

CABINET

8 February 2021 at 5.00 pm

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

Councillors Bicknell, Bower, Charles, Clayden, Mrs Cooper, Cooper, Edwards, English, Gunner, Mrs Pendleton and Roberts were also in attendance for all or part of the meeting.

458. WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed Members, members of the public and Officers to what was the tenth 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.

459. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

460. QUESTION TIME

The Chairman confirmed that no questions had been submitted for this meeting.

461. URGENT BUSINESS

The Chairman confirmed that there were two urgent items for this meeting.

The first was a verbal update from himself as Leader of the Council confirming that the Government had confirmed on 5 February 2021 that the May 2021 Elections would be going ahead. That same day the 'May 2021 Polls Delivery Plan' had been published setting out how the Government would be supporting the elections.

The Plan set out how the elections would be run because of the Coronavirus pandemic safely, not just for the voter, but also for candidates and staff. Households within the District had been written to in January 2021 to explain how the elections would be different this year and were being encouraged to consider voting by post or proxy. All details could be found on the Council's web site and further and regular updates would be made closer to the election date in May 2021.

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The Chairman also announced that a second supplement pack had been uploaded to the Cabinet web pages earlier on in the day. This urgent item was to provide a facility on request for commercial tenants meeting the criteria of small and medium enterprises in the retail, leisure and hospitality industry sectors to defer rents invoiced in January, February or March 2021, provided a repayment was agreed, due to the Coronavirus pandemic. The Chairman explained that the reason this was an urgent item was that this was the first available opportunity (since the last Cabinet meeting held in January 2021) to bring the associated paperwork before Cabinet. The Chairman outlined that Cabinet was being asked to note and endorse the action that had been taken to allow the deferral of rent to be paid from qualifying business tenants.

Having had some points raised by a non-Cabinet Councillor questioning the urgent nature of this item, the Chief Executive explained that, in future, he would hope such urgent items would not be necessary.

The Cabinet

RESOLVED

The Cabinet noted and endorsed the actions taken by Officers.

The Cabinet confirmed its decision as per Decision Notice C/050/08022021, a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of the Minutes.

462. MINUTES

The minutes from the meeting of Cabinet held on 11 January 2021 were approved as a correct by Cabinet. The Chairman confirmed that these would be signed at the earliest opportunity to him.

463. BUDGET VARIATION REPORTS

There were no matters discussed.

464. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT TO 31 DECEMBER 2020

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Corporate Support, Councillor Oppler, introduced this item confirming 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. The original budget for 2020/21 had been significantly affected by the Covid pandemic, detail of which had been set out in the report.

Councillor Oppler explained that this report had a close link to the next agenda item being the Budget 2021/22 as it provided the latest General Fund Balance forecast for March 2021 and provided an indication of the level of likely capital carry forward.

The Financial Services Manager then addressed the key highlights in the report covering Budget Monitoring for the third quarter. It was emphasised that this year had been subject to significant uncertainty due to the Covid-19 pandemic which had also resulted in significant additional expenditure and loss of income. To mitigate this, expenditure has been reviewed and controlled tightly. The Council had also been in receipt of significant additional government support which had been set out in the report at Page 15 showing that the General Fund (GF) variation against expected current budget was (£1.124m) favourable which was an improvement of (£278k) from the previous month.

The Council had been awarded £2.373m of non-ringfenced Covid-19 support and this had been detailed in Paragraph 2.3.1 of the report with the variation included (£723k) from the Sales Fees and Charges Compensation scheme, which had been claimed to the end of December 2020. It was this sound financial management that allowed the Council to be prudent and earmark the Council Tax and Business Rate in year losses to match the anticipated drop in income for next year as set out at Paragraph 6.2.

It was explained that the £7.865m s31 grants received for the retail hospitality and leisure needed to be earmarked to be available for the corresponding loss of income next year. The estimated outturn General Fund balance as at the end of December 2020 was approximately £6.9m. No further update was provided in relation to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

Finally, looking at Capital budget, it was pointed out that there would be significant carry forward into next year to enable the capital programme to catch up. The delays were again mainly due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In discussing the report, the Cabinet Member for Residential Services, Councillor Mrs Gregory, asked a question in relation to the nightly paid monitoring in December 2020, the Covid expenditure was £333k. Was the Council likely to receive any of this money back from Government? The Financial Services Manager responded confirming that it was unlikely that the Council would receive any specific grant and that it would be included as part of the non-specific general grant that the Council received.

