

Cabinet Lead Reports – Full Council

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Finance

The Covid-19 pandemic continues to pose a significant challenge to local government finances.

A full quarter 3 reports to December 2020 will be issued soon, but is in line with the Quarter 2 monitoring report to Members. This 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.

The budget papers have been discussed at full member briefing, overview and scrutiny and cabinet and the budget will officially be set at full council before the end of February 2021.

It is hoped that the external auditors, EY, have now nearly completed their field work. 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.'

Business Grants

The number of new applications for business grants continue to fall. Since November 20, we have paid grants totalling over £5.5 million to nearly 700 local businesses.

Where possible, payments have been made to businesses without the need for them to reapply each time a new scheme is announced. This has ensured that payments were made in a timely manner. The current main grant scheme runs up to 15 February 2021. We are waiting to hear if there will be a further scheme or additional funding made available.

Estates

Estates achievements since last update:

- Disposal of surplus land known as Brockhampton West.
- Closely working with HCC and the Local Resilience Forum in respect of various confidential Covid related projects.

- Reviewing ways to improve quality of service as a result of increased cross functional working with other teams

Customer Services

The Plaza Reception remains open for customers with urgent problems who cannot access Havant Borough Council services in any other way. The number of customers visiting to offices has fallen substantially with an average of four customers per day.

Elections

We are continuing to work on planning the different types of Elections in May 2021. Safety is paramount, so we are making sure polling stations are safe for the staff and electorate, postal voting is encouraged and ensuring that the count is conducted in a covid19 safe environment.

We aim to make polling stations as Covid-secure as possible by insisting on face coverings, sanitizers and social distancing in every venue. This also applies at the various counts and postal vote sessions. There is a lot of work being done with this in mind with risk assessments and detailed planning. Not least is the challenge to secure polling stations and appropriate staffing levels.

HBC boundary review.

An initial meeting with the boundary commission was held in December 20. An operational meeting with officers and the Boundary Commission is to be held on the 11th February, to discuss what is expected from the Council in terms of data and processes. This will inform a project plan being developed by the Boundary Commission. Data to include Polling Districts and Electoral Register.

Insight Team

The Insight Team continue to update the economic dashboard for the Business and Economy Recovery group (BERG)

There is a wide range of data available that begins to reflect the changing economic impacts of the pandemic on the labour market, businesses and the local area.

The latest employment data highlights a worsening situation - employment is down as unemployment is up, while record levels of redundancies continue to take place, consumer confidence remains low and high numbers of workers continue to be temporarily away from work. In terms of businesses, GDP continues to be notably lower than pre-pandemic levels and the number of

businesses being removed from the relevant register increased in 2020 (despite rises in business creations).

These messages are reflected at a local level - claimant counts remain at least twice of those seen in February 2020, vacancies are down, The consistent message coming through is that the economic situation on the whole is deteriorating, and there may be increases in the future as the furlough scheme and Universal Credit top-ups are due to end in the coming months.