

11 NOVEMBER 2020

JOINT EXECUTIVE ADVISORY BOARD

11 November 2020

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|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Councillor Paul Abbey | * Councillor Ann McShee |
| Councillor Jon Askew | * Councillor Bob McShee |
| * Councillor Christopher Barrass | Councillor Masuk Miah |
| * Councillor Dennis Booth | * Councillor Ramsey Nagaty |
| * Councillor Ruth Brothwell | * Councillor George Potter |
| * Councillor Graham Eyre | * Councillor Jo Randall |
| * Councillor Andrew Gomm | * Councillor Maddy Redpath |
| * Councillor Angela Goodwin | * Councillor Will Salmon |
| * Councillor Angela Gunning | * Councillor Pauline Searle |
| * Councillor Gordon Jackson | * Councillor Fiona White |
| * Councillor Diana Jones | * Councillor Catherine Young |
| * Councillor Steven Lee | |

* Present

Councillors Tim Anderson, Joss Bigmore, Deborah Seabrook and James Steel were also in attendance.

6 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

The Joint Executive Advisory Board (EAB)

RESOLVED

that Councillor Angela Gunning be elected as Chairman for this meeting.

7 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Paul Abbey and Masuk Miah.

8 LOCAL CODE OF CONDUCT AND NOTIFICATION OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests or non-pecuniary interests.

9 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Joint EAB held on 9 July 2020 were confirmed as a correct record, and would be signed by the Chairman at the earliest opportunity.

10 OFF-STREET PARKING BUSINESS PLAN 2021-22

The Lead Councillor for Environment introduced and commended a report which updated the Executive on progress made in delivering the parking related recommendations approved in January 2020, reviewed and sought approval for parking pricing structure proposals, reviewed improvement works undertaken and work to be pursued during 2021-22, and advised on Parking Services performance in 2019-20. The views of the Board were sought in this regard.

The Waste, Parking and Fleet Services Manager presented the report which explained changes in service during COVID-19 and the excellent work carried out by the service to

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support key workers, businesses and residents. However, due to the reduction in visitors, officers had reconsidered how to manage the Council's parking resources to best suit Guildford's needs and bring forward decisions on pricing strategy to increase confidence, footfall and revenue.

A review of parking pricing had resulted in the formulation of the following options:

- Option 1 - Hold existing pricing for 2021-22 and allow a period of stabilisation from price changes and COVID-19;
- Option 2 - Continue with a price increase from £1.50 to £1.60 per hour for the following most popular surface car parks in April 2021:
 - Mary Road
 - Bedford Road Surface
 - Commercial Road 2
 - Old Police Station
- Option 3 – Continue the pre-agreed price increase as per Option 2 and introduce a new £1 per hour shopper offer (minimum 3 hours), Monday to Saturday, with flat rates in Bedford Road Multi-Storey Car Park (MSCP), York Road MSCP, Castle MSCP, G Live, Millbrook and Tunsgate car parks as follows:
 - £3 for up to 3 hours
 - £6 for up to 6 hours
 - £12 for greater than 6 hours

The Waste, Parking and Fleet Services Manager explained the following four recommendations to the Executive contained in the report. The principal rationale behind the options and recommendations was to offer shopper car parking at a reduced price with a view to encouraging visitors to spend more time in the town centre in order to have an enjoyable relaxing visitor experience whilst boosting the local economy. This also reflected the current lower demand for town centre parking diminishing the previous need for higher turnover of parking spaces. The continuing need for short stay parking was also recognised and it was proposed that provision in this area be expanded to include the Leapale Road car park and that a modest hourly tariff increase be applied, subject to review. This would achieve a balanced offering of shopper and short stay parking in addition to commuter provision. Officers had consulted widely in respect of the proposals and consultees included local traders and Experience Guildford, the local Business Improvement District. Amanda Masters, the Chief Executive Officer of Experience Guildford, was present to comment on the proposals and contribute to the related discussion with a view to bringing a business orientated perspective to the parking proposals to balance the Council's need to increase income.

- (1) To continue with the proposed short stay car park price increase as set out in Option 2 above, but to authorise the Waste Parking and Fleet Services Manager, in consultation with the relevant lead councillor and Director of Resources, to review the charge in January 2021 and to cancel the increase if the recovery from COVID-19 is likely, in their view, to be affected negatively by this increase.
- (2) To make no changes to Sunday tariffs for all car parks.
- (3) To reallocate Leapale Road car park as 'short stay' and bring prices into line with neighbouring short stay surface car parks.
- (4) To introduce a new shopper offer, Monday to Saturday, based on the flat rate Option 3 above.

