

**FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD THURSDAY 14 MARCH 2024**

<b>No</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Summary of Key Recommendations</b>
1.	Apologies	<b>Alderman Coyle, Councillors Kane, Peacock</b>
2.	Declarations of Interest	<b>None</b>
3.	Minutes of Finance Committee meeting held Thursday 11 <sup>th</sup> January 2024	<b>Signed as a correct record</b>
4.	Management Accounts	
4.1	Period 9	<b>Noted</b>
4.2	Period 10	<b>Noted</b>
5.	APP Forecast	<b>Noted</b>
6.	Prompt Payment Statistics	<b>Noted</b>
7.	Scheme of Allowances 2024/25	<b>To recommend that Council approve the scheme of allowances for 2024/25 as tabled and authorises the Chief Finance Officer to implement any basic allowance increases as and when announced by the Department for Communities for the same period</b>
8.	Budget Process & Timetable	<b>To recommend that Council approve the process and timetable for setting the annual budget including the setting of a date for the</b>

		<b>Rates Striking Council Meeting</b>
<b>9.</b>	Essential User Policy	<b>To recommend that Council defer the item for one month</b>
<b>10.</b>	Correspondence	
<b>10.1</b>	ALACE 2024 Pay Claim	<b>Noted</b>
<b>10.2</b>	NJC Pay Briefing	<b>Noted</b>
<b>10.3</b>	Letter to Council CE's	<b>Noted</b>
<b>10.4</b>	NILGA Letter to Neil Gibson	<b>Noted</b>
<b>10.5</b>	NILGA Response to Rating Division	<b>Noted</b>
<b>10.6</b>	Chief Officer Pay Claim	<b>Noted</b>
<b>10.7</b>	Green Book Update	<b>Noted</b>
<b>10.8</b>	JNC Craft Pay Claim	<b>Noted</b>
<b>10.9</b>	NJC Pay Claim	<b>Noted</b>
<b>10.10</b>	Rates Statistics Covering Letter	<b>Noted</b>
<b>10.11</b>	Rates Statistics	<b>Noted</b>
<b>11.</b>	Matters for Reporting to the Partnership Panel	<b>None</b>
	<b>FOR CONFIDENTIAL CONSIDERATION (Items 12 - 15 inclusive)</b>	
<b>12.</b>	Fuel Contract	<b>To recommend that Council approve the extension of usage of the national fuel agreement for the period 1<sup>st</sup> June 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026; That this authority extends to use of local fuel suppliers where increased value for money can be demonstrated after benchmarking against the CCS contract.</b>
<b>13.</b>	Merchant Services Contract	<b>To recommend that Council approve the</b>

		<b>appointment of AIB Merchant Acquiring Services as the supplier for card payments to council for 12 months with two further renewals of 12 months (36 months total) and authorise Officers to sign contractual and other necessary documents</b>
<b>14.</b>	Salary Sacrifice AVC Contract	<b>To recommend that Council approve use of the Portsmouth City Council framework for the engagement of AVCWise and authorises officers to sign the agreement contract documents</b>
<b>15.</b>	Transformation Plan	<b>To recommend to Council that the Action Plan Update is considered and noted</b>
<b>16.</b>	Debt Management	<b>Noted</b>
<b>17.</b>	Any Other Relevant Business (notified in accordance with Standing Order 12 (o))	<b>Nil</b>

**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE  
FINANCE COMMITTEE HELD  
IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC HEADQUARTERS AND VIA VIDEO  
CONFERENCE ON THURSDAY 14 MARCH 2024 AT 7.00PM**

**In the Chair:** Councillor Huggins

**Members Present:** Alderman Callan, Knight McQuillan, S McKillop, Scott  
Councillors Holmes, Kyle, McQuillan, Mairs, Schenning,  
Wisener

**Officers Present:** D Wright, Chief Finance Officer  
L Clyde, Financial Accountant  
J Culkin, Management Accountant  
I Owens, Committee & Member Services Officer

**In Attendance:** A Lennox, Mobile Operation Officer

Press: (1 No) (R)

**Key:** (R) Attended Remotely

The Chair advised Committee of its obligations and protocol whilst the meeting was being audio recorded.

**1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were recorded for Alderman Coyle, Councillors Kane and Peacock.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. MINUTES OF FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD THURSDAY 11  
JANUARY 2024**

Summary previously circulated.

**AGREED** – that the Minutes of the Finance Committee Meeting held Thursday 11 January 2024 are confirmed as a correct record.

**4. MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS**

**4.1 Period 9**

Report, previously circulated, was presented by the Management Accountant.

**Background**

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council (CC&GBC) consists of 4 legacy councils that merged on 1 April 2015 into 1 council. The council is currently made

up of 3 directorates (Leisure and Development, Environmental Services, Corporate Policy and Resources) and includes a Planning, Finance and Legal department, that are reported separately in this report. The Annual Budgeted Spend for 2023/24 controlled by the Directorates is £78.818m (excludes depreciation, actuarial adjustments, provisions, accumulated absences, and it is these figures that change the figures in the Audited Accounts). Gross Income is budgeted at £76.206m the difference being a budgeted applied balance of £2.612m for the year.

