

CABINET

2 NOVEMBER 2020

Present: Councillors Forward (Chair), Fitzgerald (Vice-Chair), Barnett, Batsford, Chowney, Evans, O'Callaghan and Rogers.

282. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None received

283. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None received.

284. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 5th October 2020 be approved as a true record.

285. FINAL ACCOUNTS 2019/2020

The Chief Finance Officer presented a report on the outturn of the last financial year, ending in March 2020.

The financial landscape has changed dramatically from last year and continues to change as we move through this year. It is important to understand last year's closing position given the financial impacts occurring this year as a result of COVID-19. The report provides a starting point to understand our reserves position in particular and to help identify ongoing savings that will need to be made in current and future years. Any underspends in the year will be helpful but it is the ongoing savings that will be achieved which helps balance the budget for future years.

The audit of the final accounts, being carried out by external auditors, Grant Thornton, has been delayed this year. The final accounts themselves are meant to be presented to the Audit Committee on the revised date of November 12th. Unfortunately, Grant Thornton will not be in a position to give a view on the accounts by this date, mainly as a direct result of COVID-19. The Council's accounts remain in draft format and could be subject to change.

Currently, it looks like it was a good year, as the deficit of £1.598m was reduced from the £1.798m that was predicted in February 2020 – a reduction of £200,000. The big variations are identified in the appendices; of particular note are those in respect of street cleaning, waste and grounds maintenance. These areas need to be looked at to see if they can provide savings in the future. Whilst the report identifies numerous variations there is a lot more work to be carried out in order to set budgets for future years.

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There remain uncertainties around the future of non-domestic rate income and whether the appeals provision remains sufficient given the significant payments being made. Councillor Peter Chowney highlighted the level of savings being achieved and the Priority Income and Expenditure Review (PIER) savings in particular – as detailed in the appendices.

Councillor Chowney proposed approval of the recommendations, seconded by Councillor Rogers.

RESOLVED (unanimously) that:

- 1. Cabinet review the revenue and capital outturn positions for 2019/20.**
- 2. That the 2019-20 outturn position, along with the revised estimates for 2020/21 be taken into account when preparing the 2021/22 budget.**
- 3. Cabinet review the achievement of Priority Income and Efficiency Review (PIER) savings for 2019/20.**

Reasons:

Compliance with statutory requirements and good practice. The Council is accountable for the use of public money and continuously seeks to improve Value for Money.

The outturn position informs the budget setting process. Where there are under or overspends the reasons behind these are investigated with a view to reallocating resources to meet priorities.

The 2016/17 Audit Completion Report from the council's external auditors (BDO at the time) recommended that management report on the achievement of PIER savings following their implementation.

286. COVID-19 LOCKDOWN UPDATE

As everyone is aware, we are now heading towards another lockdown on Thursday. This is another worrying time which increases people's fear. The Leader reassured all the residents and businesses that Hastings Borough Council will do all it can to work with partners to support everyone through this next period of lockdown.

The Managing Director updated on what is happening and what the council is planning for going into the lockdown on Thursday.

Following announcements on Saturday night, the Managing Director attended a briefing with Secretary of State for Local Government on Sunday evening.

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At the briefing, the Secretary of State explained that the details of what we need to know about managing this lockdown would be made available over the next few days.

So whilst we are preparing for Thursday, we are waiting to hear a number of things including:

- Clarity about whether some outdoor sports facilities and activities are allowed or not
- Confirmation that waste and recycling sites will stay open – we expect this to be the case this time
- Any further support and expectations the government has around rough sleeping and winter conditions and any associated funding
- Expectations about what help will be offered to the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable who will we understand be written to and advised to stay home as much as they can and to work from home. They will be told by the Health Secretary what support is in place – we are keen to understand what this support is too, as we know that the national scheme will not be in place this time. Although the main responsibility for supporting this cohort of people in the last lockdown rested with upper tier councils, we provided significant support through our community hub and can reasonably expect to do so again.
- We are also waiting to hear what level of Business support will be made available, for businesses forced to close from Thursday, and what caveats or conditions they are required to meet. We are assuming it will be the same as that which has been allocated to those in tier 3 areas. We're also not yet aware of the amount or rules for the discretionary funding which we understand we will be allocated to support local businesses with.
- The Secretary of State also said a statement will be made this week regarding the national expansion of the enforcement and local contract tracing systems currently operating in tier 2 and 3 areas.

Examples of what we have done immediately include:

- Each senior manager is reviewing their second wave plans, and in the light of the specifics we understand and are preparing their response recommendations for what needs to be put in place by Thursday. For some areas this is likely to take a few days as the information they need is not yet available.
- We have re-instigated A and B teams into operation at the Cemetery and Crematorium – to ensure we have teams that do not meet to reduce the risk of infection

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- Began to review our risk assessment for staff who have been coming into work in Muriel Matters House – the clear expectation is that all those that can work from home do so, and only essential tasks, i.e. that cannot be done elsewhere are undertaken in the workplace.
- And, we have made the announcement about the arrangements for next Sunday's Act of Remembrance. This will unfortunately now be reduced to a maximum of 6 participants representing the town and laying wreaths on behalf of the people and organisations of our town.

The immediate priorities for the council over the next few days are:

- Firstly, to get accurate and detailed information to staff, councillors, residents and businesses as soon as it is available. Our website and resident's newsletter will again be invaluable for this purpose.
- Secondly, to manage our staff's wellbeing and mental health. Now that the virus is circulating in our community, the impact on staffing levels is likely to be much more dramatic than last time. Even when colleagues have recovered from the worst effects of the virus, experience is now showing us that they are not fully back to pre-virus health for some considerable weeks.
- Thirdly, the focus will be on ensuring we can meet the needs and requirements of the most vulnerable in our town – this may however mean we need to divert staff resources from areas and activities that could otherwise have continued.
- Fourthly, to ensure any and all financial allocations we are given to distribute to businesses is done so as effectively and quickly as possible.
- Fifthly, to manage number of concurrent threats our town is facing in addition to the pandemic – the impacts of EU-exit and of winter weather to name but a few of the most serious.

The Leader thanked all the officers who work at the council as they have been going above and beyond for a very long time. They are being asked to step up again to be there for the residents of the town and there is every confidence that they will do that again. We have to remember to be kind to each other because this is very stressful for everybody concerned and it is hoped residents are going to understand the priorities that have been outlined and there may be some changes to some of the services. We have got through this so far is by coming together as a community, looking out for each other, cooperating and showing understanding and it is certain we are going to continue to do that. All councillors were also thanked, it is important that they continue to look after themselves so that they can continue to look after the residents of the town. The Leader also encouraged residents to get in touch with their ward councillors if any concerns or issues need to be raised.

(The Chair declared the meeting closed at 6:30pm)