

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 1 November 2017

Subject: Finance

Portfolio Holder: Councillor G Mohindra

Recommending: That the report of the Finance Portfolio Holder be noted

Accountancy

Our last Council meeting saw the adoption of the Financial Statements for 2016/17 and that has allowed both officers and Members to now focus on the budget for 2018/19 and beyond. The budget process is being conducted with a high level of uncertainty, with details still awaited on key Government policies areas like fair funding, planning fees and social housing. It is hoped that greater clarity will emerge in the Chancellor's Budget on 22 November. The indications at the moment are that lower productivity has led to slower growth and this will limit the Chancellor's room to manoeuvre. As is usual for this time of year, the NHS is demanding more funds to stave off a winter crisis. This is likely to mean that any additional funds allocated to public services will not be coming to District Councils.

The next meeting of the Finance Cabinet Committee on 16 November will receive an update on the budget position and the first draft of the savings and growth lists. There is still money available in the Invest to Save Reserve and Members are welcome to discuss any ideas on savings with myself or the Director of Resources. Even though this initiative has been in place for a couple of years now, I am sure there are still good ideas out there that could help us achieve our savings targets.

Benefits

The annual consultation on the Council's scheme for Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) was due to run from August to early October. However, it was brought to my attention that a link to the consultation that had been published on social media did not work. As this was highlighted close to the end of the consultation period I arranged for the consultation to be extended by two weeks and for publicity to be issued to make residents aware of this. The link from the Council's website was set up correctly but the fault with the social media link may have deterred some people from responding and so it was important to both extend the opportunity and make social media users aware of this.

Even though no change in the level of support, and no other fundamental changes are proposed, it would still be helpful to gain the thoughts of residents on the proposed scheme, both residents who benefit from it and those that effectively pay for it.

Revenues

At the Cabinet meeting on 12 October delegated authority was given to the Director of Resources, in consultation with myself, to determine whether or not this Council

should participate in any Essex wide application to become a pilot for 100% retention of business rates. Since that meeting the Essex Finance Officers have discussed financial models with an independent specialist and it is evident that a 100% retention pool would be likely to benefit all of the authorities taking part.

Work is underway to complete an application by the deadline of 27 October and I am hopeful that it will be possible for all the Essex authorities to agree the governance arrangements for the pool and also satisfy their own internal arrangements.