The Cabinet

RESOLVED - That

- (1) The report in Appendix 1 be noted;
- (2) A transfer to earmarked reserves of £7.865 m for s31 Grant received in 2020/21 and £1.326m for in year Collection Fund losses be approved; and
- (3) The action taken to mitigate the Council's net expenditure due to the Covid-19 pandemic be noted.

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The Cabinet confirmed its decision as per Decision Notice C/051/08022021, a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of the Minutes.

465. ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL BUDGET - 2021/22

Before inviting the Cabinet Member to introduce this item, the Chairman made a statement about an item that had become entangled with the Budget and had made press headlines leading to speculation and some ill-informed comments to do with beach patrols in Littlehampton and Bognor Regis. Councillor Dr Walsh confirmed that the proposals did not appear in the Budget and were still under review. The situation last year was that the Council only had beach inspectors in place for a very short time due to the Coronavirus pandemic which began in March 2020. Due to Covid-19, the Council was not able to recruit these posts at the current time and that no recruitment would commence until the Covid-19 emergency was over and the decision was taken by Officers and the Cabinet to proceed.

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Corporate Support, Councillor Oppler, explained that the annual Budget provided the financial parameters and direction for the year ahead. It was excellent that the Council had managed to achieve a balanced budget for 2021/22. The pandemic had meant that the Budget process had been even more challenging than in recent years and so he wished to take this opportunity to thank the whole of the Finance Team and all Arun staff for their hard work during these exceptionally challenging times.

The Group Head of Corporate Support then provided a strategic overview of the Budget and the main highlights explained in his presentation have been summarised below:

- It was excellent news that the Council had not had to use its reserves to balance the Budget this had been clearly set out on the General Fund Revenue Budget Summary
- Another good news item was that the Council had been able to set aside around £0.5 m in contingency savings that could be used against any further Covid-19 emergencies should there be any
- The most significant variable was funding from Central Government. The New Homes Bonus (NHB) had been introduced in 2011/12 to create an incentive rewarding local authorities that delivered sustainable housing growth in their areas. This scheme had undergone major review and continued to be reduced and would likely receive a payment of zero in two years' time. This would be partly offset by a lower tier Service Grant, but it was assumed that this grant would be a one-off grant and not a replacement of the NHB.
- It had previously been flagged a number of times that the Government was planning a funding review of funding streams through the Fair Funding Review which could result in reset of business rates which would effectively mean that the Council would lose all the growth it had accumulated since the inception of the scheme in 2013. Although this had been further delayed due

to Covid-19, it was anticipated that the Government would still be carrying out these changes [the Fair Funding Review]. It was worth noting that although the Council had done well out of some of these schemes, there were other Councils elsewhere in the country that had not done so well and so were asking for this sort of funding to be shared more evenly.

- Given the balanced budget, it was anticipated that the Council's balances would remain at around £6.7m. The major variation to the Budget had been set out at the Table in Paragraph 4.6 of the report.
- On the General Fund, a Council Tax increase of £4.95 was proposed to £191.52 for a Band D Council Tax. 2.65%
- On the HRA, this reflected the priorities of the Business Plan as presented to the last meeting of Cabinet on 11 January 2021 and included a significant investment in affordable homes. For 2021/22 HRA rents would be increased by 1.5% in accordance with the provisions of the rent standard.
- Finally, on Capital and Asset Management and other projects, the report set out the significant investment in essential infrastructure. Cabinet was asked to note that in addition to what was outlined in the report, funding had been approved at the last Full Council meeting for funding for the enhancement of the Sunken Gardens and Place St Maur projects in Bognor Regis.

Questions were asked by Non-Cabinet Councillors in relation to the Council's proposed increase in Council Tax which was proposed to be increased by the maximum amount allowed. The Leader of the Council was asked if a threshold was not in place, would his administration be proposing a much higher percentage rise. Councillor Dr Walsh confirmed that the 2.65% increase proposed was the right amount as the Council had produced a balanced budget and so did not need to raise its Council Tax any more or less than what was proposed which represented a fair amount for the District's tax payers.

