

Minutes

Policy, Resources & Economic Development Committee Thursday, 30th September, 2021

Attendance

Cllr Barrett
Cllr Lewis
Cllr Mynott

Cllr Mrs Pearson
Cllr Poppy
Cllr Wagland

Apologies

Cllr Hossack
Cllr Parker
Cllr S Cloke

Substitute Present

Cllr Kendall (substituting for Cllr S Cloke)
Cllr Russell (substituting for Cllr Hossack)

Also Present

Cllr White

Officers Present

Phoebe Barnes	Corporate Manager - Finance
Greg Campbell	Corporate Director (Environment & Communities)
Phil Drane	Corporate Director (Planning and Economy)
Zoey Foakes	Governance & Member Support Officer
Amanda Julian	Corporate Director (Law and Governance) and Monitoring Officer
Steve Summers	Strategic Director (Deputy Chief Executive)
Jacqueline Mellaerts	Van Corporate Director (Finance & Resources)
Jonathan Stephenson	Chief Executive

LIVE BROADCAST

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135. Apologies for absence

The Monitoring Officer opened the meeting to inform the Committee that as apologies had been received from the committee Chair and Vice Chair, members were required to propose a Chair for the duration of this meeting.

It was **MOVED** by Cllr Mrs Pearson and **SECONDED** by Cllr Wagland to propose Cllr Poppy is Chair for the duration of this meeting. This was **AGREED**.

The Chair (Cllr Poppy) **MOVED** and Cllr Russell **SECONDED** that Cllr Mrs Pearson acts as Vice chair for the duration of this meeting. This was **AGREED**.

Apologies were received from Cllrs Hossack, Parker and S Cloke with Cllrs Russell and Kendall substituting.

136. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the Policy, Resources and Economic Development meeting held on 30th June 2021 were approved as a true record.

137. Chairs Update

Members noted the updates provided in the Chair's report.

138. Budget Update Report

The purpose of this report was to set out the forecast revenue and capital budget positions as at period 5 for 2021/22 and to provide an overall financial update for the Council.

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

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

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

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

This item was for information only, following discussion by the committee, no vote was required.

139. Litter Enforcement

The Borough of Brentwood experiences issues, like many other authorities, with discarded litter. This especially so on major trunk roads around and through Brentwood where not only is the litter a problem but so is the safety of our operatives.

The authority was reviewing how the management and collection of litter can be addressed from beginning to end which will form a report to a future Environment, Housing & Health Committee.

However, in the meantime the Council were looking at other options to reduce or deter littering in the borough. This report asked Members to consider one such option by considering the introduction of a 14 day trial of a littercam which detects people throwing litter from moving or stationary cars.

After a full discussion, Cllr Poppy **MOVED** and Cllr Pearson **SECONDED** the recommendations in the report. A vote was taken and it was **RESOLVED**.

Members are asked to:

R1. To agree to a trial of a 'Littercam' camera to be deployed for 14 days at a cost of £4,500 plus lamp column checks at £850, installation, decommission and cost to return the camera.

R2. To approve the trial is funded from an appropriate Earmarked Reserve.

R3. That a further report on the outcome from this trial is brought back to this committee for consideration.

Reasons for Recommendation

Brentwood Borough Council needed to consider all methods to combat the problem of litter in the area and whilst campaigns have their place other options should be considered.

Emphasise to the public that we as a Council and a borough do not tolerate poor behaviours of those who blot our landscape by not disposing of litter appropriately

Will enable the Council to consider whether such a scheme could work on a more permanent basis.

140. Lower Thames Crossing Community Impacts Consultation and Development Consent Order

Highways England (now known as National Highways) were inviting views on the Lower Thames Crossing, a proposed new motorway connecting Essex and Kent through a tunnel beneath the River Thames to provide additional road capacity. A Community Impacts Consultation had been launched following previous consultations. This preceded the expected submission of a Development Consent Order application for the scheme.

After a full discussion, Cllr Poppy **MOVED** and Cllr Pearson **SECONDED** the recommendations in the report. A vote was taken and it was **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY**.

Members are asked to:

R1. Approve the response to the Lower Thames Crossing Community Impacts Consultation, as set out in Appendix A; and

R2. Approve delegated powers to the Corporate Manager (Planning Development Management) as part of the Development Consent Order (DCO) process.

Reasons for Recommendation

It was recommended that the issues set out in Appendix A be issued in response to the Lower Thames Crossing Community Impacts Consultation. The Council had engaged with National Highways on the Lower Thames Crossing project to date. It was proposed that issues raised in previous consultation responses were maintained where relevant and/or unresolved.

