



Buckinghamshire County Council

Finance, Performance & Resources  
Select Committee

# Budget Scrutiny Inquiry Report for 2016/17

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



## **Introduction**

The Finance, Performance & Resources (FPR) Select Committee is appointed by Buckinghamshire County Council to carry out the local authority scrutiny functions for all policies and services relating to these areas.

Cabinet presented the draft budget at its meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2016 and the Budget Scrutiny Inquiry Group met on 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> January to scrutinise the draft report and make recommendations to Cabinet. Cabinet will respond to the recommendations at its meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2016. The final budget will be presented at full council on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2016. The budget scrutiny meetings were webcast and can be found at <http://www.buckscc.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcasts>

## **Membership of the Budget Scrutiny Inquiry**

### **From the FPR Select Committee:**

David Shakespeare OBE (Chairman of the Inquiry)

Brian Roberts (Vice-Chairman of the Inquiry)

Steven Lambert

David Martin

David Schofield – apologies received for the three days

### **Additional Members of the Inquiry Group:**

David Carroll, Select Committee Chairman, Transport, Economy and Environment

Val Letheren, Select Committee Chairman, Children's Social Care and Learning

Angela Macpherson, Select Committee Chairman, Health and Adult Social Care

Richard Scott (attended in place of Bill Chapple OBE)

Roger Reed (attended in place of Bill Bendyshe-Brown)

Andy Huxley (attended in place of Alan Stevens)

Patricia Birchley, Vice-Chairman of TEE (attended in place of David Carroll on 20th)

## **Inquiry support**

The FPR Select Committee is supported by HQ Member Services. The officers supporting the Committee and this Inquiry are Liz Wheaton (Committee & Governance Adviser) and Sara Turnbull (Head of Member Services).

# Contents

	<b>Page</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1 Recommendations</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2 Inquiry Context</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3 The Council's overall Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>4 Resources Portfolio</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>5 Capital Programme</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>6 Planning and Environment Portfolio</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>7 Community Engagement and Public Health Portfolio</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>8 Health &amp; Wellbeing Portfolio</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>9 Transportation Portfolio</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>10 Children's Services Portfolio</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>11 Education &amp; Skills Portfolio</b>	<b>30</b>

## **Executive Summary**

Due to a worse than expected financial settlement, the Leader and Cabinet Members have had to identify an additional £16m of savings in this Medium Term Financial Plan. We recognise that some portfolios have had to make some very difficult decisions. We were particularly concerned about the significant amount of unallocated savings assigned to each portfolio. Whilst some of these savings will be made through already planned Future Shape activities, there is still a real challenge for the portfolios to identify ways of delivering the rest of the unallocated savings. We heard that the Digital Strategy will help to deliver some of these savings and we felt that all the plans around savings delivery should be robustly monitored and progress reported regularly at Cabinet and the Finance, Performance and Resources Select Committee.

Pressures in Children's Services and Adult Social Care continue and the changing demographics and the impact of the National Living Wage will ensure that the pressures on these services will continue unabated. Within the Education and Skills portfolio, there are some very difficult proposed cuts in services. We have put forward some recommendations to try and reduce the severity of these cuts.

The success of the Future Shape programme was reliant on Business Units being able to create opportunities for income generation in order to become self-funding over the coming years. We felt that there was a lack of consistency across the portfolios in terms of their approach towards income generation and a more strategic approach would help to identify possible areas of income generation. We have suggested a Select Committee Inquiry with Member involvement from the other Select Committees be undertaken to support the delivery of the Income Generation Strategy.

All Cabinet Members are committed to reducing the costs associated with using agency staff, interims and consultants. We are recommending a review of all our current levels of agency staff across the Council along with a review of the current recruitment agency arrangements to ensure that it is the most cost-efficient way of meeting the Council's needs.

