

CABINET

21 September 2020 at 5.00 pm

Present: Councillors Dr Walsh (Chairman), Oppler (Vice-Chairman), Coster, Mrs Gregory, Lury, Stanley, Mrs Staniforth and Mrs Yeates

Councillors Bennett, Bower, Chapman, Charles, Clayden, Mrs Cooper, Cooper, Dendle, Dixon, Edwards, English, Gunner, Roberts and Tilbrook were also in attendance for all or part of the meeting.

203. WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed Members, members of the public and Officers to what was the fifth virtual meeting of Cabinet. He provided a brief summary of how the meeting would be conducted and the protocol that would be followed and how any break in the proceedings due to technical difficulties would be managed.

204. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Dr Walsh declared a Personal Interest in Agenda Items 14 [The Council's Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic Situation] and 15 [Covid-19 Recovery Working Party – 23 July and 8 September 2020] as he as a Member of West Sussex County Council and he felt that some of the projects identified could cross over into West Sussex County Council functions/partnerships.

205. QUESTION TIME

The Chairman invited questions from members of the public who had submitted their questions in advance of the meeting in accordance with the rules of the Council's Constitution and the Virtual Meeting Procedure Rules amended by the Council on 15 July 2020.

The Chairman confirmed that two questions had been submitted from the same questioner and that both questions for him to respond to as Leader of the Council.

The detail of the two questions have been summarised below:

The first question relation to Bognor Regis Regeneration and asked what steps the Council would now be taking in response to the Motion that had been debated and agreed at Full Council on 16 September 2020.

Councillor Dr Walsh responded stating that it was his understanding that Officers had not yet had the chance to consider the outcome of the Motion discussed but in due course would publicise how it would be taken forward.

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The second question related to the Bognor Regis Town Hall and the Bognor Regis arcade as the original plan was to relocate Council offices there, leasing back from whoever would have purchased. Was the Council committed to this course of action and why had the upper floors not been refurbished as intended?

Councillor Dr Walsh confirmed that any response made in respect of the Town Hall back in 2017 had been made by the previous administration. It remained this administration's objective to give the opportunity to the Town Council to purchase the Town Hall for a sum which could be reasonably regarded as 'Best Consideration'. In respect of the Arcade, the Cabinet was due to consider a report later in the year which would provide options for the way forward.

*(A schedule of the full questions asked and the responses provided can be found on the Pubic Question Web page at: <https://www.arun.gov.uk/public-question-time> )*

The Chairman then drew Public Question Time to a close.

206. URGENT BUSINESS

The Chairman confirmed that there were no urgent items for this meeting.

207. MINUTES

The minutes from the meeting of Cabinet held on 20 July 2020 were approved as a correct by Cabinet. The Chairman confirmed that these would be signed at the earliest opportunity to him.

208. BUDGET VARIATION REPORTS

There were no matters discussed.

209. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT TO 31 JULY 2020

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Corporate Support introduced this report outlining that financial performance was monitored on a regular basis to ensure that spending was in line with Council policies and that net expenditure was contained within overall budget limits. However, 2020/21 was proving to be an exceptional year with significant additional financial risks due to Covid-19. These risks had been clearly set out within the report which focused on performance against approved budget to the end of July 2020 in relation to the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and capital expenditure.

The Financial Services Manager then presented the report confirming that this was the first full budget monitoring report for this year and since the outbreak of Covid-19.

There was an adverse budget variation of £428k at the end of July 2020. The breakdown of this variation had been set out at Table 2.1 with further explanations contained in the report. The Financial Services Manager stated that it should be noted that a considerable proportion of this was due to a loss of income which was £454k under achievement. How the income would behave moving forward was extremely difficult to predict, but it was anticipated to worsen in the winter months due to the pandemic.

The largest expenditure pressures on the Council were:

- Leisure Support which was subject to a further report on the agenda for this meeting;
- Homelessness, including Rough Sleeping; and
- to a lesser extent, internal costs such as home working and health and safety.

Leisure Support expenditure variation had been covered by the supplementary estimate approved at Full Council on 15 July 2020)

It was explained that when the Covid-19 grant of £1.874m was applied, pro rata, (£625k) this resulted in an estimated outturn General Fund balance of £6.250m. This was approximately £250k worse than original budget. This was shown in Table 6.2 of the report. However, this figure needed to be treated with caution as it assumed that the variation continued at the current level.

