

# Budget Scrutiny Inquiry Report for 2017-18

**A report of the Finance, Performance and  
Resources Select Committee**

Contact Officer: Kelly Sutherland  
Committee and Governance Adviser



# Introduction

- The Finance, Performance and Resources (FPR) Select Committee carries out scrutiny of all policies and services relating to these areas.
- Cabinet agreed the draft budget at its meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2016.
- Budget Scrutiny Inquiry meetings were held on 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> January 2017 to scrutinise the draft budget and make recommendations to Cabinet.
- For the first time, the public were able to submit questions via email or twitter.
- Cabinet will respond to the recommendations on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2017.
- The final budget will be presented to full Council on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2017.

The budget scrutiny meetings were webcast and can be found at <https://buckscc.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcasts>



Buckinghamshire County Council

# Membership of the Budget Scrutiny Inquiry

## From FPR Select Committee

Bill Chapple OBE (Chairman)

David Shakespeare OBE (Vice-Chairman)

Netta Glover

Andy Huxley

Steven Lambert

David Martin

## Additional Members

Richard Scott (attended in place of Roger Reed on 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> Jan)

David Carroll, Chairman, Transport, Environment & Communities Select C'ttee

Val Letheren, Representative, Children's Social Care & Learning Select Committee

Brian Roberts, Chairman, Health and Adult Social Care Select Committee




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# Executive Summary

- The Committee recognises that the County Council has faced another challenging year, trying to make savings without impacting too heavily on frontline services and that these decisions are becoming increasingly difficult.
  - Other Local Authorities are struggling to deliver balanced budgets but the County Council anticipates that cost pressures will be managed to produce an underspend of £1million for 2016/17. The Committee welcomes this news and are pleased that this will be used to bring Council reserves back up to £19.5m.
  - The Committee would like to extend their thanks to all staff of the County Council for their hard work and dedication on behalf of the residents of Buckinghamshire.
  - During the course of the Budget Scrutiny meetings the Committee heard about pressures and challenges, but we also heard about achievements and we have included commendations at the end of the report to celebrate some of the positives.
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# Executive Summary

## Themes of the Committee's Recommendations

The Committee has made a number of recommendations on specific areas of individual portfolio budgets, as well as four recommendations on key over-arching themes.

The Committee's recommendations are on the following over-arching themes:

1. Unallocated Savings
2. Income Generation
3. Alternative Delivery Vehicles
4. Cross-cutting Strategic Reviews



# Recommendations

- 1. That Cabinet ensures that all projected savings in future budgets are underpinned by robust business cases.**
- 2. That Cabinet receives progress reports on Income Generation targets as part of its quarterly Performance and Finance Reports.**
- 3. That Cabinet agrees an action plan on how to ensure that the Council learns the lessons from previous Alternative Delivery Vehicles, prior to establishing any ADVs in future.**
- 4. That Cabinet ensures that there is an effective management mechanism in place for increased corporate oversight of large scale cross-cutting reviews (i.e. those which cross different portfolios and/or Business Units).**



# Recommendations

- 5. That Cabinet postpones a decision about the installation of a third lift in New County Offices until both the existing lifts are fully operational; thereafter a detailed usage study should be undertaken to assess the need for an additional lift.**
  
- 6. That comprehensive training plans are developed and delivered with more urgency to ensure an improvement in commercial skills across the Council. These plans should focus on developing staff skills and knowledge in Procurement, Commissioning, Contract Management and the identification and exploitation of Commercial Opportunities.**
  
- 7. That any business case for building new residential care homes for children is subject to rigorous scrutiny by the relevant Boards e.g. Asset Strategy Board and the relevant Select Committee, prior to a key decision being taken.**





# Recommendations

- 8. That processes for recruiting and retaining foster carers should be streamlined and the schedule of allowances reviewed. Fostering and Adoption should be more actively and effectively encouraged and Children's Services should simplify as much as possible, (within legal and safeguarding requirements) the application processes for prospective Foster Carers and Adopters.**
- 9. That a proportion of the savings made from the digital programme is ring-fenced to mitigate against the possible impact of increased social isolation, if carer visits are reduced.**
- 10. That the provision of Home to School Transport, both mainstream and SEND, by the Council meets national statutory guidelines only, and that parents/guardians are provided with reasonable notice for any policy changes.**