### **Financial Overview by Directorate**

The table, previously circulated, details a summary of the financial position at period 9 (up to and including 31 December 2023):

Council is showing a favourable variance against budget at period 9 amounting to £1,673,734 which is an encouraging position to be in as we approach the final quarter of the financial year. It should be noted that this however is not a surplus but rather a positive variance against budget, Council set a deficit budget for 2023/24 of £2.612m therefore if this position was maintained until the end of the year Council would still be in deficit by £0.938m, reducing reserves by this amount.

### **Income and Expenditure Analysis**

The overall position with regards staffing costs is shown in the table, previously circulated, by Directorate.

Council is currently adverse against budget in terms of staffing, and this is expected to be the case as the current pay award offered to employees exceeds the budgetary provision included by Council in the rates estimates. The variance has reduced slightly from P8, most likely due to the accrual for the pay award in previous months being slightly overestimated plus an element of seasonality.

The table, previously circulated, sets out the budgetary position of all other areas of expenditure against budget by Directorate.

At period 9 this is £48k favourable (Period 8 - £327k adverse) however it should be noted that this includes £139k relating to insurance costs for which the full charge for the year has already been included in the accounts thereby generating the adverse variance against the annual budget. Maintenance and materials are the other areas which are showing adverse at this stage across Council's entire estate. Other significant factors include waste where increased tonnages at our landfill site have led to increased landfill tax (this is offset by landfill tax income and increased dumping fees), the cost of the election being in excess of the Election reserve that had been previously set aside and extra ordinary audit costs. The main reason for the shift in this period was recycling contracts.

Income levels are currently reporting favourable against budget as detailed in the table, previously circulated, by Directorate:

At this stage we already know Rates Support Grant to be received by Council will be under budget by £273k therefore we have taken account of this in these

accounts. The figure for Corporate Services includes release from the Election Reserve to meet the costs of the recent Election thereby offsetting the majority of the overspend on the expenditure side.

Previously circulated, was reporting on the following:-

- Leisure And Development Directorate
- Environmental Services Directorate
- Corporate Services
- Planning
- Chief Executive

The Management Accountant advised that the P10 report, to follow, superseded the detail within the P9 report.

Committee NOTED the report.

## 4.2 Period 10

Report, previously circulated, was presented by the Management Accountant.

### Background

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council (CC&GBC) consists of 4 legacy councils that merged on 1 April 2015 into 1 council. The council is currently made up of 3 directorates (Leisure and Development, Environmental Services, Corporate Policy and Resources) and includes a Planning, Finance and Legal department, that are reported separately in this report. The Annual Budgeted Spend for 2023/24 controlled by the Directorates is £78.818m (excludes depreciation, actuarial adjustments, provisions, accumulated absences, and it is these figures that change the figures in the Audited Accounts). Gross Income is budgeted at £76.206m the difference being a budgeted applied balance of £2.612m for the year.

### Financial Overview by Directorate

The table, previously circulated, details a summary of the financial position at period 10 (up to and including 31 January 2024):

Council is showing a favourable variance against budget at period 10 amounting to £1,885,622 which is an encouraging position to be in as we approach the final months of the financial year. It should be noted that this however is not a surplus but rather a positive variance against budget, Council set a deficit budget for 2023/24 of £2.612m therefore if this position was maintained until the end of the year Council would still be in deficit by £0.726m, reducing reserves by this amount.

### Income and Expenditure Analysis

The overall position with regards staffing costs is shown in the table, previously circulated, by Directorate:

Council is currently adverse against budget in terms of staffing, and this is expected to be the case as the current pay award offered to employees exceeds the budgetary provision included by Council in the rates estimates. The variance has increased slightly from P9 by approximately £58k.

The table, previously circulated, sets out the budgetary position of all other areas of expenditure against budget by Directorate:

At period 10 this is £180k favourable (Period 9 - £48k favourable) however it should be noted that this includes £139k relating to insurance costs for which the full charge for the year has already been included in the accounts thereby generating the adverse variance against the annual budget. Maintenance and materials are the other areas which are showing adverse at this stage across Council's entire estate. Other significant factors include waste where increased tonnages at our landfill site have led to increased landfill tax (this is offset by landfill tax income and increased dumping fees), the cost of the election being in excess of the Election reserve that had been previously set aside and extra ordinary audit costs. The main movement in this period has been in the Leisure & Development Directorate.

Income levels are currently reporting favourable against budget as detailed in the table, previously circulated, by Directorate:

At this stage we already know Rates Support Grant to be received by Council will be under budget by £273k therefore we have taken account of this in these accounts. The figure for Corporate Services includes release from the Election Reserve to meet the costs of the recent Election thereby offsetting the majority of the overspend on the expenditure side

Previously circulated, was reporting on the following:-

- Leisure And Development Directorate
- Environmental Services Directorate
- Corporate Services
- Planning
- Chief Executive

The Management Accountant provided commentary on the P10 Management Accounts.

