

ENHANCEMENTS TO THE 2021/22 BUDGET PROPOSALS FROM THE INDEPENDENT GROUP

RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL:

It is recommended that Council approves the two enhancements to its 2021/22 Budget, as detailed below. These amendments will support the Council's commitment to tackle the Climate and Environmental Emergency and many of its corporate objectives, including its corporate themes of: '*A Green Borough*' and '*Healthy Communities*'. These enhancements to the proposed budget can all be met from within existing resources with no requirement to further increase Council Tax:

- (1) The Council enhances its commitment to the Health and Wellbeing of residents, in particular our older residents who experience digital exclusion, by allocating £20,000 (from: within existing Economic Development and Health and Wellbeing budgets) to improve access to online services.**
- (2) The Council enhances its commitment to the Climate and Environmental emergency by allocating £20,000 (from: Transport Policy savings) to improve access to public transport, through an access to public transport feasibility study.**

These two recommendations, we feel, would significantly enhance the lives of residents, empower greater independence, social interaction and start to facilitate some of the aspirations of the Climate and Environmental emergency which needs to be addressed.

The first proposal is to help empower our residents by ensuring they are better equipped to access services and opportunities through effective IT training. It has become apparent, particularly during the Covid19 pandemic, that many of our residents' experience concern and lack the confidence to set up programs or apps. This training would enable residents to have the appropriate skills and tools to shop online; chat 'face to face' with friends and family; and access many other services. Many people do not need the finer detail once set up. The focus needs to be on how to use a program or system. There is also a need to be able to verify information, when malicious emails arrive stating, "*you have been hacked*" – a place where they can go to feel confident to check the validity of what they have received. It is hoped that an external organisation (from maybe the third or educational sector) might be able to provide this assistance to train and offer advice.

This initiative would help to drive up confidence and provide the opportunity for some of our older residents, to feel more independent again. By addressing digital exclusion, it may help to combat feelings of isolation, provide access to services, such as books through the Library and to purchase goods and services safely.

It is likely the experience of Eastleigh Borough Residents who experience digital exclusion is replicated across the County. The intention would be to monitor the success of the scheme and roll out further, perhaps via the Hampshire and Isle of

Wight Local Authority (HLOWLA) group.

The second proposal is designed to specifically address sustainable transport. In one year not everything can be tackled. A starting point is for the Council to firstly identify gaps in community access to sustainable transport routes.

A study to understand how many residents do not have access to a bus service within a 500 metre direct walking route (not as the crow flies as this often includes gardens or muddy fields) should be conducted. Then this data can be mapped against frequency and destination of the services provided.

This would enable the Council to consider how to address this gap and target its funding towards improving services and providing a high-quality bus service with partners:

- An effective and frequent service reflecting patterns of travel and high demand.
- Good Quality Green Vehicles with a range of on-board facilities
- Attractive routes serving key destinations for employment, shopping, leisure, and education.
- Interconnectivity to other forms of transport (i.e. train stations)
- Reliable and punctual service with journey times comparable to private car use
- High quality information be made available to users, such as: fares; routes; timetables; through technology such as mobile apps and real time passenger information boards on bus movements.

The independent group sought advice from our professional officers within Sustainable Transport and Health and Wellbeing, together with the Chief Financial Officer to ensure these recommendations can be implemented from existing resources and without requiring additional tax burden upon our local residents during a pandemic.