# Recommendations

- 11. That there is no further reduction in funding for PCSOs in light of the public concern expressed in the budget consultation and the fact that these posts are match funded by the Police and Crime Commissioner.**
- 12. That Cabinet should provide funding from outside of the portfolio, to extend the Wellbeing Project into Aylesbury.**
- 13. That there should be no further reduction in the number of Local Area Technicians and that funding for this should be reinstated in the MTFP, given that they are a key access point for both Members and the public.**
- 14. That the Council's approach to gully cleansing is urgently reviewed and if appropriate, further resources reallocated to ensure there is full provision across the County. This should be considered as an invest to save approach.**



# Inquiry Context

- Following the 2016/17 Budget Scrutiny, there has been a period of political and economic uncertainty, following the Brexit referendum result and the formation of a new Government.
- There is significant national concern about the funding of Adult Social Care and the demands on its services, as well as the struggling Health system.
- In 2016, the County Council accepted a four year settlement from Government, therefore the provisional Local Government Settlement, received on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2016 was broadly as expected.



# Inquiry Context

## Local Government Settlement:

- **New Homes Bonus (NHB)** – reduction in NHB starting earlier than planned in 2017/18. This releases £240m nationally which is being recycled as an **Adult Social Care Support Grant** for **2017-18 only**.
- **Adult Social Care Precept** – Government announced some flexibility around current arrangements
  - to date have been able to increase Council Tax by up to 2% per annum
  - now have the option of increasing by up to 6% over next 3 years, as long as don't exceed 3% increase in any one year (e.g. 3%,3%,0% or 3%, 2%, 1%)
- Previous Public Health grant reductions were confirmed
- Education Services Grant was also reduced as expected. This grant funds a number of Local Authority statutory duties, including School Improvement.



# Inquiry Context

## Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Assumptions

- Although Budget Scrutiny were looking at the 2017/18 Budget specifically, this forms part of the wider Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) which extends to 2020/21. The following points should therefore also be noted:
  - By 2018/19 the Revenue Support Grant would be withdrawn entirely.
  - In 2019/20, a proportion of locally retained business rates would also be lost, a revenue reduction of approximately £11million.
- A Council Tax increase of 3.99%, which includes 2% for Adult Social Care Precept had been built into the draft budget proposals, for all 4 years of the MTFP.



# Overall Budget: Leader's Evidence

- The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) is a four year balanced budget required to deliver a high proportion of savings - £46 million by 2020/21.
- Some of the risks in the 2016/17 budget had materialised – overspends were forecast in Adult Social Care and Children's Services (this is consistent with the national trend) and also in Education and Skills, due to pressures in transport for Children with Special Educational Needs (SEND).
- Corporate contingencies would be used to offset these overspends.
- The current overall budget forecast for year end was a £1million underspend, which would be put back into the Council's reserves.



# Overall Budget: Leader's Evidence

- Many of the key challenges facing the Council remain unchanged from last year and include:
  - High demand in both Adults and Children's services and high costs of placements, particularly where children are placed out of county.
  - Costs associated with agency staff, interims and consultants, particularly due to a national shortage of qualified Social Workers
  - Demographic pressures leading to a greater demand on services, which will be exacerbated by proposed housing growth in the County. The County Council will have to respond to Local Plans, once agreed.
  - The level of savings which the Council now has to deliver, after many years of finding efficiencies, has become increasingly challenging and means that difficult decisions have to be taken.



# Overall Budget: Leader's Evidence

- In the current climate it was impossible to give guarantees on delivering the 2017/18 budget, but proposals were robust and contingencies had been built into the budget, in order to offset risks.
- Cabinet's quarterly monitoring of performance against the budget was effective.
- The new Chief Executive, who took up her post in September 2016, brought significant experience of both Adult and Children's Social Care to Bucks.
- In response to a public question about the County Council's Unitary bid, the Leader explained that the MTFP had been prepared for 'business as usual', as the Government's response had not yet been received.





# Overall Budget: Committee Findings

## Adult Social Care Precept

The Committee was asked for its view on how the Council might apply the new flexibilities around the Adult Social Care Precept element of Council Tax.

The individual views of Committee Members were diverse and as such, the Committee did not wish to make a recommendation to Cabinet, but instead offer the following comment:

***As a Committee we are sympathetic towards an increase in the Social Care Precept element of Council Tax given the continuing pressure on Adult Social Care budgets, however the final decision as to the total increase proposed is for Cabinet to recommend to County Council as part of the final Budget proposals.***



# Overall Budget: Committee Findings

## Unallocated Savings

- In 2016, Budget Scrutiny commented that the significant level of unallocated savings, which were attributed to 'Allocation of Future Shape savings' across all portfolios, (totalling £3.67m in 2016/17) undermined the robustness of the budget, as some portfolios were unable to articulate how these savings would be delivered
- Some of last year's savings have not materialised.
- In 2017, the Committee has exactly the same concerns about a number of lines in the portfolio budgets titled 'Service efficiencies – Digital and Strategic Options Appraisals', as they lack detail of how they will be achieved.



