

HOUSING AND WELLBEING COMMITTEE

25 January 2023 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Pendleton (Chair), Mrs Cooper (Vice-Chair), Daniells, Mrs English, Gregory, Haywood, Hughes, Madeley, Needs, Thurston and Yeates

Note: The following Councillors were absent from the meeting for consideration of the following items of business Councillor Gregory Minute 599 to Minute 605 (Part) and Councillor Needs Minute 599 to Minute 604 (Part)].

599. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

600. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

601. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Housing & Wellbeing Committee held on 6 December 2022 were approved by the Committee as a correct record with the Chair confirming that she would sign these at the conclusion of the meeting.

602. ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA THAT THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MEETING IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

The Chair confirmed that there were no items for this meeting.

603. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chair confirmed that no questions had been submitted for this meeting.

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604. ARTSWORK PROJECT UPDATE

(Councillor Needs arrived at the meeting at the end of this item.)

The Wellbeing & Communities Manager introduced the report and Beccy East, Programme Manager from Arun Inspires who provided members with a detailed presentation.

The Chair thanked Beccy for her interesting and exciting presentation and invited members to ask any questions they had.

It was commented that the report and presentation contained a lot of detail, which was a joy to hear and look at.

One member queried the number of children that had access to the project and what was the advertisement plan and did this include reaching out to the wider community through parish councils. Beccy confirmed that in terms of promotion it was targeted towards those at risk through schools. Over the last 2 years they had worked 18 local primary schools across the district and the plan was to keep reaching out to new areas of the district. However, a high focus would remain with those who were vulnerable or classed as at risk. She explained that working with Care Council and other youth groups who specifically located in areas of high deprivation. It was confirmed that a target to reach 1,000 children locally year on year was in place. Alongside a further target to work with at least 100 children locally to help them achieve credited qualifications in addition to GCSEs. The aim was to spread this work over the entire district but with a priority to target those most at risk in the first instance.

The Chair stated that the work being completed through this project was really important for the young people of the district, especially after the pandemic. The work Beccy and the team were delivering was vital and she thanked them for it.

The recommendation was then proposed by Councillor Cooper and seconded by Councillor Thurston,

The Committee

RESOLVED

That the funding of £30,000 per year to support the Arun Inspires Programme (phase two) in 2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26 subject to satisfactory reviews and the availability of Council resources be approved.

605. SUSSEX POLICE PRECEPT

(Councillor Gregory arrived at the meeting during this item.)

The Wellbeing & Communities Manager introduced the report and advised members that the scheduled Police and Crime Panel meeting to be held on 27 January 2023 would consider the precept for 2023/24 and the proposed precept report was published on the Police & Crime Panel website on 20 January 2023, she confirmed that this was circulated to Members the same day. She then outlined some key findings from the public consultation as well as confirming that there was a proposed £15 per annum household increase on Band D property. She confirmed that the Chair (Cllr Pendleton) would be in attendance at the meeting to be held on 27 January 2023 and that this was the committee's opportunity to express any views they had and provide feedback to the Chair ahead of the meeting.

The Chair then invited members to make any comments they had a summary of the points raised by Councillor Haywood is below;

- It was good to see priority 1 strengthened for local Policing most will agree it is local policing that people are worried about, particularly when it comes to youths in local areas. Parishes would welcome any physical presence of police that they can have. A local ballroom dancing club now had to lock itself in when it performs due to youth aggravation and anti-social behaviour in the area. More PCSOs to tackle this behaviour would also be welcomed.
- Support for the £15 per annum for Band D properties as it was understood that local Policing was needed.
- Overall the report contained great aspirations, however there was a fear these would not be achieved.

The Chair confirmed that Councillor Haywood had identified two important areas with her comments, and she would raise these at the meeting. She knows that more local Policing is what members and residents want, but this would be managed against the requirement to focus on national issues, eg. drug issues, it was important for the Police to break the county lines and stop cuckooing as well as being important for local residents that drug dealing in their local areas was also focused and minimised.

