

ANNEX 5

Business Consultation on the Council's Budget 2018/19

1. Do you think that the Council's approach to managing its finances over the medium term is acceptable?

"We suspect most businesses would like to be in a similar financial position to TVBC: significant reserves, debt free, a good income stream from its commercial portfolio underpinned by the almost guaranteed income from council tax, but we'd also recognise that the strong position comes from prudent council policies over a number of years.

"Our view would be that TVBC medium term plan is sound given the external constraints.

"Several comments from our members along the lines of the council is doing quite a good job of trying to keep the budget under control and at an acceptable level and are doing very excellent things for businesses in the Test Valley".

2. Do you have any comments on the savings/income options as set out in the appendices of the report? (Please note that Councillors have already made the decision to freeze car parking charges for next year)

"So far, where retail units are vacated new businesses have come in, some encouraged by TVBC grants. This churn of units is likely to gather pace so it is important to continue funding enabling grants.

"The resources expended by TVBC on street cleaning and associated works are essential to the town centre - attracting visitors and wanting them to stay awhile. Local businesses contribute to hanging baskets in the town centre I suspect because of the much higher investment by TVBC on planters and baskets, it's a kind of unofficial partnership that delivers.

"Freezing parking charges is a powerful message to the business community that has been well received by those I have spoken too. We need to await results of Carter Jonas research but hopefully there will be justification for car park improvements with at least one (or more) car parks decked to increase capacity. Does the capital budget have capacity for those works?

"I agree that car parking costs should be frozen - the town centre does have a lot of units and the last thing that is needed is a reason for people to go elsewhere over something as trivial as parking costs.

"Several of our Members have commented on the parking charge freeze and the fact that, although it will be welcomed by many families, it will not do a great deal to drive more business/foot fall in the town. We need a niche and/or a reason for people to come. Southampton is particularly good at this with things like the aerial restaurant and flying Santa. A little further afield, Bognor Regis even put a zip-wire down the middle of their High Street in the summer. These things give people a reason to visit and raise the profile of the town".

3. *Do you think that the Council could do more to help the business community, and if so, what should it be doing?*

"It would be good for the council to help join up the centre of Andover with the big developments - Augusta Park and Picket 20. Augusta Park is (finally) getting a few retail/office units and already has work-at-home businesses. The community centre here is trying to create a network/hub but I think the support of the council could do wonders.

"I think there probably isn't much that can be done from a property point of view, but the council should support more 'pop up' shops. There are large units sat empty and if these could be rented out on a per month basis, divided into smaller units that are really tiny costs to hire, it will give those home-based businesses a chance to try their business out in the 'real' world. This would be a great stepping stone to one day opening an entire store. Currently, rent and lease terms (5 years plus) are just too much for a new business.

"The Council could do more to communicate to businesses the ways in which they can assist.

"Try to find ways to reduce the retail vacancy rates in town

"Encourage business premises landlords to be more helpful to SMEs with regards to rents and services.

"TVBC has historically been very supportive of small businesses in the Romsey area. This has helped new start ups and helped maintain retail occupancy rates. Despite this support, retailers are beginning to falter for reasons outside of a district council's control. These are issues of business rates, commercial rents that don't seem to follow "market forces" conventions, increases in NI and other taxes like apprentice levy.

"It is our opinion that staff recruitment or rather inability to recruit represents a significant threat to some high street businesses and others that employ people at or around minimum wage. This is an area that needs investment to fix - Something for TVBC to fund?

"Footfall in the social space that is Romsey Centre is maintained through events that currently receive limited TVBC funding. It would be good to see more of the economic development budget focused on these events. Currently, most of this activity is resourced by the energy and passion of volunteers. Increasingly, finding volunteers is very hard - we have views on why - but the funding of TVCS volunteer bureaux seems even more critical.

"In summary we appreciate what TVBC have achieved in the recent past but, given some of the excellent ideas coming out of Romsey Future, potentially lots to spend future budgets on".