# Overall Budget: Committee Finding's

- The lack of clarity in budget lines means that it is difficult for the public to fully understand the Council's plans and makes effective scrutiny more challenging.
- It also creates problems for Business Units - if there is no clear plan of how all efficiencies across the service will be achieved, when the Budget is agreed in February, ahead of a new financial year on 1<sup>st</sup> April, this increases the risks of savings not being delivered within the annual budget period.

**Recommendation 1 – That Cabinet ensures that all projected savings in future budgets are underpinned by robust business cases.**



# Overall Budget: Committee Findings

## Presentation of Financial Objectives

- The paperwork supplied for Budget Scrutiny was generally comprehensive and provided in a timely manner.

***The Committee was disappointed not to have received an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Summary from Children's Services and Education and Skills. It is crucial that EIAs are completed in advance in order to substantiate proposed budget savings.***

- As both these portfolios had substantial overspends, it is paramount that the EIAs are taken into account, in order to increase confidence in budget outcomes.
- The Committee found Budget Appendix 3 to be confusing in parts.
- Following the Committee's recent Inquiry into Income Generation, Members were pleased to see that most portfolios had clearly separated Service Efficiencies from Additional Income, but in Planning & Environment this is yet to be achieved.




# Overall Budget: Committee Findings

## Income Generation

- The Committee welcomed new proposals to raise a further £8million of additional income across the 4 years of the MTFP.
- The Committee was pleased to hear that a network of Income Generation Champions was being developed across the Council.
- If this initiative and the other recommendations of the Committee's Income Generation Inquiry are implemented effectively, it will support the achievement of the MTFP's income generation targets. The Committee will continue to monitor progress in this area.

**Recommendation 2 – That Cabinet receives progress reports on Income Generation targets as part of its quarterly Performance and Finance Reports.**



# Overall Budget: Committee Findings

## Alternative Delivery Vehicles

- The Committee heard that a decision on a possible Alternative Delivery Vehicle (ADV) for the Library Service was yet to be made.
- Members noted recent challenges with Buckinghamshire Care, which were still being investigated at the time of the Budget Scrutiny meetings and the possible impact of the reduction in Education Services Grant on the Buckinghamshire Learning Trust.
- Members wanted to ensure that lessons would be learned for the future and had particular concerns about the robustness of governance arrangements for ADVs.
- In 2016, Budget Scrutiny requested that a review of existing ADVs should be undertaken and Cabinet gave assurances that this review would be completed in July 2016. The Committee had not been advised of the outcomes.

**Recommendation 3 - That Cabinet agrees an action plan on how to ensure that the Council learns the lessons from previous Alternative Delivery Vehicles, prior to establishing any ADVs in future.**

# Overall Budget: Committee Findings

## Cross-Cutting Strategic Reviews

- Significant savings in the MTFP are dependent on the delivery of a number of cross-cutting strategic reviews, particularly across Children's Services and Education & Skills.
- These reviews, e.g. the **Strategic Review of Early Help Services** for vulnerable children are proposing to deliver joint savings across both portfolios totalling **£884k in 2017/18, £3.16m in 2018/19 and £3.28m in 2019/20.**
- It is vital that progress towards delivery of these savings is closely monitored. We heard from the Cabinet Member for Transportation of difficulties encountered when liaising across three different portfolio areas on the Supported Transport Programme, which delayed progress and led to slippage on savings delivery.

**Recommendation 4- That Cabinet ensures that there is an effective management mechanism in place for increased corporate oversight of large scale cross-cutting reviews (i.e. those which cross different portfolios and/or Business Units).**

# Leader

- The Committee explored the range of services in the Leader's portfolio area including HS2, economic development including town centre regeneration and Broadband.
- In response to a public question on Housing Growth, the Leader explained that an increase in homes would increase Council Tax receipts, but would also increase pressures on highways and waste infrastructure, Children's and Adult's Social Care and increase demand for new school places.
- The County Council only received 20% of New Homes Bonus accrued locally and this was used to support Capital projects, rather than the Council's revenue budget.