## 1. Recommendations

1. That the delivery of all the savings required in the Medium Term Financial Plan be robustly monitored. The savings delivery programme should be overseen corporately and include quarterly reports to the Finance, Performance and Resources Select Committee. (Page 10)
2. That any new proposals for unidentified savings should ensure due process is followed, including Equality Impact Assessments and public consultation on specific proposals prior to a decision. (Page 11)
3. That a review of the Future Shape Business Case, agreed by Cabinet in December 2014, is undertaken to assess whether the benefits originally envisaged have been achieved and lessons learnt, as well as make recommendations on any changes to the approach needed. (Page 12)
4. That business cases for any new Alternative Delivery Vehicles are developed with full consideration to all the possible delivery models and that these include clear and consistent proposals for future governance arrangements so that Members can be assured that adequate controls and contract management are in place. A review of existing ADVs should be undertaken to ensure they are delivering against their business plan. (Page 12)
5. We recommend that the Strategic Initiatives Fund is stopped and all funds earmarked for this are reallocated to supporting services for vulnerable children, including protecting those areas outlined in the rest of the report. (Page 13)
6. To undertake a review of the current levels of agency and interim/consultancy staff across the organisation to consider how to reduce unnecessary costs. (Page 15)
7. To undertake a review of the Pertemps contract to ensure that this remains the most cost-efficient way of meeting the Council's needs. (Page 15)
8. To undertake a specific project to identify skills gaps within the Business Units and to work across the organisation to upskill the existing staff and to recruit people with commercial skills to current vacancies. (Page 16)
9. To consider withdrawing the funding for local priorities and cease running Local Area Forums and instead ensure that there are more effective mechanisms in place for engaging with communities. The money saved

could be reallocated to support services for vulnerable people, including protecting those areas outlined in the rest of the report. (Page 23)

10. To undertake a detailed review of the gully cleaning programme with the objective of achieving greater efficiencies in the use of the plant and equipment. (Page 27)
11. To undertake an options appraisal to assess the cost/benefits of different delivery models for the Fostering and Adoption service, including exploring outsourcing. (Page 29)
12. To ensure a full public consultation in relation to Children's Centres on all the options for delivering the service in a different way prior to a key decision on any service change. To work in conjunction with Public Health to understand the full impact on the proposed service reduction. (Page 30)
13. That an options appraisal be carried out on the Educational Psychology Service to assess the best delivery model for this service to maximise the income generation potential. (Page 31)
14. To review the charging policies for all Home to School transport users to ensure maximum income generation opportunities are explored. To undertake a timely public consultation on any proposed changes to the service. (Page 31)
15. To look at alternative ways of delivering the Youth Counselling Service without cutting the service completely (for example, reduce the number of paid staff and explore possibilities of joint funding the service with Oxford Health Trust). (Page 32)
16. To explore other ways to keep the Duke of Edinburgh Award programme running (for example, explore the idea of a private company/companies sponsoring the programme and target those who currently employ a number of apprentices). (Page 32)

## 2. Inquiry Context

### The Local Context

1. On the 17<sup>th</sup> December 2015, the County Council received a statement from the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government along with the release of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement.
  
2. Some of the key points from the Settlement are as follows:
  - Revenue Support Grant (RSG) will be rapidly reduced and removed entirely by 2018/19, with a negative RSG of £11m in 2019;
  - Local Government will be able to retain 100% of income from business rates by 2020;
  - Local Authorities with responsibility for adult social care can increase Council Tax by up to an additional 2% ('Social Care Precept');
  - Public Health Grant will continue to be ring-fenced for both 2016/17 and 2017/18 but is likely to be removed as part of the 100% retention of business rates;
  - Education Services Grant will be reduced by 75% by 2019/20 as the Government aims to expand the number of free schools and academies and reduce the role of local authorities around activities, such as school improvement;
  - No additional funding to cover the added financial burden of the National Living Wage;
  - A new concept of Core Settlement Funding has been introduced and authorities with a higher proportion of funding from Council Tax received a bigger cut in their RSG (includes Buckinghamshire);
  - Local planning assumptions appeared to be broadly on track at the time of the Autumn Statement/Spending Review but the resource equalising approach had not been anticipated and this has had a hugely worsening impact on Buckinghamshire;

- A negative funding announcement in relation to the additional 'Better Care Fund' monies announced as part of the Spending Review, which is designed to help the integration agenda between social care and health;
  - Given the very challenging financial situation created by the significant funding reductions from Government as well as service demand pressures, the proposal is to increase Council Tax by 3.99% in all four years of the Medium Term Financial Plan.
3. Buckinghamshire is uniquely adversely affected by the proposed settlement. It is one of the two worst affected Counties in terms of Revenue Support Grant (along with Dorset) and also one of the two worst affected by the proposed Better Care Fund allocation (along with Surrey).



