

OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE

26 January 2021 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Northeast (Chairman), English (Vice-Chair), Bennett, Bicknell, B Blanchard-Cooper, Mrs Cooper, Dixon, Elkins, Gunner, Huntley and Tilbrook

Councillors Coster, Mrs Gregory, Lury, Roberts, Mrs Staniforth, Stanley and Dr Walsh were also in attendance for all or part of the meeting.

Apologies: Councillors Mrs Catterson, Dendle, Miss Needs and Miss Seex

433. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Blanchard-Cooper declared a Personal Interest in Agenda Item 5 – [Leisure Operating Contract Covid 19 Review] in his capacity as President of the Littlehampton Musical Comedy Society which was one of the users of the Windmill Centre that Freedom Leisure operated.

Councillor Northeast also declared a Personal Interest in this item in case any debate focused on Arun District Council staff, as he was married to a member of Council staff.

434. MINUTES

The Committee approved as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 1 December 2020 and agreed that the Chairman would sign these as soon as practicably possible.

Having approved the minutes, Councillor Mrs Yeates then confirmed that the word 'radio' had been omitted in Minute 334 [Cabinet Member Questions & Updates] new digital shop radios – the word 'radios' was missing, this was noted by the Committee.

435. LEISURE OPERATING CONTRACT COVID-19 REVIEW

The Group Head of Community Wellbeing presented his report where he provided members with a summary of the support that had been delivered by the Council during the pandemic and the effect that lockdowns and other restrictions had, had on the leisure services. He and Mr Ivan Horsfall-Tuner the Managing Director from Freedom Leisure then took questions from members.

Members had asked several questions in advance of the meeting these were;

- Could an update on the current financial position, including reserves be provided?

- Do they estimate that they would need further financial support from the Council? If yes, how much and over what timeline?
- What would the consequences be for them if the Council offered no further financial support?
- How long can they survive without further support?
- What would happen if other Councils withdrew their financial support? (i.e. if one or two withdraw support does the pack of cards fall?)
- Was there any possibility of further government support?
- Are they in any danger of going into administration?
- What else can we do (excluding finance) to support them?
- Going forward would Freedom Leisure endeavour to ensure that they are able to get enough funding to maintain and upkeep a good quality of disabled facilities in their leisure centres?

In answering the above questions, the Managing Director from Freedom Leisure advised the Committee that there had been a good level of support from other local authority partners, although not all of their costs had been covered. At the end of November 2020, a loss of £1.1 million across the business had been recorded, this meant that the impact on the reserves had been much greater as they could not be reliant on customer receipts. He went on to explain that while the business was not about to fail, it was facing significant challenge and that the only way to recover and survive would be to be open and operate at full capacity, however he did not expect that to be until after the end of the financial year now. He confirmed that the Council had made an application for a government grant of £310,000, that would cover from December 2020 to end of March 2021 and he was hopeful<sup>2</sup> for a further grant scheme to be made available from April 2021 onwards.

In terms of support he stated that, the support had been great so far, but he would be looking for support from members in getting the message of reopening out across the District and to engage all demographics to use the services available as soon as restrictions allowed.

Further questions were asked at the meeting where the following issues were raised;

- What work would be done to support the Windmill entertainment centre and would the closure time be used to complete redecoration work as well as consideration to be given to use the venue in other ways. It would be good to see the council apply for an Arts Grant to help this side of the business.

- Had comparisons been investigated in terms of both building's running costs (Arun Leisure Centre and The Littlehampton Wave)? Had any differences been highlighted where further costs could be saved?
- Recovery of lost fees

The Group Head of Community Wellbeing/ and the Managing Director from Freedom Leisure gave detailed and positive answers to all issues raised.

The Committee noted the report update.

436. COUNCIL BUDGET - 2022 - 2023

The Financial Services Manager presented her report to members and confirmed that a balanced budget had been achieved for 2021/22, chiefly due to additional government grant funding that was announced as part of the Settlement on 17 December 2020. She also highlighted the following key areas of her report;

- New Homes Bonus dropped by £1.2 million as predicted
- 3 new grants totalling £1.7 million announced in December 2020
- Council Tax Band D to increase by 2.65%
- HRA 1.5% rent increase in accordance with the provision of the rent standard
- Capital Budget table 8.4 showed enhanced capital programme
- Covid uncertainty adds significant risk to the budgets in the General Fund, which had been mitigated by the income compensation scheme for Q1 2021/22 and the contingency budget.

The Committee noted the report update.

437. COUNCILS RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Chief Executive presented his report to members, he advised that a new version of a member briefing update had been circulated to Members with more accurate detail as this report had been written on 15 January 2020.

Members then asked the Chief Executive a number of questions on the following topics;

- Has there been a further update as to when lockdown restrictions may be eased?
- Accessibility to the two vaccine centres in Angmering and Rustington and should people have difficulties in getting to one of these centres for their vaccine, they should be advised to contact Community hub for help. The contact number for the community hub is on the Council website.

Overview Select Committee - 26.01.21

- Staff and public welfare were a priority for the Council; however, a concern was raised that one member had received complaints from residents regarding campaign leaflets that had been posted out

The Chief Executive provided answers to all issues raised and the Committee noted the report update.

#### 438. UPDATE FROM THE RESIDENTS SURVEY WORKING PARTY

The Chairman of the Residents Survey Working Party gave a brief introduction to members advising that working party had hoped to change some of the questions contained within the survey, however due to the short timeframe and that the questions were tied into the Corporate Performance Indicators which have already been set and agreed, they had focused on how to obtain broader engagement and how to achieve a more successful survey response rate across the District.