***The proposed housing growth poses challenges and risks to the Council. The Committee hopes that collaboration with colleagues in the Local Planning Authorities on the development of the Local Plans will help to mitigate these risks.***





# Capital

The Cabinet Member outlined 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 where possible
- The gateway process used by the Asset Strategy Board had greatly improved the governance of capital projects and capital slippage had reduced significantly, with a forecast of £2.4m slippage against £23m last year.

Priorities for the £328million capital programme for the next 4 years included:

- Road and footway maintenance
- School maintenance programme
- Creation of new school places
- Projects which would generate income e.g. Winslow Station Car Park, Waterside North



# Capital

- The Capital Programme included £56m in total for Primary School Places and £86.8m for Secondary School Places, over the next 4 years.

***The Committee believes there is too much reliance on S106 monies to provide new school places that will be required as a consequence of housing growth. Members would like the Council to work closely with the Local Planning Authorities to ensure appropriate scheduling of the required places.***

- It was noted that whilst the County Council has responsibilities for early years, Government expects the private sector to provide these places.

***Whilst currently there are enough early years places to meet demand, the Committee would like this to be closely monitored, as they consider this to be a potential risk to the Council.***



# Capital

- The Committee discussed the proposal to install a third lift in New County Offices, with an indicative cost of £1.6m.
- The two existing lifts had worked intermittently over the past two years - one had now been replaced and was fully operational and the other was in the process of being replaced.
- Members were advised that delays with the lift impacted both on productivity and staff morale.

**Recommendation 5 – That Cabinet postpones a decision about the installation of a third lift in New County Offices until both the existing lifts are fully operational; thereafter a detailed usage study should be undertaken to assess the need for an additional lift.**


# Resources

- The Cabinet Member reported a forecast underspend of £647k – end of November figures show £1.18m. The portfolio was delivering savings and benefitting from income from newly acquired investment properties.

The main challenges and risks for the portfolio included:

- Capacity of Business Services Plus teams – as income generators and supporting change
- Building a more commercial and entrepreneurial spirit
- Robust ICT system – crucial for digital shift
- Realising all savings from the shared services with Harrow
- Investment portfolio – potential of voids if there are changes in property market

***The Committee noted the income generated by the new investment properties but had concerns about possible ‘dips’ in the commercial rental market. Members welcome the fact that the portfolio budget includes a small contingency to mitigate this.***



## Resources

- The Committee welcomed the outcome of a Property Review, which would underpin a 5-10 year plan on how best to utilise or rationalise properties.
- There could be some 'quick wins' from the review and possibly some revenue implications – these were not in the 2017/18 budget as detailed figures had not yet been developed.

***The Committee looks forward to being updated on the progress of the projects which will result from the Property Review.***


- After discussions with the Cabinet Member and the Managing Director about commercial skills in the workforce, the Committee concluded that whilst there had been some improvement, the Council still lacked strength in depth.

**Recommendation 6 – That comprehensive training plans are developed and delivered with more urgency to ensure an improvement in commercial skills across the Council. These plans should focus on developing staff skills and knowledge in Procurement, Commissioning, Contracts Management and the identification and exploitation of Commercial Opportunities.**

# Children's Services

- The Cabinet Member reported a £2.38m forecast overspend at year end - mainly due to staffing and placement cost pressures.
- Children's Services was still on an improvement journey.
- The Children's Services share of the total budget had increased from 12.3% in 2013/14 to 18.9% currently, but budget overspends needed to be addressed.
- A new five year plan, '**Change for Children**' with 4 workstreams would involve staff restructuring and an overhaul of service delivery.
- Detailed implementation plans were still being developed.

***The Committee welcomes the ambition of the Change for Children plan and asks that detailed implementation plans are shared with the Children's Social Care and Learning Select Committee. We also suggest that this should be a topic for a future Member briefing.***



## Children's Services

- Reliance on agency staff had been reduced from 37% in 2014/15, to 24% in 2015/16 and again to 20% this year.

***The Committee welcomes this progress and encourages continued effort to convert agency staff to permanent, particularly experienced Social Workers and Managers, as this will assist with continuity on the improvement journey.***

- There have been longstanding concerns about the amount of Looked After Children placed outside of the County. The Cabinet Member spoke of a need to build and operate our own care homes, thereby reducing dependence on out of county fostering and the use of commercial agencies. The Committee has strong reservations about any such proposal, due to possible financial, operational and reputational risks.

**Recommendation 7 - That any business case for building new residential care homes for children is subject to rigorous scrutiny by the relevant Boards e.g. Asset Strategy Board and the relevant Select Committee, prior to a key decision being taken.**

# Children's Services

- Members were pleased to hear that improvements had been made in the Council's performance on Adoption.
- Work continues to recruit additional foster carers. However, success in recruiting new foster carers had been offset by existing foster carers retiring, resulting in the overall number of in-house foster carers remaining relatively static.

