

<b>Committee:</b> Ordinary Council	<b>Date:</b> 8 December 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 brought to Policy, Resources and Economic Committee on 24 November 2021.

### **Corporate Strategy**

The Corporate Strategy sets out the council's ambitions for a 5-year period.

An Annual Review of the plan was undertaken and Key Objectives for 2021-22 were approved by Ordinary Council on the 10<sup>th</sup> March 2021. (Min 723 refers). An update was reported to members on the progress of the Corporate Strategy 2021-22 key objectives.

### **Procurement Strategy**

The Procurement Strategy was updated to reflect the Corporate Strategy "Brentwood 2025" setting out and updating the procurement cycle and principles the Council will follow.

### **2022-23 Budget Consultation Response**

In total the Council received 255 responses for the budget consultation. 247 were from residents, 5 were from businesses in the borough, 2 respondents work in the borough and 1 respondent was interested in the borough. 97.27% of the respondents were Council Taxpayers.

Overall, after analysing the participants responses the following was derived:

- a) Services wish to be kept the same across the board.
- b) Supporting local business and organisations was the most important to the respondents regarding the corporate strategy.
- c) The household waste collection service had the highest satisfaction score. However, this is a service that is likely most participants are in receipt of. Other services such as homelessness prevention not all participants would have been in receipt of and therefore would not have a satisfaction score for them.
- d) Creating efficiencies first overall increasing income to raise extra revenue was the preferable option.

- e) Most respondents would support a marginal increase to council tax to maintain the current service provision.

The full consultation responses can be found at <https://www.brentwood.gov.uk/-/consultations#recent-consultations>

## 2022/23 Medium Term Financial Forecast and 2020/21 Mid-Year Review

Members were updated on the Draft position of the Medium term Financial Strategy and the mid year review. This is the current position known at this point in time available to the finance team. Various assumptions have been built into the base budget and the budget setting process is still in progress.

The current position was summarised as follows:

	2020/21 Actual £'000	2021/22 Projected Outturn £'000	2022/23 Budget £'000	2023/24 Budget £'000	2024/25 Budget £'000
<b>Total General Fund Net Expenditure</b>	12,063	9,060	10,359	10,705	11,253
<b>Total Funding</b>	(11,820)	(9,060)	(8,999)	(8,827)	(8,995)
<b>Funding Gap</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,360</b>	<b>1,878</b>	<b>2,258</b>
<b>Working Balance b/fwd</b>	<b>3,117</b>	<b>2,874</b>	<b>2,874</b>	<b>1,514</b>	<b>(364)</b>
<b>Less: - Funding Gap</b>	243	0	1,360	1,875	2,258
<b>Working Balance c/fwd</b>	<b>2,874</b>	<b>2,874</b>	<b>1,514</b>	<b>(364)</b>	<b>(2,622)</b>

### Addressing the Funding Gap

The strategy for managing the future budget gaps must be developed during the budget setting process. Officers are currently looking at:

- a) Service redesign and delivery of service strategies
- b) Maximising income generating opportunities
- c) Ensuring full cost recovery for services
- d) Reviewing how services are delivered to reduce costs
- e) Reviewing and rationalising Council Assets
- f) Generating innovative ideas for delivering efficiencies
- g) Reviewing and considering the activity of Seven Arches Investment Limited and the Joint Venture Brentwood Development Partnership
- h) Looking at shared service opportunities. The Joint Strategic Partnership with Rochford Council continues to progress, if this partnership continues it is likely, savings and efficiencies will be realised. These have not been factored into the current forecast.

- i) Prioritising the delivery of projects

HRA and the Capital program positions were also reported as well as the Treasury Management mid year review. Further full details can be found within the Policy, Resources and Economic Development report.

### **Review of 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.

In September 2021, Members reviewed the options available and agreed to consult with residents on three discretionary discounts 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 consultation concluded and the Committee agreed the proposed changes to the scheme.

### **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy**

Members were presented for information the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy 2021-2024. The policy has been reviewed and updated to ensure it is still reflective of the Equality Act 2010 and the Council's statutory obligation to implement provisions into its working practices. The policy sets out how the Council complies with the defined protected characteristics and also incorporates the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliances definition of Antisemitism (adopted by the Council in January 2017). The policy will be made available to all employees, provided to all new employees as part of their onboarding, as well as training to ensure all employees are aware and understand it.

### **Staff Values and Behavioural Framework**

Linked to the above Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, the committee endorsed the staff values and behaviours that have been developed over the past year through internal workshops and consultation. These are:

- **Nurture:** We empower others, courageously building relationships so that we all grow.
- **Belong:** We have purpose and meaning, aware of how each role contributes to the bigger picture of what we are working together to achieve.
- **Smart:** We are a small organisation that punches above its weight, finding innovative solutions to responsibly deliver ambitious priorities.

