

COUNCIL MEETING 25 FEBRUARY 2021

Item 4 – Public Questions Received under Standing Order 27.5

	Question From	Question to	
1	Peter Williams	Cllr Louisson	Request that the council use reserve funds to keep council tax down.
<p>Reply EHDC currently has the second lowest council tax of all neighbouring authorities. Our Council tax is currently 2.6% lower than in 2014/15, compared to the 21% increase levied over the same period by one neighbouring authority, so there is no doubt that we place great importance on providing value for money and keeping your council tax down.</p> <p>Currently within the reserve balance forecast at 1st April 2021 there is estimated to be only £3.5 million which has not been earmarked for specific purposes. This is the balance of revenue funds which are there to support unexpected events or unforeseen emergencies. This is the minimum that our S151 officer believes is prudent to hold as general working capital for the authority, and represents 30% of a single year's net expenditure for the authority, 3 months salaries or less than a month's gross trading expenditure.</p>			
2	Peter Williams	Cllr Louisson	Request that the Council lobby government to give them emergency money to keep the council tax down.
<p>Reply We are already in regular touch with government regarding access to the many different pandemic related funds, and have been successful in securing approximately £1.5M in non ringfenced funds up to the end of December 2020. This has almost exactly balanced the increased net cost of services experienced during the pandemic, such that we expect to end the year with a small surplus. Should this funding have been absent leading to a service deficit, then council tax would have had to rise by approximately 21% to secure a balanced budget.</p>			

Appendix 1

3	Ian James	Cllr Thomas	<p>In the latest year period for which statistics are available what proportion of recycle waste loads were reject from the East Hampshire District Council's collection. For what proportion of the total rejection were the following materials responsible:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Plastic 2. Paper 3. metal <p>(actual figures or percentages are acceptable)</p>
<p><u>Reply</u></p> <p>Waste analysis is carried out by HCC at the MRF and reported monthly to us. The latest annual figures we have are for 2019/20 and show a contamination rate in EHDC of 14.7%; this compares with 15.9% across Hampshire as a whole. The plastic contamination rate was 2.78%. The analysis does not break down metals and paper, they are included in 'other'.</p> <p>Project Integra (PI), the Hampshire waste partnership, commissioned a waste composition analysis report relating to 2017/18 (attached). Alternatively the report can be accessed at: https://www.hants.gov.uk/wasteandrecycling/projectintegra/documents?filter=.Report . For this report PI targeted individual resident's bins rather than whole loads delivered to the MRF. The report breaks down in detail what residents had put in their residual and recycling bins across Hampshire, although it does not break the data down to individual district areas.</p>			
4	Ian James	Cllr Costigan	<p>The EHDC commercial property strategy defines four levels of speculative risk and that the appropriate one must be assigned to every acquisition. The hotel sited on the A3 Liphook services complex was acquired and then disposed of at a loss of over £300,000 to the East Hampshire council tax payers. Which risk level was this disastrous speculation assigned?</p>
<p><u>Reply</u></p> <p>Liphook services was assessed as being in the Opportunistic category.</p>			

Appendix 1

5	Ian Robertson	Cllr Thomas	Do the council intend to use the powers created under the Public Space Protection Order Dogs to help in the control of the hugely increasing problem of livestock worrying in East Hampshire, a predominantly rural district, from loose dogs on public bridleways and footpaths near livestock. Using the offence of 'failure to put dogs on a lead when requested to do so by an authorised officer.' i.e. could the authorised officer request that all dogs in the vicinity of livestock on public paths be put on leads, perhaps in the form of a notice on relevant paths?
<p><u>Reply</u></p> <p>There are existing legal powers in place namely Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953 to cover sheep worrying, which includes a dog being at large (not on a lead or otherwise under close control) in a field or enclosure where there are sheep. The offence empowers Police to seize the dog and prosecute the dog owner.</p>			
6	Moirra Johnson	Cllr Louisson	<p>EHDC proposes a 2% increase in 2021 on Council Tax at a time of economic hardship for many of its residents. Can EHDC confirm how much was spent on external advisers in the last 3 years 2018-21?</p> <p>Ref: EHDC Supplementary Information EAST HAMPSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL CABINET 4 February 2021:</p> <p>6.1 The Council utilises the knowledge and skills of its internal officers when considering capital investment decisions and where necessary it also relies on the expert knowledge of specialist external advisors.</p> <p>6.2 The Council employs professionally qualified legal, finance and property officers who are able to offer advice and guidance when considering any capital investment decisions</p> <p>6.6 The Council uses external advisors where necessary in order to complement the knowledge its own officers hold. Some of these advisors are contracted on long term contracts or are appointed on an ad-hoc basis when necessary.</p>

