

REPORT OF CABINET

(Meeting held on 7 April 2021)

1. COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY – REPORT FROM THE ACTING LEADER OF THE COUNCIL (MINUTE NO 176)

At the Cabinet meeting, the Acting Leader of the Council provided a verbal update on the Council's latest progress in response to and recovery from COVID-19.

Going live the week of the Cabinet meeting, the Council's Revenues department will once again be working hard to get the £12m of government funded restart grants out to eligible businesses as soon as practically possible, after completing all the necessary pre-payment checks. Cabinet would like to highlight how important grant funding has been to businesses in the New Forest to date, and welcome the additional grants to support their re-opening.

With regard to Council meetings, the Government has confirmed that it will not extend the Regulations that permit Virtual Meetings beyond 7 May 2021. Consequently, a review is being undertaken on the delivery of face to face meetings in line with Government restrictions. Councillors will be kept informed of this work. An option promoted by the Government for those authorities without elections, is to bring forward meetings ahead of 7 May 2021, when they can still be held virtually, providing more time to prepare for the safe return of face to face meetings.

Looking more broadly at a return to office working for the Council, a staff poll and a survey for Members are being considered to collect a broad range of views.

2. FREEPORTS BID (MINUTE NO 177)

The Cabinet are pleased to report that the Solent was one of eight Freeports announced in the March budget by the Government. Freeports are a Government flagship programme that will play an important part in the UK's post Covid economic recovery, contributing to realising the levelling up agenda. It is estimated that a successful Solent Freeport will attract £2 billion of investment with the potential to create 52,000 new local jobs. This provides a significant opportunity for the New Forest. Work is already ongoing both locally and with the Government to move the proposal forward.

3. STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER (MINUTE NO 178)

The Cabinet, following consideration by the Council's four Overview and Scrutiny Panels and Audit Committee, adopted a Strategic Risk Register.

The adopted Strategic Risk Register contains the significant risks, as identified by senior and executive council officers in consultation with the Portfolio Holders, in the Council achieving the priorities set out in the 'Community Matters Corporate Plan 2020-24'.

It is important that the Council identifies and, where practical, mitigates risk. Portfolio Holders will work with officers to monitor the strategic risks identified within their portfolios.

4. FINANCIAL MONITORING – 2020/21 PROVISIONAL OUTTURN (MINUTE NO 179)

The Cabinet, following the adoption of the Emergency Budget 2020/21 in September 2020, and subsequent Financial Monitoring Report in December 2020, noted an

update on the General Fund, Capital and Housing Revenue Account budgets, adjusting for any budget changes now required.

Given the unprecedented year the Council has been through in requiring a new emergency budget, the Cabinet are pleased with the predicted financial outturn within services, whilst noting that the final business rate and council tax positions will not be confirmed until a little later.

To have maintained this momentum in the most challenging of years is a remarkable achievement and is a testament to the dedication and commitment of everyone involved.

**COUNCILLOR E HERON
CHAIRMAN**