When looking at the Covid-19 returns to Central Government, which were extrapolated to the end of the financial year, it was anticipated that the deficit could be closer to £1m if no mitigation was applied.

Cabinet was asked to also note that there were many smaller underspends in service areas which as the year progressed which were likely to make a significant contribution towards the adverse budget variation and therefore provide some budget mitigation.

In conclusion, the report highlighted that the Council needed to be flexible in its approach to finance this year, including having schemes and projects that could be turned off at short notice if the situation worsened and if the Council did not receive any further general Government support.

In discussing the report, the Cabinet Member for Residential Services, Councillor Mrs Gregory confirmed that there was one piece of good news to share which was that in relation to Residential Services, the Council had been awarded the sum of £319k from the Rough Sleeping Initiative. In addition to this, the Council was making a further claim in the sum of £21k which could reduce the overspend relating to homelessness.

The Chairman then invited non-Cabinet Councillors to ask questions.

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A question was raised in relation to what was being explored in terms of attracting rental income for the empty upstairs space at the Bognor Regis Arcade. Councillor Oppler responded confirming that this was an ongoing issue and that Officers were looking into options to ensure the best future for the arcade. The Cabinet Member for Technical Services, Councillor Stanley, was invited to provide input as this fell under his portfolio area. The Chief Executive responded first stating that a report was being prepared for a future meeting of Cabinet. Councillor Stanley outlined that there were several feasible options coming forward that required thorough examination, the report mentioned by the Chief Executive would address these.

The Cabinet

RESOLVED – That

- (1) the report in Appendix 1 be noted; and
- (2) the Council's Budget for 2020/21 was at risk of being exceeded because of the additional expenditure and loss of income due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Cabinet confirmed its decision as per Decision Notice C/007/210920, a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of the Minutes.

## 210. FINANCIAL PROSPECTS REPORT 2020/21 TO 2025/6

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Corporate Support introduced the Financial Prospects report covering the financial forecast for the next five years.

He outlined that the Council was facing significant financial challenges as core Government grant funding was being eroded and replaced with more volatile and uncertain funding based around the growth of the District.

The Group Head of Corporate Support then worked through aspects of the report that needed to be brought to Members' attention.

The huge uncertainty that the Council was facing over Government funding was unprecedented coupled with significant issues connected with the Covid-19 crisis. The key areas brought to the Cabinet's attention were:

- The Government had confirmed that there would be no return to austerity yet the redirection of resources within the public sector would most likely mean that there would still be cuts in lower priority areas.
- There was endless speculation in the media in terms of how Covid-19 grants the knock-on effect was still unknown.

- The reset of business rates needed to be flagged. Over the last 7 years the Council had benefited from growth in this area due to the proliferation of supermarkets in the District which had been a stimulus for the Council's finances. Government had been threatening to remove this for some time and this had been delayed due to Brexit and now Covid, but it could not be ignored that this reset would occur eradicating a lot of growth in 2022/23.
- Looking at the capital programme, the Council had not been able to complete a majority of this and there could be the need to reduce next year's programme to allow catch up to take place on all repairs and projects.
- It could be confirmed with certainty that the New Homes Bonus would be reduced to zero in the future and that this had been a buoyant source of income for the Council.
- There were further risks for the Council to be aware of. One was the collection rate from Council Tax as the potential effect of unemployment including the winding down of the furlough scheme was likely to result in an increase in arrears which could be permanent or just delayed.
- Particular attention was focused on mitigations and the need to do this as and where possible. This came with a stipulation that any proposed scheme or project had to be supported by a robust business case as it was imperative to preserve the scarce resources that the Council had available.
- The effects of the assumptions outlined had been set out in Table 2.2.1 of the report and this showed an increasing deficit but also declining balances. Steps were being taken to address the sizeable deficit but the reduction in New Homes Bonus to zero in the future and business rate reset, as mentioned earlier, would make this very difficult to achieve.
- Officers were actively working on a comprehensive savings exercise which although would assist the indicative projections, would not be able to tackle the deficit in next year's budget and so it was recommended that the Council should develop a Strategy to address the savings target illustrated.