### 3. The Council's overall Medium Term Financial Plan

4. The Leader described how the financial settlement received on 17<sup>th</sup> December was beyond what was considered “worst case scenario” and has resulted in an additional £16m of savings needing to be found. This led to an emergency meeting with Cabinet Members to go through the budgets and look for further areas of savings resulting in some very difficult decisions around service delivery.
5. The Leader stated that this was not the budget he had hoped to be presenting. He re-stated the reasons why a non-essential budget freeze had been introduced in November to try and address the forecast overspend of between £5-6m in this financial year. The overspend is now forecast at £1.7m.
6. Amongst the key challenges facing the authority are increased rates of referral in Children's Services and the high costs of placements; the impact of increased demography leading to a greater demand pressure on services; the high costs associated in the use of agency staff, interims and consultants across the Council which links with the difficulties in recruiting and retaining our own staff and the recognised lack of commercial skills across the whole Council.
7. The impact of the National Living Wage is a real concern, particularly amongst the Adult Social Care teams as this will be felt most within the Domiciliary Care and Residential/Nursing Care services.
8. The housing growth agenda also poses a significant challenge and potential risk for the Council. The impact of the growth agenda for Buckinghamshire needs to be factored into the budget planning process across all the portfolios. **We felt that due to the high risks associated with this, a regular review and monitoring on progress should take place and could be the subject of a cross-portfolio Scrutiny Inquiry.**

## Savings Delivery

9. We were concerned about the unallocated budget savings which each portfolio is expected to make and amounts, collectively, to a significant amount of money (see table below). We felt that this brought into question the robustness of the budget, especially as some portfolios, when asked how they were going to make these future shape savings, were not clear about how this could be done.
10. We understand that some of these unallocated savings are around Future Shape savings and proper plans are yet to be developed for these savings. Cabinet Members did refer to digital improvements within their portfolios which would lead to some of these efficiency savings being made.

### Extract from Appendix 3 (Cabinet papers) – Unallocated Budget

<b>Portfolio</b>	<b>MTP reason</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>2016/17 £,000</b>	<b>2017/18 £,000</b>	<b>2018/19 £,000</b>	<b>2019/20 £,000</b>
Children's Services	Service efficiency	Delivery of 'Future Shape' project savings	(527)	(736)	(736)	(736)
Community Engagement	Service efficiency	Allocation of Future Shape savings	(365)	(550)	(550)	(550)
Education & Skills	Service efficiency	Allocation of Future Shape savings	(263)	(862)	(862)	(862)
Health & Wellbeing	Service efficiency	Allocation of Future Shape savings	(804)	(1,762)	(1,762)	(1,762)
Leader	Service efficiency	Allocation of Future Shape savings	(34)	(109)	(109)	(109)
Planning & Environment	Service efficiency	Additional income	(58)	(58)	(58)	(58)
		Allocation of Future Shape savings	(251)	(854)	(854)	(854)
		Small reductions across team	(34)	(34)	(34)	(34)

Resources	Service efficiency	Allocation of Future Shape savings	(474)	(1,265)	(1,265)	(1,265)
Transportation	Additional income	Car park in Winslow	0	0	0	(155)
	Service efficiency	Allocation of Future Shape savings	(204)	(970)	(970)	(970)
		Contract efficiencies and transformation	(660)	(860)	(1,060)	(1,260)
<b>Totals</b>			<b>£3.67m</b>	<b>£8.06m</b>	<b>£8.26m</b>	<b>£8.61m</b>

11. We would like to seek assurance that the Digital Strategy, which underpins the success of the portfolios making their savings, be given due prioritisation by Cabinet Members and progress on this project be monitored and reviewed regularly.

### **Recommendation 1**

**That the delivery of all the savings required in the Medium Term Financial Plan be robustly monitored with portfolio holders providing an appropriate analysis, within three months, to show where the current unallocated savings will be made. The savings delivery programme should be overseen corporately and include quarterly reports to the Finance, Performance and Resources Select Committee.**

### **Equality Impact Assessments**

12. Following on from last year's budget scrutiny, we were assured that Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) would be carried out on all proposed budget cuts. We had particular concerns around proposed cuts to the voluntary sector and

recommended all reductions to voluntary sector funding, regardless of amount, should be subjected to an assessment.

### **Recommendation 2**

**That any new proposals for unidentified savings should ensure due process is followed, including Equality Impact Assessments and public consultation on specific proposals prior to a decision.**

### **Income Generation**

13. During last year's budget scrutiny, we were told that the Future Shape Programme aimed to make savings of £7.6m. The programme was designed around the principle that the Business Units would be self-funding. We heard that creating and maximising the opportunities for income generation would be the bedrock of the success of this strategy. We found it hard to identify where the Future Shape savings had been made.
14. This year, we asked all portfolios about their plans for income generation and asked them to provide examples where additional income had been made. We heard from two portfolios that the opportunities for income generation are very limited, if not impossible, as they are delivering demand-led services. We felt that there was a lack of consistency across the portfolios in terms of their approach towards income generation and a more strategic approach would help to identify possible areas for increased income generation.
15. The Finance, Performance and Resources Select Committee will consider undertaking an Inquiry with Member involvement from the other Select Committees to support the delivery of the Income Generation Strategy.

