

Public Document Pack CABINET

4 DECEMBER 2023

Present: Councillors Barnett (Chair), Batsford, Cannon, Evans, Roark, Rogers

In attendance: Jane Hartnell Chief Executive, Kit Wheeler Chief Finance Officer

Remotely: Mary Kilner Chief Legal Officer

18. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies received from Councillor Willis.

19. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None.

20. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING 06/11/23

Cllr Roark highlighted her comment regarding byelaws and PSPO's preventing people and dogs entering the water ways in Alexandra Park.

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 6th October 2023 be approved as a true record.

21. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (30 MINUTES)

Cllr Pragnell asked whether the council was putting together a budget that made 125% of the £4m savings that the council needs to make to avoid s114. Cllr Barnett replied this would be discussed during the Cabinet debate.

The Chair re-ordered the agenda to consider the for Fees and Charges item first.

22. BUDGET SAVINGS PROPOSALS

The Chief Executive submitted a report to consider the Budget Savings proposals together with the consultation feedback submitted and make recommendations to full Council as appropriate.

She explained that because of the seriousness of the council's budget position, proposals for addressing the funding gap have been brought forward for earlier

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consideration. This will enable the council to start work on implementing the agreed proposals before the start of the new financial year and will positively impact on our ability to achieve savings in the timescale required. A consultation exercise has taken place and stakeholders, staff and members of the public have had an opportunity to give feedback and comments. The consultation closed on Friday 1 December therefore a summary was circulated at the meeting. An equality impact assessment was not yet available but will be circulated with updated documents with the Full Council agenda tomorrow.

The budget gap is based on the current 'worst case scenario' and does not assume any further assistance from Government. The Council is legally required to demonstrate it can balance its budget.

A significant part of the savings proposals relates to a transformation programme to change the way the council works and to deliver services in partnership with others to create more capacity and resilience.

The Chief Finance Officer explained that there are other Councils in a similar position, and they are looking to also share services. If the Budget targets are not made, then further in year saving will have to be identified.

Councillor Hilton asked if there had been feedback from the youth council? The Chief Executive answered that officers had been in discussion with the youth council but will check if the Youth Council has given feedback.

Councillor Collins asked regarding total savings from housing not including savings from housing acquisitions program? The Chief Finance Officer explained that the figures included in last year's budget had been revised and that these new figures were included in the table.

Councillor Batsford asked is the Council ready to start sharing services? The Chief Executive answered that some preparations have taken place, but further work will start after the Councillor's final decision at Full Council.

Councillor Roark asked if the budget is agreed will staff in affected services be included in the discussions? The Chief Executive answered that as soon as any decisions are made about which services are to be progressed for consideration for sharing the relevant service teams will be included in discussions.

Councillor Barnett gave thanks to the Senior Leadership Team for their work in producing the Budget Proposals.

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Councillor Barnett explained that most of the consultation has been positive. All responses have been read and all concerns and ideas have been listened to. Because of this Councillor Barnett proposed to change saving proposal 10 to:

Bring food safety inspections work in-house. The saving to be changed 'to be confirmed'.

Councillor Barnett also proposed, following consultation feedback, to merge saving proposals 22, 23 and 32 into a single review regarding council tax.

The Cabinet members discussed the report and thanked members of the community for their ideas and feedback.

Proposed by Councillor Barnett and seconded by Councillor Evans

RESOLVED (unanimously):

1. That Cabinet recommends that Full Council approve the draft Budget Savings proposals and those that can be are implemented as soon as practicably possible.

Reasons

1. Current estimates are that £4m savings are required to cover the council's budget deficit in 2024/25. This deficit has been largely created by cuts in local government funding over the past decade and more recently exacerbated by the housing and homelessness crisis in Hastings.

2. Due to the seriousness of the council's budget position, proposals for addressing the funding gap have been brought forward for earlier consideration. This will enable the council to start work on implementing the agreed proposals before the start of the new financial year and will positively impact on our ability to achieve savings in the timescale required.

23. FEES AND CHARGES

The Chief Finance Officer presented an annual review of the Council's fees and charges. The Council needs to review its fees and charges on an annual basis, each service has been asked to review its fees and charges with a suggested increase of 10% but not all fees are under the Councils control as some are set by Government.

Historically the Council has tried to keep any increases to a minimum to reduce the

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impact on residents and visitors to the town. The Council can no longer absorb increases due to inflation and needs to be able to recoup any additional costs from its fees and charges.

Councillor Beaney asked a question regarding beach hut fee increases and how the decision on the increase is decided? Councillor Barnett answered that Fees and Charges are delegated to Officers, but that the Administration wished to bring a report to Cabinet for transparency. The Chief Finance Officer explained inflation has an impact and discussions are had with each service area manager to recommend appropriate fee increases and these are discussed with Lead Councillors. The decision regarding beach huts has to be made earlier as the fees are incurred from 1 January and do not run to the financial year. Councillor Beany also asked regarding the impact on Beach Hut users from Southern waters issues. Councillor Barnett highlighted a lot of work has been done by the Council to hold Southern Water to account.

Councillor Hilton asked has there been feedback regarding the charge for hire of Council spaces? Councillor Barnett answered that the fees for local groups are not proposed to go up again next year and the feedback from officers has been that the spaces have been used successfully despite the introduction of fees this year. Councillor Batsford added that feedback from groups has been they are pleased the fees are not being increased from 2024/25.

Councillor Barnett asked what the overall impact of the proposed fees and charges would be on the budget. The Chief Finance Officer answered the increases will add £120k income to the budget.

Proposed by Councillor Barnett and seconded by Councillor Rogers

RESOLVED (unanimously):

- 1. Fees and Charges be increased by a minimum of 10% except where there are clear reasons for not doing so, or where charges are on a statutory basis.**
- 2. Fees and charges proposed by services be agreed.**

Reasons

The Council relies on income from fees and charges to provide services and supplement Government funding where this does not fully cover the cost of the service, we as a Council provide. Historically costs have continued to increase whilst central funding decreases.

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(The Chair declared the meeting closed at. 7.18 pm)

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