Other questions asked were around the number of new dwellings built against targets set. The Cabinet Member for Residential Services responded confirming that to date 90 properties were being purchased, 24 had been handed over with one existing 5 bedrooomed house being refurbished into two 2-bedrrom flats for temporary accommodation. Councillor Mrs Gregory confirmed that she had to hand all the dates for the handovers with last being in early 2022 which she would be happy to share. Councillor Mrs Gregory stated that with the 70/30 monies from properties sold from the Right to Buy Scheme, it was hoped to be able to push those figures further.

Further clarification was sought from Non-Cabinet Councillors in relation to the Foreshores Team. The Chairman confirmed that it was not part of the budget proposals to alter the situation or to either increase or decrease the budget.

The Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing, Councillor Mrs Yeates, confirmed that she had not been made aware of this situation.

Suggestions were made for the foreshore team to be recruited now in readiness for the start of the new season. Councillor Mrs Yeates confirmed that she needed to check on the exact status of the personnel.

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The Director of Services was asked to expand on this issue. She reminded Councillors that the foreshore staff employed were temporary staff and she explained the reasoning for the reduced service last year reminding Councillors that this service was supported by the important service of lifeguarding which had also been reduced last year as the RNLI had prioritised Littlehampton over Bognor Regis, due to the fast flowing River Arun.

Statements were made that the answers being provided were not clear in terms of when Foreshore staff operated. The Director of Services reconfirmed that no recruitment had yet been undertaken for this season for the reasons she had already provided.

Following further debate, the Chairman confirmed that this situation was under review in line with the pandemic and that when it was appropriate to review the situation, this would occur.

The Cabinet

**RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL – That**

- (1) The General Fund Revenue budget as set out in Appendix 1 is approved;
- (2) Arun's Band D Council Tax for 2021/22 is set at £191.52, an increase of 2.65%;
- (3) Arun's Council Tax Requirement for 2021/22, based on a Band D Council Tax of £191.52, is set at £11,994,514 plus parish precepts as demanded, to be transferred to the General Fund in accordance with statutory requirements;
- (4) The HRA Budget as set out in Appendix 2 is approved;
- (5) The HRA rents for 2021/22 are increased by 1.5% (CPI plus 1%) in accordance with the provisions of the new rent standard;
- (6) HRA garage rents are increased by 5% to give a standard charge of £12.93 per week (excluding VAT), and heating and water/sewerage charges increased on a scheme by scheme basis, with a view to balancing costs with income; and
- (7) The Capital budget as set out in Appendix 3 is approved.

The Cabinet also noted

- (1) that the Group Head of Corporate Support, in consultation with the Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Corporate Support, has approved a Council Tax base of 62,628 for 2021/22; and
- (2) the budget report in **Appendix A, 1,2 and 3**;

The Cabinet confirmed its decision as per Decision Notice C/052/0802021, a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of the Minutes.

466. ELECTRICITY SUPPLY CONTRACT FOR CORPORATE AND RESIDENTIAL SITES

The Chairman invited the Cabinet Member for Technical Services, Councillor Stanley, to introduce this item. Councillor Stanley explained that when the current electricity supply contract was entered into last spring, it was the first time that Arun District Council had obtained its electricity supply from renewable sources via a Renewable Energy Guarantees of Origin (REGO) certified contract. It was an important step in reducing the carbon emissions from the Council's activities, in support of its resolution on 15 January 2020, to work towards making the activities of the Council carbon neutral by 2030.

In identifying a successor supply contract, the Council was committed to ensuring it obtained value for money, but also retained a REGO certified renewable supply. The Group Head of Technical Services then briefly expanded on what was proposed.

Having responded to a range of questions where reassurance was provided that this was the greenest product available to the Council, the Cabinet

RESOLVED – That

- (1) it approves the appointment of LASER for a new electricity supplier by running a Mini Competition from an existing Framework Agreement;
- (2) it approves LASER for the managing of the resulting contract with the supplier on behalf of the Council;
- (3) following the initial contract set up with a new supplier of 12 month fixed period, to approve the continued appointment of LASER to negotiate an Evergreen contract for the year on year supply of electric rather than repeating the tender and appointment process ever few years;

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- (4) approve the supply contract for an Evergreen Period via LASER; renewable every 12 months following the initial 12 month fixed rate agreement period; and
- (5) give delegated authority to the Group Head of Corporate Support to enter into the necessary contracts.

