

**MINUTES OF A VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE  
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD  
Havering Town Hall, Main Road, Romford  
17 June 2020 (7.30 - 9.00 pm)**

**Present:**

**COUNCILLORS**

<b>Conservative Group</b>	Philippa Crowder, Judith Holt, Robby Misir, Dilip Patel, Nisha Patel, Christine Smith and Maggie Themistocli (Vice-Chair)
<b>Residents' Group</b>	Stephanie Nunn
<b>Upminster &amp; Cranham Residents' Group'</b>	Linda Hawthorn and Christopher Wilkins
<b>Independent Residents' Group</b>	Natasha Summers and Graham Williamson
<b>Labour Group</b>	Keith Darvill
<b>North Havering Residents' Group</b>	Darren Wise (Chairman)

An apology was received for the absence of Councillor Ray Morgon.

All decisions were taken with no votes against.

The Chairman reminded Members of the protocol for meetings held during the Covid-19 pandemic

**1 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2020 were agreed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman at a later date.

**2 PLAN FOR BRINGING EXISTING SERVICES BACK ON STREAM POST COVID-19 LOCKDOWN**

The report before Members detailed the Council's plans for bringing existing services back on stream post Covid-19 lockdown.

As the Council entered the recovery phase of the Covid-19 emergency, Government and Public Health England guidance on removing lockdown

restrictions and opening up work spaces required changes to the way the Council organised its services in order to maintain social distancing requirements, maintain infection control and thus reduce the number of new Covid-19 cases and deaths in the work-force and community at large.

Members were advised that there were three main impacts on the Council during the lockdown period. Firstly was the additional costs that the Council had incurred, secondly was the loss of revenue and lastly the distraction of officer dealing with Covid-19.

Following the announcement of the lockdown on 23 March the Council had acted swiftly on the guidance and closed offices across the borough allowing staff the opportunity to work from home. Smart working had been rolling out for some time and continued at a greater pace due to the lockdown. The smart working had allowed staff to be more productive than perhaps they had been before.

Even though lockdown had started easing the Council was still left with the issue of social distancing

All services had produced recovery plans and these were appended to the Cabinet report in appendix A.

A number of new services had been introduced and managed during the lockdown these included contacting vulnerable members of the public, food distribution and PPE procurement.

Members noted that there had recently been a staff survey carried out which had attracted a good response level.

Managers were carrying out risk assessments with staff to ascertain whether staff members had concerns regarding returning to the workplace due to such things as ethnicity or underlying health conditions.

Appendix B of the Cabinet report identified all the services that were coming back on line in the coming months.

In response to a question relating to staff's mental wellbeing, officers advised that 121s were continuing, there was also a cohort of staff that a number of staff had become mental wellbeing champions.

In response to question relating to staff carrying forward annual leave, officers responded that there had been a legislation change that allowed staff to carry forward ten days of leave over a two year period.

Officers confirmed that discussions had taken place in case of a second spike of Covid-19. The Director of Public Health was continually monitoring the statistics both nationally and locally and an outbreak plan was being formulated.

In response to a question relating to the introduction of measures in schools, officers confirmed that it was ultimately the responsibility of the head teachers. The Council had supported them in implementing the Government guidance.

Members confirmed that after consideration of the report they were satisfied with the content and had no comments to pass on to the Executive.

### **3 APRIL 2020 FINANCIAL MONITORING POSITION**

The report before Members set out the 2020/21 Period 1 (April) financial monitoring position. The report focused on the financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Havering and the potential financial gap for 2020/21 to be funded from reserves.

The report included:

- A summary of the outturn for 2019/20
- Estimated financial impact of the pandemic on the Council for April 2020
- Government support provided to date and potential future commitments
- A financial projection setting out the potential impact on 2020/21

In February 2020 full Council agreed a balanced budget for 2020/21. The budget was set before the Covid-19 pandemic took hold in March and therefore was based on an assumption that the Council operations would be as in a normal year.

The budget included a package of £14.5m of savings which had been developed and reviewed throughout the budget process. This meant that a number of the savings proposals were already in place at the start of the year but the majority were based on assumed actions during the remainder of 2019/20 and during the course of 2020/21.

The budget also included a full appendix setting out the proposed fees and charges for the year and was set based on an assumption that this income would be received throughout 2020/21.

The budget setting process included the Council Tax resolution and agreement of Council Tax levels for the forthcoming year. In calculating the level of Council Tax required to balance the budget an assumption was made on Council Tax collection rates. Havering assumed a collection rate of 98.3% in its tax base used to calculate Council Tax yield.

Any lower than planned Council Tax or Business Rate yield would cause a deficit in the collection fund. In setting the 2021/22 Council budget the Council was required to estimate any deficits on the collection fund and to include funding to balance the fund. This would clearly be a significant issue

in setting the budget for next year unless the Government stepped in with further support.

The budget included a package of £14.5m of savings which had been developed and reviewed throughout the budget process. This meant that a number of the savings proposals were already in place at the start of the year but the majority were based on assumed actions during the remainder of 2019/20 and during the course of 2020/21.

Councils began experiencing costs and loss of income in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic during March. On 23 March the Prime Minister instructed the country to stay at home effectively stopping income streams for local authorities from that point onwards. The report highlighted the service areas that had been hit the hardest.

The Council had also started to experience costs directly relating to the pandemic in March. The Government issued its first support allocation to the Council in late March and as these costs were defined amounts a proportion of the grant was matched against these costs. The remaining grant was rolled forward to cover expenditure and income loss in 2020/21

The report also highlighted other areas of income loss and unplanned costs that had been incurred. The report also highlighted risk areas.

In response to a question regarding a possible review of office space requirement going forward and technology expenditure officers confirmed that both areas were being reviewed.

Officers also confirmed that the Council had received funding of £1million to assist with establishing the Government's test, track and trace system.

Officers confirmed that debt collection had been paused until the end of June. Debt collection would restart in July as it was important that debts were not allowed to escalate.

Members confirmed that after consideration of the report they were satisfied with the content and had no comments to pass on to the Executive.

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**Chairman**