The following points and views arose from related questions, comments and discussion:

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- Experience Guildford was strongly supportive of the parking proposals, particularly the shopper car park charges. A noticeable change since the first Coronavirus lockdown was that town centre visitors were mainly local residents and consideration may need to be given to the future development of the town to reflect this trend if it continued. Although retailers were not in favour of parking charges, it was acknowledged that car parks were essential to support trading.
- The proposed increase in short stay car parking charges from £1.50 to £1.60 per hour was due to be implemented in April 2021 and subject to review in January 2021, possibly informed by parking habits in the lead up to Christmas. The intention was to introduce the shopper car park charges before Christmas, subject to the fulfilment of legal requirements.
- In terms of parking support provided by the Council during the initial pandemic lockdown, all town centre car park charges were cancelled in March 2020 for the duration of the lockdown in line with Government advice. This supported essential shop workers, emergency teams and key workers in the NHS and the police during advice not to use public transport. All of the Bright Hill car park was set aside for use by NHS workers employed at Mount Alvernia Hospital which had been contracted to support the NHS. The police were granted approximately 400 parking passes owing to the displacement of staff parking by the use of Guildford Police Station as a major hub associated with police responses to COVID-19. Support continued after the cessation of the lockdown and featured access to Farnham Road car park for an additional month and an ongoing 50% reduction in parking charges for NHS and police employees.
- Parking support was also provided in relation to the Eat Out to Help Out scheme where free parking was available in the Pay and Display carparks from 4:00 pm on the relevant days to encourage late afternoon shopping followed by dining out. However, it was difficult to measure uptake as parking tickets were not issued. From the retail perspective, Amanda Masters advised that there had been a spike in footfall in the town centre in the early part of the weeks when the scheme was in operation and it was considered to be successful with many restaurateurs continuing the scheme without Government funding.
- Whilst the parking proposals were supported and welcomed, it was hoped that charges would return to previously accepted levels following the pandemic.
- There were two sets of car park payment machines, those owned by this Council located in off-street car parks and those owned by Surrey County Council and operated by this Council in on-street settings. Although the Council was seeking to invest in its car park machines with a view to increasing mutually beneficial contactless payments, officers felt that there was some demand for the retention of a cash payment option.
- Although users of the RingGo cashless parking application paid a supplementary fee above the basic parking charge for the service, this was an optional payment for the parking convenience it offered that could not be covered by the Council, which was currently reviewing its agreement with RingGo and hoped to secure a reduction in the fee. Experience Guildford welcomed the use of RingGo, or similar systems, as they provided valuable data revealing the originating location of parkers and shoppers which assisted with targeted marketing.
- Although essential works were being undertaken in Bedford Road car park to reduce the risk of flooding, as the facility was below ground level and in close proximity to the river, possible future flooding events could not be ruled out.
- Potential work at Leapale Road car park to reduce suicide risk was included in the provisional capital programme and under consideration.
- Whilst the Park and Ride scheme remained popular, its reducing use over recent years had been exacerbated by Government advice for people to work from home and avoid public transport if possible owing to COVID-19 risk. The reasons for the declining use

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and projectory for future use would be explored. It was suggested that consideration could be given to altering the charging model to one of payment per vehicle instead of per person in order to encourage car sharing and use by groups. Although the pricing structure was a decision for the operator, Stagecoach, the company had indicated that it was enthusiastic to work with this Council and Surrey County Council around future service provision following COVID-19, including pricing and customer attraction.

- The benefits of the close working relationship between the Council, the Parking Service and Experience Guildford were highlighted.
- Reference was made to the gains of having a whole system overarching approach to the Council's parking service that was sufficiently agile to react to the current changing situation.

The Chairman summarised the main views of the Joint EAB for submission to the Executive as follows:

- 1) Recommendation 3 of the parking proposals concerning shopper car park charges is strongly supported.
- 2) Cash car park payments be continued for the present and kept under review as part of ongoing developments in this area.
- 3) The Waste, Parking and Fleet Services Manager and his Parking Services team are thanked and congratulated for their rapid response to difficult circumstances under the Coronavirus lockdown and beyond in supporting essential shop workers, businesses, the NHS and police.

