

Cabinet Lead for Finance – Councillor Tony Denton

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Budget / MTFS

As reported in January, the Council has been busy revising its budget proposals for 2023/24 and updating its Medium Term Financial Strategy, (MTFS) subsequent to the Government's, (1 year), Financial Settlement announcement in December 2022.

Whereas additional funding, such as New Homes Bonus, has been confirmed for next year, there is no financial certainty beyond this period hence when setting budgets we have needed to be mindful not to commit on-going spend against one off resources.

The Council has worked hard to improve its financial stability, and resilience, over the last 12 months. However, increasing demand on core front line services such as housing the homeless and waste collection has placed added pressure on our finances.

The 2023/24 revenue budget, as presented to Council today, requires us to:

- (a) Increase Council Tax by 3%;
- (b) Increase Garden Waste charges by 6%;
- (c) Increase a number of other discretionary charges, such as parking, by 8%

Whereas we recognise that this is not necessarily good news for our residents, the Council has worked hard to keep costs down with the proposed increases being much lower than the actual costs incurred by Havant BC in areas such as staffing, major service contracts, fuel and utilities. Inflation has been running in excess of 10% and the Council, like other businesses and householders, are directly impacted by the current economic climate.

However, we continue to work hard to support those individuals and businesses that are struggling most in our communities. We have continued to maintain a Council Tax Support Scheme, for those on particularly low incomes, and have recently expanded our Discretionary Business Rates Relief Policy to help more Community and Sports Groups in the Borough.

In terms of Capital Investment, we have recently re-written our Capital Strategy and are proposing a medium term Capital Programme of £24.8m. We will continue to be

ambitious, building on recent successes such as £1.6m Brownfield Grant, for the demolition of Bulbeck Road car park, and £1m UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and aim to attract further significant investment to the Borough.

Our financial reserves remain strong, yet appropriate to tackle the difficult times that we are currently facing. We will regularly review our holding of reserves, with plans to invest in service improvement and growth where possible.

I hope that members will agree that the budget put in front of you today has been carefully considered, is transparent and much needed to move the Council on to the next stage of financial strength since our split with East Hampshire. We will strive to deliver the projects as detailed in our revised Corporate Strategy, investing and improving the Borough whilst maintaining excellent front line services.

Corporate Governance

The Quarter 3 Governance report has been finalised and will be going forward to the next Audit & Finance Committee. The report will include an update on the corporate risk register movements; our top risks remain homelessness and the risk of disruption to council services due to outside events. All risks have appropriate mitigations in place and are being monitored accordingly.

The number of complaints and complaint resolution has improved significantly over the quarter, with complaints reducing to 33 outstanding complaints at quarter end and an improvement in response times. All types of information requests are being responded to within relevant timeframes.

Work has now started on the preparation of the Annual Governance Statement for 2022-23 with the AGS questionnaire available for staff to complete. The questionnaire provides an evidence base on the governance arrangements across the council.

Finally, the 2022 Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) statistical return for 2022 has been submitted, in accordance with requirements and the 31 January 2023 deadline. Refresher Training on use of RIPA is being organised for May 2023.

Mayoralty

The team continue to support the office of the Mayor, both with official engagements, and with matters relating to national or civic events.

On 20 January 2023, a formal ceremony, hosted by the Mayor, was held to confer the title of Honorary Alderman onto former Councillor Tony Briggs. The event was attended by Councillors and Tony's family and friends and was a thoughtful opportunity to reflect upon Alderman Brigg's many years of service with Havant Borough Council.

The Council also held its annual Holocaust event at Havant Cemetery on 27 January 2023. This was very well attended by residents, schools and other visiting Mayors and Chairmen from Hampshire. We appreciate the ongoing support given to us by Cllr Leah Turner, who leads the annual service to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day. The theme for this year's Holocaust Memorial Day was 'Ordinary People' which encourages the public to speak out and stand up to prejudice and hatred.

The team will be forming part of a Project Team to discuss the next stages for the Coronation around the key dates of 6 to 8 May 2023. In doing this, we will be recognising the key themes being promoted for the Coronation, in relation to the "Coronation Big Lunch", and the "Big Help Out" volunteering day, on the Monday Bank Holiday.