

Earley Town Council

Policy & Resources Committee

Annual Report 2020/21 from the Chair of the Policy & Resources Committee,

Cllr Clive Jones, Leader of the Council.

Because of the Covid 19 pandemic, during the last year the Town Council's Policy & Resources Committee has met via zoom.

These meetings received regular reports on the effects of Covid 19 on the working of the Council and how this has affected the Council's finances.

During the last year the Council has coped really well in very difficult circumstances.

We have suffered a huge hit to our income by way of a substantial reduction in income from our halls and community centres across Earley.

The Town Clerk and I decided at a very early stage in the pandemic that we should keep a very tight lid on expenditure. Nobody knew what the financial effects of the pandemic would be so we had to be careful and cautious.

Everyone at Earley Town Council (ETC) played their part in ensuring that the Council continued to deliver services wherever it could for residents, and all Council staff should be thanked for their contribution over the last year.

I am very pleased once again with the thorough and effective budget process adopted - the second budget under the Liberal Democrats.

ETC staff have done a great job negotiating with our services providers and implementing and understanding the new finance package which was put in place last year.

When the Liberal Democrats became the majority party on the Council, we were horrified that Council Officers were expected to use out of date finance and IT systems that should have been replaced many years ago. We now have a finance system fit for purpose and several members of staff trained to use it. We hope to be making improvements to the website during the next year.

Under the Liberal Democrats the Council received a clean bill of health from its auditor – the first time this had happened for three years.

Due to Covid restrictions we have not been able to finish the transfer of Sibly Park Woods and grass areas from Persimmon Homes to ETC. A new financial agreement was agreed by the Town Council with Persimmon in July 2019 that was a significant improvement on the negotiations by the previous Council.

The transfer of this land to ETC should now be finalised during this municipal year. I am very pleased that the Town Clerk has been able to start this process again.

Because of Covid 19 we have also had to delay the extension to the May's Lane cemetery, but again we expect to move ahead with this during this municipal year.

The committee approved a budget process for agreeing the 2021-22 budget, all councillors were invited to attend these meetings.

As Leader of the Council, I was very keen that we set a careful and cautious budget and I believe that this has been achieved. We still don't know what the rest of 2021 will bring for us in terms of community hall bookings so setting income at the levels we have I think will prove to be the right thing to do.

Our 2021-22 budget once again shows a proper level of General Reserves, in contrast to the previous political administration of the council. We have also begun to make prudent earmarked reserves for vehicles and play equipment, something that should really have been considered before.

We continue to put cash behind youth projects and environmental projects. We are making improvements to Sol Joel Park, improving the cricket square and other pitches. Hopefully cricket matches can be played there later this year.

The Policy & Resources Committee set an increase in precept of 1% an annual increase per household of £0.72p (£81.82 - £82.60 for a band D house) for the year 2021-22.

During the last year the Policy & Resources Committee approved grants to local organisations of nearly £12,000. These grants will make a significant difference to the work of these organisations that help our residents.

Under Liberal Democrat management, Earley Town Council is well placed to deliver services to residents of Earley Town in a cost effective and efficient way.

To sum up, we have a good team of Officers at Earley Town Council looking after the Town's assets and the finances, who have worked very well during the pandemic. Earley Town was one of the few councils that remained open throughout most of the last year; all ETC staff should be thanked for their hard work in these difficult times.

Cllr Clive Jones

Chair of the Policy & Resources Committee.

Leader of Earley Town Council.