

## **Scrutiny & Overview Committee**

Meeting held on Monday, 10 February 2020 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

### **MINUTES**

**Present:** Councillors Sean Fitzsimons (Chair), Robert Ward (Vice-Chair), Leila Ben-Hassel (Deputy-Chair), Jeet Bains Mary Croos (for Joy Prince) and Jerry Fitzpatrick

**Also Present:** Councillor Oliver Lewis – Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure & Sport

**Apologies:** Councillor Joy Prince

### **PART A**

#### **8/20 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2020 were agreed as an accurate record.

#### **9/20 Disclosure of Interests**

There were no disclosures of interest made at the meeting.

#### **10/20 Urgent Business (if any)**

There were no items of urgent business.

#### **11/20 Fairfield Halls**

The Committee considered a report setting out information on both the redevelopment of Fairfield Halls by Brick by Brick and the ongoing operation of the venue by BHLive. A tour of the venue had been arranged for the members of the Committee prior to the meeting. The following were in attendance at the meeting for this item:-

- Councillor Oliver Lewis – Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure & Sport
- Shifa Mustafa – Executive Director for Place, Croydon Council
- Colm Lacey – Brick by Brick
- Neil Chandler – BH Live
- Natasha Bucknor – Talawa Theatre Company

- Sheree Vickers – Savvy Theatre Company

The first part of the item focussed in on the refurbishment of Fairfield Halls, with it confirmed that the current estimated cost for this was £42,600,000, with the project having been delivered by the Council's development company, Brick by Brick. It was also confirmed that cost of the redevelopment had been met through the release of land around the venue for other development and had not required direct funding from the Council.

It was highlighted by a member of the Committee that the original budget for the redevelopment of Fairfield Halls had been £30,000,000 and as such it was questioned why this had increased to £42,600,000 and whether any further increases were expected. In response it was confirmed that no further increases were expected, although the final accounts were still to be signed off with the contractor on the project. There were two main reasons for the increase, the first being design developments during the project such as upgrading the sprinkler system to meet current fire safety standards and secondly unforeseen issues such as the discovery of a significant amount of asbestos which required removal.

In response to a follow up question about whether any further capital expenditure was planned for the venue in the coming eighteen months it was confirmed by the operator, BH Live, that no additional financial expenditure was planned at this stage. It was advised that as part of the ongoing upkeep of the venue the Council would occasionally need to make further investment, but there were no planned works at this time.

Regarding the value of the land funding the development, it was confirmed that this was based on the current valuation which included the development of approximately 420 homes on the site. The previously proposed scheme was for a development of approximately 200 homes. As a result of the increased densification of the site, the value had risen to cover the full cost of the redevelopment.

In response to a question about the key risks identified at the outset of the project it was confirmed that asbestos had been identified. Work was undertaken to investigate the level of asbestos present in the building which established that it was located throughout. Despite this preliminary work, once the redevelopment commenced the level of asbestos found in the building was greater than expected. A decision was taken to completely remove asbestos from the site rather than encapsulating within the building, which was discovered to have previously been the case. Other elements of the project that contributed towards the increased cost included the need to completely replace the cladding on the building, rather than repairing the existing cladding and rebuilding the Arnhem section of the venue which proved to be more cost effective than repairing the existing structure.

Given the associated risks with redeveloping an older building, the Committee suggested that with the benefit of hindsight it may have been better to provide a cost range for the project rather than a specific budget total, which could be viewed as having been optimistic for a scheme on the scale of Fairfield Halls.

It was confirmed that approximately 10% of the total cost of the project had been spent on fees, which had helped to deliver much of the enabling work surrounding the project.

It was highlighted that the car park and landscaping around the venue had not been included in the scope of work (set out in appendix of the main report). As such it was questioned whether this would result in additional expenditure. In response it was confirmed that the budget related directly to the cost of redeveloping the building and not the external public realm and car parking costs.

In regard of the funding of £11,400,000 provided by the Coast to Capital Local Enterprise Partnership for the wider Fairfield scheme, it was questioned whether this was included in the budget total or had been allocated to other work. It was confirmed that part of the funding had been spent on the redevelopment of the Halls, with the remainder on the surrounding enabling development.

Although the car park had not been included in the scheduled of works for the Fairfield Halls redevelopment work was underway with it due to be open in eight to ten weeks. It was explained that the car park had originally been included as part of the planning application for the site, but due to Croydon College withdrawing from the scheme, it had meant that this section of the project was delayed as a planning variation was needed. It was confirmed that it was the responsibility of Brick by Brick to deliver the parking spaces.