Before inviting Cabinet Members to ask questions, Councillor Dr Walsh asked if there was place for prudential borrowing in any financial recovery strategy? The Group Head of Corporate Support confirmed that this was always possible, but that the Council had to be mindful that any such borrowing had to be repaid and supported by a concrete business case not speculation.

In looking at wider impacts for the Council, the end of the furlough scheme was identified as something that could cause problems. This was because local businesses had confirmed that they saw this as the biggest issue that they currently faced and that they needed more support from central government. The potential closure of or

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restrictions of hospitality venues could increase the furlough problem and have impacts for the Council in terms of a reduction in council tax collected. It was hoped that the Government would look further at creating some form of tailored furlough scheme for those sectors. The loss of recycling credits and New Homes Bonus were issues of concern and the Group Head of Corporate Support was asked if he could provide any further update on these declining areas of income. The Group Head of Corporate Support confirmed that these reductions were not new news and had been expected for a long time. The Business Rates reset had been deferred three times but would certainly take place and would have a detrimental impact on the Council.

The Chairman asked the Group Head of Corporate Support if, as part of his discussions with the other finance officers and through the Local Government Association, there were any signs of any further Government grant to bail out local government. The response provided was negative. There were no new schemes to assist the leisure sector in addition to the funding that the Council had already received and what had been set out in the previous report. The latest news focused on the distribution of the £500 per person self-isolating payment, which although would not cost the Council money, would be an additional administrative burden on Council staff.

Having congratulated the Council's finance team for the prudent way it had dealt with the Council's finances,

The Cabinet

RESOLVED – That

- (1) the core assumptions set out in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and the current financial position be agreed;
- (2) the significant risks to local government finance clearly outlined in the report be noted and agreed; and
- (3) the Medium-Term Financial Strategy be approved and used to set the Budgetary framework in preparing the 2021/22 Budget.

The Cabinet confirmed its decision as per Decision Notice C/008/210920, a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of the Minutes.

## 211. FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO LEISURE OPERATING CONTRACT

Prior to inviting the Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing, Councillor Mrs Yeates, to introduce this report, the Chairman welcomed Ivan Horsfall-Turner, Managing Director of Freedom Leisure, to the meeting.

Councillor Mrs Yeates then introduced the report reminding Cabinet Members that a ten-year leisure operating contract was let to Freedom Leisure in 2016 and that it played a significant role in the financial prospects of the Council. It was also a vital component in the health and wellbeing of the District's community.

At Full Council on 15 July 2020, Councillors debated a proposal to reopen the Council's Leisure facilities with a financial support package to make this possible. Members agreed with the proposal, largely for the health and wellbeing of the community, but also to protect the Council's leisure operating contract and give it the best opportunity to bounce back as the Covid-19 restrictions began to lift.

The Group Head of Community Wellbeing then updated Cabinet on the impact of the support package so that it could consider the recommendations proposed for further supporting the leisure operating contract.

He was able to confirm that there were positive aspects which had occurred since the last report to Full Council on 15 July 2020. Firstly, in addition to the centres opening, the first full month's attendance figures had been very encouraging with over 20,000 visits despite reduced capacity. Freedom Leisure had gone to great efforts to make the buildings and the activities COVID safe and to communicate that message to the community. A full track and trace process had been put into place and anecdotal responses had been that customers had felt very safe, with some admitting they preferred the new booking arrangements and lower numbers in the buildings. Despite this, Freedom Leisure recognised the need to build on this success. In August and September, it extended the range of activities available, including the capacity of some popular sessions and reintroduced the Learn to Swim programme with over 1500 children attending sessions.

The Government had introduced an income recovery scheme for Council's to claim lost budgeted income. As the Leisure Operating Fee was a loss to the Council, it could claim back approximately 70% of its lost income from the leisure contract in accordance with the rules of the scheme, representing a sum in the region of £47,500 per month.

The Group Head of Community Wellbeing stated that put into perspective how important the leisure operating contract was to the Council. In the first four years of the contract it generated £1.7M to the Council and in the next five years that sum would be in excess of £4.5M. By supporting the contract now during this recovery phase, the Council was helping to secure this long-term income stream. What also had to be remembered was the health and wellbeing benefits for residents.

