 2020 4pm Topic: Cabinet</p> <p>If you would like to watch this meeting, you should register in advance using the details below; https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_bQNUM8yLQNOHD5XDFqIhSw</p> <p>Webinar ID 929-2235-3002 Webinar Password 649071</p> <p>The agenda is available below.</p>	
1.	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE	
2.	MINUTES To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 12 February 2020.	1 - 8
3.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST Members to declare any interest as appropriate in respect of items to be considered at this meeting.	9 - 10
4.	MATTERS REFERRED FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE IN ACCORDANCE WITH SCRUTINY PROCEDURE RULES There are no items for consideration.	
5.	COUNCIL RESPONSE TO COVID-19 (CORONAVIRUS) The Leader of the Council to submit a report outlining work undertaken by the Council and other partners to date, in responding to the threat posed by the outbreak of COVID-19 and setting out on-going work being undertaken to ensure that all possible steps are taken to prepare and respond to the challenges arising.	11 - 26
6.	MELTON SOUTH SUSTAINABLE NEIGHBOURHOOD MASTERPLAN The Leader of the Council to submit an update on progress and next steps in relation to production of a Masterplan for the South Sustainable Neighbourhood. <p>To follow.</p>	

7.	<p>ACCEPTANCE OF BUSINESS RATE POOL GRANT FUNDS The Portfolio Holder for Growth and Prosperity (and Deputy Leader) to submit a report seeking approval to enter the relevant grant agreements and accept the funding.</p> <p>To follow.</p>	
	<p>EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC RECOMMENDED that the Public be excluded during the consideration of the following item of business in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (Access to Information : Exempt Information) under paragraph 3.</p>	
8.	<p>WRITE OFF OF IRRECOVERABLE DEBTS The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Finance and Resources to submit a report seeking approval to write off debts over the value of £2,500, where officers believe that there is little or no prospect of recovering them.</p>	27 - 36

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Minutes

Meeting name	Cabinet
Date	Wednesday, 12 February 2020
Start time	4.00 pm
Venue	Parkside, Station Approach, Burton Street, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire. LE13 1GH

Present:

Chair Councillor J. Orson (Chair)

Councillors L. Higgins (Vice-Chair) R. de Burle
 A. Freer-Jones A. Pearson

In Attendance P. Cumbers

Officers Chief Executive
 Deputy Chief Executive & Director for People & Communities
 Director for Corporate Services
 Director for Governance & Regulatory Services
 Assistant Director for Strategic Planning and Delivery
 Legal and Governance Manager
 Democratic Services Officer (CR)

Minute No.	Minute
71	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Illingworth.</p>
72	<p>MINUTES The minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2020 were confirmed and authorised to be signed by the Chair.</p> <p>The exempt minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2020 were confirmed and authorised to be signed by the Chair.</p>
73	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST Councillors Orson and Pearson each declared an interest in any items relating to Leicestershire County Council, due to their roles as County Councillors.</p>
74	<p>MATTERS REFERRED FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE IN ACCORDANCE WITH SCRUTINY PROCEDURE RULES <u>Scrutiny of the Corporate Strategy, Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy</u></p> <p>Councillor Pat Cumbers, Scrutiny Chairman introduced the report, which provided Scrutiny Committee feedback on the Corporate Strategy, Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy</p> <p>During discussion the following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Leader of the Council, Scrutiny Chairman and Chief Executive had been eager to engage all Members on these important issues. • The Scrutiny Committee meeting on 21 January, at which these items had been discussed had facilitated good discussion. Members had submitted questions prior to the meeting and answers had been given during the meeting. This had worked particularly well. However, it was hoped that in future more Members would feed into these issues. • The Leader highlighted the importance of the Scrutiny function and the value it added to the decision making process. • The Leader thanked officers and Scrutiny Committee for their work on these issues.
75	<p>A NEW CORPORATE STRATEGY 2020-2024 Councillor Joe Orson, Leader of the Council introduced the report, which set out the proposed Corporate Strategy 2020-2024 for consideration and recommendation to Council.</p> <p>During discussion the following points were noted:</p>

- The strategic direction of the Council over the next few years needed to be affordable and achievable.
- Corporate performance measures had identified areas of good performance and where improvements could be made.
- Improving the Council's housing stock was high priority.
- The Council working closely with Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership and public consultation was key to achieving goals and aspirations for the community.
- The good work officers had undertaken on public consultation was noted. Public engagement was crucial and the Council had taken a new approach by its 'conversational' consultation.

DECISION (KEY)

(1) Cabinet **ENDORSED** the new Corporate Strategy 2020-2024;

(2) Cabinet **RECOMMENDED** to Council approval of the new Corporate Strategy 2020-2024.

Reason for the decision

To set the strategic direction of the Council for the next four years and to establish a set of affordable corporate priorities which provide clarity and focus at a time of ongoing significant financial pressures.

The new strategy seeks to find a balance between affordability and ambition; a balance between investing in core services and new initiatives.

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CAPITAL PROGRAMME AND CAPITAL STRATEGY 2020/21

Councillor Ronnie de Burle, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Finance and Resources and the Director for Corporate Services, Dawn Garton introduced the report, which set out the proposed Capital Programme 2020/21 for consideration and recommendation to Council.

A modest Programme was proposed with further resources being made available as necessary. Commercial investment supported by borrowing would also be considered. Assessment of assets was needed and currently the Council needed to progress with an element of caution.

DECISIONS (KEY)

(1) Cabinet **RECOMMENDED** to Council the approval of funding for capital schemes in respect of General Expenses for 2020/21 and the sources that funding would be taken from;

(2) Cabinet **RECOMMENDED** to Council that delegated authority be given to

the Director for Corporate Services to amend the amount in the Capital Programme for Disabled Facilities Grants once funding confirmation had been received;

(3) Cabinet **RECOMMENDED** to Council the approval of the Capital Strategy.

Reason for the decision

As part of the budget framework Cabinet are required to review the capital programme and seek the approval of Council to provide the required funding.

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REVENUE BUDGET 2020/21 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2020/24

Councillor Ronnie de Burle, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Finance and Resources and Director for Corporate Services, Dawn Garton introduced the report, which set out the proposed General Fund Revenue Budget 2020/21 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020-2024 for consideration and recommendation to Council.

The latest forecasted outturn position for 2019/20 was a £98k overspend on General Expenses and £31k underspend on Special Expenses (Melton Mowbray). The deficit demonstrated the challenging position facing the Council. However, Strategic Leadership Team were making every effort to minimise the likelihood of drawing on reserves. In addition, this was a balanced budget, which recognised the importance of generating income and the need to invest in high priority areas.