In response to a question about changes made to the scope of works during the course of the project it was highlighted that delivery of the project had been handed to Brick by Brick following a decision by Cabinet in 2016. Once the decision had been made a full detailed design was undertaken in consultation with the Theatre's Trust and BH Live. There were land ownership changes during the course of the project, as well as Croydon College not proceeded with their proposed project which also led to changes to the scheme. The land ownership of the site had been transferred over to Brick by Brick to deliver enabling development that funded the refurbishment of the venue.

It was noted that the current layout of the public realm at the front of Fairfield Halls was temporary and as such it was questioned when this would be finished. It was advised that the public realm work was the responsibility of the Council who had commissioned a design team for the project, although it was likely to be two years before this was completed as it had to be delivered in conjunction with the next phase in the wider development of the site.

The second part of the item focussed on the ongoing operation of the venue, with it explained that the contract had been awarded to BH Live who would run the venue without cost to the Council. It was highlighted that the contract included provision for a diverse range of shows and as such it was questioned how this had progress since the venue reopened in September 2019. It was confirmed that at present the venue was still in its mobilisation phase, with a lot of work carried out prior to reopening to understand what the local

community wanted from the venue and to work with theatre operators and other performing arts groups to encourage full use of Fairfield Halls once it reopened. There had been challenges since the venue reopened, but BH Live had been realistic that this would be the case when bidding for the contract.

The current challenges were similar to those faced by other venues across the country which was predominately making sure there was an audience for the product provided. There was research undertaken daily on what local audiences wanted, where they live, how far they were willing to travel and how much they would spend which was used to inform the programme of events. However with the venue having been closed for three years, it meant that there was a lack of trust with audiences and a need to build a database of potential customers, both of which were challenging. 90,000 tickets had been sold since the venue reopened in September 2019 up to January 2020, which was only 23% less than the final year before the venue closed when sales had been at their highest level.

As the current occupancy rate was 30% against a project target of 45%, it was questioned whether the target was achievable. It was advised that the target was considered achievable by BH Live who were an established theatre operator with a lot of experience in the field. There had been delays in the completion of the project with the car park not yet reopened and the interior work only just completed, all of which would have had an impact on the initial performance of the venue. However ticket sales were only slightly down on those before the closure when many more events had been hosted. There had also been a significant number of both conference and church events at the venue, all of which pointed towards a positive future.

The representatives from the Talawa and Savvy Theatre Companies were also questioned on their experience of using the venue and their reasons for choosing Fairfield Halls to work with.

Sheree Vickers from the Savvy Theatre Company advised that having studio space in the venue allowed the company to bring groups together in a safe space to create theatre. The venue not only provided a safe studio space, but was as a whole welcoming to groups the theatre company worked such as the homeless and adults with learning disabilities. Having a permanent venue had increased the status of Savvy, allowing them to work with other leading cultural providers and to increase participation.

Natasha Bucknor from the Talawa Theatre Company highlighted that when the company was looking for a permanent home, they found in Croydon partners with similar views on the promotion of culture to address wider social issues. It was advised that the facilities offered at Fairfield Halls were world class, with the studio space allowing the company to develop its work. An unexpected positive of being located in Croydon was becoming part of the cultural and civic community in the borough, which had helped them to feel at home in the Fairfield Halls.

It was confirmed that the concessions contract mentioned in the report was the lease on the venue, which was for an initial ten year period with the

possibility of extending this for an additional five years. The Cabinet Member highlighted that the openness of BH Live to working in partnership with the Council should be commended and that it was welcomed that they shared an artistic and cultural vision for the borough with the Council.

In response to a question about how the performance of BH Live would be monitored, it was explained that a number of key performance indicators were being developed with the Council that would come into effect from April 2020. These would include audience numbers, community engagement, community hires (which were offered at up to 50% of the full hire charge), ticket pricing and the general trading position. It was agreed that performance information on the first full year of trading would be brought back to a future meeting of the Committee after April 2021.

It was highlighted by a Member that from their experience the online ticketing system could be difficult to negotiate, with concern that this may discourage some potential customers from purchasing tickets. In response it was confirmed that BH Live was looking to upgrade their ticketing system which would address these concerns.