The Group Head of Policy then thanked the members of the Working Party for the work they had completed in a tight timeframe. She then went on to provide the Committee with key highlights from her report and referred members to the recommendations that had been put forward by the Working Party.

Members then took part in a debate where the following issues were raised;

- Questions around the budget for this work, it was agreed that an answer would be provided outside of the meeting
- It was felt that the issue surrounding the western side of the District having a lower up take on completing the surveys had not been addressed, it was advised that different approaches would be looked into in an attempt to address this issue, however there was no guarantee that it would produce results of rectifying the issue we are currently facing with a lack of up take from the Western side of the District

The Committee

#### RESOLVED

1. That 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

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

439. FEEDBACK FROM MEETINGS OF THE HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON 13 JANUARY 2021

The Chairman advised that the report had been circulated with the agenda and asked the Committee if they had any questions for the Council's nominated representative, Councillor Bennett.

Councillor Bennett referred members to the last paragraph of his report where he reported the proposed cut to the West Sussex County Council (WSCC) budget, estimated at £5.4 million and that most of it would come from reductions made to care packages for adults who were still in their own homes. It was felt that this did not fit with the aim of helping people to remain in their own homes.

The Committee noted the update.

440. CABINET MEMBER QUESTIONS AND UPDATES

The Chairman invited members of the Cabinet who had not provided a written update to the Committee to provide a verbal update on any matters.

The Cabinet Member for Economy and Leader of the Council advised that he had attended a meeting with Greater Brighton Economic Board (GBEB) where they agreed in principal that Officers look at the wholesale decarbonisation of housing stock. The board meeting also detailed the ambition for Greater Brighton areas to become a hydrogen powered economy for England. Furthermore, a small update was received by the Board on the city fibre expansion and I.T roll out across some of the GBEB area. He also confirmed that he had made a plea for a report covering the Network Rail contribution, specifically relevant to the importance of the Arundel Chord

The Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing advised that today a press release had been published that confirmed that Arun had been successful in being awarded funds to increase outreach engagement and communication with residents who were disproportionately likely to be impacted by Covid-19, particularly those with disabilities and from the Black And Minority Ethnic community relating to the mis-information regarding the Covid-19 vaccinations that was currently in circulation. The

Wellbeing team have continued to offer services which can be found on the Council's website and have a number of support projects running currently that residents could benefit from. She also advised that a workplace wellbeing project had also been rolled out to offer support to Council staff with a particular focus on emotional support due to the difficult last 12 months. Community safety update was that a community warden project was due to commence in March 2021 that would focus on anti-social behaviour hotspots across the District. She concluded her update with a request to the voluntary sector voluntary action Arun and Chichester for all their work and support.

The Cabinet Member for Technical services provided members with an update on his attendance at last month's Local Government Association Coastal Special Interest Group meeting, where Beach Safety and Coastal suicide prevention was discussed. He advised members that he would provide them with a link to the report in relation to beach safety. In summing up he thanked that Licensing Team manager and her team for the work they completed in collecting and rehoming 44 stray dogs.

The Chairman then thanked Cabinet Members who had provided written updates to the Committee ahead of the meeting and then invited members of the Committee to ask any questions. These have been summarised below;

- A question to the Cabinet Member for Technical Services in relation to his comments made at the Cabinet Meeting held on 11 January 2020, regarding Members of the Development Control Committee having a tough job when voting on applications because they did so based on representation from local residents and as he was the Chairman of the Planning Working Party did he feel that this was the best way of determining planning applications? In response the Cabinet Member explained that the intention behind his comments at that meeting was about how difficult it was for members to balance the comments and feeling made by residents against the planning reasons.
- A question to the Cabinet Member for Commercial and Business Development was that as he had now been in post for 8 months, how many of his ideas had made it into the budget? In response the Cabinet Member advised that there would be a report going to Cabinet shortly. Interviews had also taken place for the position of commercial consultant; however, a suitable candidate had not yet been found as it was a difficult time to recruit during the pandemic. Due to the same reasons that vacancies in the Property and Estates and the Monitoring Officer post had not been filled yet. He advised that until a team was in place to complete the work, the work could not be completed. The Chief Executive confirmed that a report had already been drafted for Cabinet to receive in March.
- A question to the Cabinet Member of Economy and Leader of the Council in relation to Highways England having misrepresented the views of this Council and when would he be confirming that he had addressed this issue. In response the Leader of the Council advised that there had been 5 or 6 responses given on this matter. The Chief Executive also confirmed that the next opportunity to address this would now be when

the proper consultation comes through as Full Council voted not to discuss the A27 matter at its meeting on 13 January 2021.

- A question to the Cabinet Member of Economy and Leader of the Council in relation to the 3D art in Littlehampton having been confirmed by the Director of Place as being jointly funded by Arun District Council and Littlehampton Town Council and not the Restoring Highstreets Fund and would he like to correct his previous comments made at the last OSC meeting held on 1 December 2020? In response the Leader of the Council apologised if he had incorrectly advised where the monies had come from. He also explained that whilst in this instance the artwork had not had the desired impact, he believed that it was the right thing to pursue in order to try and attract people to Littlehampton Town.
- A final question to the Cabinet Member for Economy and Leader of the Council was asked in relation to leafletting of Liberal Democrat literature at this current time. It was confirmed that the guidance from government had only been put in place on Saturday 23 January 2021 where previously there had been none.

441. WORK PROGRAMME 2019/2020

The Group Head of Policy advised members that there would be a presentation to members on the Voluntary Action Arun and Chichester (VAAC) and the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) in March 2021.

(The meeting concluded at 7.56 pm)