**\* Councillor Holmes joined the meeting at 7.05 pm**

At the request of Alderman McKillop, the Chief Finance Officer confirmed that the accumulated absence figure shown was not in relation to sickness but was associated to carry over of annual leave as part of year end budgeting.

At the request of Alderman McKillop, the Chief Finance Officer explained the mechanism for recording absenteeism in financial terms.

At the request of Alderman Callan, the Chief Finance Officer advised that the Estates Essential Maintenance budgets would be managed solely by Estates from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024.

In relation to the cost saving exercise undertaken by Heads of Service the Chief Finance Officer confirmed at the request of Alderman Callan that budgets are signed off by Directors and overviewed at a high level by the Finance department.

At the request of Councillor Holmes, the Chief Finance Officer agreed to provide an updated detail of current staff numbers across all departments, including Agency Staff, at the April Finance Committee meeting.

Alderman Callan referred to the Audit Office report on Local Government in which some issues were raised and suggested that it would be good practice going forward to view performance against other Councils in respect of debt, absence and payments.

The Chief Finance Officer referred to year end projections as follows:-

Worst - £1.3m favourable – £1.3m deficit  
Best – £2.5m favourable - £112m deficit  
Likely – £2.1m favourable - £500,000 deficit

The Chief Finance Officer urged Elected Members not to expect the next financial year to be as positive as major income for this year had been incorporated in budgeting for the rates setting process.

## **5 APP FORECAST**

Report, previously circulated, was presented by the Chief Finance Officer.

### **Background**

Land and Property Services (LPS) who issue bills and collect rates on behalf of Councils issue in year forecasts on the Actual Penny Product (APP) and projected outturns with regards the amount of rates actually collected.

### **Detail**

LPS has issued to Councils interim in year forecasts for the APP based on figures at 31 December 2023 and 31 January 2024. The forecast for Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council indicates that we are on course to receive a positive finalisation in terms of rates income amounting to approximately £256k, down from the November forecast of £335k. The figure has fallen steadily since the June forecast and could be as a result of the impact of revaluation challenges, certainly the drop does appear to be mainly on the non-domestic sector. The drop in the latest figures would appear to be driven by the settlement of a sizeable revaluation challenge. This means that the expected settlement reported in previous periods and referred to in paragraph 4 below is still outstanding and has the potential for a further significant reduction, possibly even pushing Council into a clawback scenario. Council will continue to monitor these figures over the remainder of the financial year.



## Monthly Analysis

Month	Jun	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan
Forecast	£421	£412	£374	£322	£334	£335	£364	£256

All figures £'000

### Additional analysis

Included with the November figures is a second estimate for the APP forecast.

### APP analysis

The tables, previously circulated, set out the analysis of the APP forecast for the current financial year in terms of both domestic and non-domestic properties.

### Revaluations

Whilst the figures remain positive Council must be mindful of the potential effect which challenge cases against previous revaluations may have, Non-domestic properties were revalued for 2023 and with Causeway Coast and Glens being one of only 4 Council areas with an increase in the overall Net Annual Value (NAV) of it's non-domestic property we may be exposed to a higher risk of appeals against those revaluations which, if successful, may lead to a reduction in the overall NAV figure and therefore subsequently rates income. It would appear that the decrease in this forecast in recent months has occurred mainly in the non-domestic sector and may therefore be as a result of revaluation appeals being processed. We have recently been told informally that a potential significant case is due to be settled and the possible effect of that settlement could be as high as £390k which, if it materialises, will, based on the current projections, move Council into a clawback scenario.

### Recommendation

**It is recommended that** Council note the report.

Committee NOTED the report.

## 6 PROMPT PAYMENTS

Report, previously circulated, was presented by the Chief Finance Officer.