It was noted that there was significant public concern about the cost of redevelopment of the venue, which was difficult to allay with a significant proportion of the work hidden from public view. As such it was questioned what could be done to restore public confidence in the venue. In response it was highlighted that the refurbishment of the venue was part of a wider regeneration project, which was using development elsewhere on the site to fund the refurbishment without cost to the Council. The project had also acted as a trigger for other regeneration and development elsewhere in the town centre. It was also highlighted that without the newly refurbished Fairfield Halls it was unlikely that Croydon would have made the shortlist for the London Borough of Culture 2023. It was advised that a photo exhibition detailing the refurbishment work could be staged at the venue to help the public understand the scale of the work that had been required.

At the conclusion of the item the Chair thanked the attendees for their participation in the meeting.

## **Conclusions**

Following discussion of the report, the Committee reached the following conclusions:-

1. That the Fairfield regeneration scheme is complex in nature, with separate but interdependent schemes taking place at the Halls and across the surrounding public realm and amenities. As the different schemes have evolved, it has become increasingly difficult to easily understand what work was being commissioned and at what cost. The Council could have communicated this information more effectively as the scheme evolved to help ensure that there was a better understanding of the scheme.

2. That a definitive value for money judgement can only be made when the final breakdown of all costs is finalised, and at least a year of full site operation, to understand if the Council's objectives of a revitalised Fairfield Halls has been achieved
3. The Committee was reassured that there was a strong community programme in place and that the operator, BH Live, was ensuring that there was a strong community focus at the Halls.
4. That while occupancy levels at the Halls were not as high as immediately prior to their closure for its restoration, they were positive in the context of the building work having only recently been completed and car parking provision not being available. It would take a full year of operation before the Committee could fully assess the performance of the restored Halls.

### **Recommendations**

The Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend to the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport that BH Live be invited to attend a meeting of the Committee in the summer of 2021 to update Members on the progress made, to allow the committee to assess their progress against the operator's original business case.

#### 12/20 **Question Time: Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure & Sport**

The Committee considered a report together with a presentation delivered at the meeting from the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure & Sport, Councillor Oliver Lewis, which provided an overview of the key activities within the Culture, Leisure & Sport portfolio over the past year.

A copy of the presentation can be found at the following link:-

<https://democracy.croydon.gov.uk/documents/b7156/Question%20Time%20Cabinet%20Member%20for%20Culture%20Leisure%20Sport%20-%20Presentation%2010th-Feb-2020%2018.30%20Scru.pdf?T=9>

During the course of the presentation the following points were noted:-

- £42,600,000 had been invested in the restoration of Fairfield Halls which had resulted in the provision of an inclusive space for all of Croydon.
- There was a growing cultural calendar in the borough with the Pride and Mela events attracting 22,000 people to Wandle Park. There had also been larger events such as the Ends Festival in Lloyd Park. Work continued on growing and developing the local music scene.
- There was a thriving cultural network in the borough with 500 people on the Council's cultural database

- The Council was being held up as an example of best practice for the creation of its Night Time Plan, which had been developed in consultation with the Scrutiny and Overview Committee.
- There had been a £5,000,000 capital investment in the borough's libraries to create modern digitally enabled spaces, with the Selsdon Library the most recently upgraded.
- There were a number of threats to the continued growth of culture in the borough such as the economic uncertainty making finding new investment challenging, historic underinvestment in the cultural sector and the wider economic issues restricting the public's spending on non-essentials such as theatre tickets.
- There were active Friends Groups in the parks across the borough and investment continued to be made in parks with data being used to inform this approach.
- It was due to be confirmed on 11 February whether Croydon had been named the London Borough of Culture for 2023.
- There had been historic underinvestment in sport in the borough which was changing with the Park Life project and the installation of outdoor gym equipment in parks, most recently in Norbury Park. The New Addington Leisure Centre had opened in January, providing a modern sports and leisure facility for the local community.
- The Museum of Croydon was working towards reaccreditation, following the loss of its status in 2013. The future of the museum would be closely linked to the Clocktower development.

Following the presentation the Committee was given the opportunity to question the Cabinet Member about his portfolio. The first question concerned the provision of cafes in the borough's libraries and how the success of these would be reviewed. It was advised that the provision of café facilities was decided on a case by case basis depending on the space available and whether there were existing alternatives in the near vicinity. As the provision of cafes in libraries was a new approach, each location would be reviewed and if they proved not to be successful the space would be utilised for another purpose.

