

FOR PUBLICATION

**ENTERPRISE AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT
ON WATER RATES ARREARS POLICY**

MEETING: CABINET

DATE: 29 JULY 2014

REPORT BY: POLICY AND SCRUTINY OFFICER

WARD: ALL

COMMUNITY FORUM: ALL

KEY DECISION REFERENCE (IF APPLICABLE): FORWARD PLAN ENTRY REF: KEY DECISION NO 30

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BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR PUBLIC REPORTS: Reports to Enterprise and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee held (i) 16 January and (ii) 5 June 2014.

TITLE: i) Scrutiny Project Group Report on Water Rates Arrears Evictions
ii) Scrutiny Project Group Recommendation on Water Rates Arrears Policy

LOCATION: Scrutiny Office

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To present for consideration by Cabinet the report and recommendations of the Enterprise and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee on the water rates arrears evictions policy and water rates collection process.

- 1.2 To provide the statutory written notice that must be given by the Enterprise and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee to Cabinet to take required action as at 3.2 below.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Cabinet consider the recommendations of the Enterprise and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee as set out below : -
- 2.2 That officers report to Scrutiny in six months time, as to the outcome/progress on the water rate collection process and technology review.
- 2.3 That an update be made to Scrutiny when the Contract with Severn Trent Water is formally signed, and again after one year.
- 2.4 That support be given to reviewing the Tenant's information to include (i) more robust and prominent information on support available and advice regarding water rates and water meters, and (ii) re-emphasis to all tenants of the importance of communication with Revenues and Tenancy Support, if it is likely that the tenant may be approaching financial difficulties that may lead to arrears.
- 2.5 That a progress report be given to Scrutiny in six months time, monitoring the number of evictions for water rates arrears.
- 2.6 That the Council's policy and procedure document in respect of evictions for arrears of water rates only, be amended.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Enterprise and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee agreed that a Scrutiny Project Group be appointed to look into matters associated with the Councils water rates arrears evictions policy and water rates collection process.
- 3.2 Further information and background detail are contained within the Scrutiny Review Panel's report attached at Appendix 1 which provides the purpose of the review and its findings.
- 3.3 Statutory Scrutiny Committees are also required to provide written statutory notice to Cabinet requiring action in response to its scrutiny report and recommendations. These actions require Cabinet to :-

- (i) consider the attached report and recommendations;
- (ii) indicate the actions it proposes to take if any; and

(iii) publish its response within 2 months of the receipt of the report.

With regard to (i) and (ii) above the Council's Constitution provides for Cabinet to consider the report at the earliest practicable opportunity.

4.0 SCRUTINY PROJECT GROUP REPORT

- 4.1 The report of the Scrutiny Project Group was considered and its recommendations approved by the Scrutiny Committee on 16 January 2014 (Appendix 1).
- 4.2 One of the Project Group recommendations was for relevant officers, scrutiny and executive members to meet to further discuss detail of the adopted policy which had formerly been agreed by Cabinet on 31 January 2012.
- 4.3 Following the meeting a subsequent recommendation to amend the existing policy was made to and approved by the Scrutiny Committee on 5 June 2014. The amended policy now recommended for approval is attached at Appendix 2.

5.0 RISK CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1 There is potential risk of misunderstanding in implementing the policy if wording in the policy is not amended.

6.0 FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 Action on recommendations in this report should be contained within existing budgets.

7.0 LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 There are no legal considerations arising from the recommendations in this report.

8.0 EQUALITIES CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 There are no equalities considerations arising from the recommendations in this report.

9.0 HUMAN RESOURCES CONSIDERATIONS

- 9.1 There are no human resourcing considerations arising from the recommendations in this report.

10.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 That Cabinet consider the recommendations of the Enterprise and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee as set out below : -
- 10.2 That officers report to Scrutiny in six months time, as to the outcome/progress on the water rate collection process and technology review.
- 10.3 That an update be made to Scrutiny when the Contract with Severn Trent Water is formally signed, and again after one year.
- 10.4 That support be given to reviewing the Tenant's information to include (i) more robust and prominent information on support available and advice regarding water rates and water meters, and (ii) re-emphasis to all tenants of the importance of communication with Revenues and Tenancy Support, if it is likely that the tenant may be approaching financial difficulties that may lead to arrears.
- 10.5 That a progress report be given to Scrutiny in six months time, monitoring the number of evictions for water rates arrears.
- 10.6 That the Council's policy and procedure document in respect of evictions for arrears of water rates only, be amended.

11.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

To review the Council's policy relating to water rates arrears evictions and the water rates collection process.

ANITA CUNNINGHAM
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You can get more information about this report from Anita Cunningham (Tel. 01246 345273).