### **Recommendation 3**

**That a review of the Future Shape Business Case, which was agreed by Cabinet in December 2014, is undertaken to assess whether the benefits originally envisaged have been achieved and lessons learnt, as well as make recommendations on any changes to the approach needed.**

### **Alternative Delivery Vehicles**

16. We heard from Cabinet Members about their plans for Alternative Delivery Vehicles (ADVs) as a mechanism for delivering services in a different and more cost-effective way. In particular, we are aware that there are proposals in the pipeline in regard to setting up a Library Trust, and Shared Services with Harrow in relation to Legal Services and Human Resources.

17. Where ADVs have been set-up, there are differences in the governance arrangements which are in place and there have been a number of issues in relation to their delivery. We understand that the Regulatory & Audit Committee are currently reviewing and monitoring the Bucks Learning Trust.

18. As stated by the Leader, it is vital that we learn the lessons from existing ADVs, including understanding whether the benefits originally envisaged in the business cases have been achieved. We also need to ensure that the right commissioning governance is in place to oversee their operation and that there is a consistent approach across all the ADVs.

### **Recommendation 4**

**That the business cases for any new Alternative Delivery Vehicles are developed with full consideration to all the possible delivery models and that these include clear and consistent proposals for future governance arrangements so that Members can be assured that adequate controls and contract management are in place. A review of existing ADVs should be undertaken to ensure they are delivering against their business plan.**

## **Leader's Portfolio**

19. The Leader answered our questions in relation to a range of services under his specific portfolio area including in relation to economic development, broadband and corporate costs.
20. We heard from the Leader that the budget for the Chief Executive's office relates to staffing costs within HQ (page 22 in the Cabinet papers, 11 January 2016). Further clarification of this budget line was sought after the meeting and we understand that part of this budget is used to fund a "Strategic Initiatives Fund" (SIF) which is a top-up fund for the Chief Executive to use to pump-prime any key projects during the year as needed.
21. We understand that £158k has been set aside for the next financial year. In such a difficult financial year, we should examine whether we can still afford the special project funds for unidentified activities.

### **Recommendation 5**

**We recommend that the Strategic Initiatives Fund is stopped and all funds earmarked for this are reallocated to supporting services for vulnerable children, including protecting those areas as outlined in the rest of the report.**

## 4. Resources

22. The Cabinet Member explained that there is currently an overspend in this portfolio which is predominantly due to property management contracts but he is confident that the savings can be achieved within his portfolio. There are two main projects where the greatest savings can be made - the Shared Services project and the Digital Transformation project.

23. According to the Cabinet Member, the key challenges facing this portfolio are:

- Portfolio capacity;
- Rolling out the ICT infrastructure;
- Controlling property maintenance costs;
- Staff morale;
- Recruitment and retention of staff across the Council;
- Reducing the spend on agency staff, interims and consultants;
- Realising the income potential from the property investment review which is currently being undertaken.

### **Agency and Interim staff**

24. We welcome the commitment by Cabinet Members across all portfolios to reduce agency spend and the use of interims and consultants, but every year the figures are not reducing to a satisfactory rate which is costing the Council significant amounts of money (currently around £1m per month on agency staff). We currently have 216 agency staff across the Council.

25. We heard about the additional fees which agencies charge us for placing their staff and the amounts vary according to the experience and skills required – for example, for frontline social workers, the agency will add 40% to their fees, middle managers +55-65%, and senior managers +80-90%. We believe this needs to be investigated further to better understand the very high costs associated with the higher level positions.

26. Given the ongoing high expenditure on agency staff and interim/consultants, we ask that this issue is addressed corporately and not just left to each individual Business Unit. Whilst there will be different challenges facing each Business Unit, the Council is one employer. Looking holistically at the issue will provide an opportunity to explore what more can be done to reduce costs – particularly the costs of using middle/senior management in temporary roles.

**Recommendation 6**

**To undertake a review of the current levels of agency and interim/consultancy staff across the organisation to consider how to reduce unnecessary costs.**

27. We understand that a review of Recruitment Consultants was undertaken in 2012 and the contract with Pertemps started in April 2012. We have concerns around using just one agency to provide all our agency staff as it removes the scope to be competitive.

28. A report went to the FPR Select Committee on 5 December 2013 which reviewed the Council's consultancy and interim spend. A subsequent report went to the Select Committee in February 2014 which provided details on the Council's agency staff spend. As agency staff is one of the biggest areas of spend for the Council, we would like to ask that a review be undertaken of the Pertemps contract to ensure that it continues to meet our needs and remains the most effective solution for the Council in meeting its recruitment needs.