The provisional finance settlement figures had resulted in a 'holding position' but now the final settlement figures had been confirmed and were in line with those set out in the report. The referendum limit had reduced over previous years, impacting negatively on the Medium Term Financial Strategy. There was also uncertainty concerning future Government funding. It was imperative that the Council progressed with an element of caution.

During discussion the following points were noted:

- Members noted the hard work and difficult decisions which had been made to secure the best financial position for the Council. The Corporate re-structure had helped with this.
- Moving forward, it was vital to increase revenue and identify further savings.
- It would be useful if Members were provided with updates on the outcomes of certain decisions (i.e. those relating to cemeteries, car parking), to assess their value and if decisions made were justified and promoted the anticipated results.

DECISIONS (KEY)

(1) Cabinet **NOTED** the year end forecast and financial position for the General Fund and Special Expenses for 2019/20;

(2) Cabinet **RECOMMENDED** to Council that

- a) The proposals for General Expenses and Special Expenses Melton Mowbray be approved for inclusion in the 2020/21 budget;
- b) The revenue budget for 2020/21 for General and Special Expenses be approved, resulting in an overall council tax increase of £5;
- c) That the permanent establishment be updated in line with the growth proposals;
- d) Any increase or shortfall against the target working balance on General Expenses at 31 March 2020, be adjusted by transfers to/from the Corporate Priorities Reserve and for Special Expenses Melton Mowbray any surplus/deficit be transferred to/from the Special Expenses Reserve;
- e) That Members note the changes made to the risk categorisation of budgets.

Reason for the decision

The Council, having set a Budget at the start of the financial year, needs to ensure the delivery of this Budget is achieved. Consequently, there is a requirement to regularly monitor progress so corrective action can be taken when required which is enhanced with the regular reporting of the financial position.

To propose a general fund budget and level of council tax for the 2020/21 financial year for Council's consideration and approval that takes into account the proposals set out in the draft Corporate Strategy, also presented for approval. The proposals take into account the net amount of expenditure that the Council expects to spend in the next financial year to deliver services to our customers. The report also includes recognition of efficiencies secured and details of the funding and income received to support these services to ensure a balanced budget is proposed.

The Council also holds a number of reserves which the Council can draw upon to fund future expenses. The level of reserves is considered within this report, as is the future outlook for spending in the years ahead in order for the Council's future financial resilience to be considered as part of the proposals.

Cabinet and Council are required to consider and approve the General Fund Revenue Account budget proposals in order to set the budget and Council Tax for the forthcoming year.

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PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS & TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2020/21

Councillor Ronnie de Burle, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Finance and Resources and the Director for Corporate Services introduced the report, which outlined the Council's prudential indicators for 2020/21-2022/23 and set out the expected treasury operations for this period.

The inclusion of sustainable and ethical investments and multi-asset funds in the

investment strategy for 2020/21 was highlighted.

During discussion the following points were noted:

- The Council had an excellent record of managing its investment and the good work undertaken by the Corporate Services Manager was noted.
- In relation to the Council's commercial agenda and prudential borrowing, a commercial investment business plan together with an updated treasury management strategy would be required. The two were linked. This would be discussed further at Cabinet in March.
- The Council's commercial agenda should not be progressed in isolation but should be closely related to its aspiration to provide excellent social housing.

DECISIONS (KEY)

- (1) Cabinet **RECOMMENDED** to Council the prudential indicators and limits be adopted and approved;
- (2) Cabinet **RECOMMENDED** to Council the Treasury Management Strategy and treasury management prudential indicators be adopted and approved;
- (3) Cabinet **RECOMMENDED** to Council the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement, which set out the Council's policy on MRP be approved;
- (4) Cabinet **NOTED** the linkages to the Capital Strategy due to the integral nature of how the Council manages its treasury finances to support capital development.

Reason for the decision

The Treasury Management Code requires the Council to approve annually a Treasury Management Strategy and to provide a mid-year update on Treasury Management activities to the Council. It is a requirement that Treasury Management is scrutinised during the year which falls within Cabinet's remit.

To facilitate the decision making process and support capital investment decisions the Prudential Code requires the Council to agree a minimum number of prudential indicators.

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REVENUE BUDGET PROPOSALS 2020-2021 - HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA)

Councillor Alan Pearson, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities introduced the report, which set out the rents of Council dwellings, sought approval for the Housing Revenue Account estimates for 2020/21 and set the working balance for 2020/21.

Councillor Pearson highlighted the following amendments at 6.2 of the report:

- **The surplus/deficit (-) estimated year end position for 2019/20** – from £911,800 to £511,800.
- **The working balance carry forward** – from £985,250 to £1,385,250.
- Therefore the estimated year end position showed an increase to the original budget of £97,050. Of this £257,840 related to supplementary estimates completed in relation to the Housing Improvement Plan (HIP), this was reduced by savings of £160,790 over the approved budget. Items over £10k were set out in the report.
- **Repairs & Maintenance overspend** – from a £277k overspend to a £123k underspend.
- While there had been a significant rise in responsive repairs and voids costs in the year, the underspend on planned maintenance which allowed £450k to be transferred into the responsive repairs budget in December had continued and the need for the additional £450k, now more likely to reduce to £300k, resulted in an estimated £150k underspend.

During discussion the following points were noted:

- Councils had new powers to borrow and invest in new and existing housing and these would be explored when the Director for Housing and Communities is in post.
- The new service charging proposals were welcomed and there would be a further review of all potential service charges for Cabinet consideration in the Autumn.
- Concerning housing benefit as detailed at paragraph 6.6 of the report, referral to tenants in percentage, then in numbers was confusing.
- Funding allocated to Me and My Learning (M&ML) was noted. The work undertaken through M&ML enabled the Council to support the community (many within priority areas) to manage debt and their finances.

DECISIONS (KEY)

- (1) Cabinet **RECOMMENDED** to Council the estimates for 2020/21 be approved, subject to receipt of the rent standard, with delegated authority being given to the Portfolio Holder for Housing & Communities in consultation with the Director for Corporate Services to amend the estimated working balance based on any changes to this standard;
- (2) Cabinet **RECOMMENDED** to Council an average rent increase of 2.69% for all Council dwellings for 2020/21, with effect from 1 April 2020 and that when a property is re-let, the rent continues to be brought into line with the Government's formula rent;
- (3) That the working balance be maintained at the approved minimum working balance of £750,000, with any residual amounts transferred to the

Regeneration and Development reserve;

- (4) Cabinet **RECOMMENDED** to Council approval of a delegation to the Director for Housing and Communities in consultation with the Director for Corporate Services to access the Regeneration and Development Reserve balance for schemes and projects supporting the HAMP and in line with the HRA Business Plan;
- (5) That a working balance of £750,000 be budgeted for at 31 March 2021, based on a 2.69% average rent increase;
- (6) Cabinet **APPROVED** the new service charge for Health and Safety Works for purpose built flats in the Borough of £3.10 per week for 2020/21;
- (7) That taking account of comments from Scrutiny Committee, a further comprehensive review of all potential service changes be undertaken with a view to Cabinet considering a more detailed policy by the autumn and any further charges being introduced in April 2021;
- (8) Cabinet **APPROVED** a new electricity re-charge to tenants who make use of the new mobility scooter pods.