An update was provided on the installation of three all-weather cricket pitches in the South Norwood, Sanderstead and Norbury parks. Two had been installed, but the installation of the pitch at Norbury Park had been delayed from last summer due to weather conditions damaging the ground. It was still planned that the pitch would be installed this year.

It was highlighted that some of the paths in the borough's parks were not sufficient to support maintenance vehicle, which had resulted in tyre damage on the surrounding grass. As such it was questioned whether there was

anything that could be done to address this. In response it was advised that there would be differing views over widening the paths in parks with some people not in favour of reducing the amount of green space available to do so. There was no budget available to commit to widening the paths in parks across the borough, but the width of any new path could be designed with this provision in mind. As an alternative it was suggested that there could be a conversation with the contractors about the size of the vehicles used to ensure that they were suitable for the space available.

It was confirmed that money had been set aside for the provision of play spaces in parks across the borough with the team working on this at the moment. It was highlighted that as well as affecting the budget, austerity had also had an impact upon the number of staff in the Parks team which meant that projects sometimes took longer to be delivered.

It was advised that groups such as the Local Study Forum were important to promoting and preserving the history and heritage of the borough, and the Cabinet Member was happy to engage with these groups.

It was questioned whether when upgrading Council facilities such as libraries consideration was given to the needs of users with specific sensory sensitivities such as those with certain forms of autism. The Cabinet Member highlighted that he had met with the Minister for Disabled People, Justin Tomlinson MP, at the Fairfield Halls to discuss the inclusive pantomime performances that were being delivered. This example could be used as a good model for other service areas such as gyms and leisure centres. It was acknowledged that further work was needed to understand the needs of the autistic community in the borough which could be informed through the work of the Council's Autism Champion, Councillor Jerry Fitzpatrick.

The community engagement in the Selsdon library was welcomed with it noted that the community was preparing a plan for cultural events at the facility. The Cabinet Member confirmed that he was happy to engage with and support local groups who were taking the initiative to promote culture in their own areas.

As Croydon was bidding to become the London Borough of Culture for 2023, it was questioned what this would mean for the borough should the bid be successful. It was confirmed that should it be awarded it would help to raise the cultural profile of the borough. It would also deliver funding of £1,350,000 from the Greater London Authority as well as opening up additional opportunities to bid for funding from organisations such as the Arts Council, which could result in an externally funded budget for the project of approximately £4,000,000.

Should the Council be successful in being named as the London Borough of Culture for 2023, it was questioned whether there should be a Public Art Strategy created to use as a guide for any newly commissioned public art. It was confirmed that the Council was in a position to reflect on the current public art in the borough, with work underway on the Croydon Collection of Public Art which would help to inform future public art.

It was questioned whether there was a comprehensive strategy for play spaces in the borough. In response it was highlighted that there was over 50 play sites across the borough with a limited budget for maintenance and improvement works. As such work had been undertaken to identify the sites most in need of maintenance or with health & safety issues. This information was then taken into account along with other information such as accessibility and childhood obesity data to draw up a list of the ten sites most in need of investment. It was confirmed that on a wider level the Administration was keen to ensure that the general environment of the borough could be made as child friendly as possible.

In response to a question about the pricing of memberships for the Council's leisure and sports centres it was advised that these facilities were operated by GLL on the Council's behalf and the pricing structure was based on their experience. There had been an increase in the membership fee for the New Addington Leisure Centre as prior to the rebuild the fee had been held at the same level from when GLL took over the contract. Whereas other centres had gradually increased membership fees, the New Addington Leisure Centre had increased from a previously low level to a more standard cost with the opening of the new facility. It was advised that it could be explored with GLL whether there was any support that could be provided to previous users of the old facility who were struggling with the new charges.

Concern was raised about the scope of the Music City project with it highlighted that it only seemed to focus on the musical history of the borough since the late 1970's when there was a significant history prior to this in the 1950's and 1960's. It was confirmed that the list was not definitive and instead outlined the key musical genres that had been highlighted as important for the borough. Other genres of music would also be celebrated through the musical heritage trail and the Music City project.

It was highlighted that the Committee had previously recommended that the by-laws covering the Council's parks be reviewed and as such it was disappointing to note that apart from a couple of small changes a wider review had not been undertaken. In response it was acknowledged that some of the by-laws were outdated, for instance those that prevented cycling in parks as there were many locations where this activity should be encouraged. As such this could be updated on a park by park basis with a wider review undertaken to ensure the Council's parks were available for a wide range of activities.