The financial aim was to get back to normal business levels as quickly as possible and Members were asked to note that that by the end of September, the agreed level of support would be over £400,000. Initially this support was merely to mothball the centres, but it was now providing the balance between the income that Freedom Leisure was able to achieve through sales, and the expenditure required to operate the leisure facilities under the current conditions. This support was key whilst

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the customer numbers increased, and income returned to its pre-pandemic levels. Once the level of income from customer activity met the cost of keeping the centres open, the Council would be able to withdraw this level of support.

Looking forward, Freedom Leisure estimated the support required for the contract in the third quarter to be £191,400. In comparison, the support costs in the second Quarter (July to September) were almost £267,000. Freedom Leisure was doing all it could to rebuild customer numbers, income and therefore its reliance on support from the Council. The current assessment was that after a further payment in the fourth quarter the income generated would cover operating costs.

However, despite this news, the possibility of a local lockdown or further restrictions being imposed could not be overlooked. But what had been proven was Freedom Leisure's ability to bounce back from a closure and instil confidence in customers to return to activity in its facilities.

In concluding his presentation, the Group Head of Community Wellbeing outlined that the total cost of supporting the leisure operating contract to the end of this year could be in the region of £700,000. However, the Council stood to receive £570,000 this year from the Government's income recovery scheme. There were also valuable social and health benefits of keeping the centres open. By providing support during these difficult times, recovery was likely to be swifter if the centres remained open and the Council would have a stronger chance of achieving the £4.5M it stood to gain from the leisure operating contract over the next five years.

Cabinet debate commenced with Cabinet Members thanking Officers for ensuring that the funding needed had been organised and for working with Freedom Leisure to ensure that the centres had opened again in a safe way that was clearly benefiting the community. It was acknowledged that it had clearly been the right decision to make in terms of the income that was now coming in and from the first round of attendance figures received.

The Cabinet questions asked, and the responses provided are set out below:

- How had the customer experience been for staff when the centres had re-opened? Staff had been delighted to return to work and there had been no significant staff anxiety in terms of operating within the centres as all areas had been made very Covid secure and all appropriate processes were in place and working effectively.
- How had interaction with customers been and had any frictions been reported? Responses received had been 100% positive with virtually no complaints made.
- How was Freedom Leisure's relationship with other Councils and how was the financial health of the business generally? FL had a good liaison and support from almost all of its partners. Out of 19 local authorities, 18 had offered support agreements with the 19<sup>th</sup> hopefully

commencing soon. Their financial health was good as they had had a good solid year the year before Covid and so had been able to enter the pandemic in a good financial position, though had run up considerable losses since then.

The Chairman then invited non-Cabinet Members to ask their questions. The questions asked and the responses provided are set out below:

- 1) The amount of financial support from the Council to operate leisure facilities seemed to be more than that required to have them empty – why?

The reality was that when facilities were closed there were a certain amount of costs that could not be fully lost known as unmitigated costs such as the resource for checking the facilities, paying for utilities and there were costs that could not be recovered through Government schemes. Staff that had been on the furlough scheme had since returned to work and so there were staffing and full plant costs, including full repair and maintenance that had come back into the business, although partially offset by income, this was not high enough to offset those costs.

- 2) What are your forecasts for future users of the leisure facilities?

Looking at usage numbers that were expected on the return to being open, this was for around 60% of membership and for fitness and class usage approximately 40%, swimming and casual usage was 30% in the first 6 weeks of opening – FL confirmed that it was close to those numbers. The challenge would be how these figures needed to grow over the remainder of the financial year. Although this could be considered as good news, it needed to be accepted, with a health warning, that this situation was unprecedented. Whilst regrowth models were based upon best industry knowledge, they were also based on the assumption that Covid-19 restrictions would continue to be lifted over a period of time so there was concern about what news future announcements could bring and whether these would take the sector backwards rather than forwards. Whatever happened, it was vital to continue to ensure consumer confidence was not damaged moving forward.

- 3) What level of visitors do you need in order to cease any financial support and when do you predict that point will be reached?

It was explained that FL was a not for profit leisure trust and so made small margins of income. It needed to get back to as close to 100% of previous levels of occupancy to get back to the same level of surplus. It had taken a lot of cost out of the organisation and was targeting to get back to around 85% of last year's income by March 2021 to achieve a position of being properly sustainable.

- 4) Should we still have Covid restrictions into next summer, would we still need to be providing a subsidy to you at that point?