Reason for the decision

The Local Government and Housing Act 1989 requires the Council to produce and publish an annual budget, including the setting of rents, for the HRA which avoids a deficit. It is a requirement that this be scrutinised prior to its submission which falls within Cabinet's remit.

The meeting closed at: 5.15 pm

Chair

Advice on Members' Interests

COUNCIL MEETINGS - COMMITTEE MINUTES : DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Interests need not be declared at Council in relation to Committee Minutes which do not become the subject of debate at Council (i.e. Minutes referred to solely on a page by page basis when working through the Minutes of each Committee.)

An interest must be declared at Council as soon as it becomes apparent that a relevant Committee Minute is to be debated – this applies even if an interest has been declared at Committee and is recorded in the Minutes of that Committee.

PERSONAL AND NON-PECUNIARY INTERESTS

If the issue being discussed affects you, your family or a close associate more than other people in the area, you have a personal and non-pecuniary interest. You also have a personal interest if the issue relates to an interest you must register under paragraph 9 of the Members' Code of Conduct.

You must state that you have a personal and non-pecuniary interest and the nature of your interest. You may stay, take part and vote in the meeting.

PERSONAL AND PECUNIARY INTERESTS

If a member of the public, who knows all the relevant facts, would view your personal interest in the issue being discussed to be so great that it is likely to prejudice your judgement of the public interest and it affects your or the other person or bodies' financial position or relates to any approval, consent, licence, permission or registration then **you must state that you have a pecuniary interest, the nature of the interest and you must leave the room***. You must not seek improperly to influence a decision on that matter unless you have previously obtained a dispensation from the Authority's Governance Committee.

DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND OTHER INTERESTS

If you are present at any meeting of the Council and you have a disclosable pecuniary interest in any matter to be considered or being considered at the meeting, if the interest is not already registered, you must disclose the interest to the meeting. You must not participate in the discussion or the vote and you must leave the room.

You may not attend a meeting or stay in the room as either an Observer Councillor or *Ward Councillor or as a member of the public if you have a pecuniary or disclosable pecuniary interest*.

BIAS

If you have been involved in an issue in such a manner or to such an extent that the public are likely to perceive you to be biased in your judgement of the public interest (bias) then you should not take part in the decision-making process; you should leave the room. **You should state that your position in this matter prohibits you from taking part.** You may request permission of the Chair to address the meeting prior to leaving the room. The Chair will need to assess whether you have a useful contribution to make or whether complying with this request would prejudice the proceedings. A personal, pecuniary or disclosable pecuniary interest will take precedence over bias.

In each case above, you should make your declaration at the beginning of the meeting or as soon as you are aware of the issue being discussed.*

*There are some exceptions – please refer to paragraphs 3.12(2) and 3.12(3) of the Code of Conduct

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Helping people | Shaping places



Cabinet

22 April 2020

Report of: Councillor Joe Orson - Leader of the Council

Council Response to COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

Corporate Priority:	Service excellence in all we do Connected with and led by our community Ensuring the right conditions to support delivery
Relevant Ward Member(s):	n/a
Date of consultation with Ward Member(s):	n/a
Exempt Information:	No
Key Decision:	No
Subject to call-in:	No Not key decision

1 Summary

- 1.1 The current COVID-19 (coronavirus) outbreak has been designated a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation.
- 1.2 The UK Government has been regularly convening COBRA meetings and more recently there have been regular announcements from the Prime Minister and other Secretaries of State regarding this emergency and actions being undertaken. This is an unprecedented situation and local government is playing a significant role in supporting vulnerable people, businesses and local communities.
- 1.3 This report outlines work undertaken by the Council and other partners to date in responding to the threat posed by the outbreak of COVID-19 and sets out on-going work being undertaken to ensure that all possible steps are taken to prepare and respond to the challenges arising.

2 RECOMMENDATION(S)

That Cabinet:

- 2.1 considers and acknowledges the work that has been undertaken to date in responding COVID-19 by the Council.

3 Reason for Recommendations

- 3.1 Cabinet have a leadership and strategic role in the Council and have been working closely with officers throughout this period. It is important therefore that they formally note and acknowledge the response to the pandemic and the implications arising from the current situation.

4 Background

- 4.1 The current coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, which began in December 2019, presents a significant challenge for the whole country and the wider world.
- 4.2 The Council had been monitoring the situation closely since January 2020 but at the start of March 2020 and in response to the World Health Organisations declaration of a pandemic the Council put in place governance arrangements to respond to the impact of COVID-19 on the organisation and its communities. From 13th March 2020, full major incident and business continuity structures have been in place. During the period that has followed, there have been daily updates from Government and the Council has responded quickly in order to ensure that we continue to provide essential services, help people across the Borough stay safe, particularly the most vulnerable in our communities and support our businesses to remain sustainable.

5 Main Considerations

- 5.1 The Council has well established Business Continuity Plans which have informed action plans within services. Government guidance has been evolving rapidly and the Council has responded quickly. The report sets out a number of decisions taken over the last few weeks with the emphases being to maintain public safety, continuing to provide essential services, supporting our communities and businesses, as well as protecting elected members, staff and contractors.
- 5.2 Both critical services and those enabling services required to support them were identified as part of the Council's existing business continuity plan. These lists were reviewed in early 2020 so that the Council could be clear on which services needed to be prioritised to support the pandemic response and with an emphasis on continuity should the Council have a reduction in its workforce or have to respond to Government guidance. These services are monitored on a daily basis in terms of staff availability, levels of demand and any future vulnerability risks. A list of identified critical and enabling services can be found at Appendix A. This list is subject to ongoing review.
- 5.3 Ensuring good governance structures has been at the heart of the Council's response.
- 5.4 Cabinet have led corporate decisions and Portfolio Holders have been appraised of changes within their service areas. In addition, the wider membership have been updated regularly and have provided valuable community leadership roles.
- 5.5 The Council's Senior Leadership Team has ensured strategic oversight of the operational running of the Council and has been supported by a wider management team attending near daily meetings to make decisions, move forward actions and respond to Government guidance. Following the implementation of social distancing requirements, meetings are undertaken by video conferencing facilities.
- 5.6 Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) are multi-agency partnerships made up of representatives from local public services, including the emergency services, local

authorities, the NHS, the Environment Agency and others. The Leicestershire LRF has been overseeing a co-ordinated response to COVID-19 since early 2020 and has established multi agency management tiers to create a local framework. These are led by a Strategic Co-ordination Group which the Chief Executive attends. Officers attend the other tiers regularly to ensure that we have a joined up and consistent approach within Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. Mutual aid has also been provided for Personal Protective Equipment and staff expertise and knowledge.

