

Minutes

Performance Management Board

29th January 2020



Present

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
J Coleridge	Apologies	S Rehman	Yes
G Courtauld	Yes	B Rose	Yes
Mrs C Dervish	Yes	P Schwier (Vice-Chairman)	Yes
T Everard	Yes	N Unsworth (Chairman)	Apologies
M Radley	Yes		

The following Councillors were also in attendance at the meeting: J Abbott, J Baugh, D Bebb, K Bowers, Mrs M Cunningham, T Cunningham, P Euesden, Mrs D Garrod, A Hensman, S Hicks, P Horner, D Hume, H Johnson, D Mann, J McKee, Mrs I Parker, Mrs J Pell, M Radley, S Rehman, F Ricci, Mrs J Sandum, Mrs W Schmitt, Mrs G Spray, P Tattersley, R van Dulken, T Walsh, Mrs L Walters and B Wright.

13 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: The following interests were declared:-

Councillor J Abbott declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5, "Scrutiny of the Council Budget for 2020-2021 – Update," as the Chairman of Rivenhall Parish Council.

Councillor J Baugh declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5, "Scrutiny of the Council Budget for 2020-2021 – Update," as a Director and trustee of the Braintree District Museum Trust.

Councillor J McKee declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5, "Scrutiny of the Council Budget for 2020-2021 – Update," as a Director of the Braintree District Museum Trust.

Councillor Mrs J Pell declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5, "Scrutiny of the Council Budget for 2020-2021 – Update," as a trustee of the Halstead Community Centre charitable company.

Councillor F Ricci declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5, "Scrutiny of the Council Budget for 2020-2021 – Update," as a trustee of the Braintree District Museum Trust.

Councillor B Wright declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5, "Scrutiny of the Council Budget for 2020-2021 – Update," as the Vice-Chairman at Rivenhall Parish Council.

14 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

INFORMATION: There were no questions asked, or statements made.

15 **MINUTES**

DECISION: The Minutes of the meeting of the Performance Management Board on 27th November 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Vice-Chairman in the Chair.

16 **SCRUTINY OF THE COUNCIL BUDGET FOR 2020-2021- UPDATE**

INFORMATION: Councillor T Cunningham, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Infrastructure, introduced the report and the Council's Corporate and Budget Strategies for the period 2020 to 2024. Members then received a joint presentation on the updated budget position and proposals from Councillor D Bebb, Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance Management, and Councillor J McKee, Cabinet Member for Corporate Transformation.

Members received an update in respect of the Retail Relief scheme for High Streets. On Monday 27th January 2020, it was reported that the HM Treasury had issued a statement which stipulated that the increase of relief from 33.3% to 50% for 2020/21, thus confirming the proposal outlined in the Queen's Speech to Parliament in December 2019. The list of businesses eligible for relief had also been extended to include cinemas and live music venues. In addition to this, the pub relief scheme had been reintroduced after being abolished in 2018/19, with £1,000 for pubs with a rateable value of under £100,000. The relief scheme also encompassed local newspaper offices, with £1,500 per annum to be given for the period 2020/21 to 2024/25. Furthermore, it was confirmed that Local Authorities were to be reimbursed for relief granted under the scheme. These relief schemes would be brought forward to the meetings of Cabinet and Full Council in February for consideration in order to ensure that the reliefs are included in the 2020/21 bills of eligible businesses.

The presentation slides can be viewed at:

<https://braintree.cmis.uk.com/braintree/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/914/Committee/18/Default.aspx>

Further to the presentation, Cabinet Members provided the following information in response to questions raised by Committee Members and other Members present:

- In respect of New Homes Bonus (NHB), Members were advised that the Council would likely be in a more beneficial financial position than that of a number of other Local Authorities as its approach was to use NHB to fund schemes such as the District Investment Strategy and other costs, like those associated with the Local Plan, economic development and project management, rather than to use NHB to support the revenue account. Members were reminded that the Government had confirmed its plans to review the NHB scheme and whether this was the best mechanism to incentivise housing growth; as such this indicated that there would be a mechanism in future for helping to encourage Local Authorities with the delivery of their housing numbers.