Councillor Thurston advised the committee that the local PCSO in her area was doing a brilliant job and had been able to respond to community concerns very quickly. Because of this she was also supportive for an increase in Police Officers. She also commented that PCSOs noticed that the Community Engagement Strategy had been very much improved.

The Chair made comment on the importance of good communication with local Police Officers, in particular understanding where they are located and what they will be doing during their time in that location. However, Councillor Yeates highlighted that she was aware of the difficulties with the 101 service, from the length of time to answer an

incoming call, to being cut off once through to an individual. It was felt that there needed to be a shift in the way people were able to contact the Police. In responding to this concern, the Chair referred to her recent visit to the call centre for 101 and 999 emergency calls. She explained that they had recently changed the way they deal with 101 contact and she assured the committee that the service had been much improved. She explained that what she saw on her visit appeared to be very effective, in particular the way they processed each call ensuring the caller ended up with the right person to provide help. She then asked the Wellbeing & Communities Manager if the council received any stats relating to the call centre, It was confirmed that not currently, however it could be requested. The Vice-Chair suggested that a question could be added to the Safer Arun Survey that asked respondents *'How easy was it for you to contact the Police'*.

In summing up the Chair raised another communication barrier was that the relationship between Parish, District and the districts local Police Officers/PCSOs was important to get right. She confirmed that she would represent this point strongly at the meeting.

The Committee then agreed to note the content of the Sussex Police and Crime Panel precept report for 2023.

606. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN (HRABP)

The Interim Head of Housing introduced his report and advised members that the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan (HRABP) report was required to be updated annually and that the objective of the plan was to increase housing stock and ensure stock was fit for purpose. He confirmed that there were some challenges to overcome in terms of reducing cost while achieving efficiency gains. He informed members that a review of charging for services would be undertaken to increase cost recovery. He also advised that there was a need for a greater use of borrowed finance from the HRA capital programme.

The Chair then introduced Glenn Smith from Housing Finance Associates Ltd who stated that an annual update of the HRABP allowed for officers to take a longer-term view of pressures and opportunities facing the HRA. Confirming that the current position was presenting differently than previous years as the world had changed. Inflationary pressures had hit the HRA severely not just at this council but nationally. There had also been constraints placed on rents that could be charged, restricted authority ability to generate rent to pay for additional costs. There had been overspend against the budget and this had put the council in a challenging position. With all of this, it had meant that an in depth look at measures that could be taken in order to address the situation, in order to make things manageable.

He then talked members through the graphs in the report and laid out each step that would be taken to ensure that the HRA was brought back to a more comfortable position.

The Chair asked for Glenn to elaborate on the overspend, she stated that the Committee understood the national situation, however more detail was needed regarding rent capping. Glenn then explained the percentage rent increase as detailed at paragraph 4.17 showed increases within the projections. A 7% increase was the maximum increase amount, an assumption had been made that the following year would see an increase of inflation plus 1% which had been based on the predicted inflation from the Bank of England. It was confirmed that if the rent cap was not in place, the council would be looking at an 11% maximum increase. He referred to graph at paragraph 4.5 in the report and explained that the bulge showed where the spare capital could be used for the reinstatement of a larger development programme. But that other pressure would also emerge and would require consideration.

It was then queried that the bulge on the graph starts in 2038 and it was clear that this was having to be done as a measure to keep the council afloat. Many members of the committee were not happy with this and wanted reassurance that the £3m spend allocated for the decarbonisation strategy would still be completed given the legal regulations that were attributed to this.

The Head of Housing advised that an application for a grant had been completed and the council would be match funding should the application be successful. He explained that there would also be further rounds of grant funding that could be applied for. He said he was committed to continue with the strategy but caveated that with unknown future risks. Discussion was also had regarding Gas boiler replacement; members were keen to clarify that although the report showed no further expenditure after 2024 that the project would continue. The Head of Housing advised that another report on this project would be produced next year where it was hoped that the situation the council was in now, would have improved as well as further knowledge of grants that could be applied for to support this work.