- 5.7 Regulations made under the Coronavirus Act 2020 enable all local authority meetings before 7 May 2021 to be held remotely. The Council is conducting business by remote attendance in accordance with the new legislation and will continue to do so until such time as social distancing requirements are relaxed. The Planning Committee was successfully held by remote means on 9th April 2020 with facilities available to allow for all participants to fulfil their respective roles, including external 'third parties' This included provision for officer presentations, questions and answers, presentations and speeches from applicants etc. and enabled all procedures normally applicable to the meeting to be facilitated in remote format. Remote Meetings Procedure Rules were approved to accommodate any changes needed due to remote attendance. Where necessary, the Council may continue to defer agenda items or specific meetings should it remain preferable to undertake such meetings or decisions in person.
- 5.8 The Council's Internal Audit Team have been assisting the Council with ensuring that new processes implemented as a consequence of the crisis have had due regard for transparency and minimising fraud risk. They will shortly be looking at expenditure incurred relating to the crisis and providing assurance regarding the probity of that spend.
- 5.9 On 9th April 2020, the Council sent a letter to all residents in the Borough advising them of the way in which the Council is responding to the crisis, including changes to services and support being provided to communities and businesses. Further details on this response are set out below.

Workforce

- 5.10 The Council has a well-established Home Working Policy and the majority of colleagues have the facilities to be able to work from home effectively therefore the Council was in an excellent position to move to more frequent home based working.
- 5.11 Following the Prime Minister's announcement on 16th March, staff were encouraged to work from home where possible and those at 'increased risk' instructed to work from home from 19th March. On 23rd March following an announcement of "lockdown measures" confirming that the public should only attend work if they cannot work from home, all staff were instructed to work from home where possible. Those officers who are required to attend the office to perform critical functions are complying with social distancing measures and enhanced cleaning is taking place at Parkside. No face to face meetings are taking place and instead are conducted remotely to ensure that the Council complies with Government guidance. One member of the Senior Leadership Team is present at Parkside at all times the offices are open.
- 5.12 The Council is focussing on mental health and wellbeing of its staff and is having regular remote team meetings and briefings. In addition, internal communications are sent out to all staff on a regular basis and the normal excellent external support mechanisms are still available to staff.

- 5.13 On 18th March, the Council decided to close Parkside to members of the public except for urgent matters by appointment only in order to minimise the potential spread of the virus.
- 5.14 Those staff who are not undertaking critical services or responses to the pandemic have been supporting critical services and where necessary have been temporarily redeployed.
- 5.15 Temporary amendments have been made to relevant terms and conditions of employment to ensure flexibility in working arrangements to support those colleagues with caring responsibilities, especially those with children since the closure of the schools and other childcare facilities. A change in legislation allowed for an extended carry over of annual leave for 2 years which has been implemented and communicated to all staff. Local agreements have been made in consultation with Unison for payment for colleagues who are on standby duties over weekends and bank holidays.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- 5.16 The requirement for PPE is becoming increasingly prevalent. The Council is continually reviewing the guidance issued by the Government in terms of Health & Safety to ensure its staff are adequately protected in the circumstances.
- 5.17 The Council has advised all staff who may come into contact with the community to observe social distancing at all times. Gloves, hand sanitiser and wipes are readily available to staff working at the offices in Parkside and those supporting residents in the Community.
- 5.18 In light of the guidance issued on 10 April 2020, the Council has reviewed and undertaken further risk assessments to ensure that staff who are supporting the community through essential services have the correct PPE available to them.
- 5.19 The Council is maintaining contact with its contractors to ensure that they are also working within the guidelines issued by the Government and observing socially distancing at all times.
- 5.20 In terms of the wider PPE implications, a request for mutual aid was received on 7th April 2020 for aprons, gloves, sanitiser and masks to enable GP's surgeries to continue offering essential frontline services. The Council was able to respond to the request for aprons without any adverse implications on its own stock levels. Any responses to mutual aid will be replenished from national supplies.
- 5.21 The Council will continue to respond to requests of mutual aid where possible ensuring the health and safety of its own staff and volunteers remain a priority.
- 5.22 Daily PPE checks are being undertaken and reported into a dedicated cell through the LRF structure. This cell has introduced a daily traffic light reporting mechanism to establish quickly where the highest need is for PPE across the County and Rutland.
- 5.23 Currently Melton is reporting as Green which means it has sufficient stock levels to protect staff and no current issues with PPE.

Community Hub

- 5.24 On 16th March, the Council began drawing together local responses and actively engaging with groups to see how it could facilitate faith and community based efforts and co-ordinate them which resulted in the establishment of a Community Hub on 18th March. The Council established the hashtag #Here4Melton which was encouraged in any social media posts by the public to help the Council keep track and promote community efforts. A dedicated email address was created and a webpage with information that is updated

regularly went live on 20th March. For residents who are not able to connect online, the Council's main customer services number remains as the telephone contact channel to minimise confusion.