Once National Highways commence the Development Consent Order (DCO) process there would be strict deadlines to adhere to, often with challenging timeframes. Once submitted the Council's Planning Development Management Team would be responsible for considering the scheme and responding to the Planning Inspectorate. In light of the timeframes, it is recommended that the Corporate Manager for Planning Development Management be delegated authority to determine the DCO process. Updates on progress will be brought to Members when relevant.

141. Review Of Local Council Tax Discounts

In March 2021, following a motion at full Council by the labour group which was accepted in February 2021, PRED resolved to review Council Tax Discretionary Discounts and report options to a future PRED Committee.

This report reviewed the options available and recommends to consult with residents to make amendments to the scheme of Council Tax Discounts and Premiums with effect from 1 April 2022, using discretionary powers granted by the Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018.

The report outlined the proposed changes and the potential impact on the tax base.

After a full discussion, Cllr Poppy **MOVED** and Cllr Barrett **SECONDED** the recommendations in the report. A vote was taken and it was **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY**.

Members are asked to:

R1. Award delegated authority to the Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Chair of Policy, Resources & Economic Development Committee to consult with residents on:

A) Removing the Council Tax discretionary discount for Empty and Unfurnished properties from 1 April 2022.

B) Removing the Council Tax discretionary discount for Second Homes from 1 April 2022.

C) Not changing The Council Tax discretionary discount for Empty & Uninhabitable properties from 1 April 2022.

R2. Report the results of the consultation to the next appropriate Policy, Resources and Economic Development Committee for a final decision on any proposed changes to Council Tax Discretionary Discounts.

Reasons for Recommendation

Properties that are vacant for long periods of time, can lead to problems with squatters, anti-social behaviour and have a direct impact on the amount of housing available in the Borough. The removal of these discounts would incentivise the owners to bring properties back into use and occupation with less delay.

Currently two local Council Tax discounts we are reviewing to remove are costing Brentwood Council £13,519 per annum, and the precepting authorities collectively £113,344 per annum. This would generate additional income to the collective Councils to reinvest within their services.

Legislation would still allow the Council to award discretionary support to people in exceptional circumstances and each request would be given due care and consideration and assessed on its own merits.

142. Amend the order of the agenda

The Chair amended the order of the agenda to take this Financial Initiatives Working Group ahead of the other items on the agenda in case the later items are required to move into private session.

143. Financial Initiatives Working Group

Members will be aware that one of the key objectives within the Council's Corporate Strategic Plan 2020-2025 is to sustain £1 million revenue via commercial activities to reduce the council's revenue budget gap.

To assist with this objective and meet the targets set out in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and build on the initiatives already developed it is considered appropriate to introduce a member's cross working party, Financial Initiatives Member Working Group (FIWG) to review and develop financial initiatives for presentation to and consideration by this committee.

The members had to talk with their group to decide which members from the opposition would be part of the working group. Cllr Poppy confirmed that the members from the Conservative Party would be Cllrs Hossack and White.

After a full discussion, Cllr Poppy **MOVED** and Cllr Pearson **SECONDED** the recommendations in the report. A vote was taken and it was **RESOLVED**.

Members are asked to:

R1. Agree to set up a formal cross party Member's Financial Initiatives Working Group.

R2. Agree the Members to be representatives on the working group.

R3. Agree the working group's Terms of Reference as attached at Appendix A.

Reasons for Recommendation

To ensure that the council considers all financial opportunities in an appropriate and structured manner.

144. Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business to discuss.

145. Social & Commercial Opportunity

Following an approach from Grove School to request assistance in securing a commercial premise from which their students can gain work experience, to improve skills and resilience, as they come towards the end of their student careers, a proposal had been prepared that requested the Council to make a capital investment to deliver the social aspirations and requires member approval.

After a full discussion, Cllr Poppy **MOVED** and Cllr Pearson **SECONDED** the recommendations in the report. A vote was taken and it was **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY**.

Members are asked to:

R1. To approve to purchase of a vehicle within the Councils Capital Programme 2021/22, to pursue the Business case attached in Appendix A.

R2. To delegate authority to the Corporate Director of (Finance and Resources) and S151 officer and the Corporate Director (Law and Governance) and Monitoring Officer in consultation with the chair of PRED to enter into the legal agreements required.

Reasons for Recommendation

To create an opportunity within the borough that meets a social need as well as a commercial return.

146. Disposal of General Fund Property Asset - EXEMPT

The public were excluded from the meeting for the item of business on the grounds that the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 was involved.

A Motion was **MOVED** by Cllr Poppy and **SECONDED** by Cllr Mrs Pearson to agree the recommendation in the report.

A vote was taken by a show of hands and it was **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY.**
