

HAVANT BOROUGH COUNCIL

Governance, Audit and Finance Board

5 February 2019

Review of the Budget 2019/2020

FOR RECOMMENDATION

KEY DECISION NO

REPORT BY: Budget Scrutiny Panel

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The review was established to analyse the formation process for the 2019/20 budget.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The Governance, Audit and Finance Board Recommend to Cabinet:

- 2.1.1 that the number of editions of Serving You be reduced from three to two in any year and the budget be amended accordingly;

- 2.1.2 to agree that any move towards publishing less than two editions of Serving You in any given year be subject to a business case, which should include an investigation into ways of dissemination of the information currently provided by Serving You. Such a business case to be subject to a scrutiny review by the Governance, Audit and Finance Board before a final decision is reached on this matter;

- 2.1.3 the business case for paperless meeting papers, highlighting the costs and potential savings for this move be submitted to the Governance, Audit and Finance Board for scrutiny before submission to Cabinet;

- 2.1.4 the officers be instructed to seek a formal agreement with Norse giving Norse SE priority for commercial development opportunities within a defined area;

- 2.1.5 the officers be instructed to put arrangements in place to keep local Councillors informed of any play equipment to be repaired or replaced in their ward; and

- 2.2 a trend analysis of staffing costs as a proportion of the Council's overall annual budget over the past five years be submitted for scrutiny by the Budget Scrutiny Panel

3.0 RESOURCES:

- 3.1 A reduction in the number of editions of Serving You would create savings to the Council.
- 3.2 The savings or additional costs of moving towards paperless meetings would depend upon the option adopted by the Council.

4.0 LEGAL:

- 4.1 In relation to paperless meeting papers, the Council is required to supply a reasonable number of papers agendas/reports for members of the public. The Council is also required to send paper copies of meeting papers to Councillors, if they do not consent to electronic versions of meeting papers.

5.0 STRATEGY:

- 5.1 The delivery of financially sustainable services is a key commitment in the Councils' Corporate Strategy.

6.0 RISKS:

- 6.1 A reduction in the number of editions of Serving You could lead to complaints from members of the public and failure to meet the needs of our communities.
- 6.2 Evidence from other Councils making similar moves towards paperless committee meetings has shown the challenges that such a transition presents. The main issues reported are commonly the shift in culture and practice, and the resource and support needed for such a move.

7.0 COMMUNICATIONS:

- 7.1 Residents should be fully informed of any change in the number of editions of Serving You to overcome any adverse publicity.
- 7.2 Councillors should be consulted fully on any preferred option for paperless committees prior to implementation. The success of any move would be dependent on the take-up by Councillors, and they of course must consent to receiving only electronic copies. This can be achieved through the scrutiny process, where the Board may wish to survey all Councillors on their views and invite Councillors to Board meetings to discuss these options.

8.0 FOR THE COMMUNITY:

- 8.1 The delivery of financially sustainable services, which are affordable for customers will benefit the community.

9.0 METHODOLOGY

9.1 This review was undertaken to review the budget proposals for 2019/20. It was agreed that the review would be carried out investigating a sample of services as follows:

- a) Challenge sessions with officers on a select number of services; and.
- b) Discussion with the Deputy Leader of the Council, the Chief Finance Officer, and the Deputy Section 151 Officer on the strategic direction for the budget 2019/20.

10.0 KEY FINDINGS

10.1 The Panel has identified the following potential efficiencies

(a) Serving You

When considering this future of Serving You the Panel took into consideration:

- (i) the costs this publication (£14,771 for each issue (25p per household));
- (ii) the Council's drive towards encouraging customers to use digital channels to access Council information;
- (iii) Not everyone had access to the internet;
- (iv) a survey that indicated that 59% of the respondents wished to receive printed copies of this publication; and
- (v) the importance of this publication for the dissemination of information and promoting the work of the Council

A majority of the Panel ("the majority") was satisfied that sufficient evidence had been submitted to support the reduction of the number of editions of this publication from three to two in any given year in a way that would not adversely impact upon residents. However, the majority considered that, at this stage, the evidence provided did not justify just one edition a year. The majority further considered that a move towards less than two editions a year should be supported by a robust business case, which should include an investigation into other ways of communicating information currently provided to all residents. The majority considered that this business case should be submitted to scrutiny by the Governance, Audit and Finance Board before a final decision is reached.

(b) Paperless Meetings

The Panel considered that the business case currently being prepared should be submitted for scrutiny by the Governance, Audit and Finance Board before submission to Cabinet.

(c) Norse South East – Commercial Development

The Panel was surprised to learn that there was no formal agreement with Norse that Norse South East should have priority when seeking commercial development developments within the south east. It was considered that failure to have such an agreement could hinder the commercial success of Norse SE.

(d) Staffing Costs

The Panel considered that a trend analysis of staffing costs over the past five years would be useful to enable the Panel to understand the impact of staffing costs on the Council's budgets

(e) Replacement of Play Equipment

The Panel was pleased to note that provision was being made for the replacement of damaged play equipment. The Panel considered that arrangements should be put in place to inform local Councillors of any repairs to be undertaken under this provision to enable Councillors to fulfil their community role.

Appendices

None

Background Papers

Minutes of the Panel (exempt – paragraph 3, Schedule 12a, Local Government Act 1972)

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