



Report to: Policy & Performance Improvement Committee: 6 July 2026

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Report Summary	
<b>Report Title</b>	The Council’s Approach to Debt Collection and Managing Cases of Multiple Debt.
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	To share with the Policy & Performance Improvement Committee the draft Corporate Income and Debt Strategy and Policy Management of Cases that Involve Multiple Council Debt
<b>Recommendations</b>	That the Policy & Performance Improvement Committee: a) review and endorse the proposed approach to debt collection as set out in Appendices A and B and recommend to Cabinet; and b) also recommend to Cabinet, the additional budget requirement for 1 additional FTE of £72,800 (based on 25/26 values) funded 50% each between the GF and HRA based upon the reserves identified in the financial implications.
<b>Reason for Recommendation</b>	To improve the customers experience of debt collection to align with our customer experience strategy and centralise our collection approach.

## 1.0 Background

- 1.1 SLT agreed on 3 December 2024 for a review into the Single View of Debt (SVoD) as a service concept. The concept of what is meant by SVoD is such that where residents of the District have debt across more than one fund, this would potentially be treated as one instance of debt to assist the resident providing a better customer experience. This approach aligns with our [Customer Experience Strategy](#) which outlines at outcome “To have customer led and designed processes”.
- 1.2 Work has progressed since that point with a series of meetings between internal stakeholders seeking to forge agreement on the best strategy to achieve a better focused customer journey

- 1.3 At the point when the report was first presented to SLT, the outstanding debt owed to the Council, as at 30 September 2024 was:

<b>Breakdown of total outstanding debt</b>	<b>£m</b>
Council Tax	8.419
Business Rates previous years still outstanding	1.788
HBOP	0.861
Rents current tenant arrears	0.382
Rents former tenant arrears	0.305
Sundry Debt overdue	0.561
<b>Total debt outstanding as at 31st March 2024</b>	<b>12.316</b>

The table below demonstrates the level of debt as at 31 March 2026. This shows a £2.589m increase in outstanding debt across all funds.

<b>Breakdown of total outstanding debt</b>	<b>£m</b>
Council Tax	9.877
Business Rates	2.106
HBOP	0.945
Rents current tenant arrears	1.069
Rents former tenant arrears	0.534
Sundry Debt overdue	0.374
<b>Total debt outstanding as at 31st March 2026</b>	<b>14.905</b>

- 1.4 Since the original report, data collection activities have taken place and based on information gathered in February 2026, the following table demonstrates those individuals that have debt with the authority:

<b>No. debt streams</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>% Total</b>
1	4,165	88.1%
2	534	11.3%
3	27	0.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,726</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

## **2.0 Proposal /Options Considered**

- 2.1 A new Corporate Income and Debt Strategy has been created which will deliver a cohesive and customer-centred approach to corporate debt management. This strategy sets out the Council's commitment to fostering a payment culture that supports prompt settlement of accounts and minimises the build-up of debt. It aims to maintain outstanding debt at the lowest possible level through proactive engagement, early intervention, and consistent enforcement where necessary. This is attached at **Appendix A**.
- 2.2 In addition to this, a new Policy on the Management of Cases that involve multiple Council debt has been developed (**Appendix B**). This policy sets out the Council's approach to identifying, managing, and supporting individuals whose debts and/or arrears in more than one Council area (e.g. housing rent and council tax).