<b>Prompt Payment Statistics 2020/2021</b>					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Total No of Invoices	3424	5544	5802	6296	21066
Total amount paid	£ 5,602,247	£ 10,310,263	£ 10,622,455	£ 17,216,296	£ 43,751,261
Number of invoices paid within 10 days	2414	3804	4308	4087	14613
% of invoices paid within 10 days	70.50%	68.61%	74.25%	64.91%	69.37%
Number of invoices paid within 30 days	2846	4951	5184	5383	18364
% of invoices paid within 30 days	83.12%	89.30%	89.35%	85.50%	87.17%
Number of invoices paid outside 30 days	578	593	618	913	2702
% of invoices paid outside 30 days	16.88%	10.70%	10.65%	14.50%	12.83%
No. of Disputed Invoices	10	82	102	57	251
% of disputed invoices	0.29%	1.48%	1.76%	0.91%	1.19%
Average Payment Days	15.52	13.85	16.26	17.06	15.74
<b>Prompt Payment Statistics 2021/2022</b>					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Total No of Invoices	5830	6442	7117	6567	25956
Total amount paid	£ 12,255,753	£ 14,938,664	£ 11,824,362	£ 16,652,683	£ 55,671,462
Number of invoices paid within 10 days	4139	4113	5240	4331	17823
% of invoices paid within 10 days	70.99%	63.85%	73.63%	65.95%	68.67%
Number of invoices paid within 30 days	5447	5886	6613	5893	23839
% of invoices paid within 30 days	93.43%	91.37%	92.92%	89.74%	91.84%
Number of invoices paid outside 30 days	383	556	504	674	2117
% of invoices paid outside 30 days	6.57%	8.63%	7.08%	10.26%	8.16%
No. of Disputed Invoices	32	26	48	28	134
% of disputed invoices	0.55%	0.40%	0.67%	0.43%	0.52%
Average Payment Days	15.80	17.23	15.27	16.81	16.27
<b>Prompt Payment Statistics 2022/2023</b>					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Total No of Invoices	6461	6090	6825	6265	25641
Total amount paid	£ 17,214,458	£ 17,078,164	£ 12,851,511	£ 35,804,964	£ 82,949,097
Number of invoices paid within 10 days	4446	3487	4806	4628	17367
% of invoices paid within 10 days	68.81%	57.26%	70.42%	73.87%	67.73%
Number of invoices paid within 30 days	5872	5267	6252	5829	23220
% of invoices paid within 30 days	90.88%	86.49%	91.60%	93.04%	90.56%
Number of invoices paid outside 30 days	589	823	573	436	2421
% of invoices paid outside 30 days	9.12%	13.51%	8.40%	6.96%	9.44%
No. of Disputed Invoices	33	35	61	20	149
% of disputed invoices	0.51%	0.57%	0.89%	0.32%	0.58%
Average Payment Days	16.24	18.55	15.92	14.28	16.22
<b>Prompt Payment Statistics 2023/2024</b>					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Total No of Invoices	6512	7263	6847	4529	25151
Total amount paid	£ 23,864,802	£ 17,139,245	£ 13,837,183	£ 8,346,139	£ 63,187,368
Number of invoices paid within 10 days	3675	5233	5444	3371	17723
% of invoices paid within 10 days	56.43%	72.05%	79.51%	74.43%	70.47%
Number of invoices paid within 30 days	5398	6232	6215	4001	21846
% of invoices paid within 30 days	82.89%	85.80%	90.77%	88.34%	86.86%
Number of invoices paid outside 30 days	1114	1031	632	528	3305
% of invoices paid outside 30 days	17.11%	14.20%	9.23%	11.66%	13.14%
No. of Disputed Invoices	33	162	35	117	347
% of disputed invoices	0.51%	2.23%	0.51%	2.58%	1.38%
Average Payment Days	18.71	15.59	11.36	20.88	16.06
*Incomplete period					

Committee NOTED the report.

## 7 SCHEME OF ALLOWANCES 2024/25

Report, previously circulated, was presented by the Chief Finance Officer.

### Background

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council must establish a scheme of allowances payable to Members annually. The scheme provides for the payment of allowances to Councillors on the basis that:

- 1 – The maximum level of basic allowance as determined by the Department for Communities (DfC) is paid
- 2 – The maximum level of carers allowances as determined by the DfC are paid
- 3 – The maximum level of mileage rates as determined by the DfC are paid
- 4 – Councillors' payments are made on the third last banking day of each month

### Detail

The scheme of allowances for 2024/25, a copy of which has been included with this report, considers a number of factors:

- 1 – basic allowance – remains at the 2023/24 level pending DfC determination on the 2024/25 level – a 4% increase has been budgeted for in the 2024/25 estimates
- 2 – mileage rates
- 3 – rates for dependant carer's allowance
- 4 – Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA)

The four items are in keeping with the normal periodic update of the scheme of.

### Amendments

Circular LG 23/2023 (attached as an appendix) from DfC dated 28 November 2023 sets out the revised consolidated Councillor's Allowances guidance, as our scheme is predicated on the inclusion of the maximum rates allowable under departmental guidance any updates to rates of basic allowance will be automatically applied should Council approve this report. The Basic allowance remains at £17,030 per annum, it should be noted that a 4% increase had been allowed for in the rates estimates for 2024/25. Other changes include the hourly and maximum monthly rates payable in respect of dependant carer's allowance.

### Recommendation

**It is recommended that** Council approve the scheme of allowances for 2024/25 as tabled and authorises the Chief Finance Officer to implement any basic allowance increases as and when announced by the Department for Communities for the same period.

Alderman Callan said that Elected Members should not be in a position where they had to approve allowances relating to them.

Alderman Callan asked for the figures relating to Mayoral expenditure to be brought to the Finance Committee as previously requested, referring to an overspend in previous terms where in some cases the incoming Mayor was shortchanged with their budget.

The Chief Finance Officer advised that this information would be available by the May Finance Committee.