11 GENERAL FUND OUTLINE BUDGET 2021-22 AND BUSINESS PLANNING 2021-22 TO 2024-25

A report to the Executive outlining the current position regarding the 2021-22 outline general fund budget and the business planning assumptions for 2021-22 to 2024-25 was before the Joint EAB for consideration. The report invited the Executive to note the situation, including areas of uncertainty that would influence the final position, and agree the proposed strategy for savings and efficiencies to be implemented over the period 2021-22 to 2024-25 in order to achieve a balanced budget over the medium term. The report contained the following five recommendations to the Executive to assist it with the preparation of the General Fund estimates for 2021-22:

1. Approve the budget assumptions used in the preparation of the 2021-22 outline budget and three year forward projections.
2. Note the current position on the outline budget for 2021-22 and the budget shortfall anticipated over the 3 years to 2024-25.
3. Approve the savings strategy for 2021-22 through to 2024-25 (Section 13 & Appendix 3).
4. Agree to the proposal to Council to make the contributions to/from the Council's various earmarked reserves for specific purposes as set out in section 9 of the report as part of the budget report in February 2021.
5. Agree the use of the Council's earmarked reserves as set out in section 10 to fund the cost of the COVID-19 pandemic, in line with the supplementary estimate agreed by Council in May 2020.

The Director of Resources gave an introductory presentation which explained the difficulties associated with 2021-22 financial predictions, the core assumptions, the best estimate of the budget gap based on core assumptions and the budget gap sensitivity analysis.

The financial prediction difficulties arose owing to a number of uncertainties including the Government funding settlement, the Fair Funding Review, possible devolution, the ongoing

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financial implications of COVID-19 and subsequent pace of economic recovery, the impact of the increase in Local Council Tax Support Scheme claims and the future of the Leisure Management contract. Known factors affecting the budget were the overspend in the current year and possible mitigations, Council Tax and Business Rates collection rates and ability to spread the collection fund deficit over three years, the current level of reserves, interest rates and the cost of servicing debt, and savings resulting from the Future Guildford transformation programme.

Core assumptions upon which the 2021-22 budget was based consisted of the general inflation rate; staff pay award, pay increments and vacancy factor; increases in fees and charges; income reduction due to COVID-19; Council Tax base and proposed increase; housing rents; and Government Settlement Funding Assessment.

The best estimate of the Council's budget gap based on core assumptions was £2.692million in 2021-22 rising to £4.417million in 2024-25.

The budget gap sensitivity analysis explored estimates of surplus or deficit in relation to staff pay inflation, capital programme slippage, various income streams, Fair Funding Review reduction in base line spend, changes in investment income and interest rate rise.

The Lead Councillor for Resources and the Leader of the Council highlighted the challenges associated with balancing the budget for 2021-22, which would include a public consultation exercise regarding priorities for Council services, and acknowledged budget reductions achieved to date and the extraordinary work undertaken by officers to support vulnerable residents in the Borough during the Coronavirus pandemic.

The following points arose from related questions, comments and discussion:

- Essential services to support the most vulnerable in local communities should be continued as a priority.
- It was proposed that the budget consultation would be undertaken by a polling company which would target a representative sample of all Borough residents to gain views to inform subsequent decisions by the Council.

The Joint EAB

RESOLVED

That, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the consideration of information contained within Appendix 3 to the report on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act; namely, information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

Accordingly, the Board moved to a second (Part 2) meeting for the duration of its discussion regarding the exempt information in Appendix 3. The meeting received and considered a presentation in respect of the Savings Strategy which described the approach to the identification of savings target areas providing related spend lines, normalised net expenditure and proposed actions and savings for each portfolio.

Following the EAB's consideration of the exempt information the public was readmitted to the meeting.

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Having indicated its support for the five recommendations to the Executive as set out above, the EAB agreed the following points for submission to the Executive:

- Notwithstanding the outcome of the public consultation exercise associated with the outline budget, services provided to the most vulnerable residents should be protected.
- There may be merit in exploring the work undertaken by an Older People's Services task group established by Surrey County Council to inform service needs and provision in this area.
- Whilst the Joint EAB was not equipped to discuss or consider suggested budget reductions in any detail or advise on the extent and prioritisation of savings due to a lack of supporting information, it was aware where possible and likely inevitable reductions would fall.
- Owing to uncertainty, it was not currently possible for the Joint EAB to form a view in respect of budget and business planning scenarios associated with the possibility of the Council forming part of a new unitary authority in the future.

The meeting finished at 9:47 pm

Signed

Chairman

Date