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It was outlined that FL made relatively low levels of surplus due to the type of organisation that they were and so if it was still in a position of making limited income, the pressure would be on them still to continue with mitigating actions to reduce their financial position. They could make changes and could adjust the service to make it affordable if this is what was needed. If Covid was still a significant issue next summer, they FL would not be in the position they thought they would be in when they bid for the Contract back in 2014.

5) What actions are you taking to reduce the financial risk to Councils?

Those actions were around the level of mitigation in the short term and during lockdown, utilising the Government's JRS system to reduce costs but also they had looked at central overheads and sadly had had to lose some good staff from the central team to make things affordable. Some significant salary cuts had also been made to include their senior management team back from April onwards.

6) In terms of reduced visitors, what impact was this having on the health and well-being of the District?

The Group Head of Community Wellbeing responded stating that the impacts on the District were that people were not able to access the facilities as they had done previously. Before lockdown, many attendees did not book and just turned up to take part in sessions. All sessions now had to be pre-booked, with the prime slots being booked out early and so some people were feeling excluded. The positive news was that the centres were now creating sessions where pre-booking was not required and so it was hoped that this would provide more opportunity for people to exercise when they wanted and would install more confidence going forward.

7) If the Cabinet decided to approve the recommendations before them, what is the total cost of support to Freedom Leisure since March in terms of both income to the Council that has been lost and in terms of money agreed to Freedom Leisure?

The Group Head of Community Wellbeing responded confirming that since March, when the outbreak took hold and the centres had closed, £419,388 had been paid up until the end of September 2020. Loss of income was £399,882 giving a total of £819,270k. The caveat was that the Council was claiming back lost revenue to the approximate value of £285k, representing a net figure of £534,270k.

- (8) What are the consequences if we do not provide any further financial support?

This had partly been responded to earlier. It was confirmed that FL had received very good support from all Local authorities, however, when they first entered into the pandemic back in March, the first round of discussions made a commitment to Local Authorities that if they were to receive support, this would be received with conditions, making it clear that one local authority would not be supporting another's contract. If Arun was not able to provide support – FL would have to review the contract in place as this would mean a change in law mechanism in which the implications would have to be fully discussed.

- (9) How long would Freedom Leisure survive without further support?

It was explained that without the critical mass support from other authorities, the contract in place with FL would become vulnerable. If all support was taken away, FL would have approximately 6 weeks' worth of reserves. It was hoped that this provided Councillors with enough reassurance in that FL was not hugely vulnerable with the collective support that it had.

- (10) Was there any possibility of receiving Government support?

FL had been working closely with industry lead bodies such as UK Active and Sport England. There had been much talk of funding in the region of £800m for public sector leisure, however, not much had progressed even though this had been signed off by DCMS and MCHLG – an outcome was expected shortly.

- (11) Was there any danger of Freedom Leisure going into administration and what else could Arun do?

Arun's client team had been very supportive, and work was continuing with joint communications/marketing to encourage the customer to come back and use facilities.

Other questions asked were related to other capital programmes and how these might be affected, this was because there were investments being looked at such as further modifications to the Littlehampton Wave and the Arun Leisure Centre. The response provided was that FL was not aware of anything specific. In view of the earlier discussion around prudential borrowing, it was confirmed that FL would be happy to take away and review/look at whether or not anything they could do with the provision of some capital could improve the financial situation in the future i.e. further environmental savings, looking at their carbon footprint and meeting the carbon agenda. The Group Head of Community Wellbeing confirmed that there were no projects of this nature in the pipeline.

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The Cabinet

RESOLVED

That approval be given to recovering the forecast income for operating fees as budgeted using the local government income compensation scheme for lost sales, fees and charges as a result of Covid-19.

The Cabinet also

RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL

That a supplementary estimate for a sum up to £191,000 (Band equivalent of £3.07) to support the Council's Leisure Operating Contract from October to December 2020 be approved.

The Cabinet confirmed its decision as per Decision Notice C/009/210920, a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of the Minutes.

212. COVID-19 RELIEF PAYMENT FOR JUNE 2020 TO OSBORNE PROPERTY SERVICES LIMITED

The Cabinet Member for Residential Services, Councillor Mrs Gregory introduced this report confirming that it sought approval to pay the Council's Responsive Repairs and Void Contractor, Osborne Property Service Limited, Covid-19 relief payment for June 2020 to the value of £55,057.37.