Proposed by Alderman Callan  
Seconded by Alderman Scott and

**AGREED** – to recommend that Council approve the scheme of allowances for 2024/25 as tabled and authorises the Chief Finance Officer to implement any basic allowance increases as and when announced by the Department for Communities for the same period.

## **8 BUDGET PROCESS AND TIMETABLE**

Report, previously circulated, was presented by the Chief Finance Officer.

### **Background**

District councils are obliged under legislation, Section 3 of the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, as part of the annual budget procedures to submit estimates of income and expenditure of the council for the next financial year. Regulation 3 of the Local Government (Capital Finance and Accounting) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 states the prescribed date for the annual budget for a financial year beginning on or after 1st April 2012 shall be 15<sup>th</sup> February. This report recommends a process and timetable for the annual Council budget setting.

### **Review**

In recent years the rate setting process has not run a smoothly as would be desired, additionally the out workings of the Extra Ordinary Audit have recommended a review of the budgeting process. The role of the Finance Committee currently is not well defined therefore this report seeks to address that matter. There is not enough time set aside to allow sufficient information to come to the Finance Committee to facilitate consideration and decisions on inclusion/exclusion from the proposed budget, again this report sets out a revised timetable for future years. Finally this Council has always scheduled an additional special meeting to deal with rates however if this process is correctly drafted and followed the need for additional meeting should be avoided, allowing the rate setting process to follow the normal monthly Council cycle.

### **Revised process**

Council adopted a Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) in October 2023, this plan now requires updating in light of the newly approved budgets in February and will therefore become the baseline for any new budgetary cycle. It is envisaged that the MTFP be updated in line with the 2024/2025 budgets and presented to this committee in April to allow consideration of its assumptions and projections, including whether any of those assumptions or projections need

amended. This will then become the basis for the 2025/2026 budgetary cycle to begin. The Finance Committee can assess all aspects of Council finances and incorporate these into a budget model for recommendation to full Council in February annually to allow the rate to be struck. There will also need to be at least one if not two workshops arranged to allow consideration of the capital programme for incorporation into the budgetary process.

### **Proposed budget setting timetable**

A recommended process and timetable for setting the annual budget is tabled below at Appendix 1, previously circulated.

### **Recommendation**

It is recommended that Finance Committee approves the process and timetable for setting the annual budget including the setting of a date for the Rates Striking Council Meeting.

Alderman Callan referred to the difficulties during previous rates setting processes and referred to the usefulness of presentations by Directorates and that it would be useful for Elected Members to have an understanding from Heads of Service on management of areas of resources and performance also.

The Chief Finance Officer advised that the February Finance Committee did not take place due to the rates setting process; Period 10 accounting covers the period up to the end of January 2024.

Councillor Kyle questioned how prudent it was to forecast in November for the following April. The Chief Finance Officer advised that certain assumptions were made regarding estimates and gave the following examples:-

Pay award estimated as 4% but could be 2% or 6%;  
Estimates for utility costs in relation to electricity and gas were reduced and Landfill increased;  
Best estimate for waste tonnage may have to be nudged up or trimmed back.

Proposed by Alderman Callan  
Seconded by Alderman McKillop and

**AGREED** - to recommend that Finance Committee approves the process and timetable for setting the annual budget including the setting of a date for the Rates Striking Council Meeting.

## **9 ESSENTIAL USER POLICY**

Report, previously circulated, was presented by the Chief Finance Officer.

### **Purpose of Report**

To seek approval of revised Essential Car User Policy.

### **Background**

Employees Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council has to establish a framework of governance under which its services and functions can operate.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council operates in accordance with the Green Book as agreed at National Joint Council level with Unions in terms of the basis of staff terms and conditions. Within those terms and conditions provision is made for staff who, in the course of their duties, make use of their private vehicle for business purposes and they are then recompensed accordingly using the agreed mileage and expense rates set by the National Joint Council. Part of those provisions allows the employer to award a status of "Essential User" to employees whose role requires regular and repeated use of a vehicle in their day to day role, again the Green Book sets out the additional benefits that can be received as a result of this. Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council does not have an agreed Council wide policy for the award of Essential User status to employees, each of the 4 legacy Councils had differing rules and procedures for dealing with this. In addition none of the legacy arrangements had any review process to ascertain the appropriateness of the continued award of Essential User status.

The purpose of this policy is to provide a single, uniform and fair set of guidelines for the assessment of applications to be granted Essential User Status and also to provide a single equitable method of review to ensure the granting of Essential User status is correct for all employees within Council. The rules and processes are clearly set out within the policy and these have been presented to the Unions at local level and have been agreed with Unions. The policy will apply to all staff with the first review being carried out after 12 months operation.

This policy had been presented to Council previously in August 2019 but was not adopted at that point.

The policy has been discussed with Trade Unions with a view to reviewing the mileage thresholds that were previously agreed.

Trade Unions have indicates that they feel the thresholds are high enough citing that the amount of travel being undertaken since the COVID pandemic has reduced significantly with the advent of online meetings. There are statistics to support this position in section three below.

A copy of the policy is attached as an appendix to this report, previously circulated.

