

20 NOVEMBER 2019

JOINT EXECUTIVE ADVISORY BOARD

20 November 2019

* Councillor Angela Gunning (Chairman)

Councillor Paul Abbey	* Councillor Ann McShee
Councillor Jon Askew	* Councillor Masuk Miah
* Councillor Christopher Barrass	* Councillor Ramsey Nagaty
* Councillor Ruth Brothwell	* Councillor George Potter
* Councillor Graham Eyre	* Councillor Jo Randall
Councillor Andrew Gomm	* Councillor John Redpath
* Councillor Gillian Harwood	* Councillor Maddy Redpath
Councillor Liz Hogger	* Councillor Will Salmon
Councillor Gordon Jackson	* Councillor Deborah Seabrook
Councillor Diana Jones	* Councillor Patrick Sheard
Councillor Steven Lee	* Councillor Tony Rooth
* Councillor Ted Mayne	

* Present

Councillor Joss Bigmore was also in attendance.

1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

The Joint Executive Advisory Board (EAB)

RESOLVED

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

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Paul Abbey, Andrew Gomm, Liz Hogger, Gordon Jackson and Steven Lee. Councillor Tony Rooth was present as a substitute for Councillor Paul Abbey.

3 LOCAL CODE OF CONDUCT AND DECLARATION OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

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

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Joint EAB held on 10 January 2019 were confirmed as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

5 BUSINESS PLANNING - GENERAL FUND OUTLINE BUDGET 2020-21

The Director of Finance presented a report in respect of the General Fund outline budget 2020-21. The presentation set out the Borough-wide policies and strategies that were incorporated into the Corporate Plan and informed the Council's business planning, described the service and financial planning process, and highlighted factors which shaped the General Fund Revenue budget. The report outlined the current position relating to the 2020-21 outline budget and invited the Executive to note the position. The Board's comments would be circulated as an addendum to the report as it had already been

20 NOVEMBER 2019

published. The Joint EAB Budget Task Group had also considered the outline budget at its meeting held on 8 November 2019.

Section four of the report set out the budget parameters which included the assumptions that had been utilised to prepare the outline budget for 2020-21 and projections for the following three years.

The report explained that the Council had included government funding at a level based on the information contained in the 2020-21 local government technical consultation document issued on 3 October 2019, however, the amount of grant would not be known for certain until the Government released the provisional local government finance settlement which the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government had provisionally indicated would be in December 2019. The Fair Funding Review and implementation of the 75% business rate retention scheme, which would result in major changes to the local government funding system, had also been delayed. A £5 (3.0%) increase in Council Tax was assumed. The draft Council Tax base was 57,645.76, which was 1.5% higher than in 2019-20 and had increased the resources available by approximately £146,100. There would be changes to the New Homes Bonus (NHB) reserve.

Section 7 set out the proposed Council Tax reduction pilot scheme for Surrey County Council care leavers for 2020-21.

Section 10 covered the present position of the 2020-21 outline budget, which currently showed a shortfall between the likely resources and the proposed net expenditure of £820,760. The use of reserves for specific projects, namely, Future Guildford, the Town Centre Masterplan, Midleton Industrial Estate redevelopment, works to car parks and investment property voids were proposed.

The growth bids and savings outlined in Section 11 featured growth bids totalling £828,000 and Future Guildford savings of £2.5 million which were both included in the 2020-21 budget. Future Guildford savings were expected to increase to £5.5 million by 2023-24 and there was a further sum of £3.8 million of Future Guildford savings still to be assessed.

The outline budget was the base budget for services based on last year's budget uplifted for inflation factors and other minor movements. The base budget was reviewed for comparison to last year actuals and reduced where possible. The major reasons for movements between 2019-20 and 2020-21 were set out in the report and the variances at service level were shown in Appendix 2. Revenue growth bids received for 2020-21 were set out in section 10.11 and included in the outline budget, however, some capital bids may also have revenue implications attached to them. These would be considered as part of the capital and investment strategy report in January 2020, together with a schedule of proposed fees and charges for 2020-21.

As it was early in the budget process, the report also identified the areas of uncertainty that may influence the final position.

