

Minutes

Corporate Services, Commerce and Communities
Policy Overview Committee
Thursday, 17 September 2020
Meeting held at VIRTUAL - Live on the Council's
YouTube channel: Hillingdon London



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Members Present:

Councillors Richard Mills (Chairman)
Vanessa Hurhangee (Vice-Chairman)
Lindsay Bliss
Nicola Brightman
Alan Deville
Jazz Dhillon
Scott Farley
Martin Goddard
Wayne Bridges

Officers Present:

Luke Taylor, Democratic Services Officer
Iain Watters, Financial Planning Manager

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

5. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meetings held on 4 February 2020 and 14 May 2020 be agreed as a correct record.

6. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was confirmed that all items were marked as Part I and would be considered in public.

7. 2020/21 BUDGET PLANNING REPORT FOR SERVICES WITHIN THE REMIT OF THE CORPORATE SERVICES, COMMERCE AND COMMUNITIES POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

The Financial Planning Manager introduced the report that introduced the current stage of development of budget planning work with regard to services within the remit of the Corporate Services, Commerce and Communities Policy Overview Committee.

The Committee heard that the report was being presented a little later than in previous years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Financial Planning Manager noted that the General Fund had an anticipated £20m saving requirement over the next two years, allowing for an assumed Council Tax increase and the Adult Social Care Precept.

Members were informed that this position was unlikely to move materially heading into the budget setting cycle, despite the COVID-19 pressures currently experienced. The Financial Planning Manager stated that the Council were facing pressures of around £26m in terms of the impact of COVID-19 on income streams and the direct cost to the Council of some of the measures taken to respond and support the local community. However, the Committee was informed that all but £3m of that planned expenditure has been covered by grant funding from Government, and there is a remaining balance of £9m set aside in earmarked reserves to manage anything that Government grants are not available for.

Outside of COVID-19 pressures, the Financial Planning Manager confirmed that the Council were £360k under spent at this point in the year and on track. The Committee heard that, outside of the Council's General Fund, the housing revenue account continued to be backed by a fully funded 30-year business plan, and the Council is confident that it has the underwriting from the Department for Education to ensure that often reported pressure on high needs and SEND within the school's budget is not a concern for the General Fund and would not directly hit budget setting for the Council's own operations.

The Financial Planning Manager noted that a number of service transformation proposals were expected, along with zero based reviews, savings related to procurement and managing demand, and ensuring that fees and charges are set at an appropriate level. The final budget proposals will be approved at Cabinet in December, and will then go to public consultation and will return to the Committee in January for final comments.

Councillors sought clarification on the use of cash balances against reported expenditure, and were informed that this was a planned use of reserves following the Council's actions to build up their balance in the early 2010s, so it only used money that was set aside for this purpose and was part of the Council's strategy. Additionally, the Financial Planning Manager confirmed that the savings programme will adapt to what was required through the year.

Responding to questioning from the Committee, the Financial Planning Manager also noted that a rise in Council tax would not bridge the shortfall in itself, and would communicate these figures to the Committee, along with the figures that outlined the acquisition of new dwellings in the Borough.

RESOLVED: That the financial context in which the 2021/22 budget setting process will take place in advance of detailed saving proposals being developed and approved at Cabinet in December 2020 was noted.

8. REVIEW: LOCAL COMMERCE, EMPLOYMENT, SKILLS AND JOB CREATION

The Chairman noted that the final report of the Committee's review into Local Commerce, Employment, Skills and Job Creation was contained within the agenda, but since the conclusion of the review, the world had changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Committee agreed that the pandemic meant that the report was currently out of date and incomplete, and it would not be right to send to Cabinet in its current form, given the recommendations contained were based on the local economy pre-COVID.

Members noted that it was important to demonstrate the depth and breadth of the review by sending it to the relevant Cabinet Members, and questioned whether it may be a subject that the Committee can reconsider in the future. The Committee agreed that there was a lot of uncertainty at current, and agreed that the review should be revisited at some point, although the current situation meant that the Committee should wait to see the full impact of COVID-19 on the local economy before committing to this.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- 1. Agreed the final report on "Local Commerce, Employment, Skills and Job Creation";**
- 2. Noted the change in circumstances as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the impact it had on the review; and,**
- 3. Agreed to send the review to the Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Business Services and Cabinet Member for Community, Commerce and Regeneration with a letter highlighting the impact of the pandemic upon the review.**

9. FUTURE REVIEW TOPICS

The Committee discussed potential topics for the next Policy Overview Committee's review.

Members suggested reviewing the voluntary sector's response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Hillingdon. This topic would include considering how the voluntary sector reacted to the pandemic, and how the Council were able to support it. The Committee recognised that Hillingdon 4 All faced challenges in its response and needed the Council's assistance, so it was important to look at what support was provided or funded.

Councillors also suggested a number of other issues, including:

- How the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) responded to the increase in ASB during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Reviewing the performance of Hillingdon First Limited;
- Considering the maintenance and upkeep of Council-owned buildings, including cladding;
- Looking at building regulations regarding Houses of Multiple Occupation;
- Issues surrounding the Alleygating Scheme, including community safety.

The Democratic Services Officer noted that he would explore the suggestions, and provide a written update to Councillors regarding which topics may fall under the Committee's remit.

The Committee agreed that any suggestions that fell within the Committee's remit could be provided as information items and added to Committee's work programme. Members agreed a scoping report on the Voluntary Sector's response to COVID-19 be prepared and presented at the next meeting.

RESOLVED: That a scoping report be prepared on the topic of the "Voluntary Sector's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic".

10. FORWARD PLAN

The Committee sought clarification on the review of the new Licensing Policy, and the Democratic Services Officer confirmed an update on when Councillors could contribute to the policy review would be sent to Members via email.

RESOLVED: That the forward plan be noted.

11. WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21

RESOLVED: That the Work Programme be noted, subject to:

- 1. The information provided by officers on potential information items outlined in Item 7, items be added to the Work Programme where necessary.**
- 2. Discussions with Lead Officers regarding the viability of presenting an update on the Committee's previous review on "Recruitment".**