- 5.25 With excellent support from IEG4, the council's new digital platform provider, a digital form was created within a day to capture data for people who need support of some description. This provides a basis for dedicated staff triage for residents' requests to establish the level and urgency of needs. Signposting will be to groups who can provide a wide range of support such as telephone calls to the isolated, food and shopping services. Where there are gaps in support, the Council is delivering this support directly whilst working to address the gap in support by sourcing alternative support mechanisms.
- 5.26 The NHS identified around 1.5 million people nationally with certain pre-existing medical conditions who are considered at very high risk of severe illness from Coronavirus because of an underlying health condition. Shielding is a measure to protect people who are clinically extremely vulnerable by minimising interactions with others. All those who are part of this arrangement will have received a text, phone call or letter direct from the NHS, with the letter which enables those within this category to get support through that channel. Due to the volume of customers in this cohort, the Council are also supporting the County in the delivery of this.
- 5.27 In addition to the residents identified by the NHS, the Council used the Mosaic Public Sector segmentation tool to identify approximately 2,000 households across the Borough who were more likely to be particularly vulnerable through this crisis. A letter was sent week commencing 30th March to these households advising them of ways to access support through the Community Hub.
- 5.28 In three weeks, the Council has directly supported upwards of 300 residents with over 300 food bags and over 100 prescriptions – the two most commonly requested support needs. Approximately a third of those requesting or referred to support fall into the government's 'shielded' cohort.
- 5.29 In another initiative to support our residents, government have allocated funding nationally to support working age families currently on council tax support. Melton has been allocated £258,126 and the Government expects billing authorities will primarily use their allocation to provide all recipients of working age local Council Tax Support a further reduction in their annual bill of up to £150. Where taxpayers liability for 2020/21 is less than £150 their liability would be reduced to nil. Where a taxpayer's liability is nil, no reduction to the council tax bill will be available. The Council is also providing tailored support to individuals who contact the council including re-phasing of payments to the last ten months in the year, rather than the first ten months.
- 5.30 The Council's community efforts were cited by the Local Government Association as best practice for Community Hubs and were also featured on East Midlands Today.

Volunteers

- 5.31 Following the website going live, the Council received an overwhelming response from Community Partners, Groups, Parish-based support networks and individual volunteers. The desire to not dampen the community spirit that had mobilised had to be balanced with an awareness of the risks to the safeguarding of our most vulnerable residents. Upon creating a database of these volunteers, the Council followed a risk-based approach to the allocation of any roles. For example, high risk roles such as the collection / delivery of prescriptions and food parcels were allocated to low-risk volunteers such as the Council's

own DBS checked staff or individual volunteers with enhanced DBS from working in the health, emergency services and education sectors. Some were signposted to existing community groups and trusted partner networks with their own safeguarding policies. As the Voluntary Action Leicester (VAL) website is now live, any remaining volunteers have been referred to VAL for redeployment. The NHS responders service is also now up and running and we are looking to trial the effectiveness of this locally. If successful, this will reduce long term reliability on Council resources for the delivery of shopping and prescriptions.

Business Hub

- 5.32 On 20th March the Council Business Hub webpage went live. This provides a signposting service to support and advice available for businesses and its approach to government initiatives. A range of communications, such as social media posts, regular e-newsletter updates and press releases, to tell businesses and stakeholders about the support packages available to them has also been rolled out.
- 5.33 In relation to Business Rate Relief, The Chancellor announced in the Budget that the current 50% retail discount would be increased to 100% for 2020-21 and expanded to include all occupied retail, leisure and hospitality premises. The Council will be fully funded for the cost of the discount and reimbursed through grant. Many businesses were due to pay business rates by direct debit in April however for eligible businesses these were cancelled to ensure that there was minimal impact on businesses during this challenging time. The council has been awaiting a new patch from the IT provider which was received on 9 April 2020 and accordingly bills will now be re-issued to all relevant parties.
- 5.34 The Government also announced two grant schemes, the Small Business Grant Fund, and the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant. The total value of these grants for Melton is approximately £11.7m and affects approximately 950 businesses across the Borough. All Businesses the Council believes to be eligible for the grant have been written to directly. The letter contained information on how to access the online grant form as well as hard copies for businesses to send back to us if they were unable to get online. The grant is ring fenced and any unused portion will need to be repaid. The risk of fraud or irregularity is a major concern and it is not clear should any fraudulent payments or errors be made whether these would be covered by grant. Government provided a grant to the Council in April and at the timing of publishing this report 614 grant forms had been received with 430 of these being identified as eligible. Of these 430 forms verification checks are being undertaken on just under 300 of these, with 134 payments totalling £1.85m having been made to eligible businesses so far.
- 5.35 With regard to enforcement of debts during the pandemic, the Council has shown its commitment to aligning with the concerns of national Government and has put measures in place with regard to the enforcement of debt. All action to recover debts has been suspended to enable residents to keep their businesses and homes during this unprecedented time. Support can be provided upon request from residents and through the Business Hub.
- 5.36 During the dissemination of the grants the Council has been in regular liaison with the Audit team to ensure the checks and balances being put in place to protect the authority from any fraudulent claims. These checks include searching on companies house, checks against internal records, use of the Governments 'Spotlight' anti fraud systems as well as an escalation system should those undertaking checks be unsure as to whether a grant

can be awarded in any particular circumstance. Audit has confirmed they are broadly satisfied with the process currently in operation.

- 5.37 The Council has highlighted several instances where businesses in Melton currently fall between the gaps of the grant support being provided by central government. The main chunk of these being businesses who occupy properties which have an umbrella ratable value, for instance those located at PERA or the cattle market, those working from home and those businesses who occupy premises with a ratable value above £15,000 and not in the retail, hospitality and leisure sector. In these instances the Council is using the full extent of its networks and working with colleagues, partners and other key stakeholders, such as Alicia Kearns MP, BEIS, the LGA, the FSB and Chamber of Commerce to raise awareness of those businesses to central government. The Council has committed to continue to lobby on behalf of, and champion, the many businesses in Melton who are unable to be supported through the grant schemes whilst we continue face the impact of the coronavirus on our local economy and beyond.
- 5.38 The Council is engaging with our commercial tenants on one to one basis to provide support based on the individual circumstances of the businesses.

Impact on service provision and decisions taken

Landlord Services

- 5.39 In order to protect our tenants, staff and contractors, on 17th March, the Council postponed work on planned housing maintenance, focussing instead on maintaining emergency repairs. A risk-based assessment has been completed regarding the management of the landlord health and safety compliance function and delivery of the Housing Improvement Plan, taking into account the latest guidance from the Regulator for Social Housing and HSE. Wherever possible, following suitable case-by-case risk assessments, work is continuing as normal, but there will clearly be an impact in delivery where households are shielding or confirmed as having an infection and where there is no imminent risk of significant harm if works are delayed. Work is continuing to prepare for legal action for cases where tenants have refused access in the past to allow work, meaning this can be picked up when the Government relaxes the current restrictions on contact. The Council's annual gas safety checks are still being undertaken to the statutory timescales, although are subject to workarounds and changes to working practice as needed by the circumstances of individual tenants.
- 5.40 All tenants have been sent a letter to update them on what service they can expect from the Council as their Landlord and to provide reassurance that they will still receive essential support.
- 5.41 Rent statements are being distributed as normal, with an additional emphasis on support for tenants should they fall into difficulty making payments. All rent accounts are being monitored and engaging with tenants who fall into arrears is a priority
- 5.42 On 23rd March, Gretton Court was closed to all but essential visitors (those providing care to tenants). The Council is working closely with its contractors to ensure that Government Guidance is upheld and that both they and the residents are well supported and are staying as safe as possible.

