



<b>Coleraine Business Improvement District Levy Administration</b>	<b>20/08/2019</b>
<b>Corporate, Policy and Resources Committee – For decision</b>	

<b>Linkage to Council Strategy (2015-19)</b>	
<b>Strategic Theme</b>	Innovation and Transformation
<b>Outcome</b>	The Council will continuously examine and introduce ways to provide services in more accessible and efficient ways
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Chief Finance Officer
<b>Cost: (If applicable)</b>	£7,500

### **1.1 Background**

Business Improvement Districts (BIDS) are business led partnerships which are created through a ballot process to deliver additional services to local businesses.

They can be a powerful tool for directly involving local businesses in local activities and allow the business community and local authorities to work together to improve the local trading environment.

### **1.2 Coleraine BID**

In December 2017 a BID project manager was appointed in Coleraine and since then a full-time office has opened in the town from where businesses and public agencies have been consulted leading to the creation of a draft plan for the creation of a BID in Coleraine. The draft plan sets out a 5 year strategy for the area in various matters including public transport, energy, waste, communications and promotion of the area to name just a few. Finance for this plan will be raised by imposing a small levy on each of the businesses within the designated BID area over the 5 year life of the plan.

### **1.3 Current Status**

A BID is created following a ballot of the businesses which reside within the designated BID area, the ballot for the Coleraine BID commenced on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2018 closing 6 weeks

later on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> September 2018. Following a successful ballot the creation of Coleraine Business Improvement District came about.

#### **1.4 Council Role**

Under the enabling legislation regarding BIDS the local Council is designated as the billing and collection authority for the BID levy which will fund the programme. This will involve raising an invoice to each business and the collection of the levy as set out in the invoice including, if necessary, any debt collection actions against defaulters. The collection process will be handled in line with Council's current Debt Management Policy. Each levy is calculated based on the rateable value of a business' premises the data for each property being held by the BID office. Invoices will be issued on a pre-determined date with the necessary data regarding all businesses being provided to Council finance staff in advance of that date to allow processing. Once the invoices have been issued Council will collect the levy from each business in the same manner as it would from any other customer of Council. Once collected the levy will at prescribed points in time be paid over to the BID team, the process for this is set out in section 1.5 below.

#### **1.5 BID Levy Collection and Payment Process**

The levy invoices are to be issued on 1<sup>st</sup> November annually therefore the process will run as follows:

October	BID levy data provided to finance staff, billing period being 1 <sup>st</sup> October to 30 <sup>th</sup> September
November	BID levy invoices issued to all relevant businesses
1 <sup>st</sup> Weds in December	Minimum of 80% of BID levy paid over to BID team
March	Review of collections to date, status of any defaults and write-offs considered and agreed by BID office with remaining BID levy minus any outstanding debts paid to the BID office by 31 <sup>st</sup> March. Should there be any outstanding levy being actively pursued at this stage this will be paid over to the BID team immediately following successful collection.

#### **1.6 Costs**

There is a cost to Council in terms of staff time, stationery and postage connected with the issue of invoices and possibly reminders to levy payers. In addition there may be debt collection costs if some payers default in accordance with our Debt Management Policy and may therefore be pursued through legal channels. Provision exists under the legislation for Councils to recoup the cost incurred in the invoicing and collection of the levy on behalf of a BID. Officers initially estimated that these costs would be approximately £5,000, including an assumption that a proportion of levy will be taken to legal action. Council at the Corporate, Policy and Resources meeting in August 2018 decided not to apply an administration charge to the programme. Since that time we have issued the first year of five year's invoices and it is fair to say that the response was not as expected. Finance staff have incurred more time than estimated dealing with BID related queries and the collection rate of these payments has not been as high as was anticipated. At the date of writing 38% (230) of the BID invoices remain unpaid by number and 25% (£58,255) by value remains unpaid. Given the next batch of invoices are due to be raised

in the next couple of months it may be prudent to reconsider the application of an administration charge to the BID Company for this support work. Council is under increasing budgetary pressure and any avenue to recover cost needs to be examined.

### **1.7 Recommendation**

**It is recommended** that Council approve an annual administration charge of £7,500 for each the remaining four years of the current BID programme.