The Group Head of Residential Services then explained the rationale behind the payment.

The Cabinet

RESOLVED

That a payment of £55,057.37 exclusive of VAT be aid to Osborne Property Services Limited to cover operating costs for June 2020 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and in accordance with Cabinet Office issued guidance documents, Procurement Policy Note (PPN) 02/20 and 04/20.

The Cabinet confirmed its decision as per Decision Notice C/010/210920, a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of the Minutes.

213. VARIATION TO CAR PARKING CHARGES

The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services, Councillor Mrs Staniforth, introduced this item. She confirmed that having discussed the matter with colleagues, it was her view that this was not the right time to introduce increases in car parking charges as this could be very damaging to the District's already fragile economy and as the Pandemic was still a major threat.

Councillor Dr Walsh therefore asked Cabinet Members to confirm that they approved the suggestion to withdraw this item.

The Cabinet

RESOLVED

That the variation to car parking charges be withdrawn.

The Cabinet confirmed its decision as per Decision Notice C/011/210920, a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of the Minutes.

214. OPTIONS TO PROGRESS WEBCAST IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

The Cabinet Member for Technical Services, Councillor Stanley, introduced this item confirming that following previous reports made to Cabinet, this report provided options for Councillors to consider in terms of progressing the findings from the webcast improvement project. Several options had been explored in terms of upgrading equipment which had to be considered against the Council's current financial situation which had been further strained by Covid-19.

The Director of Place outlined the estimated costs in looking at what was the preferred option – Option 2.1 (a) to upgrade the Council Chamber only to allow meetings of Cabinet and the Overview Select Committee to be webcast in addition to Full Council and the Development Control Committee. All other Committees, including those created by the new Committee structure post May 2021 would not be webcast. This resulted in a one-off cost of £65k needing to be approved for the webcasting hardware installation and to allow for a procurement process in line with financial regulations and the Constitution to take place.

A range of questions were asked by Cabinet and non-Cabinet Councillors. These focused upon whether the upgrade to the Council Chamber incorporated a hybrid approach to meetings in case these were run moving forward in working in pandemic restrictions. Others asked about the terms and conditions of using Zoom and whether Zoom had a function that at no cost allowed users to webcast to social media the live meeting. Had the option of all Councillors sitting in the Council Chamber with i-pads using existing technology been discounted?

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The Director of Place explained that returning to the Council Chamber was not a feasible or permitted option at the moment due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Other concerns were expressed over the £65k investment at a time when the Council was having to seriously consider all financial decisions. It was explained that this option would resolve the technical issues experienced in the past.

Following further discussion,

The Cabinet

**RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL – That**

- (1) A supplementary estimate of £65k (Option 2.1(a) in the report for one-off project costs for the webcasting hardware installation be approved. [This equates to a Band D equivalent of Council Tax of £1.04]; and
- (2) Subject to the approval of recommendation (1) above, the additional on-going revenue costs for annual maintenance and broadband subscription of £21k per annum be included in the Budget for 2021/22.

The Cabinet confirmed its decision as per Decision Notice C/012/210920, a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of the Minutes.

**215. ADVISORY GROUP TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Cabinet Member for Planning, Councillor Lury, introduced this item confirming that at the request of the Chairman of the Bersted Advisory Group, the Terms of Reference for that Group be changed to expand its membership.

The Director of Place then presented the report confirming that all Advisory Groups had been established with very specific terms of reference. As a request to change the terms of reference to expand membership for one particular group had been received, it was necessary for this to be brought to Cabinet for decision.

It was explained that the request made to expand membership was to allow that Group's membership to include a Ward Member from Aldwick and a representative from Aldwick Parish Council.

Following some discussion, the Cabinet

**RESOLVED – That**

- (1) The proposed amendments to the Terms of Reference for the Bersted Advisory Group as set out in Appendix 1 to the report be approved; and

- (2) Any further minor changes to the Terms of Reference for all Groups be delegated to the Cabinet Member for Planning and the Group Head of Planning.

The Cabinet confirmed its decision as per Decision Notice C/013/210920, a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of the Minutes.