Car Parks

- 5.43 In line with government guidance, free parking was approved by the Portfolio Holder for Growth and Prosperity on Council owned carparks to support NHS workers, key workers,

and those helping vulnerable people. The Council will keep this under review but is committed to supporting those supporting the COVID-19 response.

Closure of Businesses

- 5.44 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020 gave the Council the power to use enforcement powers to ensure that the restrictions on businesses are upheld. The Council's Licensing, Environmental Health and Regulatory Teams have been leading on this work and providing encouragement, guidance and support to ensure that businesses are aware of their obligations. Cross boundary and multi agency working has been prevalent which has helped to support a consistent approach throughout Leicestershire and Rutland.
- 5.45 Due to the closure of household waste and recycling centres, the Council has seen an increase in fly-tipping, whilst throughout Leicestershire an increase in burning of waste has been reported. Proactive communication has been issued to residents through social media to advise and encourage residents on the proper disposal of waste during this period.

Leisure Centres

- 5.46 On 20 March Melton Sports Village & Waterfield Leisure Centre were closed following a period of ensuring social distancing and hygiene requirements were upheld. Support has been requested by the contractor and the Council is currently in negotiations regarding the terms of that support. Specifically financial support is requested for the portion of salary costs not being covered by the government's furlough scheme as well as the costs of two staff members maintaining equipment and providing other essential ongoing work during the closure. A request has also been made to waive the management fee. Due to the short term of the remaining contract it is difficult for the contractor to commit to reimbursing the council for these costs over the remaining life of the contract as they are doing elsewhere. As such the option of extending the contract is currently being examined.

Household Waste and Recycling

- 5.47 The Council's contractor Biffa has continued to provide an excellent service by continuing with household waste and recycling collections at the kerbside. Bulky waste collections were suspended from 23rd March. The Council has been working with Biffa to ensure that they are as protected as possible and are following Government guidance. Whilst there are concerns around social distancing these are being mitigated wherever possible, ensuring that only two waste collectors travel in the cab together, and the third crew member follows separately to the destination.
- 5.48 Grounds Maintenance Operatives have been trained on waste management procedures to provide additional capacity if needed, however Biffa has been instructed to utilise agency resource as the first option to enable the high priority grass cutting to be maintained.

Elections

- 5.49 With regard to elections, Regulations postponed the Police and Crime Commissioner election until 6 May 2021 and local by-elections and other polls, either scheduled or which would otherwise arise before that date. The Council has taken the necessary steps to stand down preparations that were made.

Homelessness

- 5.50 Following government guidance, all rough sleepers have been offered and provided with housing by the homelessness team. To facilitate this, 12 units of Council stock have been

converted to semi furnished temporary accommodation, whilst bed and breakfast units have also been used. The Council is working closely with neighbouring authorities to ensure potential future demand through hospital discharges and prison releases are effectively managed and sufficient temporary accommodation is available.

Other Services

- 5.51 Play areas, public toilets and the Children's Centres at The Cove, The Edge and Fairmead have been closed in accordance with Government Guidance. Grass cutting continues, with an emphasis upon prioritised areas including the cemetery, housing complexes and main arterial routes into the town. Leicestershire County Council has largely ceased grass cutting on County owned land, only doing so when health and safety becomes a factor.

Business Recovery

- 5.52 Whilst the emphasis naturally needs to be on the current response, the Council has started to consider recovery and how it can support its communities, businesses and staff to transition following this difficult period. The Council is also undertaking work to understand how it can learn from the actions that have been taken as a result of the response and can improve its service provision as a result.

6 Options Considered

- 6.1 The reporting is for acknowledgement and noting and therefore no other options have been considered.

7 Consultation

- 7.1 Consultation on the Councils response to Coronavirus has been undertaken as explained in the main considerations of the report.

8 Next Steps – Implementation and Communication

- 8.1 The Council will continue to respond to Government guidance and the needs of its residents, tenants and businesses.
- 8.2 Business continuity work will continue in preparation of the Governments exit strategy.

9 Financial Implications

- 9.1 The crisis is having a significant financial impact on the Council's General Fund and Housing Revenue Account. The financial impact is arising from additional expenditure in dealing with the crisis both externally and organisationally, lost income and savings targets that will not be met within the same timeframe due to resources being diverted elsewhere. Costs are being monitored and updated on an ongoing basis. The current estimate is based on major disruption on services for a 3 month period followed by a slow recovery thereafter. On this basis the financial impact for the general fund is currently estimated at £590k with the majority of this impact being lost income from services such as car parking, planning fees, cattle market, rental income and investment income. The additional direct costs that are being incurred include such costs as additional cleaning materials, IT equipment, staffing costs, postages as well as supporting community needs. Indirect costs

will continue for some time with debt levels increasing and being difficult to recover. With regard to the HRA the impact is still being estimated but the majority of the impact will be bad debts, lost income from increased voids and the associated council tax costs borne by the council from these voids.

9.2 To date the Council has received a £23k grant from the government with nothing specifically for the HRA. The bulk of the grant distributed nationally has been allocated to upper tier authorities. However as a result of information provided via various local government and finance networks it is clear that the impact on district councils is now being more understood and it is hoped that further funding allocations will reflect the impact on districts more appropriately. The government has just issued its first data collection return to councils which enables the financial impacts of the crisis to be collected and submitted and these are to be updated and provided on a monthly basis moving forward. In addition, working with the LGA, the council has commissioned a piece of work in conjunction with the other Leicestershire districts to more fully understand the financial impact on the area of the crisis. The Government has been clear in the message to local government that costs will be reimbursed and the council is working on that basis when incurring expenditure with the emphasis on leading the local response.

9.3 The council's unallocated revenue reserves within the general fund are estimated at £1.4m which includes the working balance and the estimated impact of the crisis would utilise a considerable portion of these reserves if costs were not to be reimbursed.

9.4 Another area of concern is cashflow. The government has allocated the £11.7m grant in full for the business grants and as such this has eased the pressure. It should be noted this grant is ring fenced and any unused grant will need to be returned. However in order to support the community at this time and those that are suffering financial hardship council tax instalments are being re profiled to later in the year on request and there will also be collection issues. The increase in business rate reliefs will also impact on cash flow as it is not yet known when the grant will be received for these and in the meantime payments from businesses are not being received as they would have been. Monitoring is being undertaken on the impact of this on the Council's cash flow and discussions held with the LCC and other preceptors should the council need support from them by way of delayed precept payments.

