

**BUDGET SPEECH
SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING
25th February 2021**

Mr Mayor,

Introduction

1. What an extraordinary year it has been. Little did any of us know when we were considering the budget this time last year how a small outbreak of a disease in York would come to dominate our lives so entirely. And none of us could have foreseen the devastating impact that the disease has had on so many families, some of whom are attending the meeting this evening, who have lost loved ones as a consequence of the Covid-19 Pandemic. I am sure that you all will agree with me that our thoughts are with them as they come to terms with their loss.
2. Covid-19 is, I hope, a once in a generation event. And whilst I don't wish to be complacent, with rates of infection very much on the decline and the vaccination programme being rolled out, I believe there is at least light at the end of the tunnel.
3. I would normally use this budget speech to review what we've achieved over the past year and to set out the plans for the forthcoming financial year. However, the Pandemic has dominated the work of the Council over the last year in a way that we could never have imagined. Indeed, who would have thought this time last year that the Budget Council Meeting – or any meeting for that matter - would be conducted using Microsoft Teams. And for that reason, you will be grateful to hear that my speech this year will be considerably shorter than in previous years.

Response to Covid-19

4. Since the start of the first lockdown on 23rd March last year, the Pendle area has been subject to some form of restrictions. Whilst none of us would wish these restrictions to last one second longer than is absolutely necessary, our response to this has been magnificent. Let me remind you, over that time we have:-

- established the Pendle Community Support Hub to provide much needed support and guidance to vulnerable people in our Community.;
- worked with the Pendle Food Alliance and the Burnley and Pendle CVS to provide essential food and other supplies to the many vulnerable people of Pendle who have been directly affected by the impact of Covid-19;
- contacted and made available support to over 5,000 clinically extremely vulnerable people who have been advised to shield on a number of occasions throughout the year;
- worked with Lancashire County Council to provide asymptomatic testing within the Borough, both to the community at large over last summer and currently to essential workers;
- set up a local Track and Trace function that, to date, has dealt with more than 2,000 people who have had Covid-19 or been the contacts of those who test positive;
- put in place a Track and Trace Payment system to provide much need support to those on low incomes who, having contracted Covid-19 or been in contact with somebody who has, have had to isolate;
- put in place a business support and inspection programme to ensure to ensure businesses are Covid-secure;
- provided almost £30m of business support grants to a wide range of businesses that have been significantly affected by the restrictions;
- and ramped up our communications through the Council's website, the press, social media, local radio to warn, inform and communicate those critical messages, provide people with the information they need

5. Despite all of this, and the fundamental changes to the way in which the Council has had to operate, we've still managed to deliver day to day services that I am proud of. In particular, our critical services such as Refuse Collection, Bereavement Services, Environmental Health to name but a few have continued to provide the high quality of service we've come to expect even under very challenging circumstances.
6. And as we have all said before, there is little doubt in my mind that the Council's response is the result of the hard work, dedication and tenacity of our staff and the many partners we rely on – it has truly been a team effort. In particular, I would like to thank the Pendle Leisure Trust led by their Chief Executive Alison Goode which has proven invaluable in supporting the Council's efforts on a number of fronts over the last year.
7. And at the same time, we have continued to make progress on some of the strategic developments in the Borough – the extension of Lomeshaye Industrial Estate, the redevelopment of Northlight and the building of new homes at Further Clough Head. And whilst we were disappointed about the outcome of our bid for Future High Street Funding for Nelson, I am hopeful that the Nelson Town Investment Plan – developed by the Town Deal Board under the Chairmanship of our former Chief Executive Stephen Barnes – will bring the much needed investment to the Town.

Revised Budget 2020/21

8. Returning to the Council's financial position, the impact of Covid-19 has been significant. Nevertheless, with the support of additional Government funding and above all our prudent approach with the Council's finances, I am pleased to say that the budget for the current year is expected to be broadly in balance.

Budget 2021/22

9. Turning to 2021/22, developing the budget for next year against the backdrop of the uncertainty of Covid-19 Pandemic has been an extremely challenging process. For a long time, Local Government has been seeking a longer-term funding settlement and, for Pendle, one that more fairly reflects the needs of our Borough.

10. However, like many of the Government's plans, dealing with the Pandemic has again meant a further delay to the Comprehensive Spending Review and, specifically for Local Government, both the Fair Funding Review and the Review of Business Rates. So, again, we have a one-year funding settlement for 2021/22 providing no real ability to plan our finances beyond next year.
11. I alluded to it earlier but it is fair to say that the Government has provided unprecedented financial support to Local Authorities, not least to support their local economies. Unfortunately, I cannot say that about the next financial year. Despite promises direct from Number 10 Downing Street that no Council will be in position to not have a balanced budget in the next year, unless we increase Council Tax by the maximum possible under Government rules, our Core Spending Power will reduce. And because of that, we are forced to consider how we will cut the cost of our services, and services themselves, so that we can fulfil our statutory obligation to have set balanced budget. Once again, it feels like Local Government and particularly places like Pendle will have to bear the brunt of funding cuts by Government. And we were told 'austerity is over'!
12. Having had the opportunity to review the budget proposals from each Group following the change in procedure for this meeting, I should like to propose the following motion [***Describe the joint Labour/Liberal Democrat Budget***].

Council Tax 2021/22

13. And, before I close Mr Mayor, I'd just like to mention briefly our proposals for Council Tax. There is a clear message from the Government: Council Tax can be increased to pay for local services.
14. Reluctantly, again we will follow the Government's lead and increase Pendle's share of the Council Tax by 1.99%. This will mean that, for the majority of Council Taxpayers in Pendle, their Council Tax for Pendle's services will be £180.41 for the year or just £3.30 per week. This represents an increase of £3.52 for the year or just 7p per week.

Conclusion

15. Mr Mayor, in conclusion, this last year has been one of the most challenging in the history of this Council but we have risen to that challenge. The Pandemic is not yet over but there is light at the end of the tunnel and, despite the continuing reduction in funding for local authorities, we have proposed a balanced budget with minimal cuts to services.

16. I would, therefore, like to move both the Capital Programme and the General Fund Revenue Budget (Items 6 and 7) for 2021/22, as set out earlier, and call upon Councillor Whipp to second the motion.