

This Report will be made public on 14 April 2022



Report Number: **OS/21/20**

To: Overview and Scrutiny
Date: 26 April 2022
Status: Non-Key Decision
Head of Service: Charlotte Spendley, Director – Corporate Services
Cabinet Member: Councillor David Monk, Leader of the Council

SUBJECT: INCOME AND DEBT MANAGEMENT POLICY

SUMMARY:

This report is seeking a decision to adopt the proposed changes to the Income and Debt Management Policy and bring to Cabinet.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Overview and Scrutiny is asked to:

1. To receive and note report OS/21/20.
2. To provide feedback on the new Income and Debt Management policy

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of the policy is to ensure Folkestone and Hythe District Council collect debts fairly and efficiently. The Council has a duty to ensure all revenue due is collected for the benefit of residents and taxpayers to enable the delivery of services to the district.
- 1.2 The Council takes a corporate approach to debt collection and strives to ensure a holistic view is taken so debtors do not find themselves being approached by multiple departments. Rather, they receive one call for one payment arrangement to potentially cover multiple debts.
- 1.3 The amendments to this Policy and debt collection as a whole, now incorporate arrangements for Housing Rents following the return of this service to an in-house provision.
- 1.4 The benefits of this policy is to have our fair and consistent approach in a document that is accessible to the public. It outlines legislation and best practice adhered to, to enable the Council to maximise income collected and minimize debt owed to the Council by residents.
- 1.5 Overview & Scrutiny Committee's comments will be noted and the updated Policy position reported to Cabinet for adoption in due course.

1 PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

- 2.1 The full revised policy can be found in Appendix A, and a tracked changes version for transparency has been included in Appendix B of this report. For ease the key amendments proposed from the original policy are:
 - A refresh of the current policy in relation to Council Tax, Business Rates, Sundry debts and Housing Benefit Overpayment.
 - Updates to the references to the Council, the Corporate Plan and the new management structure.
 - Introducing our obligation to Breathing Space and Mental Health Crisis Moratoriums.
 - Introducing Housing Rents legislation and process.

3 LEGAL/FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS/POLICY MATTERS

3.1 Legal Officer's Comments – NM

Legislation differs, dependent upon the type of debt the council are attempting to recover. Having an up to date policy will ensure that all customers will be handled in line with the relevant legislation and a standardised process for managing customer debt is implemented.

3.2 Finance Officer's Comments - CS

This policy sets out the Council's procedures for income collection and debt recovery in a clear and transparent manner and looks to centralise debt recovery within the Corporate Debt team. This will improve the management of the Council's income collection arrangements allowing all debts to be managed fairly and consistently under a single framework. The collection of debts is key to the efficient financial management of the authority.

3.3 Communications Officer's Comments – DK

There are no communications implications arising directly from this report.

3.4 Equalities Officer's Comments – GE

Equality implications have been considered in the form of an Equalities Impact Assessment which is available.

3.5 Climate Impact Officer's Comments

There are no Climate Change Implications arising from this report.

4. CONTACT OFFICERS AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Councillors with any questions arising out of this report should contact the following officer:-

Jo Robinson – Business Rates and Corporate Debt Senior Specialist

Telephone: 01303 853350

Email: jo.robinson@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk

Appendices:

Appendix A: Revised Income and Debt Management Policy

Appendix B: Tracked changes version of the Income and Debt Management Policy for transparency reasons.