The financial monitoring report for the first six months of 2019-20 was reported to the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee on 19 November 2019. The projected net expenditure on the General Fund for the current financial year was estimated to be £0.57 million more than the original estimate. One of the factors contributing to the forecasted position in 2019-20 was the costs incurred in respect of planning appeals. The report requested the approval of a supplementary estimate to cover these costs and a supplementary estimate to cover the costs of enforcement action at Stoney Castle, Pirbright.

20 NOVEMBER 2019

Although there was currently a budget deficit of £828,760 for 2020-21 and a medium term budget gap of £3.3 million, the £3.8 million of unassessed future Guildford savings would assist and it was expected that the budget could be balanced in the medium term.

The report recommended the Executive to approve the budget assumptions used in the preparation of the 2020-21 outline budget and three year forward projections, approve a supplementary estimate of £125,000 to cover the forecasted budget shortfall in respect of planning appeal fees, approve a supplementary estimate of £120,000 to cover enforcement costs at Stoney Castle, Pirbright, note the current position on the outline budget for 2020-21, support the proposal to use the Council's various earmarked reserves for specific projects as set out in section 9 of the report and approve the pilot 100% Council Tax reduction for Surrey County Council care leavers for 2020-21 only. The reason for the recommendations was to assist the Executive in the preparation of the General Fund estimates for 2020-21.

The following points arose from related questions and discussion:

- In response to a Councillor's expressed wish for the NHB reserve to be directed primarily towards funding housing delivery, the Board was advised that the proposed Town Centre Masterplan included provision for housing delivery and that a policy agreed by the Council in 2016 specified the use of the NHB reserve for new housing and a range of other initiatives.
- A councillor suggested that the Democratic Services staffing resource should be increased in order to meet the support demands of the many new and inexperienced councillors. Although this was unlikely at present given the current budget deficit and staff reductions as part of the Future Guildford programme, the matter could be discussed by relevant Lead Councillors.
- In response to a suggestion that planting schemes be included in the budget, the Board was advised that such initiatives may emerge from the Climate Change and Innovation Board and that higher level schemes would take priority.
- Options for the future use of an empty investment property would be considered by the Executive at its meeting on 26 November 2019.
- The Joint EAB Task Group had indicated its support for the proposed budget growth bids and related queries had been referred to service managers for clarification and response. It was queried whether climate change proposals were sufficiently ambitious.
- The Council was collaborating with neighbouring local authorities and the Forestry Commission with a view to minimising the risk from the Oak Processionary Moth.

In conclusion, the EAB noted the current 2020-21 outline budget position and indicated its support for the recommendations to the Executive contained within the report.

6 GUILDFORD PUBLIC REALM IMPROVEMENT PROJECT - PROGRESS REPORT

A report updating the Executive in relation to the public realm improvement work undertaken to date and seeking its view on the preferred option for officers to pursue was before the Board for consideration.

A supporting presentation was given by the Project Manager which gave the background to the project and explained the partnership approach; achievements to date; the focus area of the study; consultation; results of the online survey; highway issues; options to improve Chapel Street, Castle Street east and west, and Swan Lane; place-making and information; existing bollards and barriers; proposed pedestrian safety gates; costed options comparison; programme based on option 1; risk and issues; and next steps.

20 NOVEMBER 2019

At its meeting on 8 April 2019, the Executive had agreed to proceed with a public engagement exercise for Guildford town centre public realm improvements from which high-level feasibility design options were developed. This report considered the outcome of this work and detailed the two available options. The scheme focused on delivering public realm improvements to Chapel Street, Castle Street, Swan Lane, to pedestrian safety by upgrading existing facilities and introducing new vehicle restrictions to the High Street, and to signage and wayfinding to better connect the historic town centre and promote businesses and the cultural offer of Guildford.

The total budget available was £1.3 million which comprised £1.248 million approved capital budget, £49,300 of revenue budget and a £10,000 contribution from Experience Guildford. Swan Lane was brought within the scope due to the offer of a financial contribution from a group of Swan Lane landlords.

