

Tabled Paper

Cabinet 27 February 2020 – Agenda Item

Correction:

Please note a correction to the figure in recommendation (ii) – currently £17,129,560, but should read **£15,967,490**.

Responses to the 2020 Budget Consultation with Stakeholders.

- 1) The 2020/2021 budget was published for consultation between 20 December 2019 and 7 February 2020 using through the Councils' social media channels, website, and also received coverage in the KE newspaper on the 23 January 2020.
- 2) Overall the Council received three responses which are shown below with responses where applicable:-

Response 1 - Comments

To: Maria Stevens <maria.stevens@ashford.gov.uk>

Subject: Budget

Hi Maria

Looking at the Budget figures, the main thing that jumps out to me is the money to KCC. I believe that all Councils should be able to decide on how and where they spend this money, instead of giving it to KCC to waste on un-necessary and non urgent things. I live in ██████████ Singleton next to ██████████ and have raised concerns with my Parish council about the dangers of this road. The local councillors have been working on this for the last four years or so, but KCC won't budge and make this road safer. This I believe is one example of ABC having the financial control to do something like this, which I believe they would do to make this road safer, as for KCC, they just make excuses for not doing anything about it that would make the road safer, apart from a 20mph speed limit that no-one will take notice of. It won't be long before the first fatality happens, and that will be one too many, all because of KCC not allowing ABC to manage their own finances where it matters.

Regards

██████████

Response

Dear ██████████,

Thank you for your consultation response, it will form part of the information supplied to Ashford Borough Councillors when they make the decision to set the final budget for Ashford Borough Council.

Ashford Borough Council (the billing authority) has the responsibility to charge and collect Council Tax from Ashford Borough residents on behalf of preceptors (Kent County Council, Kent Police, Ashford Borough Council and Kent Fire and Rescue). The money that is paid to each preceptor is their money, Ashford Borough Council is only collecting on their behalf.

Sadly Kent County Council have already consulted on their budget this year but the details are below.

<https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/finance-and-budget/our-budget>

Kind regards

Maria

Head of Finance and IT

Ashford Borough Council

Response 2 – Comments and response

- I understand that in China government policy has been to suspend local business taxes in the affected areas of the corona virus. The logic being that the short term loss of revenue should be absorbed by the government so that businesses do not close in the immediate aftermath of the virus, due to loss of trade as a result of travel restrictions. Then once the situation is improved more businesses should remain solvent and able to continue trading, reducing the economic loss/time to recover which would occur without that relief. It may be that such a policy would be necessary in the UK and would pose a risk to the budget if mandated by central government. Similarly in such a scenario would the council find it more prudent financially, in the long run, to provide short term relief to some small business tenants within its property portfolio. **If the UK Government mandated a relief scheme then they would be expected to provide a new burdens grant to local authorities to mitigate any financial impact. In relation to supporting small businesses, I think this would need to be reviewed if the need arises, this would require the Council to find funding though which would effectively see residents (through Council Tax) support the local businesses, we would also need to consider state aid implications.**
- There should be a specific budget allowance made for Overview and Scrutiny to allow them to seek professional advice independently on an issue. **– this is something that I do not recall coming up with Overview and Scrutiny although it is a good point, I would add though that if members of the committee felt it was necessary to get external opinions to discharge their responsibilities as members of the O&S Committee, then an application to use general reserves to fund such works could be made.**

Response 3 – Letter of support from Kent Chamber of Commerce

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20th January 2020

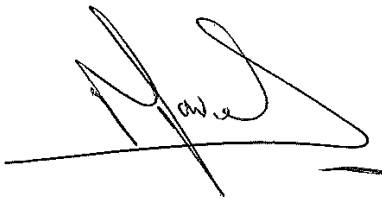
Dear Maria Stevens

Re: - 2020/21 Budget Consultation Summery Document

Your Budget Summery Document was formally presented to the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce Economic Development Group meeting held on the 16th January 2020.

I am pleased to inform you that the document was unanimously supported on behalf of the Chamber. The group expressed their congratulations to the Council regarding Ashford's position in the comparative anticipated levels of Council Tax for 2020/21.

Yours sincerely



Richard M Lavender
President
Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce
Chair, Ashford Economic Development Group