Financial Implications reviewed by: Director for Corporate services

10 Legal and Governance Implications

10.1 Legal implications are contained within the report.

Legal Implications reviewed by: Monitoring Officer

11 Equality and Safeguarding Implications

11.1 It is particularly important during the current crisis to ensure the safeguarding of our most vulnerable residents. It is also noted that the scope of vulnerabilities has widened from what we would consider our usual cohort to include financial, health / clinical and the impact of isolation, especially for those with care and support needs. The Council cannot deliver such a comprehensive and flexible support package on its own. A risk based approach has therefore been developed to balance the need to bolster the community and neighbourhood efforts and managing any risks to the individuals most at risk of their

vulnerabilities being exploited. This approach is aligned to and supported by the VAL and NHS responders service.

12 Community Safety Implications

- 12.1 Consideration must be given to potential increases in domestic abuse, neighbour disputes and noise nuisance as a result of residents spending more time at home. Working with partner agencies such as the police, UAVA (domestic abuse support), probation services and Leicestershire County Council to provide support and reassurance where required is a priority. Homeless services are also prepared for an increase in demand as a result of domestic abuse incidents.
- 12.2 The Council is prepared to support agencies in ensuring compliance with social distancing regulations, including the monitoring of parks and open spaces and housing complexes.

13 Environmental and Climate Change Implications

- 13.1 Although there is a positive environmental impact on the borough due to reduced emissions, there is an increase in environmental crime which the Council is continuing to monitor and enforce if necessary.

14 Other Implications (where significant)

- 14.1 Whilst the Council is responding to the crisis the implementation and delivery of the corporate plan which was approved in February 2020 will be delayed. The extent of the impact is not yet known but expectations will need to be managed moving forward on what can be achieved with resources diverted not just during the immediate response to the crisis but also during the recovery phase as the Council supports community and business recovery as well as its own organisational needs.

15 Risk & Mitigation

Risk No	Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Risk
1	Inability to deliver critical services due to loss of staff	Low	Critical	Medium Risk
2	Inability to maintain financial sustainability of the organisation should grant not fully cover the impact and long term indirect impact such as debt collection	Significant	Catastrophic	High Risk
3	Errors made in implementing and administering new grants and services	Low	Marginal	Low Risk
4	Failure to deliver landlord health and safety responsibilities	Low	Critical	Medium Risk

5	Safeguarding issues arise through the enhanced level of community support	Low	Critical	Medium Risk
6	Staff are at increased risk of the disease in certain services	Significant	Marginal	Medium Risk
7	Increased risk of fraud and cyber security breach	significant	critical	Medium Risk
8	Reduced cemetery capacity	Significant	Marginal	Medium Risk
9	The continual spread of the virus causing increased illness across the population and increased loss of life	Significant	Critical	Medium Risk
10	Lack of PPE for key workers	Low	Critical	Medium Risk
11	Increase in community safety issues which are difficult to respond to due to capacity	Significant	Marginal	Medium Risk
12	Economy is deflated post recovery leading to ongoing economic issues in town centre and wider economy	High	Critical	High Risk

		Impact / Consequences			
		Negligible	Marginal	Critical	Catastrophic
Likelihood	Score/ definition	1	2	3	4
	6 Very High				
	5 High			12	
	4 Significant		6,8,11	7,9	2
	3 Low			1,4,5,10	
	2 Very Low				
	1 Almost impossible				

Risk No	Mitigation
1 and 11	Record being maintained of all staff that can be deployed so these can be redirected to high priority areas as required. Use of standby staff where required.
2	Record of COVID expenditure being separately recorded and income and savings

	loss being tracked. Impact on Reserves being monitored. Lobbying being undertaken on financial need of small districts such as Melton being undertaken with financial and local government networks. Specific consultancy supported by LGA being undertaken on financial implications for Leicestershire district councils.
3	Internal audit engaged in the process to reduce impact of any error or fraud. Assurance checks being undertaken
4	Proactive risk-based approach, weekly monitoring of all compliance functions
5	Risk assessment and consultation with Parish Councils have been undertaken to ensure that we are able to assess needs vs risk
6	Assessment undertaken to ensure high risk areas have appropriate PPE. Enhanced use of sanitisers and social distancing being recognised.
7	Regular reminders, bulletins issued to staff and published on intranet. Enhanced input of internal audit.
8	Work to identify future cemetery site build into Corporate Strategy.
9	Keeping abreast of Government Guidance and following this and best practice and promoting this through communications. Continuing with stakeholder engagement including funeral directors. Enforcement of business closures and working with Police on social distancing requirements.
10	Regular tracking and monitoring through the LRF and internally. Council's PPE is adequate.
12	Economic development keeping in touch with business community and providing advice and support where possible.

16 Background Papers

None

17 Appendices

17.1 Appendix A: List of Critical and Enabling Services

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APPENDIX A : LIST OF MBC CRITICAL AND ENABLING SERVICES

Critical Services
Customer Services
Lifeline and out of hours (Harborough)
Household Waste Collection – Residual
Household Waste Collection – recycling and other collections
Burials inc cemetery grass cutting
Grounds maintenance including general grass cutting
Community Support for vulnerable people (inc tenants)
Gretton Court
Intensive Housing Management Service
Landlord obligations: urgent housing repairs
Void Turnaround
Homelessness
Support for businesses
Council Tax Collection
Benefits administration
Land Charges
Responding to high risk incidents; dangerous buildings
Responding to high risk incidents: infectious diseases, food and burials
Statutory permissions - licensing
Statutory permission – planning
Communications
Car parking season tickets, Parking machine failure, tenants liaison, allotments
PPE & Stock Levels

Enabling Services
Landlord obligations: Property health and safety compliance
Distribution of Financial Relief – government policy
Financial Accounts and Payments)
Deferring rental payments
Income posting
HR (welfare and salaries
Corporate Enforcement
Post & Reprographics
Caretakers & Cleaning

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Cabinet

22 April 2020

Report of: Councillor Ronnie de Burle -
Portfolio Holder for Corporate
Finance and Resources

Write Off Of Irrecoverable Debts

Corporate Priority:	Ensuring the right conditions to support delivery.
Relevant Ward Member(s):	N/A
Date of consultation with Ward Member(s):	N/A
Exempt Information:	Appendix 1 & 2 of this report contains exempt information and are not for publication in accordance with Paragraph 1 & 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. Further details can be seen in paragraph 17.1 below.
Key Decision:	No
Subject to call-in:	No

1 Summary

- 1.1 The Purpose of this report is to seek approval to write off debts, over the value of £2,500, where officers believe that there is little or no prospect of recovering them.

