

Comments on Council Activities.

2021/22 budget

Despite COVID-19 we have managed our way through 2020/21 and have added to the Council's reserves.

Government did what they said they would and have provided funding to support councils. They will pay 72% of lost income from car parks and leisure centres and other services that feature in the Council's fees and charges lists. Funding was also provided to support older people and to assist in moving people out of hospital settings into Care Homes. My personal view is that this was initially done without a proper risk assessment which led to people catching covid. To date 92 people have died in care homes in the Borough and 232 in a hospital setting.

We will receive the same level of funding for the first quarter of 2021/22 but this will leave the Council with an additional budget burden of £9.25M in lost income and increased costs. Setting the budget against this backdrop has been challenging and has led to some services reductions that I would rather not have made but we are obligated in law to deliver a balanced budget.

Waste collection service

The change to the biweekly collection of black bins, which will happen in June, is much more to do with a recycling drive that to save money. There is evidence to show that where this change has been made recycling has increased. The Council is running a campaign to promote the use of food waste bins as food is a significant portion of the municipal waste that we collect.

Libraries

It would be wrong if I did not mention the Library consultation. If implemented this would lead to the closure of a number of smaller libraries including Sunninghill. There has been a strong response to the consultation and discussion are taking place across the borough on how libraries might be managed at lower cost.

Climate change

In December 2020 an Environment and Climate strategy was published. There have been two immediate spin offs. Firstly, an Interim Sustainability Position Statement was published which sets out sustainability requirements for new homes. This includes nett zero carbon and if this cannot be achieved on site a charge would be made per tonne of carbon and this placed into a Carbon Offset fund that would be ring fenced for carbon reduction projects.

The Council's Pensions Panel has agreed a responsible investment policy which is focused on the achievement of the Paris Accord and zero carbon by 2050 but importantly includes governance and employment practices. The Borough manages the pensions of the six Berkshire Authorities and this is pooled with two other funds and managed by LPP. The combined fund amounts to nearly £20 billion and allow pressure to be brought to bear on companies in which we are invested. In the past two to three years responsible investing has become high profile and new investments will be a challenge for any company not signed up zero carbon in 2050.

Maidenhead Regeneration

The Maidenhead regeneration project, funded by private investments, is moving ahead. One of the Council Joint Venture projects is delivering 229 homes now and a planning application has been made for another 439, of these 33% will be affordable homes. Areli Real Estates proposal for the

centre of Maidenhead gained planning approval a couple of weeks ago. This £300M project will bring much needed change, economic vibrancy and more new homes to the centre of Maidenhead.

Closer to home I understand that the application to develop the Green Meadow Surgery is likely to be withdrawn.

Cllr. David Hilton

23rd March 2021