The Chair then invited debate and thanked Glenn Smith for providing such a detailed explanation which unfortunately confirmed that the HRA was in a worse position than originally anticipated. One Member of the Committee outlined that she had compared last year's report with this year's report, and this confirmed that:

- New build numbers had been reduced dramatically.
- There was no money in the Capital Reserve Fund as all the Right to Buy receipts had been spent.
- The dec-carbonisation project bid of £3m had yet to be agreed with Government and still had to be match funded and following the Member Briefing held on 5 January 2023 briefing it appeared that the Council had missed first round of the bidding.
- There was £2.5m in repairs reserve but that would have to be ringfenced.
- A rental increase of 7% was being proposed for 23/24 in line with the government rent cap. Rent increases of CPI + 1% are assumed for 24/25 so if this is capped at a lesser amount the Council would be in a worse situation than projected.

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- The minimum balance threshold of £2M mentioned in section 3.2 of the report will be breached for the next few years and is then projected to return above the £2M level after 7 years.
- £6m mentioned from capital for sheltered housing improvements but what about the progress of this review and the outcomes of that baseline project could make now, allowances for additional costs. Would the council be making redundancies relating to looking after its stock? There was no safety belt which was discouraging when last year and year before was so encouraging, was there anything else that could be done?
- Referring to paragraph 4.3 of the report, it was noted that the baseline projections make no allowances for further additional costs on energy efficiency or decarbonisation on existing stock and given changes to regulations it was vital this was monitored closely to ensure the plan stayed on track.
- Further risk factors identified by way of incorrect assumptions, additional spending pressures and reactive repairs.
- The overspend on HRA was a huge concern, but clarity sought on what efficiency gains from costs of managing stock meant. Did it mean redundancies?

The Director Environment and Climate Change Services was invited to make comment on the points raised. She explained that the Council was now in a very difficult financial position and that the reason an annual review of the HRABP was in place was because it helped to forecast and model the future position, ensuring that it had the right support, regular monitoring and reporting to react to the challenging financial position. There were plans to restructure the department to ensure that it had the right people in the right place to enable a strong team that focused on strong compliance. A commitment to move to a greener infrastructure was in place alongside more sheltered housing work of which a report will be brought to the committee outlining the next stages. She advised that it was a big programme but would also come with its challenges. She confirmed that officers were not shying away from the challenging position they were in, they were focused on putting in the right measures to bring up standards and get service performance up to upper quartile.

The Chair stated that the position was a very fragile one. But she was satisfied that there was a plan in place to deal with the challenges on the table. She said that she felt it was a positive plan that would resolve the issues. However, the committee would scrutinise that process, it was clear no member was happy this was the position presented however the best plan was in place to deal with the situation.

The Vice Chair then commented that the briefing held on 5 January 2023 was helpful and covered a lot of detailed information. She asked if a 6-month update was planned to be given to the committee or were officers going to continue with just the annual update. The Head of Housing confirmed the annual report was what was planned; however, he will review with Glenn Smith throughout the year to ensure further risks and or improvements are known at their earliest, he would then be able to keep members updated in this way also.

The Chair said she would like to have an update report presented in 6 months' time and there was agreement across the committee for this also. It was then proposed by Councillor Gregory and seconded by Councillor English that a 6 monthly update report brought back to the Committee.

The recommendations in the report were then proposed by Councillor Gregory and Councillor Cooper

The Committee

RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL that

- 1) the annual update of the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2022/23 be noted.

The Committee also

RESOLVED

That an interim review of the HRA be brought back to this Committee in six months' time.

607. COMMITTEE GENERAL FUND REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS AND HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGETS 2023/24

The Interim Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer introduced the report and advised members that this was the second year of preparing the budget under the committee style of governance system. The budgets from this committee plus any growth bids would be considered at the Policy and Finance Committee as part of the overall budget on 9 February 2023 before being considered at Full Council on 1 March 2023 for approval. This committee being responsible for the General Fund and HRA.