- 2.3 A summary of the strategy and the approach to debt collection have been developed and shared with members of the residents panel and engaged tenants' groups. They have been invited to provide feedback through a short survey. The survey closed on Friday 22 May, and any feedback received will be considered.
- 2.4 Both of the new documents, as described above, will work in tandem with individual team policies and are not to contradict them. They don't replace or supersede individual team policies, these act as a further layer of engagement with service users/residents, in order to offer a "One Council approach" to managing debt.
- 2.5 The strategy and policy will be supported via two mechanisms, the creation of a joint working group, attended by representatives from all of the major funding streams, together with a proposed new role "Multiple Debt Caseworker" that will undertake the engagement with those that have debt with the Council over multiple funds.
- 2.6 The joint working group would meet periodically once data has been consolidated and analysed in order to allocate cases to the Multiple Debt Caseworker. A ringfenced amount would notionally be transferred to the caseworker, ringfencing this debt. The caseworker would then engage with the individual and seek to agree a single payment plan with the Council for the outstanding debt. All payments for ongoing charges for the various funds would be managed by the individual teams, with just the ringfenced debt subject to the caseworker.
- 2.7 The caseworker would seek to engage with the individual, understand their circumstances in greater depth, signpost where appropriate to benefits they currently don't claim, in order to seek a payment plan to accommodate a singular monthly/weekly payment for the debt owed to the Council. This officer would then reallocate the payment to the relevant funds over the course of the payment plan.
- 2.8 Where the individual doesn't engage with the caseworker after several attempts the caseworker would then hand back the individual to the relevant teams for them to initiate further enforcement relevant to each of the funds.
- 2.9 During the period for which the individual is with the caseworker, its suggested that further enforcement is paused, whilst engagement is sought.
- 2.10 It is noted that whilst this officer will seek to generate payments from individuals this is not the primary purpose of the role. Offering a more coordinated service to individuals, where two different teams aren't chasing for payments simultaneously and potentially seeking further enforcement would offer a better customer experience and one that supports individuals and seeks to find holistic solutions.
- 2.11 A job description and person specification is being drafted and will be scored through the JE process. It is anticipated that this will be scored at circa NS09. This would be apportioned over the General Fund and the HRA equally.

- 2.12 It is proposed that this post would be a fixed term post for 18 months, which would allow sufficient time for the post to establish itself, whilst also ability for the Council to review its effectiveness. The expected cost for 18 months (based on assumed pay awards) would be £72,800

### 3.0 **Implications**

In writing this report and in putting forward recommendations, officers have considered the following implications: Data Protection; Digital & Cyber Security; Equality & Diversity; Financial; Human Resources; Human Rights; Legal; Safeguarding & Sustainability and where appropriate they have made reference to these implications and added suitable expert comment where appropriate.

<b>Implications Considered</b>			
<b>Yes – relevant and included / NA – not applicable</b>			
Financial	Yes	Equality & Diversity	Yes
Human Resources	Yes	Human Rights	NA
Legal	NA	Data Protection	NA
Digital & Cyber Security	NA	Safeguarding	NA
Sustainability	NA	Crime & Disorder	NA
LGR	NA	Tenant Consultation	NA

#### Financial Implications FIN26-27/3117

- 3.1 As described at paragraph 2.12 the proposed cost of the additional post would cost circa £72,800 over the 18-month period including on-costs based on the estimated 2026/27 and 2027/28 pay awards. An equal split between the General Fund and the HRA would mean a cost of £36,400 each which would need to be funded through the Change Management Reserve for the GF and the Service Improvement reserve in the HRA.

#### Equalities Implications

- 3.2 The proposed Corporate Income and Debt Strategy and the Policy on the Management of Cases that Involve Multiple Council Debt have positive equalities implications. A more joined up and customer centred approach to debt management should reduce the risk of residents, including those who may be more vulnerable because of disability, age, poor mental health, low income or other protected characteristics, experiencing duplicated contact, inconsistent recovery action or avoidable escalation. The strategy and policy support earlier identification of need, more proportionate engagement and improved signposting to advice, benefits and other support. The appointment of a specified support officer will also allow greater flexibility in the methods of communication available to the customer, helping the Council to tailor engagement more appropriately to individual needs and circumstances. Implementation will need to be monitored to ensure that reasonable adjustments are made where required, communication methods are accessible, and the approach is applied fairly and consistently in line with the Council's Public Sector Equality Duty.

**Background Papers and Published Documents**

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

None