Reply

Thank you for your question. In the most recent Residents survey undertaken by EHDC as part of a county-wide initiative, completed in December 2020, 74% of residents indicated that they had experienced either no impact or a positive impact to their household finances during the pandemic. The proposed Council Tax increase is intended to support community and welfare initiatives targeted at those residents who may be encountering difficulties.

EHDC will be able to provide details of the expenditure on external advisors during the three year period requested once that period is complete after 31st March 2021, and will provide a written response once the accounts for that period are complete.

7	Moira Johnson	Cllr Louisson	Can EHDC confirm how it has helped childcare provider businesses in EHDC manage financially throughout the lockdown?
---	---------------	---------------	--

Reply

Nurseries that are Ofsted registered and have a Business Rates assessment qualify for Nursery Rate Relief. This means that they paid no Business Rates during this financial year.

Any Nursery provider entitled to Small Business Rate Relief qualified for a £10,000 grant under the Small Business Grant Fund.

Childcare providers who work as a Nursery or from their own home could have applied for a Discretionary Grant under the first lockdown and are entitled to make an application for an Additional Restrictions Grant under the current lockdown.

8	Moira Johnson	Cllr Drew	In view of the widely reported heavier burden that Covid has made on women, can EHDC confirm it's gender pay gap for 2020 yet? I note from https://cdn.easthants.gov.uk/public/documents that in 2019 the figures published showed a substantial gender pay gap.
<p><u>Reply</u></p> <p>By way of background, the statutory requirement to publish the gender pay gap in medium and large size public sector organisations (over 250 employees) was introduced in April 2018 and EHDC has published from this date. Previous and current reports show both Councils' commitment to addressing and improving the gender pay gap. Due to the Covid emergency there was no reporting required in 2020 and the deadline for 2021 is 5th October. As such the last set of data reported is as per the published report on the council's website. This will be updated as per the 2021 deadline and published.</p> <p>The latest data submitted for 2019 shows that the gender pay gap at both Councils is below the public-sector benchmark. Whilst this is positive there is still a reported gender pay gap in place. It is important to note that the presence of this gender pay gap does not indicate an equal pay issue. Job evaluation systems in place at both councils are designed to ensure that work is rewarded equally and fairly.</p> <p>Generally, the gap is linked to how women are recruited and promoted at work and can be an indicator to how organisations accommodate the different needs of both genders. Typically, women continue to undertake caring responsibilities for children and other family members whilst developing a career and this has been proven to impact their pay prospects. Women also continue to be disadvantaged in gaining roles at higher salary levels in organisations overall and so female pay is typically lower than male pay. This is true in the public sector as in the private and the national benchmark figures are provided within the report for comparison purposes.</p> <p>Improving the gender pay gap could lead to cost savings in the short and long term due to better attraction of talent from a wider pool and reduced turnover and loss of talent from female workers if there were further opportunities for women to advance their careers e.g., flexible working arrangements: more job share arrangements etc.</p> <p>The Organisational Development strategy is designed to support the corporate strategy in better enabling the councils to attract and retain talent and engage staff to best effect and removing/reducing the gender pay gap is part of these actions.</p>			