

BOARD

10 February 2021

Present: **Elected Members** **Councillors Warrington (In the Chair), Bray, Cooney, Fairfoull, Feeley, Gwynne, Kitchen Ryan and Wills**
 Chief Executive **Steven Pleasant**
 Borough Solicitor **Sandra Stewart**
 Deputy Section **Tom Wilkinson**
 151 Officer

Also in **Steph Butterworth, Ilys Cookson, Jeanelle De Gruchy, Dr Ashwin**
Attendance: **Ramachandra, Ian Saxon, Paul Smith, Jayne Traverse, Debbie Watson,**

226 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

227 BUSINESS RATES YEAR START BILLING 2021/22

Consideration was given to a report of the Executive Member (Finance and Economic Growth) / Assistant Director of Exchequer Services, which detailed the written ministerial statement from government on 3 February 2021, that billing authorities could defer the issue of year start business rates bills until after the Budget Statement of 3 March 2021.

It was explained that on 3 February 2021 the government issued a Business Rates Information Letter (BRIL). The BRIL text was detailed at **Appendix 1** to the report was from the Financial Secretary to the Treasury who made a Written Ministerial Statement (WMS) to Parliament and asked billing authorities to consider waiting until the Chancellor had set out plans in the Budget Statement on 3 March, before issuing bills for 2021/22.

The year start production timetable for all bills had already been set and software release for the production of annual business rates billing was underway. Software suppliers had also confirmed that they too were unaware as to what information regarding business rates would be contained in the Budget announcement on 3 March 2021 and were unclear whether reprogramming to facilitate production of year start bills would be required. Should that be the case then there would be significant delay in sending bills out.

It was further explained that bills would need to be produced before 31 March each year to create a full financial year record even if any new system developments required for the Budget announcements had not been completed. In addition to this, there was no automated process for reversing any incorrectly awarded reliefs.

It was further explained that it was against this backdrop of confusion and uncertainty that plans for year start business rates bill production had to be made. Colleagues across Greater Manchester were equally concerned with the majority deferring billing production for business rates.

To delay billing until after the government announcement on 3 March 2021 was the preferred option to save bills being sent out with incorrect information and/or requesting the incorrect amount of payment which would result in increased customer contact. This was likely to be at the expense of business rates instalments collected in April, which would have to be collected in the remaining 11 months of the year subject to the date that year start bills were issued.

AGREED

That Executive Cabinet be recommended to agree that the issue of business rates bills for 2021/22 will be deferred until after the Budget Statement on 3 March 2021, and bills are issued as soon as practicably possible after that date.

228 BROWNFIELD HOMES FUND GRANT - GMCA

Consideration was given to a report of the Executive Member (Finance and Economic Growth) / Director of Growth, which detailed the proposals following the successful bid into the Brownfield Land Fund (BLF) grant programme.

Members were reminded that in late June 2020 MHCLG, announced that GMCA would receive an initial allocation of £81m to unlock 5,500 homes over the period of the programme with an aspiration to achieve unlocking 7,500 homes. In July 2020 GMCA asked Districts to develop bids for schemes to be considered for funding.

The Director of Growth outlined Council owned sites that had been selected for the BHS programme. The bid for BHS for these sites would assist with the funding of existing capital programme works and in some instances would support bringing forward the capital works. This would reduce ongoing liability for revenue expenditure for business rates, repairs and managing these empty properties.

The former Two Tree Site (the footprint of the former school buildings) would receive BLF funding of £0.800m, this would make a positive contribution to reduce the capital cost of the demolition and infrastructure works to the Council which were estimated in the region of £0.763m.

The former Denton Baths site would receive BLF of £0.300m, this would reduce the Council liability to £0.150m for this site if successfully applied.

The Droylsden Library Site occupied by a Library building which was in operation would receive £0.8m if the BLF was successfully applied. The opportunity to relocate the Library to another building was the subject of a separate Executive Cabinet report. The estimated cost of the scheme at this stage was £ 2.3m.

The Director of Growth outlined risks that were associated with entering in to the Grant Funding Agreement. It was stated that the funding to GMCA from Government was time limited and a commitment had been made by GMCA to take up the capital funding and spend in financial year 20/21 or potentially have the allocation clawed back.

Members considered the timetables required to ensure that the funding was available to support the identified schemes. Members also requested that the report be amended so that it was clear that the Two Tree Site referred only to the footprint of the building not the site as a whole and to be brought to the next meeting of Board to consider further as they needed to be certain as to the terms of the negotiated agreements and deliverability.

AGREED

That the work continue on the report to finalise the content and the report be submitted to the next Board meeting.

229 DROYLSDEN LIBRARY REDEVELOPMENT

Consideration was given to a report of the Executive Member (Finance and Economic Growth) / Executive Member (Lifelong Learning, Equalities, Culture and Heritage) / Director of Growth, which set out the nature of the funding opportunity available to the Council and the options relating to Droylsden Library.

It was stated that the existing Droylsden Library building, was deteriorating exponentially and was now well beyond its design life. Staff and users of the library experience anti-social behaviour encouraged by the adjacent poor quality public realm to the side and rear of the property, which did not have any natural surveillance. Rising costs of repairs combined with the desire to progress with the regeneration of Droylsden Town Centre with a modern Library at its core meant that a solution for the future of the Library was needed.

It was stated that the relocation of the library into the ground floor of the GMPF building was considered to be a viable option for members to consider. The GMPF building was situated 50m from the existing building thereby servicing the same catchment. The total scheme cost was estimated to be £2.3m, the capital receipt value of the vacated site was estimated to be £0.15m with a potential Brownfield Capital Grant of £0.8m. The net effect on the Capital Programme was estimated to be £1.35m.

With regards to retaining the exiting library building this option included not progressing with the application to the GMCA for Brownfield Land funding for the existing library building site. In this instance the existing library building would remain in operation, the site would not be brought forward for residential development and the ground floor at the GMPF buying would remain unoccupied until such time as a viable solution for the space could be identified.

It was explained that in order to arrest the deterioration and to support the development of the existing library offer investment was required to deal with backlog maintenance, requirements connected with buildings and site security and also improvements to the energy efficiency of the building were estimated to be £0.600m.

AGREED

That the work continue on the report to finalise the content and the report be submitted to the next Board meeting to consider further finances and contractual delivery.

CHAIR