**Recommendation 7**

**To undertake a review of the Pertemps contract to ensure that this remains the most cost-efficient way of meeting the Council's needs.**



## **Commercial skills**

29. We heard from a number of Cabinet Members that there are gaps in the current skills base across the Council, particularly around planning and experienced social workers. We understand that there are plans in place to recruit and retain people to these posts but we also heard that some authorities are offering substantial incentives to encourage people to join them. The buoyant private sector has also meant that the public sector is struggling to compete in terms of pay and other benefits. We would like to receive assurance that everything is being done to attract the right people to the Council.

30. We also heard that there is a recognised lack of commercial skills across the Council which is of a particular concern because as the Council moves towards a more commercial approach, it will become more reliant on people possessing these skills. We would like to see commercial skills become more embedded across the Council, for example, forecasting skills, contract re-negotiation skills and business development/marketing skills.

### **Recommendation 8**

**To undertake a specific project to identify skills gaps within the Business Units and to work across the organisation to upskill the existing staff and to recruit people with commercial skills to current vacancies.**

## **Property**

31. We asked the Cabinet Member about the unallocated budget savings in his portfolio and he stated that some of these savings would be made by taking a more commercial approach to the property portfolio and maximising all possible income generation opportunities. The Agricultural Estates review has been carried out by Carter Jonas and the results of this review are currently being discussed by the Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cabinet Member for

Planning and Environment. If the review leads to the disposal of properties, we ask that the Local Member be fully involved in the disposal process.

32. A review of the remaining Property portfolio is not due to be completed until June 2016. **We suggest that the Property reviews be given due prioritisation by Cabinet Members and officers and a timeframe agreed for delivery provided to Cabinet as soon as possible (and shared with the Finance, Performance and Resources Select Committee).**

## 5. Capital Programme

33. The Cabinet Member described the three objectives of the capital programme:

- To own fit for purpose assets;
- To make sure income is generated where possible;
- To address the capital maintenance backlog.

34. The new gateway process, used by the Asset Strategy Board when approving capital projects was acknowledged as a success and has greatly improved the governance around reviewing, monitoring and awarding money for capital projects. Capital slippage has reduced significantly this year with a forecast of £17.5m slippage against £30m last year.

### Green Park

35. One of the specific issues we wish to comment on is the proposed capital investment in Green Park. We have concerns about the long term sustainability of Green Park and are seeking assurances that a viable business and marketing plan has been produced to show that this facility can be sustained and grow its income over the coming years. **We would like to see evidence that there is a demand for the conference facilities at Green Park and that a full cost/benefit analysis has been carried out before investing the planned £900k capital expenditure.**

### Pressure on Primary School Places

36. It is no longer possible for the DSG to contribute to the schools capital programme without a specific dispensation from the Secretary of State and support from the Schools Forum. This removes £3.3m of previously assumed funding from the Schools Programme.

37. We heard that the Government expects the private sector to provide the places for early years and that the County Council is responsible for providing Primary school places.

38. We recognise that there is £37.5m in the schools capital programme earmarked for primary school places however, we are concerned that there is a risk that if the private sector fails to provide the early years places, primary school places would be lost to provide those places, which could undermine the primary places strategy and put pressure on the capital programme. **We view this as a significant area of risk for the Council and ask that this is closely monitored.**

## **6. Planning and Environment**

39. The Cabinet Member stated that his portfolio has a budget of £18.5m and has a forecasted underspend of £700,000 this year due primarily as a result of the non-essential budget freeze.
40. The key priorities for this portfolio are to “Keep Buckinghamshire attractive and thriving” and to “Protect the environment”.
41. We heard that the biggest challenges facing this portfolio are around the ambitious income targets that have been set which will not be achieved in the short term so will have to be found from elsewhere; and the challenges around the growth agenda (50,000 houses in the County), which has seen the planning team being tasked with managing the large number of planning applications over the coming years, with a view to improving the developer and planning response.
42. The portfolio currently generates 19% of its own expenditure and this is projected to increase to 43% by charging services to the external marketplace and by generating more income through Country Parks (increased car park revenue). There is also potential for income from bulky waste as the Council has the machinery for getting rid of bulky waste so plans are currently being developed on how to maximise its usage.
43. We asked the Cabinet Member to provide some further examples of potential income generation from within the portfolio and he said that a feasibility study has been carried out for an energy company which would provide an income of around £500k from 2018/19.
44. The Cabinet Member advised us that funding of £80,000 has been received from DEFRA in relation to developing flood interventions. The Strategic Risk Strategy is due to be published shortly.
45. We note that a review of the Transport, Economy and Environment team structure will be starting soon with a particular focus on trying to fill the vacancies which are currently being back filled by consultants.