The Cabinet confirmed its decision as per Decision Notice C/053/08022021, a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of the Minutes.

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

The Chairman, as Leader of the Council, introduced this report explaining that it provided the most recent collation of issues around the Council and the District's position on the Coronavirus pandemic. It related particularly to the 4 January 2021 Lockdown and since the last Cabinet meeting on 11 January 2021.

It was reported that Officers had again set up a weekly Emergency Management Team to oversee issues that arose quickly, and thanks were extended to the sterling work of that team of Officers, who were working over and above their normal duties. The Chairman outlined that he and the Chief Executive had continued with the weekly briefings to all Members and the Council's partner organisations, which he hoped were still helpful. Any feedback on how to improve the briefings would be most welcome. At this point and in view of some emails received from Councillors, the Chairman provided some further information on the Community Champions Fund.

Finally, the Chairman confirmed that locally, Arun's Covid prevalence remained high, but it was slowly improving, and he thanked the public for their diligence. The Chief Executive then added some additional points – these were that:

- The Council had had to change its position on skateparks when the guidance changed overnight;
- It continued to look after rough sleepers, who were very vulnerable anyway, and that the Council would be proactively working with them to assist them;
- Environmental Health had been working with businesses that remained open to ensure the safety of their staff and customers;
- That the report included an update on the numerous grants that the Council continued to administer for the Government; and
- To re-emphasise that pressure on staff remained very high as they managed the demands of Covid-19 whilst undertaking the day to day job.

A range of questions were asked. Firstly, in providing some feedback, a request was made for the report to provide more information on Covid Marshalls in terms of where they operated, which was provided by the Chief Executive. Looking at Appendix A, and the grants received by the Council, it would be helpful to know how much had been paid out on top of what had been received. It was felt that this might urge those



who were entitled to grants to apply for them when perhaps they had not claimed in the past to avoid missed opportunities.

The Chairman responded confirming that the weekly report issued to all Councillors jointly from him and the Chief Executive did indicate how much had been paid out by each grant headline. Councillors were reminded that the rules on closing dates for entitlement were not set by the Council but by Central Government and so flexibility could not be applied if a deadline had been missed. The Chief Executive confirmed that on the issue of grants, he would look to see if any changes could be made in terms of showing the most accurate picture. On the issue of Covid Marshalls, an update was provided by the Group Head of Technical Services. Returning to the Covid grants [Appendix A] a request was made to provide more commentary and for those that contained no details. The Chairman confirmed that he would liaise with the Chief Executive to ensure that information would be provided.

Following some further questions regarding the 3D street art at Littlehampton and where the funding for this project had come from, the Cabinet

**RESOLVED**

That the report and actions to date be noted.

The Cabinet confirmed its decision as per Decision Notice C/054/0802021, a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of the Minutes.

**468. OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE - 26 JANUARY 2021**

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Corporate Support, Councillor Oppler referred Cabinet's attention to Minute 438 [Update from the Residents' Survey Working Party] which set out a range of recommendations for Cabinet Members to consider.

The Cabinet

**RESOLVED – That**

(1) the Council carries out its 2021 Residents Satisfaction Survey using methods identified by the Working Party to improve participation across age groups, which can be implemented within budget, these are:

- a) Increase number of surveys, potentially offsetting this cost by not sending out follow up letters, numbers to be determined with the survey provider
- b) Carry out an open online survey alongside the targeted survey
- c) Explore options for incentives for survey completion to be vouchers for local businesses

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- d) Explore options for invitations to participate being sent in a more appealing format.
- e) Carry out an additional sample geographically targeted survey to target younger respondents

(2) delegated authority be given to the Group Head of Policy to work with our chosen provider to deliver the most representative survey for 2021, within existing budgets based on the recommendations of the Residents Satisfaction Survey Working Party and in consultation with the Chairman of the Working Party; and

(3) the effectiveness of the changed methodology be reviewed in the 2021 survey report and developed for future years.

The Cabinet confirmed its decision as per Decision Notice C/055/0802021, a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of the Minutes.

(The meeting concluded at 6.32 pm)