## 216. THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC SITUATION

The Chairman presented a further report which was another regular update from the Chief Executive setting out what the Council had done in responding to the pandemic situation. He stated that although it sometimes appeared that there had been a lull in activity, there had been news of increasing cases and concern over local outbreaks and so the Council had been concentrating on its preparedness for this, should it have a local issue.

From the various reports already received tonight, it was clear that the Council's finances remained an issue. Financial updates had been received on the Council's current budget and its prospects over the next few years. Difficult decisions had also been made in relation to the Council's leisure contractor, its housing maintenance contractor and car parking charges.

Councillor Dr Walsh outlined that he was aware that the next meeting of Cabinet on 19 October 2020 would receive a report on a variety of other financial considerations. All difficult decisions but by working together, planning ahead, and making those difficult decisions, Members and Officers would ensure the Council remained in a stable financial position.

The Chief Executive then picked up on some other key points focusing on the numerous grants that the Council had now successfully administered which had been set out in the report. What could not be underestimated was the tremendous amount of work behind ensuring grant money had been issued to those that needed it, whilst following Government instructions. The Council's Finance Officers were now dealing with the Government auditing of those grants, which was taking considerable time.

Officers were also focussing on the Council's preparedness for any local outbreak or a forecasted second wave as the weather turned colder. This was equally time-consuming and grateful thanks was extended to the work of the Environmental Health Team.

A suggestion was made, and it was agreed, to move directly onto the next agenda item to look at the proposed actions from the Coronavirus Recovery Working Party, and then return to the recommendations of this item.

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The Chairman stated that this cross-party group of Members had met on the 23 July and 8 September and a number of recommendations needed to be considered.

Turning to the Working Party meetings, these had been very positive where Members had raised and discussed a wide variety of possible areas where the Council could help in terms of local economic recovery. Over the course of the last two meetings, Members had managed to refine their proposals into five themes and a long list of separate proposals.

The Chief Executive outlined that in progressing the recommendations outlined, it would be necessary to consider, when prioritising them, the Council's financial position and the amount of Officer time available to take projects forward. A further update would be provided to the next meeting of Cabinet.

All of the recommendations were applauded, especially the work that would be undertaken by the Climate Change and Sustainability Manager and the reviews to be taken forward to assist regeneration in the District.

Thanks were extended to Councillors Chapman and Tilbrook as Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Working Party and they provided a brief overview of the work undertaken and they thanked Members and Officers for their valuable input and work to date.

In discussing the future of the Working Party, it was agreed that future meeting dates would not be confirmed at this time but that meetings would take place, when needed, in light of changing factors surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic. A request was made to have this added to the list of recommendations for approval.

Following further discussion,

The Cabinet

RESOLVED – That

- (1) A reliable database of skills shortage is compiled so that the District can effectively play its part in recovering and continuing the economic wellbeing of businesses and residents in the future. The Arun Business Partnership should be involved in this process;
- (2) a further study is initiated into the convergence of the results of the survey of skills shortages with the extra Government funding for "Skills Academies";
- (3) the "Climate Change and Sustainability Manager" (when appointed) should fully engage with local enterprises in the drive for economic recovery including "green" insulation and heating for homes, business premises and public buildings and other emerging innovations and new products;

- (4) The Planning Policy Sub-Committee consider how the provision of higher numbers of self-catering units for families and individuals in the District might be increased;
- (5) The Council supports the emergency provision of IT equipment to disadvantaged pupils and students. It is therefore recommended that Cabinet seeks clarification from West Sussex County Council about any plans it has to continue the supply of IT equipment to disadvantaged pupils in schools or colleges;
- (6) Agreement be given to seek the approval of the Council to seek a Commercial Buyer of the Sussex by the Sea brand;
- (7) Approval be given to consult with Parish and Town Councils to establish their capability and willingness to continue to provide Community Hubs for the future to ensure that community/social support gained during the emergency are not lost;
- (8) Reviews take place on the previous strategies for the two seafronts to:
- Re-examine the 2016 Bognor Regis Seafront Delivery Plan and prioritise a series of deliverable interventions and actions
  - Re-examine the 2014 Nine Big Ideas for Littlehampton, Concept Investment Plan and the 2016 Seafront Greens and Promenade project ideas and identify ways to progress the recommendations into deliverable projects;
- (9) the emerging heightened importance of the appointment of a Climate Change and Sustainability Manager to deliver a green, carbon neutral plan for the District is noted;
- (10) a study is commissioned aimed at gaining improved synergy from the numerous “bio-diversity” groups within the District so that better value is obtained from the District’s contributions to their diverse interests and activities; and
- (11) When the full and final recommendations from the Government’s independent review are published the Council establishes a Working Party to consider a food strategy for local implementation; and
- (12) The Working Party to not confirm future meeting dates at this time but be able to meet when needed in light of the changing factors surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Cabinet confirmed its decision as per Decision Notice C/014/210920, a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of the Minutes.

