

<b>Committee:</b> Ordinary Council	<b>Date:</b> 13 October 2021
<b>Subject:</b> Policy, Resources and Economic Development Committee Chairs Update	<b>Wards Affected:</b> All
<b>Chair:</b> Cllr Chris Hossack	
<b>Report of:</b> Steve Summers – Strategic Director and Deputy Chief Executive	<b>For Information</b>

The following matters were updated at the Policy, Resources and Economic Committee on 30 September 2021.

### **Budget Consultation 2022/23**

On 31<sup>st</sup> August Brentwood Borough Council went live with a Budget Consultation and is urging residents and businesses to have their say about the Council's proposed budget for 2022/23. The purpose of the consultation is to understand where residents want to see the council's budget spent, what services they deem important and what services they want to see investment from in order to see improvement.

In recent years, the government has reduced grant funding to councils, this consultation is looking for views on how to spend the next budget to ensure that despite reduced grant funding the Council can still provide the best services and meet the needs of residents and businesses in Brentwood.

The Consultation is looking to collate views on the following:

- Spending on services – Should the Council spend less, the same or more on the services it currently provides. Also gives residents the opportunity to rate the service currently being provided
- Corporate Strategy – how important are the objectives outlined in the Corporate Strategy to you
- Raising Funds and Driving Efficiencies – How should the Council look to generate funds and achieve efficiencies in order to continue delivering services
- Council Tax – Would residents like to see a decrease in council tax and therefore a decrease in services, a marginal increase in council tax and maintained services or a significant increase in Council Tax (subject to a referendum) and further investment in delivery of services.

The information from this survey will be reviewed at the next Policy, Resources & Economic Development Committee to inform the budget setting cycle and Council Tax for 2022/23 in February.

The consultation can be accessed via the Council website at <https://www.brentwood.gov.uk/-/setting-a-balanced-budget-for-2022-23> or by contacting the Council on 01277 312500 and requesting a form be posted, The consultation closes 3 October 2021.

### **Budget Monitoring Update**

Forecasts for revenue and capital budget positions as at 31<sup>st</sup> August (period 5) for 2021/22 were reported to give an overall financial update for the Council.

The report did not attempt to cover all budgetary changes but draws attention to the key factors affecting net expenditure differences.

The General Fund is forecasting a balanced budget, this is where income matches to expenditure. The utilisation of reserves has allowed the Council to mitigate in year budget pressures so there is no impact on the Council's general working balance.

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is currently forecasting a deficit position of £290k. In year pressures associated with the housing development programme regarding costs that cannot be capitalised have impacted this negative position.

The Capital Programme including slippage totalled £33.211m. Majority of projects are forecast to complete with an expected delay in some projects resulting in a budgetary impact of £550k below the budget. This underspend will be considered as slippage into next year's programme.

### **Brentwood Business Showcase**

Our fifth annual Brentwood Business Showcase returns on 20 October 2021, 10am to 4pm at The Brentwood Centre. Supported by Gold sponsor, Tees, the event will feature keynote speakers, workshops and an exhibitor display. Land Charter Homes will be sponsoring the informal drinks reception from 4-6pm. A record amount of sponsorship has been achieved this year, with 14 businesses taking up a sponsorship package. Confirmed keynote speakers include Kate Willard OBE (Thames Estuary Envoy), Scott Russell (founder of Paddy and Scott's Coffee), Barry Hearn (Matchroom Sports) and Peter Gudde (Greater South East Energy Hub). The Brentwood Chamber of Commerce will be hosting a series of workshops led by local experts. New for 2021 is a Sustainability Zone, spotlighting companies and organisations who are driving the green agenda and the transition to net zero. Due to the additional space at The Brentwood Centre, the exhibitor display can now hold over 75 stands, with 62 exhibitors already confirmed.

### **Business Grants**

On 23 August, £184,100 was distributed in a fifth round of the Additional Restrictions Grants to 687 businesses. Council officers are working up a new “Growth Grant” scheme to distribute the remaining £240,000 in discretionary funding. A policy will be brought forward to PRED Committee in November.

Essex County Council has allocated an additional £350,000 in financial support to Brentwood Borough Council to help businesses adapt to prevent further spread of COVID-19. Grants of up to £5,000 are available and will be awarded based on individual business needs. The funding will allow businesses from all sectors to adapt their premises and operations so that they can continue to operate safely and in line with government guidance. This money can be used in different ways, including to buy new equipment, support employees to work from home or to adapt premises. Applications are open from 26 August to 3 October. Grants will be distributed to successful applicants during the week commencing 4 October.

### **The Pop-Up Marketplace and Vegan Market**

The Brentwood Business Partnership and its sponsors, Beresfords and Tees, hosted The Pop-Up Marketplace on Saturday 4 September. The market included over 60 artisan stalls, food vendors, live entertainment and children’s entertainment. The event was supported by the Council, who provided space at the Chatham Way car park for the event. Footfall statistics show the event attracted over 3,000 visitors, a 30% increase in shoppers in the Brentwood town centre from the previous Saturday. The Vegan Market on Sunday 5 September was also well attended, with an estimated 1,750 visitors, also a 30% increase in Sunday figures over the previous weekend.

### **Click It Local**

The platform has seen order numbers increasing in Brentwood in August and September. A recent marketing campaign featuring local independent shop, The Greenhouse, saw a 375% increase in sales from the previous week. In addition to its targeted social media marketing, Click It Local has also been running a leaflet distribution campaign, taken out advertising at Shenfield station and hosted a stall at the recent Pop-Up Marketplace to raise brand awareness.

### **Local Rewards**

The new digital loyalty scheme pilot launched in conjunction with the Safari Trail on 17 July. Visitors were encouraged to scan QR codes placed near the animal statues to claim free points that they could redeem in independent shops. Officers will be working closely with Brentwood, Shenfield and Ingatestone traders to create Christmas special offers for the Local Rewards platform.

### **Local Development Plan Examination and Main Modifications Consultation**

Examination hearing sessions have now concluded subject to outcomes of the next step in the process (see below). This followed week six held at the end of July, including discussion on the Highways England objection to growth impacts at strategic highway junctions. This matter was resolved to accept evidence that necessary highways mitigation can be provided by planned growth, but that this issue be reconsidered for longer term growth through the requirement for the Council to undertake an immediate partial review of the plan. A plan review policy will be one of the proposed modifications needed to make the plan sound.

Main modifications are those necessary amendments to make the plan sound according to the requirements of the appointed planning inspectors. If the plan is not sound it cannot be adopted by the Council. In order to progress towards eventual adoption, legislation requires a six-week public consultation on those main modifications. This consultation runs from late September until early November. Following this, responses will be collated and passed to the planning inspectors for consideration. The outcome of that process will inform the inspectors' letter confirming whether the plan is sound or not. If it is sound, the Council can decide whether to adopt the plan, a decision expected in early 2022.

### **Dunton Hills Garden Village application**

The Dunton Hills Garden Village project has reached another milestone with the recent submission of an outline planning application by developer CEG (see application reference 21/01525/OUT). Two overarching themes were embedded at the outset of the project: 1) allocation; and 2) application. Allocation of the land will be confirmed subject to soundness and adoption of the Local Development Plan (plan-making). This outline application is the first of several applications that will be submitted as the project progresses into more detail and from different landowners (decision-making). This milestone takes us closer to delivery of the first new homes on site and is the culmination of a significant amount of work by officers, CEG and partners.