- It was confirmed that the charges in relation to Council Tax on empty homes would not apply to empty business premises. On the topic of business rates, it was highlighted that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) was giving consideration to potential options that would help to ensure that all such premises were liable for the payment of their rates (e.g. such as a separate levy).
- The Council's approach to setting fees and charges was to look at the recovery of costs or to apply a general increase, where appropriate, of 2.4%; which represented the level of RPI in September 2019. As at the end of the second quarter of the financial year, it was predicted that the Council would be £715,000 under budget, and that the actual variance for the year would be added to the unallocated balance. In the upcoming financial year, the unallocated balance will be used to fund the payment of the three years' pension deficit on 1st April 2020. Although it was not anticipated that there would be a large variance from the budget in the next year from what was originally set, it was emphasised that the level of income actually received will be dependent on the demand for many of the Council's individual services.
- With regard to garden waste collections, Members were informed that the Council would await the outcome of the Government's current review of Waste Management before any conclusive decisions in relation to waste collection amendments were made.
- The Council's income from commercial rent properties was reportedly increasing by less than the rate of inflation. Members were informed that some of the properties that the Council currently received a rental stream from were not producing the desired levels of income. In order to address this issue, the Council was now undertaking a full Asset Management review which would help it to determine which of its properties were performing successfully against the rent criteria, and which were not. The outcomes of the review would then enable the Council to determine the appropriate course of action for improving the return received from those properties; this could include the disposal of some assets and the acquisition of new ones. The overall approach was to consider the Council's assets from a more strategic perspective in order to use them as efficiently and effectively as possible. It was added that the outcomes of the review and actions stemming from this would be presented at upcoming meetings of Cabinet and Full Council.
- Although it was giving consideration to the financial viability of the option, Members were advised that BDC had not confirmed that it would allow a budgetary allocation for the installation of bring bank sites for tetra packaging in the District. It was stressed that there were always alternatives to the purchasing of tetra packs, including plastic recycling containers.
- In respect of the outcomes of the Climate Change Working Group, it was confirmed that there were no specific allocations within the current budget towards implementing the Group's recommendations, as the work of the Group was still ongoing. The Group's work was due to finish in September 2020, which would coincide with the start of the budget process for the next financial year; as such, any budgetary requirements needed for the Group would be considered at this time. However, it was emphasised that should any urgent need for small-scale budgetary support emerge from the Group between now and September, allocations could potentially be provided.

- On the subject of the Councillor Grants Scheme, Members were informed that any unspent allocation in the current year would be rolled over into next year. The feasibility of the Scheme would be considered at this time as well.
- With regard to monies that had previously been allocated as a provision for planning appeals, this was being removed from the 2020/21 base budget. It was relayed that no further increase was needed as there was still an amount of the provision available. Planning officers were confident that this would be sufficient to finance any arising appeals.
- With regard to funding for the North Essex Garden Communities (NEGC), Members were informed that there was no provision for a loan within the scope of the current budget. It was added that the Council was awaiting the outcome of the Local Plan Examination; the future budget for NEGC would be given further consideration at this time, but the end result would depend largely on the conclusions drawn from the Examination.
- Further to a question raised about the current arrangements for Council Tax due on properties which are empty for short periods of time, Members were advised that a written response would be provided.
- With regard to High Street assets, it was stated that the Council owned little in the way of this type of property. In respect of purchasing properties, it was explained that the Council employed a mechanism for measuring the level of investment against the relevant criteria; for example, whether the property would produce sufficient return for the tax payer, and whether the purchase coincided with the Council's Corporate Strategy and objectives. It was added that in the current market climate, the sustainability of purchasing retail properties was equivocal and caution was therefore advised when consideration of such purchases was being given.

Following the end of the item, the Chairman thanked the Cabinet Members, Committee Members and other Members present for their attendance and contribution to the discussion.

A webcast of the discussion is available for six months at www.braintree.gov.uk.

17 **SECOND QUARTER PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT 2019/20**

INFORMATION: Members considered a report on the performance of the Council as at the end of the second quarter (July 2019 to September 2019).

Members were informed that as at the end of September 2019, an additional three projects had been completed to bring the total to five. The three projects were in relation to the replacement of benches in the District's parks and open spaces, the Council's formal adoption of the first Neighbourhood Plan in respect of Bradwell and Pattiswick, and the installation of a new artificial grass pitch with associated play equipment at Great Notley. It was confirmed that one project had been cancelled in response to the Government's consultation on the proposed 75% business rate retention scheme and fair Funding Review, of which had been delayed until 2020/21. The project would start again when the Government's stance on how it would proceed with this became known.

Of the 15 performance indicators, it was reported that 10 had either met or exceeded their target, whereas five had missed target; of these indicators, one had missed its target by

less 5% and was in relation to the percentage of invoices paid within 30 days. The remaining four indicators that had missed target by more than 5% were in relation to the cleanliness standards for litter, the percentage of household waste sent for re-use, recycling and composting, the average waiting time for applicants for Disabled Facilities Grants, and the average call answering time in the Customer Service Centre.

With regard to the number of complaints received, Members were advised that 145 complaints in total had been received, of which only one was escalated to Stage 2 of the Council's complaint's process. One further complaint was escalated to Stage 3. The complaints related primarily to the Operations Team following instances of missed bin collections.

In respect of the Council's financial position, it was reported that as at the end of September there was an overall positive variance projected for the year of £715,000 against the Budget.

DECISION: Members of the Performance Management Board noted the report.

REASON FOR DECISION: To inform Members of the performance of the Council.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 8.34pm.

Councillor P Schwier
(Vice-Chairman)