2 RECOMMENDATION(S)

That Cabinet 2.1 Approves the write off of the debts shown in Appendix 1 & 2.

2.2 Notes the action taken by the Council to recover outstanding debts.

3 Reason for Recommendations

- 3.1 All recovery methods have been considered and where appropriate pursued, before recommending that debts are written off.

- 3.2 Officer time can be maximised on greater returns, focusing on debts where there is more realistic chance of recovery.

4 Background

- 4.1 The Council collects Council Tax, Business Rates, Rents and Sundry Debtor Income. Every effort is made to collect all monies due by the most appropriate and effective method. This includes but is not limited to reminder letters, attachment of earnings and benefits and special arrangements to pay.
- 4.2 The Council has a good track record of collecting debt, the council tax collection rate for 2018/19 was 98.2%, business rates 98.5% and rent collection including arrears was 94.51%
- 4.3 In the context of these collection rates, the level of proposed write offs is relatively low. The Council's Constitution and supporting Financial Regulations delegates the responsibility for writing off individual debts up to and including £2.5k to the Director for Corporate Services under the scheme of delegation. Above this threshold debts (greater than £2.5k) are written off by the Cabinet. Cabinet are being asked to write off debts of £6,686.15 which officers believe cannot be recovered.
- 4.4 The need to write off debt can arise for a number of reasons, including the debtor being untraceable, ceased trading with no assets, or deceased with insufficient funds in the estate. All methods of recovery are considered and pursued in line with legislative provision, before making the decision to write off. This can include internal recovery action, use of debt collection agents, external tracing agents and procedures through the Courts.
- 4.5 All debt approved for write off will be set against existing bad debt provisions and can be resurrected in full or in part at any time should new information come to light suggesting that they might be recoverable after all. In all cases collection options have been exhausted and there is no realistic prospect of recovery.
- 4.6 Debts arising from absconders are thoroughly investigated using our enforcement agent tracing services and third party tracing agents prior to a request for write off. Should the debtor be discovered at a later date the write off will be reversed and the debt reinstated.
- 4.7 With the current economic climate, taxpayers may find it harder to pay local taxes such as Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates and as such, there may be an increase in the number of taxpayers who abscond with arrears owing. By not writing off bad debts efficiently, this can affect collection rates by inflating arrears figures.
- 4.8 All recovery action is now carried out in line with the newly adopted Corporate Debt Policy. There is an increased focus on improving the Council's current debt position. The Council are keen to take an increased grip on the current debt position. Making us a more agile Council and securing our financial future. It is recognised this is an area that needs some improvement, we are looking to allocate additional resource in this area both through the corporate strategy and the budget proposals.

5 Main Considerations

- 5.1 This report is to be submitted to Cabinet on a quarterly basis for debts to be considered for write off. At the Cabinet meeting on 22nd January 2020 a number of debts were approved for write off. They have since been input and reconciled by the Revenues team.
- 5.2 However since this meeting a sample of those write offs was selected and a deep dive exercise was carried out on the selected cases. This was to establish if there had been any shortfalls whilst dealing with the accounts in question. The results of this exercise confirmed that in all cases the relevant recovery process had been followed. Where applicable the relevant recovery action had also taken place in accordance with legislation.
- 5.3 The low number of cases that are being considered for write off shows the Revenues team are currently up to date with the processing of write offs. They are actively pursuing other debts where it is considered there is a more realistic chance of recovery and will continue to do so.
- 5.4 The table below summarises amounts outlined in the Appendices that are being requested for write off

Fund	Value
Council Tax	£3,557.75
Business Rates	£3,128.40

- 5.5 The table below is an analysis of what has been written off in previous years

Fund	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Council Tax	£287,728	£239,382	£114,744	£163,955
Business Rates	£156,194	£122,815	£211,680	£190,050
Sundry Debtors	£13,902.95	£57,800.75	£113,056.31	£32,472.40
Rents	£85,604.74	£39,700.20	£30,718.14	£60,761.37

- 5.6 All debts that are being considered for write off have followed the steps outlined in the newly adopted Corporate Debt Policy. The necessary recovery action has taken place where applicable prior to recommending for write off.
- 5.7 In light of the current COVID-19 situation there is a risk that the level of debt will increase. Cases are currently being dealt with on an individual basis. We are ensuring that our residents are fully supported in this difficult time. Recovery action is currently not being pursued however this is being reviewed on a regular basis.

6 Options Considered

- 6.1 The debts in question are not written off and we continue to pursue and recover. This would mean officer time would be diverted away from recovering debts where there is a more realistic chance of recovery.
- 6.2 This could in turn lead to the Council being criticised by external auditors for not following debt management and accounting procedures.

7 Consultation

- 7.1 There was no consultation required as part of this report.

8 Next Steps – Implementation and Communication

- 8.1 Once authorised the debts in question are written off within the applicable system and the relevant write off reconciliation will take place within the Revenues team.

9 Financial Implications

- 9.1 Clear processes for the writing off of irrecoverable debts represent sound financial management practice. Provision for bad debts is also made in the Council accounts.

Financial Implications reviewed by: Director for Corporate Services

10 Legal and Governance Implications

- 10.1 Cabinet approval is required for the write off of debts in excess of £2,500 as per the Council's Financial Procedure Rules. Debt recovery is undertaken in line with the Council's Debt Recovery Policy and is reasonable and proportionate.

Legal Implications reviewed by: Monitoring Officer

11 Equality and Safeguarding Implications

- 11.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken and this should be referred to for full details on any implications. As part of the Equality Impact Assessment it was detailed the Council will adopt a consistent approach when considering debts for write off. Ensuring that all cases are assessed against the same criteria.

12 Community Safety Implications

- 12.1 There are no community safety implications arising from this report.

13 Environmental and Climate Change Implications

- 13.1 There are no environmental and climate change implications arising from this report.

14 Other Implications (where significant)

14.1 There are no other implications arising from this report.

15 Risk & Mitigation

15.1 By the nature, volumes and value of annual revenue to the Council there will always be uncollectable amounts which will be recommended for write off once avenues to recover are exhausted. Provision for bad debt is made and reviewed regularly.

15.2 If proper debt management and accounting procedures are not followed in the management and writing off of debt the Council could be criticised by external audit.

16 Background Papers.

16.1 There are no additional background papers to the report.

17 Appendices

17.1 Exempt Appendix 1 - Council Tax Debts

Exempt Appendix 2 - Business Rates Debts

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