Starting with the General Fund, it should be noted that the budget had been prepared against a backdrop of a significant budget gap for 2023/24. Only essential growth bids for 2023/24 had been put forward for the committee to approve. The growth bids listed in appendix B totalling £730k were: Support for Leisure Operator £580k (£265k current year); Events £100k and an Events Officer £50k.

The main year on year changes were: The most significant increase was in the net cost of Homelessness. The net budget had increased to £2m from £810k, which was an increase of £1.19m. Leisure contract contribution had increased by £121k – however, this had to be seen in light of the bid for £580k (£265k current year) Housing Benefit had increased by £127k. This was mainly due to assisted accommodation which attracted lower level of Housing Benefit and the move to Universal Credit

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The Chair invited comments from the committee regarding the general fund where comments were made regarding funding support for the Leisure Operator and it was confirmed that an additional report on that topic would be brought to the committee at a later date. A short discussion regarding the success of recent events over the Christmas period was also had.

Turning to HRA, the revised budget for the HRA for 2022/23 was approved at Full Council on 18 January 2023. It approved changes to accounting policies had been reflected in the projected HRA balance in paragraph 3.15 which showed the HRA balance improving steadily, and it would reach a balance of £2m by 2027/28. The projected improvement in the HRA balance was a result of the delivery of savings as part of a recovery plan to address the growing revenue costs of repairs and supervision and management costs as well as changes in accounting policies mentioned previously. The budget for next year assumed a 7% increase in rent levels resulting in an average rent level of £102.34 per week. The capital programme shown in appendix E. Shows the budget reflected the £3m match funding for decarbonisation programme and £1.6m for the first part of the sheltered housing improvement scheme.

The Chair then invited questions and comments on the HRA where more information was sought in relation to paragraph 3.9 where it referred to savings and what sought of savings would the council be expecting to receive. The Head of Housing explained that a lot is spent on emergency accommodation, however the councils recovery of funds for that income is low there was scope for this to be improved this considerably. The Chair then asked if there was a timeline for when the council would be on track with this improvement, and it was confirmed that 6-9 months should be enough time to see some improvements implemented. She then requested that the Head of Housing work with members to identify those improvement metrics that can be benchmarked against other authorities. It was agreed that an update report would be brought back to committee in 3 months' time.

The recommendations were then proposed by Councillor Gregory and seconded by Councillor Needs

The Committee

RESOLVED

- (a) Agree on the 2023/24 Revenue Budget as illustrated in Appendix A of this report;
- (b) Agree on the list of uncommitted growth items as illustrated in Appendix B of Page 39 Agenda Item 9 this report;
- (c) Agree on the 2023/24 HRA Revenue Budget set out in Appendix C of this report;
- (d) Recommends to allow the HRA Balance to remain below the minimum level of £2.0m for the period 2023/24 to 2026/27 to enable the realisation of savings in Repairs and Supervision & Management expenditure to deliver a sustainable HRA;

- (e) Recommends HRA rents for 2023/24 are increased by 7.0% in accordance with the provisions of the rent standard
- (f) Recommends that HRA garage rents are increased by 7% to give an average rent of £14.50 per week (excluding VAT) and heating and water/sewerage charges be increased on a scheme-by-scheme basis, with the aim of balancing costs with income;
- (g) Agree on the 2023/24 General Fund Capital Programme as illustrated in Appendix D of this report;
- (h) Agree on the 2023/24 HRA Capital Programme as illustrated in Appendix E of this report; and

RECOMMEND TO POLICY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

- (i) that the General Fund Revenue Budget, list of growth items, General Fund Capital Programme, HRA Revenue Budget and HRA Capital Programme be included in the overall General Fund Budget when considering the overall budgets on 9 February 2023

Before moving on to the next agenda item the Chair took the opportunity to thank the Interim Group head of Finance and Section 151 Officer who was leaving Arun District Council at the end of February 2023. She thanked her for the support she has given to members over the years that would be missed and wished her luck with her new role at another authority.