### **Statistics**

The table below sets out the total mileage travelled by staff, the number of claimants and the number who exceeded 2000 miles total for the years ended 31 March 2019, 2023 and year to date for 2024.

The data does support the position that the amount of travel being incurred is still well below the levels prevailing when this policy was first presented, it is

therefore reasonable to maintain the thresholds at the levels previously agreed with unions.

Year	Mileage	No. of Claimants	No. > 2000 miles
2019	705173	272	133
2023	332341	288	59
2024	234130	208	36

### **Recommendation**

**It is recommended that** Council approve Essential User Policy as presented.

Discussion ensued regarding the Essential User Policy and the Chief Finance Officer provided clarity as follows:-

- Eligibility and criteria for the scheme;
- The current scheme does not ensure a level playing field;
- Tool to revoke the policy is included in the proposed scheme;
- Proposed policy will be reviewed after one year;
- The review mechanism included in the proposed policy could allow for the removal of some users;
- May be between 12 and 15 employees wishing to be considered for the Essential User Policy at this time;
- Mechanism for clocking miles;
- Journeys between place of work and home cannot be claimed for;
- The Senior Management Team are ultimately responsible for signing off the Essential User Policy;
- Finance hold records of mileage and journeys travelled;
- In comparison with other Councils the policy there is slight variation with Causeway Coast and Glens Council being about average;
- Essential users receive a lump sum monthly but receive a lower rate per mile travelled than casual users.

Councillor Holmes pointed out an anomaly within the report which the Chief Finance Officer said would be reworded in relation to undertaking duties enroute to place of work.

Some Elected Members welcomed the review but felt that the threshold should be higher than 2,000 miles per annum. The Chief Finance Officer said there would be no guarantee that the Trade Unions would agree on an increase in the threshold and pointed out that the Trade Union acceptance of the Policy was based on the 2,000 miles threshold and the one year review.

Proposed by Councillor Holmes  
Seconded by Alderman Scott and

**AGREED** – to recommend that a decision is deferred to the April Finance Committee to include the following information:-

Re-worded in relation to undertaking duties enroute to place of work.  
Costs for 2023 and 2023 to date;  
Total number of staff availing of Essential User Allowance including those  
'locked in' by legacy agreements;  
Additional details of how this policy is managed by other Councils.

## **10 CORRESPONDENCE**

Correspondence report, previously circulated, was presented by the Chief Finance Officer.

### **10.1 ALACE 2024 Pay Claim**

Correspondence dated 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024 received from I Miller, Honorary Secretary, ALACE/Officers' Secretary, JNC for Chief Executives of Local Authorities

Re: Joint Negotiating Committee for Local Authority Chief Executives – Pay Claim for April 2024 Onwards

### **10.2 NJC Pay briefing**

Correspondence dated 30<sup>th</sup> January 2024 received from A Allen, Chief Executive and National Pay Local Co-ordinator, NILGA

Re: Regional Pay Briefing – NI Councils

### **10.3 Letter to Council CE's**

Correspondence dated 16<sup>th</sup> February 2024 received from A Allen, Chief Executive, NILGA

Re:- Covering Letter for 10.4 and 10.5 re Revenue Raising

### **10.4 NILGA Letter to Neil Gibson**

Correspondence dated 17<sup>th</sup> February 2024 received from President and Vice-Presidents, NILGA

Re:- Financial Context for Revenue Raising Contributions

### **10.5 NILGA response to Rating Policy Division**

Correspondence dated 29<sup>th</sup> January 2024 received from President and Vice-Presidents, NILGA

Re:- Revenue Raising – Rates Measures Consultation



## **10.6 Chief Officer Pay Claim**

Correspondence received from GMB and UNISON

Re: JNC Pay Claim 2024/25

## **10.7 Green book update**

Correspondence dated 4<sup>th</sup> March 2024, received from National Joint Council for Local Government Services

Re: Updated 'Green Book' Part 4.12: Term-Time Only Employees

## **10.8 JNC Craft Pay Claim**

Correspondence dated March 2024, received from UNITE and GMB

Re: Pay Claim 2024

## **10.9 NJC Pay Claim**

Correspondence dated 29 February 2024, received from UNITE, UNISON and GMB

Re: NJC Pay Claim 2024-25

## **10.10 Rates Statistics - covering letter**

Correspondence dated 29<sup>th</sup> February 2024, received from J Glass, Local Government and Housing Regulation, Department for Communities

Re: District Council (Northern Ireland) Rate Statistics 2024/2025

## **10.11 Rates Statistics**

Table received from Department for Communities

Re: District Council (NI) Rates Statistics 2024/2025

The Chief Finance Officer advised that Correspondence Items 10.1, 10.2, 10.6, 10.7, 10.8 and 10.9 were associated with pay awards, negotiations for which were at a very early stage with no certainty in terms of budgeting and suggested that an accrual of 4% based on budget would be prudent to avoid large positive variances.