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217. COVID-19 RECOVERY WORKING PARTY - 23 JULY AND 8 SEPTEMBER 2020

This item had been considered as part of the last item, the Council's response to the Covid-19 Pandemic situation.

218. HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP - 21 JULY 2020

The Cabinet Member for Residential Services, Councillor Mrs Gregory, presented the Minutes from the meeting of the Housing & Customer Services Working Group held on 21 July 2020.

Councillor Mrs Gregory alerted Cabinet to the first set of recommendations at Minute 5 [Fire Policy and Management Plan] which set out how the Council would respond and comply with regulations and manage fire risk for all its properties. Councillor Mrs Gregory praised the huge amount of work that had been undertaken by the Repairs and Maintenance Manager and his team for concluding this vast piece of work.

The Cabinet

RESOLVED – That

- (1) The Fire Safety Policy 2020 be adopted;
- (2) The Fire Safety Management Plan 2020 be adopted; and
- (3) Delegated authority be given to the Group Head of Residential Services in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Residential Services to make minor changes to the Policy and Plan.

Councillor Mrs Gregory then alerted Cabinet to the next set of recommendations at Minute 6 [Void Lettable Standards 2020] which enabled the Council to comply with health and safety and security requirements as well as providing clarity to contractors on the expected performance expected from them.

The Cabinet

RESOLVED – That

- (1) The Void Lettable Standards be adopted; and
- (2) Delegated authority be given to the Group Head of Residential Services in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Residential Services to make minor changes to the standard.

The Cabinet confirmed its decision as per Decision Notice C/016/210920, a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of the Minutes.

219. EXEMPT INFORMATION

The Cabinet

RESOLVED

That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and accredited representatives of newspapers be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it may involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act by virtue of the paragraph specified against the item.

220. LONDON ROAD COACH, LORRY AND CAR PARK [EXEMPT - PARAGRAPH 3 - THE SUPPLY OF GOODS AND SERVICES]

The Cabinet Member for Commercial and Business Development introduced this item explaining that at Cabinet on 23 July 2018, it had been agreed to market the disposal of freehold land at London Road, Bognor Regis for redevelopment to include student accommodation, whilst retaining public car parking. In accordance with that Cabinet resolution, the site had been marketed and a preferred bidder selected. A revision was made to the authorisation by Cabinet on 10 February 2020 to include public convenience provision. The report before Cabinet, provided an update on progress and it considered the options available to the Council.

It was outlined that since the last report to Cabinet, the market had changed considerably resulting in the preferred bidder withdrawing its offer, although a reduced offer had been submitted citing a variety of reasons which were explained to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Commercial and Business Development explained his preference for undertaking further investigation or alternative uses for the site, as well as alternatives to disposal, in an attempt to provide greater certainty that the Council was obtaining best consideration for its interest in the site.

Following some debate, the Cabinet

RESOLVED – That

- (1) The rejection of the current offer for purchase of the site for a development of student accommodation be approved;
- (2) Delegated authority be approved for the Director of Place, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer, the Cabinet Member for Technical

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Services and the Cabinet Member for Commercial and Business Development to:

- (a) Open discussions with Sussex Police on whether there is an opportunity for a joint venture involving the adjacent Police Station site;
  - (b) Identify a wider range of alternative future uses of the site; and
  - (c) Consider an alternative way forward for delivery and return to Cabinet with a recommendation on the proposed delivery options for how to obtain best consideration for the site
- (3) Agreement be given that these decisions replace all previous decisions related to this site.

The Cabinet confirmed its decision as per Decision Notice C/017/210920, a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of the Minutes.

(The meeting concluded at 8.12 pm)