608. ARUN WELLBEING PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Wellbeing & Communities Manager introduced the report and provided members with a brief update on the Arun Wellbeing Programme, where she advised that the team provided range of free adult health improvement programmes for residents and the wellbeing service helps people to stop smoking, reduce weight and reduce alcohol intake which is managed by the council and the service is funded through partnership agreement with West Sussex Health. In April 2022 a new 5 year partnership agreement has been entered into and this report details the outlined progress first the first 6 months of year 1. She explained that the programme has a strong focus on supporting residents with greatest health needs, working in specific areas that had been identified as the most deprived wards and with high-risk groups such as those with serious mental health and carers.

The Chair thanked Wellbeing & Communities Manager for her clear introduction and asked if members had any comments or questions.

As there were no questions from the Committee the recommendation was then proposed by Cooper and seconded by Yeates

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The Committee

RESOLVED

- 1) the Arun Wellbeing Programme and support targeted work in Arun's areas of significant health inequalities and need be endorsed.

609. PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDER (ASB)

The Community Safety Officer introduced the report and advised members that the Council's Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) in relation antisocial behaviour was due to expire at the end of March 2023. He confirmed that the report set out the options available to the Council in respect of the Order and that if the recommendation was accepted by committee it would be renewed for a further 3 years on the same terms as the current order.

The Chair thanked the Community Safety Officer for his introduction and confirmed to members that on page 81 of the agenda they could see the specific area locations that were being referred to. She then invited members to make any comment or ask questions where it was queried how the PSPO would help those areas that are subject to large groups of people who drink in public. It was confirmed that it would create a threshold by which officers could then deal with. The Chair stated that the Police would be required to make a judgement call as to whether anti-social behaviour was occurring.

It was then asked what action would be taken specifically when 'moving people' on from areas. The Community Safety Officer provided an example of feedback from Community Wardens. The Vice-Chair then commented that it was an extension of something members agreed and discussed at length in a member workshop not long after the 2019 Election where it was explained that managing this type of behaviour was a balancing act. The PSPO had worked for the purpose it was implemented for.

The recommendation was then proposed by Councillor Hughes and seconded by Councillor Yeates

The Committee

RESOLVED

- 1) the PSPO, as it is currently set out, be extended for a further three years with effect from April 2023.

610. HOME ENERGY ADVISOR ROLE

The Principal Environmental Health Officer to introduced the report and advised members that from the Extraordinary Committee meeting held on 3 November 2022 the decision was made that £180k be approved for a range of cost-of-living initiatives. However, £40k of that fund remained unallocated and the report and recommendations before members now proposed two options to use that £40k.

She confirmed that the role would provide direct support to residents and have a set criteria to work to alongside working with frontline staff to include consideration for referrals. This role would provide vital support to those who needed it and would assist with supporting a behavioural change. It was also explained that visiting residents in their homes would enable the council to see how people are living and would lead to being able to identify other issues where the council can also provide support.

The Chair stated that she thought this was a very proactive and useful initiative for residents and would help them to manage increasing living costs. She then invited the committee to make any comment or ask questions to the officer.

It was stated that this work and the role was crucially important and that the case studies referred to in the appendix were powerful and provided some depth to the differences that could be made. It was also commented that it was hoped the role would be considered to continue for more than a year as currently planned. Further discussion was had on the skills and qualifications required for the individual who would be recruited and was a part time role going to attract the right individual. It was confirmed that the job description was looking for an individual who had an energy efficiency qualification, however there would also be training offered and that it was hoped that because the role was being advertised as part time, this would attract more applications rather than hinder. A concern was raised regarding the safety risks of sending an employee into residents homes. It was explained that the council had robust risk assessments in place. It was also confirmed that initial contact with a resident would be via telephone along with additional information being shared from other sources such as GP's before the individual would complete a home visit.

The recommendations were then proposed by Councillor Thurston and seconded by Councillor Needs

The Committee

RESOLVED

- 1) To agree to use the £40,000 unallocated budget for cost-of-living initiatives to:
 - a. Recruit a Home Energy Advisor to be part of the Private Sector Housing and Public Health Team, part time (22 hours), on a one-year fixed term contract, at an annual cost of £21,890.