The Chief Finance Officer advised in relation to Correspondence items 10.10 and 10.11 that a review of Rates Support Grant was taking place with the terms of reference signed off by the Minister. The Chief Finance Officer agreed to table correspondence received regarding an Executive meeting

scheduled for June at the following Finance Committee under Correspondence.

## **11 MATTERS FOR REPORTING TO THE PARTNERSHIP PANEL**

There were no matters for reporting to the Partnership Panel.

### **MOTION TO PROCEED 'IN COMMITTEE'**

Proposed by Alderman Knight-McQuillan  
Seconded by Councillor Kyle

**AGREED** – that Committee move 'In Committee'.

*The information contained in the following items is restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.*

- \* **Press were disconnected from the meeting at 8.10 pm**

## **12 FUEL CONTRACT**

Confidential report, previously circulated was presented by the Chief Finance Officer.

Confidential by virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

### **Purpose of Report**

To seek approval to sign contracts with crown commercial services national fuel agreement.

### **Background**

Council has a need to procure heating oil (28 Sec) and vehicle fuels, both Diesel and Petrol.

We are currently signed up with Crown Commercial Framework RM6177 to ensure an uninterrupted supply of fuel with a reserve available in the event of other suppliers being unable to furnish councils requirement.

Council is not obligated to use the contract and carries no cost to access.

The current contract period expires on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2024

The current contract was approved by council in March 2023.

### **Financials**

Current spend year to date on liquid fuels is £ 860,125.

### **Options**

N/A

## **Recommendation**

### **It is recommended:**

That Council approve the extension of usage of the national fuel agreement for the period 1<sup>st</sup> June 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026;

That this authority extends to use of local fuel suppliers where increased value for money can be demonstrated after benchmarking against the CCS contract.

Alderman Scott said he welcomed the provision being from local suppliers.

Proposed by Alderman Scott

Seconded by Alderman Callan and

### **AGREED – to recommend:**

That Council approve the extension of usage of the national fuel agreement for the period 1<sup>st</sup> June 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026;

That this authority extends to use of local fuel suppliers where increased value for money can be demonstrated after benchmarking against the CCS contract.

## **13 MERCHANT SERVICES CONTRACT**

Confidential report, previously circulated was presented by the Chief Finance Officer.

Confidential by virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014

### **Purpose of Report**

To seek approval of members for the recent procurement exercise undertaken to engage a supplier for Merchant Payment Acquiring Services.

### **Background**

Evo Payment Solutions (formerly Bank Of Ireland Payment Acceptance) are the current suppliers of Merchant Acquiring Services.

A procurement exercise via eSourcing councils online tendering portal between 4<sup>th</sup> December 2023 to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2024.

AIB Merchant Services provided the most advantageous tender in both cost to council and servicing of the contract.

Previous costs per transaction of 12p if customer uses Mastercard and 8p if customer uses Visa have been reduced to 5p per transaction for either card type.

### **Financial**

Current Merchant Acquiring costs with BOI are £32,509.00, estimated costs for new contract £28,000.00 based on previous years transactional numbers.

Monthly Charges per terminal (20 nr) £446.00, £5,352.00 pa.

**Options**

N/A

**Recommendation**

**It is recommended that** Council approve the appointment of AIB Merchant Acquiring Services as the supplier for card payments to council for 12 months with two further renewals of 12 months (36 months total) and authorise Officers to sign contractual and other necessary documents.

Proposed by Alderman Scott  
Seconded by Alderman Callan and

**AGREED** – to recommend that Council approve the appointment of AIB Merchant Acquiring Services as the supplier for card payments to council for 12 months with two further renewals of 12 months (36 months total) and authorise Officers to sign contractual and other necessary documents.

**14 SALARY SACRIFICE AVC CONTRACT**

Confidential report, previously circulated was presented by the Chief Finance Officer.

Confidential by virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

**Purpose of Report**

To seek approval to sign framework contracts with Portsmouth City Council to access additional pensionable benefits to council employees.

**Background**

Employees can currently make additional voluntary contributions (AVCs) to their pension scheme through Prudential. These contributions attract a taxation exemption and therefore tax saving for the employee.

AVCWise have designed a modern salary sacrifice scheme under which pension scheme members can choose to make AVC's to their pension and these will still be invested with Prudential.

Salary sacrifice schemes enable pension scheme members to not only avail of tax relief on their contributions but also relief from National Insurance Contributions. An added benefit is that in this case the employer will also benefit from reduced Employer's National Insurance contributions.

Portsmouth City Council have produced a framework for other councils to take advantage of which is compliant with current procurement regulations thereby removing the need for additional employers to have to repeat a separate procurement exercise.

Employees can pay in as much as they like into an AVC up to the pension contributions limit, contributions are voluntary, employees can decide if they wish to contribute or not.

The cost of engaging AVCWise to administer the scheme on Council's behalf is met from the reduced Employers National Insurance Contributions, leaving a small cash saving to Council overall.

