

Cabinet Lead Reports – Full Council 27 January 2021

Councillor Mark Inkster: Cabinet Lead for Finance

Financial Performance

As discussed in previous briefings, the Covid-19 pandemic continues to pose a significant challenge to local government finances.

As a reminder, the Quarter 2 monitoring report to Members highlighted a projected deficit for the net cost of services of **£1.333 million**. After central Government has provided the Council with grants of **£1.558 million** to help support during the Covid-19 pandemic. This produced an overall year end forecast position of **£0.225 million** return to reserves.

The overall uncertainty at present means that there are some fluctuation of numbers, and make it important to ensure regular review of overall Council spend. We are currently producing a period forecast for quarter 3, December 2020 which will come to come to Member soon.

The government announced the Local Government settlement for 2021/22 on 17 December. The budget working papers are being updated to reflect this and the council set the budget for 2021/22 in February 2022.

The external auditors, EY, are in the process of finalising the audit of the year end accounts. They did not sign off before the extended statutory deadline of 30 November. EY have nearly completed their audit work and we have ensured as much resource as available to support the EY audit. We are currently requesting the proposed sign off date, and will share as soon as we are made aware of this. We hope this will be as soon as possible.

Revenue and Benefits

Business Grants

There are several grants that businesses can apply for to support ongoing fixed costs. These can be found here <https://www.havant.gov.uk/business-support> .

The grants cover all periods from the November lock down to the Council moving into Tier 2 and then Tier 4 and now into National lockdown.

Businesses who successfully applied for the November lockdown grant have automatically received the first payment under the Tier 4 / National lockdown scheme, and further payments will be made on a 14 day cycle. These businesses do not need to reapply for this grant (approx. 480 businesses).

A further one off payment has been announced today. Whilst we await further information with regards to this scheme, we are working on a process that would again facilitate the payment of these grants without businesses needing to reapply where they are already in receipt of payments under previous national schemes.

The team have been administering several schemes supporting our local businesses since the second lockdown in November. The table below shows what has been paid so far.

Grant Scheme	Number of Businesses	Value of Grants
National Lockdown (November)	497	£754,924
National Lockdown (November) – Discretionary Scheme	67	£70,688
December Schemes (Pub Christmas Bonus, Closed Businesses etc)	34	£30,989
Tier 4 payments to Closed Businesses	497	£432,004
National Lockdown (January)	497	£323,253
Tier 4 and National Lockdown (January) – Discretionary Scheme	20	£20,674

New applications are still coming in and will be dealt with as quickly as possible. Further National Lockdown payments will be made over the coming weeks.

Estates

Local Testing Site - Estates worked closely with Local Resilience Forum (LRF) and Deloitte to enable a new Testing Site to open opposite The Plaza requiring a quick turnaround. Estates are continuing to work closely with LRF, Health & Safety and others in respect of various Covid related projects.
Rent Recovery - Estates has continued to recover a high proportion of debt/rent arrears during challenging times.

Empty Properties - Void rates in terms of vacant and unlet premises within the HBC portfolio continues to be very low ie less than 2% achieved through active asset management. The only vacant units available to let are 4 No units at Meridian.

Capital receipts have been realised - capital receipts have been generated through the recent negotiations with developers in respect of various pieces of land in order to facilitate residential development.

Customer Services

On 27 August the Plaza Reception re-opened for customers with urgent problems who could not access Havant Borough Council services in any other way. Phase one of the project saw the reception open for access to Customer Services, Revenues and Benefits, with pre-booked virtual meetings with the Housing Needs team also available.

The local plan has also been made available for viewing. There have been on average less than 14 customers each day visiting the office, with only one having to be seen in Reception. Capita Customer Services are meeting customers at the door and signposting them to alternative methods of contact.

Plans are now underway for phase two, which will enable people to have legal documents signed by prior appointment and enable interviews under caution and taxi driver knowledge tests to be completed. We continue to monitor the situation to ensure that our customers' needs are met, whilst protecting the well-being of everyone working at the Plaza.

Elections

The annual Canvass is nearly complete. We're still following up the new pending electors who, despite having three forms sent, have not sent their details to be registered to vote.

The annual Personal Identifier review will commence straight after Christmas. Every five years postal voters have to provide updated signatures and this year there are 1400 new signatures to be obtained.

In difficult circumstances we are trying to make initial preparations for the elections due to be held on 6 May 2021. There will be 3 elections held on that day, the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Local Borough elections postponed from May 2020 and the Hampshire County Council elections due in 2021. This number of large elections held in one day is unprecedented and held during a pandemic, even more so.

Insight Team

The Insight Team continue to work on the recovery workstreams. The economic workstream dashboard has been updated and they continue to pull together internal data to finalise our community and health recovery workstream dashboard.

The Second staff survey looking at staff's wellbeing during the pandemic closed in mid-December - this is primarily an online survey although paper copies are being provided to teams that aren't online e.g., cleaners etc. The team is currently analysing the results.

The second wave of Covid 19 resident survey for Havant residents closed on the 23 December - we received 1112, which is a great response especially as the survey was live so close to Christmas. The team are currently analysing the results.