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- b. Utilise the remaining budget to support the most vulnerable residents with minor repairs and energy efficiency measures and give the Group Head of Technical Services the delegated authority to determine the criteria for this assistance.

611. HOUSING OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINT HANDLING CODE & SELF-ASSESSMENT

The Head of Housing introduced his report and drew members attention to published updated code, he advised that the council had to self- assess annually and the report before members sets out work that has been completed by officers in order to meet the regulations of the code.

The Committee noted the contents of the self-assessment completed in accordance with the requirements with the Housing Ombudsman complaint handling code and note that the self-assessment will be published on the council's website in accordance with the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman complaint handling code.

612. QUARTER 3 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS REPORT

The Chair advised members that the report was to be taken as read and advised that if they had any questions these could be asked of the officers in attendance.

As there were no questions, the committee noted the report.

613. LOCAL COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME (LCTRS) FOR APRIL 2023-MARCH 2024 (YEAR 11)

The Benefits Team Leader presented the report to members and explained that the purpose of the report was to gain approval for a minor change to current local scheme that had been previously agreed. She provided members with some background information where she referred to the previous members Working Party who had developed the scheme and updated its roll out with Universal Credit (UC) which was very complicated for customers. In 2019 a banded scheme was implemented for simplicity and the report before members was asking for the committees agreement to increase the income bands in line with September 2022's inflation increase. This would enable customers to have a bit more income and would assist those that were considered most vulnerable and on low incomes. In summing up she advised that the financial impact was £230k for the year, however this had already been budgeted and accounted for.

The Chair then asked for member to make any comments on the report, where it was asked how many people in the District were affected by this scheme. It was confirmed that the scheme had 4,342 claimants and these numbers do see regular increases and decreases as it is impacted by those eligible for UC. Clarity was sought regarding the council's share of the cost documented within the report. It was confirmed that £23,000 was the correct figure.

The recommendations was then proposed by Thurston and seconded by Gregory

The Committee

RESOLVED

- 1) Approve the increase in the income banding widths of the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme in line with the Consumer Prices Index inflation. (Year 11)

614. OUTSIDE BODIES - FEEDBACK FROM MEETINGS

The Committee received and noted a feedback report from a meeting of West Sussex County Council's Health and Adult Social Care Committee held on 11 January 2023 attended by the Chair. This was circulated to members for information purposes and would be uploaded to the Committee's web pages following the meeting.

The Vice-Chair also confirmed that at this meeting regarding the stroke services item she asked specifically that members be consulted as Arun was on the cusp of the area affecting travel times.

No questions were raised, and no other updates were shared at the meeting.

615. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair invited members and officers to make comment on the work programme as there were no comments the Committee then noted its work programme.

The Chair then took this opportunity to express her thanks to the Wellbeing and Community Manager who was after 17 years leaving Arun District Council. She and the Vice-Chair stated they had both enjoyed working with her and wished her well with her new role.

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616. EXEMPT INFORMATION

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Cooper and seconded by Councillor Hughes

The Committee

RESOLVED

That under Section 100a (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and accredited representatives of newspapers be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act by virtue of the paragraph specified against the item.

617. HOUSING BENEFIT OVER PAYMENTS

The Chair advised that the report should be taken as read and any questions could be asked to officers in attendance.

The recommendation was then proposed by Councillor Cooper and seconded by Councillor Gregory

The Committee

RESOLVED

- 1) To write off the outstanding Housing Benefit Overpayments totalling £42,045.02 where despite pursuing outstanding amounts, the Council has been unable to collect the debt.

618. COUNCIL TAX INSOLVENCY

The Chair advised that the report should be taken as read and any questions could be asked to officers in attendance.

Subject to approval at the next Housing and Wellbeing Committee meeting

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The recommendation was then proposed by Councillor Madeley and seconded by Councillor Cooper.

The Committee

RESOLVED

- 1) To write off the outstanding council tax charges totalling £18,957.01 which are subject to insolvency action, preventing the Council from pursuing the debtor for payment.

(The meeting concluded at 8.13 pm)