The adoption of this scheme will require a minor amendment to Council's pensions discretions policy, this policy is currently being reviewed and will be tabled in due course. There is at least a three month lead time from signing up to implementation of the scheme which will give time to complete the necessary review of the policy and adoption by Council.

### **Financials**

Adoption of the framework is at no cost to council.

### **Options**

N/A

### **Recommendation**

**It is recommended that** Council approve use of the Portsmouth City Council framework for the engagement of AVCWise and authorises officers to sign the agreement contract documents.

The Chief Finance Officer provided further clarity on some of the key features of the scheme.

At the request of Alderman Callan, the Chief Finance Officer advised that this scheme would be open to any member of the pension scheme.

Proposed by Alderman Callan  
Seconded by Alderman Scott and

**AGREED** – to recommend that Council approve use of the Portsmouth City Council framework for the engagement of AVCWise and authorises officers to sign the agreement contract documents.

## **15 TRANSFORMATION PLAN**

Confidential report, previously circulated, was presented by Chief Finance Officer who provided commentary on the report.

virtue of paragraph(s) 3 & 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

### **Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to present an update on the Transformation Action Plan in terms of Financial Governance

## **Background**

Following completion of the Extraordinary Audit a number of recommendations were made to Council, these recommendations form the Transformation Action Plan with a section specific to Financial Governance relative to the work of the Finance Committee.

Recommendation FG4 requires that the Finance Committee be kept updated on a regular basis regarding progress on the implementation of the Financial Governance section.

## **Action Plan Progress – Financial Governance**

The Action Plan has been updated to reflect the current status of each of the recommendations and is attached at Appendix A. Members are asked to note the update provided.

Also attached at Appendix B, previously circulated, are copies of the minutes of previous Financial Management Team meetings which are required under recommendation FG5 to be provided to the committee. These meetings involve the Senior Management Team and the Accountants from the Finance Department. The agenda for these meetings is predominantly centered around the production of management accounts and the discussion of those accounts prior to a report being prepared and presented to the Finance Committee. Member are asked to note the minutes.

## **Recommendation**

**It is recommended** that the Action Plan Update is considered and noted.

Alderman Callan welcomed regular meetings including the financial management team saying that previously there had not been a conversation at senior level in relation to finances. Alderman Callan also welcomed the ongoing actions from the Transformation Implementation Action Plan which he believed would provide a clear oversight for Elected Members.

Proposed by Alderman Callan  
Seconded by Councillor Schenning and

**AGREED** – to recommend to Council that the Action Plan Update is considered and noted.

## **16 DEBT MANAGEMENT**

Report, previously circulated, was presented by the Chief Finance Officer.

Confidential report by virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

### **Purpose of Report**

This report informs members of the current position surrounding debt owed to the Council by its customers.

## **Background**

Council implemented a revised Debt Management Policy in July 2023.

## **Detail – Aged Debt Analysis**

Tables, previously circulated, showing the following:-

- As at 29<sup>th</sup> February 2024
- As at 28<sup>th</sup> February 2023
- Movement and Comparison between last year and this year (28<sup>th</sup> February 2023 and 29<sup>th</sup> February 2024)

Within the current figures the 2024 total includes caravan park invoices issued in February, last year these were issued in March hence the significant disparity, many of these will be paid in full before the end of March and another sizeable number will be collected by direct debit over the next six months. With regards the 90 days and over figures there are customers who have entered administration totalling £11,020.64, in due course we will be informed if Council will receive any settlement from these companies following which any debts requiring written off will be informed to this committee or if required authority to write off will be sought. A further £158,470 included within the 90 days and over figure relates to invoices which are not Council debt but are invoices issued and collected on an agency contract for a third party under relevant legislative direction. The 90 days and over figure includes £5,223 from customers who are paying by direct debit.

## **Over 90 Days analysis**

The tables, previously circulated, detail the status of any debt which was over 90 days in excess of £10 currently (excluding third party invoices and direct debit accounts):

The table, previously circulated, sets out such debts that have been cleared since the last report in January:

## **Options**

### **Debt write-off under £1,000**

In accordance with our debt management policy I am required to report to Council any debts under £1,000 which the Chief Finance Officer has the authority to write-off. There are no such debts this month.

### **Debt Write-off over £1,000**

In accordance with our debt management policy, Council approval is sought in order to write off any debts in excess of £1,000.

The Chief Finance Officer referred to a typographical error in the following paragraph where the reference to 'March' should read 'May'

*Within the current figures the 2024 total includes caravan park invoices issued in February, last year ...*

Committee NOTED the report.

**17 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS (NOTIFIED IN ACCORDANCE WITH STANDING ORDER 12 (O))**

There were no items of Any Other Relevant Business

**MOTION TO PROCEED ‘IN PUBLIC’**

Proposed by Alderman McKillop  
Seconded by Alderman Knight-McQuillan and

**AGREED** – that Committee move *‘In Public’*.

This being all the business The Chair thanked Elected Members for their attendance and the meeting closed at 8.25pm.

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Chair