## **Energy from Waste**

46. The major project within the portfolio is the Energy from Waste (EfW) plant but the long-term challenge will be around the impact of unpredictable energy prices. We heard that whilst recycling arrangements with the District Councils require improvements, the Cabinet Member remains confident that the EfW plant will operate at near maximum effectiveness

## **Enforcement team**

47. We were particularly interested to hear about the Enforcement team, who are responsible for ensuring planning applications are adhered to, which comprised five officers three years ago but now has just 1.8 full time equivalent (FTE) posts within the team. We feel that investing in this particular activity could have the potential for further income generation and we were disappointed to hear that over the years this team has been reduced and can only provide a reactive rather than a proactive service. **If the current financial situation were different, we would be asking for a review of the Enforcement team and the possibility of more resource being added to it.**

48. We noted that there are some charges which the planning team can make for their services, such as pre-application advice, but the charges are subjected to a Government ceiling so we are unable to increase these charges so as to gain maximum income from them. **We would ask that the Council continues to lobby Government to remove the statutory ceiling around charges to allow us the freedom to set our own charging policy, therefore taking away the need for local taxpayers to subsidise the planning process.**

## 7. Community Engagement and Public Health

49. The portfolio changed last year and now includes Public Health as well as Community Engagement. Community Engagement covers lots of different areas with relatively small budgets whereas Public Health has a larger budget with more pressures around cost savings. Whilst the Public Health financial settlement has not yet been received, the service is expecting a 14.4% reduction in Government funding over the next four years. We were concerned to hear that there could be cuts to preventative services as these services help to take the pressure off other services in the long-term.
50. We noted the Director for Public Health's comments around the need to work more closely with colleagues in the NHS to drive through efficiencies and cost savings. She reiterated the need for the "health system" to work as a system. **We also heard that the Public Health budget is currently being used to support Children's Centres.**

### Libraries

51. One of the main focusses of the Community Engagement portfolio is around Libraries and plans are currently being developed to set-up a Library Trust. **We would expect to see a stronger vision around what a 21<sup>st</sup> century library service looks like on a practical level.**
52. We are seeking assurance that all the options for Libraries are being looked at in conjunction with other services, for example, Children's Centres – could the buildings be used for both? As this portfolio is relying very heavily on the service efficiencies from the Library Service in order to meet its savings target, we would like to see a robust business case for all the options around this service. We feel the risks are significant if it does not deliver and we refer to recommendation 4.
53. We heard that there are plans to reduce the mobile libraries from three to one but we did not see any evidence to demonstrate the thinking behind this decision.

We are looking for assurance that the impact of this service reduction has been fully investigated as mobile libraries help reduce social isolation.

### **Local Area Forums**

54. We feel that a 'salami slicing' approach to some budgets, rather than stopping the service completely, reduces the effectiveness of the service too much and makes it unviable.

55. We were interested to explore with the Cabinet Member the plans to reduce the Local Priorities budget from £780k to £500k. This money is currently administered via the Local Area Forums (19 areas across the county) and the funding is used to meet the priorities agreed by each local area.

56. We recognise the need to keep a mechanism in place for working closely with our communities but felt that the local priorities budget has been reduced significantly over the years and with the current financial challenges facing the Council, it was felt that this budget should be offered up as a saving and the money used to support the vulnerable people, including protecting those areas outlined in the rest of the report.

### **Recommendation 9**

**To consider withdrawing the local priorities budget and cease running Local Area Forums and instead ensure that there are more effective mechanisms in place for engaging with communities. The money saved could be reallocated to support services for vulnerable people, including protecting those areas outlined in the rest of the report.**



## 8. Health & Wellbeing

57. The Health & Wellbeing portfolio absorbs the largest proportion of the authority's budget at approximately 40%. It is also impacted most directly by growing demographic pressures, the most significant being an ageing population. It is also under pressure from the introduction of the National Living Wage where the greatest impact will be felt within the Domiciliary Care and Residential Care markets.

### Prevention

58. Whilst noting that one of the main priorities for the portfolio was around prevention and early intervention so as to reduce the demand for other services in the long-term, we were concerned to hear that other portfolios are looking to cut some of their preventative services. **We would like to see a more strategic approach to preventative services across the Council to ensure we are providing the best provision in all portfolios.**

### Integration between social care and health services

59. Whilst acknowledging that there are already some areas of integration within Buckinghamshire's social care and health services (eg. the Quality Care team and Mental Health services), the Cabinet Member felt that there was a lack of appetite and pace around the integration of social care and health services, in terms of the Better Care Fund (BCF). We understand that the 2019/20 allocation for Buckinghamshire, as announced, is £875k, which is a lower amount than the loss of New Homes Bonus used to part fund the BCF increase and is far less than a number of other similar authorities.