It was noted that Croydon Central library seemed to be well used by people wanting to find a quiet study space and as such it was questioned whether there were plans to upgrade the facilities and increase the opening hours to include evenings and weekends. In response the importance of the provision of study space in the borough's libraries was acknowledged. It was agreed that the possibility of Sunday opening would be explored and there was a possibility that the Open Plus scheme would allow access to libraries outside of the standard opening hours. Consideration was given to current technology requirements when refurbishing libraries to ensure that the facilities delivered met the expectations of library users. Given the diverse nature of the borough

consideration was also given to the availability of books and other resources in a variety of different languages.

It was noted that £12,000,000 had been raised from the sale of the Riesco Collection which had originally been intended to fund the restoration of the Fairfield Halls. As the cost of the restoration had been met by Brick by Brick, it was questioned whether this money should continue to be allocated for cultural use. In response it was highlighted that the sale of the Riesco Collection in 2013 had a significant negative impact for culture in the borough, which it was only now starting to recover from. The money raised by the sale had not been ring fenced for cultural activity and had instead been transferred to the General Fund by the previous Administration and used for the wider Capital Programme.

At the conclusion of the item the Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for his attendance at the meeting and his engagement with the questions of the Committee.

### **Conclusions**

Following discussion of the report, the Committee reached the following conclusions:-

1. That the portfolio is particularly cross cutting in nature and has interdependencies across the majority of Cabinet portfolios.
2. That there are examples of where more co-ordination between portfolios would be of benefit, such as the use of inappropriate vehicles by other council services in the borough's parks.
3. That while the evolving cultural programme in the Borough was to be commended for promoting Croydon's youth culture, the programme should also be inclusive of all ages and celebrate the many historical aspects of culture in Croydon.
4. That the trailing of extended library opening hours was to be commended and likely to provide a beneficial study environment at evening and weekends.
5. That the previous recommendation requesting a review of the Council's by-laws in parks had not been undertaken and remained outstanding.

### **Recommendations**

The Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend to the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport that:-

1. That the musical heritage trial be developed to include Croydon's rich musical heritage in the genres of rock, R&B and folk music.

2. That the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources and the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport expedite the review of by-laws in the Council's park and open spaces.
3. That the Cabinet Member be asked to provide an update in 12 months on the success of the implementation of the Library Plus programme.
4. That the use of Council vehicles in its parks be limited to vehicles that are appropriate and sensitive to the park environment.

13/20 **Pre-Decision Scrutiny: Proposed General Fund Revenue Budget 2020/21**

The Committee considered a report, introduced by the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, Councillor Simon Hall, which set out the Administration's budget proposals for 2020-21. During the introduction to the report the following points were noted:-

- It was a challenging environment for the local government finance, with continuing austerity and uncertainty over the longer term funding from central government beyond 2020-21 making it difficult to plan financially.
- The Council will receive a £1,000,000 increase to its grant, which equates to a real term cut when balanced against the ending of the London Business Rates pilot.
- Despite cross party support across the Council, the cost for supporting Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) had not been addressed and was costing the Council £9,000,000 each year due to a shortfall in funding from the Home Office.
- Protecting front line services continued to be a priority in the budget which a focus on new, innovative digital ways of work to deliver improvements for residents.
- Through sound financial management the budget for 2020-21 increases the contingency and also looks to invest £5,000,000 in to Council reserves, along with continued investment over the next few years.
- The budget looks to ensure that services are delivered efficiently through partnership and localities based work. Funding will also be sought from partners in areas where there is considered to be an imbalance.
- Work will start in the next few weeks on monitoring both the budget and the action required to deliver the budget.

Following the introduction by the Cabinet Member, the Committee was given the opportunity to ask questions on the information provided.

The Committee learnt that although there had been periods in the past when the support provided by the Council for unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) had been fully funded by the Home Office, due to the way funding was currently administered that was not presently the case and had not been for a number of years. However, the fact that there was cross party support on the Council and from the local MPs on this issue would help to make the case for fair funding for Croydon. Recent conversations with the government about UASC funding had been encouraging, leading to optimism that the current funding shortfall of approximately £9,000,000 per year would be addressed.