The Council's principal design consultants had developed a range of costed options, based on a feasibility study and informed by the consultation with residents, businesses, visitors, councillors and council officers. The two options presented consisted of a core scheme (option 1) that included Chapel Street, Castle Street and Swan Lane and addressed the core elements of road surface treatments, street lighting, traffic control interventions but excluded architectural lighting, signage and wayfinding enhancements and could be delivered within budget at a cost of £1.3 million. The second option was an enhanced scheme which would significantly improve the 'look and feel' of the public realm through integration of architectural lighting, street furniture, wayfinding, signage and a major transformation of Tunsgate junction with a large raised table that replicated the lost historic 'square'. This option would cost £1.67 million, requiring additional funding of £367,000 through a virement from the capital contingency fund. Officers proposed that the full capital cost of the project was funded from the New Homes Bonus (NHB) reserve, in line with the NHB policy approved by Council in February 2016. Funding the scheme from the NHB reserve would mitigate any on-going borrowing costs on the Council's general fund revenue account from this scheme. It was noted that both costed options included pedestrian safety barriers for the High Street including a new gated access for the west end of the High Street.

The report recommended that the Executive agreed that officers proceed with the detailed designs and construction relating to option 2, that up to £367,000 be vired from the Capital Contingency Fund and that the full capital cost of option 2 be funded from the Council's NHB Reserve. The reason for the recommendations was to support the Council's strategic priority of increasing Guildford town centre's economic success, increasing accessibility and improving links between the High Street and Cultural Quarter.

Arising from related discussion and questions, the following points were made:

- Depictions of the improvement options, including the proposed bollards, in visual format were welcomed.
- The inclusion of Swan Lane in any options was welcomed and it was felt that the proposed treatment of Chapel and Castle Streets was positive.
- A safety audit of all scheme options would be undertaken and cobbles would be reused where possible.
- In response to a suggestion that Surrey County Council as local highway authority should make a financial contribution towards the improvement work, the Board was advised that this was unlikely as the standard of the proposal was significantly higher than general maintenance work for which the County Council was statutorily responsible. However, the County Council may provide some stone paving setts.
- In addition to the three improvement funding options of use of the NHB reserve, retained business rates or borrowing, use of crowdfunding was suggested and the

JOINT EXECUTIVE ADVISORY BOARD

20 NOVEMBER 2019

Board was advised that consideration was currently being given to the establishment of a wider Council crowdfunding platform.

- Market testing had taken place prior to the appointment of consultants and the costs reflected the complex nature of the works above and below ground and the need for contingencies.
- Concerns in relation to costs, particularly in relation to the Castle Street Square raised table, and highway safety, mainly associated with traffic speed and loss of traffic islands, and the severity of the proposed gates were raised. The use of traffic calming measures was suggested as one solution. Although the highway authority did not hold any speed data for the Castle Street junction, it had reviewed it with a view to solving traffic issues and had approved the design for the corner in Castle Street. A traffic regulation order could be pursued at the detailed design stage.
- It was noted that the plan on page 59 of the agenda depicted the gate opening in the wrong direction.
- The consultation exercise in relation to the improvement project was appreciated and it was noted that further consultation would take place once firmer proposals had been agreed by the Executive.
- Some planting was included in the options and consideration could be given to supplementing this.
- Accessibility should take account of older and vulnerable people.
- Measures, such as public artwork, to improve the appearance of buildings in Swan Lane were welcomed.
- Consistency in street furniture design to reflect the historic nature of the High Street Conservation Area would be pursued.
- Measures to mitigate the impact of restaurant delivery vehicles in part of Castle Street were being discussed. It was noted that there was a trend of moving towards centralised multi-brand out of town kitchens which would resolve this issue.

Having indicated its support for option 2 of the improvement project, the Board agreed that the recommendations to the Executive contained in the report should be modified to read as follows to address its views and concerns:

That the Executive:

1. Approves option 2 and agrees to progress to detailed design and construction.
2. Approves for officers to proceed with the detailed designs for the preferred option.
3. Approves that the full capital cost of the preferred option is funded from the Council's New Homes Bonus Reserve, subject to recommendation 4.
4. Explores further funding options for the improvement project.
5. Gives further consideration to road layout and design at the junction of South Hill, Sydenham Road and Castle Street to reduce traffic speeds and ease crossing by pedestrians.

The meeting finished at 9:00 pm

Signed
Chairman

Date