60. We understand that a plan for integration needs to be in place by 2017 which will be implemented in 2020. Although the Government has yet to publish detailed guidance around what this integrated service will look like, it has outlined conditions in order for the funds to be released. A more serious commitment will need to be made to pooled budgets and a joint approach around assessment and care planning, ensuring that there is an accountable professional for the

integrated packages of care. **We believe that this area of work needs to be a focus for this portfolio over the next year for the planning stage and then the following three years before implementation. We suggest that this should be a topic for a Member briefing over the coming months.**

61. Staffing within the portfolio was described as an issue due to the high number of temporary workers in the service. There is a real problem recruiting people to the more experienced posts as it is a very competitive market. We refer to recommendation 6.

62. **We were concerned to hear about the proposed cuts within the Learning Disabilities service and would like to ask that these changes in this service be closely monitored and reviewed by the Health and Adult Social Care Select Committee.**

## **9. Transportation**

63. We heard about the success of devolving of a number of services to town and parish councils and the plans for more devolution in future.

64. We noted that the Council has joined the Midlands Highway Alliance and a number of commercial issues with Ringway Jacobs have been rectified. We noted the Cabinet Member's confidence that the relationship with Ringway Jacobs is at its healthiest and a productive and efficient service is being delivered and future savings can be achieved.

65. The Cabinet Member advised that a Strategic Options Appraisal is currently being undertaken to look at public transport needs across the county and to bring together public transport and community transport to better meet the needs of local people. A public consultation is currently being carried out.

### **Pay and Display machines**

66. We heard about the proposed additional income from Pay and Display machines and a revised list of schemes has been developed following the belief that the original plan was not sustainable or deliverable.

### **Local Area Technicians**

67. The Local Area Technicians were recognised for their hard work and the Cabinet Member endorsed the effectiveness of the LAT system. The new system (CONFIRM) was being reviewed to ensure the LATs spend the maximum amount of time on the road rather than being office bound. We would like to receive assurances that any proposed restructuring of the LATs would involve Members at every stage as we would not like to see the number of LATs reduced.

68. We understand that the gully sucking machines currently operate Monday to Friday (five shifts in total) and we have five vehicles, with a value of around £1.4m. We would like to see the machines operating more efficiently (for example, consider shift work so that the vehicles are spending more time on the road - seven days a week with two shifts per day) which would result in reduced

local flooding and significantly increase the surface life of the highways. As a potential income stream, we should explore the possibilities of hiring this equipment to other Authorities.

**Recommendation 10**

**To undertake a detailed review of the gully cleaning programme with the objective of achieving greater efficiencies in the use of the plant and equipment.**

## 10. Children's Services

69. The Children's Services portfolio was audited by Ofsted in August 2014 as being 'inadequate', resulting in remedial action by the authority. An improvement plan is in place and the portfolio has been receiving continued support from the Department of Education who visited recently to review progress and a report will be available shortly.

### Staffing

70. The Cabinet Member reported that there is now a permanent Senior Management team in place but that staffing across the portfolio remains an issue, with an excessive reliance on agency staff at every level. We noted the reduction of agency staff to around 22-24%.

71. We were pleased to hear about the initiative to recruit newly qualified social workers from the local University and the drive to convert as many agency staff to permanent staff, thereby reducing costs. We appreciate the difficulties around recruitment and retention but would reiterate recommendations 5 and 6 at this point.

**72. We were concerned to hear that one year on, the First Response team is still virtually 100% run by agency staff. It was acknowledged that those in the team are providing a good service, but the Cabinet Member recognised the need to make more of the posts permanent quickly.**

### Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers

73. The arrival of unaccompanied asylum seekers is putting increased pressure on the services in this portfolio and there is uncertainty around how many children Buckinghamshire will be seeing over the coming years. The Government should provide adequate funding for these children but there is a concern around the potential additional pressure on the CAMHS service (support for children with mental health issues).

## **Fostering and Adoption**

74. We noted the work currently being undertaken in the fostering and adoption teams and the partnership working with fostering agencies, in particular. We recognised the desire to place as many looked after children with a foster carer within Buckinghamshire whilst appreciating there will always be some children who require specialist residential placements. We felt that it would be beneficial to look at all the possible options for the fostering and adoption teams.