The Committee gave consideration to the fees and charges for Council services, noting that there would be an increase to pay and display parking charges for the first time in a number of years, with care being taken to ensure these increases were fair and equitable. The full year effect of implementing the emissions based charging for residents parking permits and increased Building Control charges had also been factored into the budget.

The Committee questioned whether there would be any contract variations with the Council's waste collection providers, Veolia, and learnt that there had been an increase in the cost of the contract of £2,500,000 which had been factored into the budget. The cost had increased due to the growth in the number of properties in the borough and also other contractual issues that had been resolved following negotiations through the South London Waste Partnership.

The Committee questioned the priorities used when setting the capital programme for 2020-21, with it advised that it was focussed on areas outlined in both the Labour Party Manifesto and the Corporate Plan. These included asset investment particularly the provision of new housing, ensuring that the requisite school places were available including the provision of a new Special Educational Needs (SEN) school in New Addington and renewing facilities such as roads and investing in sustainability.

The Committee learned that there continued to be uncertainty over the Government's plans for fair funding for local authorities, which meant it was challenging to plan for the longer term. Once there was additional clarity, an updated Medium Term Financial Strategy would be produced. It was hoped that the outcome from the Fair Funding Review would be positive for Croydon given that the current level of funding provided was based on out of date census data which was no longer reflective of the borough.

In response to a request for clarity about the focus on high risk and high spend services, it was advised that these were predominately people focussed services such as Adults and Children Social Care and SEN Transport, which were demand driven and as such required additional focus to manage potential risks. Monitoring of these service would focus on both what was being delivered and how it was delivered.

As there had been different programmes aimed at delivering savings over a number of years it was questioned whether these had achieved their targets.

It was advised that recent efficiency programmes had achieved significant savings for the Council and had also freed up floor space in Bernard Weatherill House which had been used to deliver a rental income of £4,000,000 per year. The savings delivered had been in the region of £10,000,000, which had enabled the level of reserves to be maintained, unlike many other local authorities.

As there had been an increasing amount of partnership working between the Council and Croydon Health Service NHS Trust over the past few years, the Committee questioned whether it was likely that there would be increasing amounts of partnership working going forward. In response it was highlighted that the One Croydon Alliance had been successful in delivering better outcomes for over 65's in the borough and saving money, as such it was likely to lead more opportunities in this area. These included plans being developed to expand the One Croydon Alliance to all age care and the recent creation of the Health and Care Board which would see even closer integration between health and social care. In doing this it was essential to ensure that savings were shared across health and social care and as such negotiations were underway with health to address the current imbalance.

The Committee welcomed the inclusion in the budget for 2020-21 of £5,000,000 being added to the Council's reserves to address concern about the current level which was perceived to be low. However it was acknowledged that the budget would need to be carefully managed throughout the year to ensure that it could be achieved.

As the budget included savings within Children Services, the Committee questioned how this would be managed without service delivery being negatively affected. Reassurance was given that none of the savings identified within the Children Service would involve any of the permanent staff and a range of performance indicators would be used to ensure any savings did not undermine service delivery.

The Committee asked the Council's Section 151 Officer whether the budget proposed met the requirements for a sound budget. It was confirmed that this was the case, although it was highlighted that there would be a need for continual monitoring of the budget throughout the year along with the agility to respond quickly to any challenges as they arose and address accordingly.

The Committee also sought reassurance that the budget monitoring process would be improved to ensure that issues were quickly responded to and managed appropriately during the year, lessening the need to find in-year savings. It was confirmed that extra resource would be put into finance, including business analytics, to ensure that effective monthly monitoring could take place and forecasting was more accurate. A greater level of monitoring would also be put places in the previously mentioned high risk areas, looking at underlying actions as well as headline budgets.

At the conclusion of the item the Chair thanked both the Cabinet Member and the Section 151 Officer for their attendance at the meeting and their engagement with the questions of the Committee.

## **Conclusions**

At the conclusion of the item the Committee reached the following conclusions:-

1. That the Council was continuing to face significant pressure on its budget position.
2. Supported the proposed increase in balance which will help manage financial uncertainty.
3. That the Council's ability to accurately forecast and monitor the delivery of required savings would be crucial to achieving the budget in the 2020/21 financial year.

## **Recommendation**

The Committee agreed to recommend to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources that an update on the bedding in of the Council's new financial monitoring systems be provided in September 2020.

## **14/20 Exclusion of the Press and Public**

This motion was not required.

The meeting ended at 9.35 pm

**Signed:**

**Date:**

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