

## Budget Speech 2015

### Introduction

This municipal year has seen a number of changes both from a **leadership perspective** and from a **financial perspective**, both of which might have caused some uncertainty in terms of the direction in which the borough is going and also what sort of financial implications and therefore changes there might be as the current Government's austerity program starts to bite.

With this budget speech, I would therefore like to focus on **leadership, finance, our customers, our organisation, and finally working with others, our Partners.**

From a **leadership** perspective I hope that in the last year I have demonstrated to you that I can be trusted to lead and navigate us through these challenging times of fiscal reductions and uncertainties, but at the same time ensure that we, as a service provider, ensure best value for our residents.

To that end, I have visited all surrounding district and city leaders to present Havant's credentials personally to them. This has then facilitated officer to officer follow up meetings with the sole aim of capitalising on any opportunities that might occur as a result of those initial Leader's meetings.

From the **financial perspective** I am pleased to be able to put before you tonight a robust and balanced budget. A budget that has been very carefully considered by Cabinet and in full consultation with the Councilors of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, all of which voted unanimously for its adoption before being presented here to you at Full Council for final approval.

We should be very pleased that through good financial management, focused governance and a clear drive to ensure that we spend our limited financial resources on areas that are within our Core Strategy, we have been successful in this overall financial objective. Just to remind ourselves this is the sixth consecutive year that this council has frozen its share of the council tax bill for our residents at £192.78 for a band D property, where other organisations that we are a collection agency for, have not been so successful and have increased their precept.

We have all been party to delivering a plethora of services in a difficult global climate of austerity. We have a good record in this regard given that our net budget has reduced by over £3m in the last 6 years and yet we have continued to provide the same level of services to our customers and maintained a freeze in the cost of council tax to our residents over that same timescale.

This is no mean feat. However, we must be minded to understand that future predictions show us that there is more work to be done. It is anticipated that there will be a continued squeeze on public services and our council will be at the Centre of this challenge.

This continued austerity means that by 2020, if we do nothing to take these predictions into account, there will be a further £1.5m to find in order to deliver a long-term balanced budget whilst still delivering our current level of services to our customers.

This reduction and anticipated budget deficit will need to be found through maintaining our focus upon savings and new, but exciting income opportunities.

I am determined that we will challenge ourselves to:

- Deliver our services differently;
- Seek opportunities, wherever they exist, to work through new models of delivery;
- Look at personalizing our services to customers and offering an enhanced service for those who wish to pay.

Moving on now to our **focus on customers**.

As far as I am concerned the 'Customer is King'. As Councillors and Council Officers we are in a privileged position to represent our residents the best we can and provide the best services which are based upon their needs and within our financial capability.

Our customers, local residents, communities and businesses, and all those who use public services, have a high and increasingly higher expectation of quality, performance and efficiency of those services that we provide.

We will meet and we will exceed these expectations as we move forward as a highly valued organisation. We will be investing further over the coming year to ensure we have all the right tools available to both our Councilors and our Staff to provide the best possible service to our customers.

For example, we are investing in a Customer Relationship Management System that will help to ensure we meet these exacting expectations to the highest standards and in a way that any global business would be proud of.

Now lets move on to **our organisation**.

The staff we have are dedicated –'as keen as mustard' as I would say, and we should applaud and reward that dedication as they go that 'little bit further'. We are investing time and effort in developing a modern and effective employment package to retain and attract the best quality people. For those already working with us we offer a supportive and learning environment where continuing professional development is strongly encouraged. As a demonstration of that commitment, we have ensured our budget includes staff CPD as a priority. Our staff are the **Greatest Single Factor** in the success of Havant BC.

We also have an effective, dedicated, keen and enthusiastic Membership here at the council, of all political parties, who have a wide range of skills, experience and competence. I believe these skills and competences will be helpful in scrutinising and helping to develop our policies in the future. Again, I am determined to ensure we provide the best support and development opportunities that makes certain our elected Councilors can do their job to the optimum of effectiveness and efficiency, and I do look to each and every one of us to do whatever we can to achieve our overall Corporate Strategy.

As some of you might be aware, I am a keen enthusiast of contingency and succession planning. You will therefore see some changes in the Cabinet and in the Chairmanship of different boards in the next and subsequent municipal years.

These reshuffles are not at all related to poor performance, they are merely designed to capitalise on the skill base within our membership, and which also ensures we have a cadre of expertise and experience that facilitates a seamless transfer of responsibilities as and when necessary.

We have the perfect working environment that we share with a number of important public, private and voluntary sector partners here at The Plaza.

Our focus over the last year has been to ensure that of **co-location**. We now need to **move on to the next phase of efficient integration and then finally total transformation** of public service delivery for the people of Havant. The concept of the Public Service Village is still very much alive.

We intend to explore and encourage new partners to join us here at The Plaza, such as Hampshire Police for example.

Since becoming Leader, I have been made aware of many volunteers who do not necessarily wish to be aligned to any political party, but would be willing to add value to, say, our scrutiny programs. I would very much welcome a “fresh set of eyes” on the issues being scrutinised.

We have always been agile in outlook within our organisation. I applaud and encourage the use of flexible and mobile working as our supporting technology continues to be at the cutting edge of public service delivery, and is the envy of many of our peers in Local Government. To be at your desk is not necessarily to be at work! Over the last year colleagues from around the country have come to see how we are applying modern ways of working and are inevitably complementary with their comments and some see us as an exemplar.

Finally, **working with others** to enhance our Customer Focus.

This council is not at all shy of exploring, and exploiting the opportunities to work with others. For example:

- Our shared management arrangements with East Hampshire District Council;
- Our shared ICT partnership with Hampshire County Council;
- Our contract with Capita for a number of services;
- And the building we are sat in tonight, The Plaza, are examples of the strong partnerships we have with other providers of public services.

We will be exploring further opportunities to deliver services through the most viable, efficient and effective means over the coming years – to that end I am committed to;

Working with private sector,

Working with other public sector providers,

Working with voluntary sector.

Furthermore this council will be developing a strong emphasis upon the commissioning of services through others such as community groups, private businesses, and charitable organisations.

We will also look to develop our own companies where our products and services are the strongest in the market. For example, we are already pursuing the setting up of a company with East Hampshire to deliver Legal Services.

We will also explore joint ventures with organisations and are open to all types of delivery models for the future of public services in this borough.

The General Election provides us with many opportunities, and one of those opportunities are to explore how we might influence legislation to the benefit of our communities. I am already working with our 2 x MPs to ensure they understand our clear agenda, our

Corporate Strategy and the outcomes we are seeking for the people and businesses of Havant.

As part of this discussion I am confirming that Havant Borough Council is at the forefront of any discussions that involve the concept of Devolution and of Combined Authorities. We are participating proactively in all of these debates on the devolution of power debate to local government and how such powers will assist with the much needed growth of our local economy.

We are working with our partners across Hampshire.

The two key ones being the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH) and the Hampshire Partnership.

We have strong ambitions for the future prosperity of the Borough and will work hard with partners to create new jobs, teach new skills and build new businesses and homes in sustainable locations. Hence our input and debates with the Solent Local Enterprise Partnership.

So Members, in Conclusion:

Before you this evening, you have 2 important documents: namely,

1. A full and balanced budget that has been considered and scrutinised by the Scrutiny Board and the Cabinet, and

2. A Corporate Strategy that takes us from where we are now up to 2020. It is a strategy that you all have had the opportunity to influence at different stages of its development, and one that has also been through the Cabinet process.

I therefore commend both documents – the Budget and the Corporate Strategy - to this Council for final approval.

Thank you.