### **Recommendation 11**

**To undertake an options appraisal to assess the cost/benefits of different delivery models for the Fostering and Adoption service, including exploring outsourcing.**

## **Short breaks for disabled children**

75. We were concerned to hear about the proposal to reduce support for short breaks for disabled children and their families as we recognise the importance of this service for parents and carers with disabled children. **If the financial situation were different, we would be asking for a review of this proposed service reduction but we ask that this area be looked at again should the situation change.**

76. When asked about opportunities for income generation, the Cabinet Member felt that this portfolio is increasingly demand-driven and there are limited opportunities for generating additional income. She went on to say that the Future Shape programme has provided a platform for ensuring best value for money and good quality services rather than focussing on income generation.

## **11. Education & Skills**

77. We noted the particular budget pressures within this portfolio and the drive to look at alternative ways of delivering some of its services and we acknowledge the difficult decisions which have had to be taken in light of these pressures.

78. We noted with interest the plans to mitigate the reductions in the Children's Centres, the Youth Counselling Service and the Duke of Edinburgh Award by looking at alternative methods of delivering these services.

### **Children's Centres**

79. Whilst fully appreciating the challenges facing this portfolio, we felt that the proposed cuts to Children's Centres is a short term saving with many medium to long-term costs to other Council services. Having heard from the Director of Public Health that one of her priorities is around Early Years provision, we feel that any proposed changes to Children's Centres needs to be undertaken in conjunction with Public Health so that the full impact of reducing this service can be understood.

### **Recommendation 12**

**To ensure a full public consultation in relation to Children's Centres on all the options for delivering the service in a different way prior to a key decision on any service change. To work in conjunction with Public Health to understand the full impact on the proposed service reduction.**

### **Educational Psychology Service**

80. Whilst recognising the work undertaken by the Educational Psychology Service, we were concerned to hear that the opportunities for income generation from the Educational Psychology Service have not been fully explored. The Educational Psychology Service is a small in-house team of specialists and we understand other councils have different models for delivering this service, for example, via external providers.

### **Recommendation 13**

**That an options appraisal be carried out on the Educational Psychology Service to assess the best delivery model for this service to maximise the income generation potential.**

### **Home-to-School Transport**

81. We welcome the fact that the home-to-school transport programme is now back in-house and noted the associated savings as a result. We heard that there is currently a Strategic Options Appraisal being carried out which is looking at how this service is currently delivered, including the service for SEN children which we recognise as a way of helping to support children in becoming more independent. From the evidence we heard, we believe there are opportunities to increase income from this service.

82. We urge that any proposed changes in home-to-school transport provision be subject to a proper consultation process and that it be conducted in a timely manner to ensure parents and local Members are fully engaged.

### **Recommendation 14**

**To review the charging policies for all Home to School transport users to ensure maximum income generation opportunities are explored. To undertake a timely public consultation on any proposed changes to the service.**

### **Youth Counselling Service**

83. There are many risks associated with reducing the Youth Counselling Service and the potential impact on other services in the medium to long term. The Equality Impact Assessment states that approximately 1,100 young people access the service per annum. This year, young people have accessed the service reporting the following serious issues – 102 young people accessed counselling to resolve self-harming, 42 young people have accessed the service



reporting suicidal thoughts/risks of suicide and 22 disclosing domestic violence issues. Currently 22 of 36 secondary schools receive counselling support which, if withdrawn, will affect schools ability to support and safeguard pupils.

84. We feel this is a short-term saving that will have longer-term costs across a number of portfolios and the risks to the Council are significant. The service is currently delivered by six paid staff and over 90 qualified volunteer counsellors. At the recent Children's Takeover Day run by the Council, one of the most important issues identified by the young people was the mental health and counselling services.

**Recommendation 15**

**To look at alternative ways of delivering the Youth Counselling Service without cutting the service completely (for example, reduce the number of paid staff and explore possibilities of joint funding the service with Oxford Health Trust).**

**Duke of Edinburgh Award**

85. We heard the proposed plan to cut the funding to the Duke of Edinburgh Award programme and once again, we recognise that difficult decisions have had to be taken but we feel this programme could be continued if a different delivery method could be secured. We would like to see a full investigation of alternative methods for example, seeking sponsorship from private companies and targeting those who currently employ apprentices. This is regarded as a valuable activity for young people which has long-term positive effects on those who undertake the programme.

**Recommendation 16**

**To explore other ways to keep the Duke of Edinburgh Award programme running (for example, explore the idea of a private company/companies sponsoring the programme and target those who currently employ a number of apprentices).**