- **Dynamic:** We enthusiastically embrace positive change, adapting to meet the needs of each other and our borough.

These values will help the Council maintain and improve a positive staff culture that is motivated and resourced to deliver corporate objectives. Members also approved that further work be undertaken to consider how the values can be embedded in relevant policy and guidance that covers member and officer engagement.

## **Economic Development Strategy**

The Council's Corporate Strategy 2020-25 outlines key corporate priorities and objectives, such as to grow the economy. Members approved a new Economic Development Strategy to provide greater detail on how the local economy will grow, focussing on the three key objectives:

- Promoting Brentwood as a place to set up and do business from
- Enabling the growth of existing businesses
- Encouraging the creation of new enterprises and inward investment

Each objective is supported by several tasks that will help deliver the Council's aims. This will form the basis of a work programme for the Council's Economic Development Team, as well as other teams supporting corporate objectives and external partners.

The strategy sets goals based on recent achievements, such as the 2021 Brentwood Business Showcase, held in October for the first time at The Brentwood Centre. The event was a huge success, bigger and better than ever before with 85 exhibitors, over 500 visitors and fantastic opportunities to learn from a great range of keynote speakers, including Barry Hearn OBE (Matchroom Sport), Kate Willard OBE (Thames Estuary Envoy), Scott Russell (Paddy & Scott's Coffee), Jane Winfield (Tees Law), and Peter Gudde (Greater South East Energy Hub). Use of The Brentwood Centre also made it possible to host the Stars of Brentwood Awards after the showcase, for a community recognition ceremony (voluntary organisations, charities and individuals) and a staff celebration event.

Building on the business showcase success, the team will consider how to further grow the event for 2022, as well as holding a Town Centre Conference in January 2022, inviting key stakeholders from a wide range of backgrounds to discuss the future of the high street, among other things. The team also supported the first Essex County Council High Street Summit on 24 November, representing Brentwood Borough Council at the event that enabled businesses to express concerns and gain insider knowledge from an expert panel of guest speakers.

## **Brentwood Business Growth Grant**

Since November 2020 the Government has provided £2.99m to Brentwood Borough Council as part of its Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) fund allocation for distribution to local businesses. To date five rounds of grants have been distributed totalling £2.72m.

With the remaining £250,000 of ARG funding, the committee approved that a new Brentwood Business Growth Grant is created to support local businesses who are looking to scale up and grow within the borough post-pandemic. This will help to create a level playing field and encourage businesses of any size or sector to put forward growth projects for funding. Applicants will be asked to detail how their project will create new jobs, safeguard existing jobs, increase turnover and bring new skills into the businesses. This will help grow the local economy as part of the Council's corporate objectives.

### **Ingatestone and Fryerning Neighbourhood Plan**

As a matter of Council policy, given once adopted neighbourhood plans from part of the Council's development plan for Planning decision-making, the committee approved the Ingatestone and Fryerning Neighbourhood Plan Regulation 15 stage and next stages towards adoption (including eventual referendum stage). This is an important milestone that reflects the dedication and hard work from Ingatestone and Fryerning Parish Council in preparing the neighbourhood plan. The parish council presented their neighbourhood plan to the committee.

The neighbourhood plan sets out a wide-ranging policy framework for the area within the parish boundary:

- Housing
- Housing Design
- Heritage
- Economy
- Transport
- Environment
- Wellbeing, Leisure and Community Facilities

Going forward, Brentwood Borough Council is responsible for undertaking consultation of under Regulation 16, followed by submission to the Planning Inspectorate for examination on behalf of the Secretary of State (Regulation 17), and subject to necessary modifications the neighbourhood plan can be published for referendum. Updates on progress will be brought to Members.

### **Response to the Southend Local Plan**

The Southend Local Plan, Refining the Options consultation (Regulation 18) was recently published, and the committee approved a response on behalf of Brentwood Borough Council. Southend-on-Sea Borough Council is a partner through the Association of South Essex Local Authorities (ASELA) and have notified Brentwood Borough Council that Southend Borough is physically unable to meet its full housing needs. The committee conveyed broad support of the aims to prepare a new local plan, noting that the Southend Plan is currently at the early stages of the plan-making process with little specific details provided on the strategic approach for the area. It also set out the limitations that Brentwood Borough faces being wholly within Green Belt, and so proposed further joint working regarding cross-boundary issues be progressed, such as unmet needs.