**Recommendation 8 – That processes for recruiting and retaining foster carers should be streamlined and the schedule of allowances reviewed. Fostering and Adoption should be more actively and effectively encouraged and Children's Services should simplify as much as possible, (within legal and safeguarding requirements) the application processes for prospective Foster Carers and Adopters.**





# Health and Wellbeing

- The Cabinet Member reported a small forecast overspend for year end.
- The recent termination of the Council's contract with Buckinghamshire Care would put pressure on the budget, but exact figures were not yet available.

The key challenges for the portfolio in the year ahead included:

- Implementation of a new operating model
  - Reconfiguring services for clients with Learning Disabilities
  - An ambitious digital programme including installing sensors in homes
  - Continuing work on the integration of Health and Social Care
  - Delivering the Bucks Care service in-house
- 
- The Cabinet Member acknowledged that the demand led nature of the service and the impact of both the National Living Wage and local authority budget pressures on social care providers, posed significant risks to his portfolio.



# Health and Wellbeing

***The Committee feels there is a significant risk of care homes or domiciliary care providers going out of business. Members urge Social Care commissioners and contract managers to strike the right balance between delivering budget savings and preserving the viability of providers in an increasingly unstable market.***

**Health and Social Care Integration** – The Cabinet Member was unable to give assurances that Health and Social Care Integration in Bucks would be implemented by 2020. Planning was still in the early stages and although there were some integrated services, e.g. the Quality Care team and the equipment service, more work was needed to produce a step change.

***The Committee asks the Health and Wellbeing Board to drive this complex piece of work forward with more urgency, to ultimately provide a more cohesive Health and Social Care system for the public.***



# Health and Wellbeing

**New Operating Model** – Adult Social Care is using a new operating model based on conversations with clients, their family, friends and communities, to support people to be more resilient. Assistive technology and the reablement service would support this new model. Other local authorities had found this to be effective in supporting clients and reducing costs.

***Whilst the Committee welcomes this approach of engaging with clients and their families, Members were not convinced that the new operating model can deliver both outcomes for clients and the service efficiencies required.***

**Reconfiguration of Learning Disability Services** – The Committee was pleased that the Cabinet Member was engaging regularly with service users around how to deliver services differently, in order to meet their needs, whilst also addressing budget pressures.



# Health and Wellbeing

**Digital Programme** – An ambitious digital programme was being undertaken, which would involve installing digital sensors into client’s homes to enable remote monitoring.

The Cabinet Member commented that this could lead to a reduction in social interaction for some clients.

*The Committee welcomes the introduction of digital aids in people’s homes to enable them to continue to live independently but has concerns about the potential impact on social interaction. It would be helpful to mitigate this - perhaps colleagues in Prevention Matters could provide a link to community volunteer visitors?*

**Recommendation 9 – That a proportion of the savings made from the digital programme is ring-fenced to mitigate against the possible impact of increased social isolation, if carer visits are reduced.**




# Education & Skills

- The Cabinet Member reported a forecast overspend of £2.1m on his overall budget of £12m at year end. This overspend was mainly due to Home to School transport costs, particularly for children with Special Educational Needs (SEND)

The key priorities for the portfolio in the year ahead remained:

- Supporting schools to achieve Ofsted ratings of 'Good' or 'Outstanding'
- Offering Early Years support to give children a good start
- Narrowing the achievement gap in schools

The key challenges for the portfolio included:

- Building on the outcomes of the SEND review to implement changes to services which support Children with Disabilities and SEND
  - Tackling the overspend on Home to School transport
  - Cross cutting review of Early Help services (with Children's Services)
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# Education & Skills

- Although it is still in the consultation stages, the Committee was pleased to learn that Buckinghamshire schools may benefit from increased levels of funding in future (circa £10million) as a result of reconfiguration of the Schools Funding Formula from 2019/20.

**Children with Disabilities & SEND Strategic Review** – The review will consider a wide range of services provided by the Council and Health, including Community Paediatrics, CAMHs and therapies.

**Strategic Review of Early Help services** – This review is aiming to deliver early help in a responsive way to build resilience and reduce the need for children to access statutory services. This would encompass services such as Children’s Centres and the Family Information Service.

***The Committee had concerns about the level of proposed savings which were attached to cross-cutting strategic reviews and believe that these need to be closely monitored – please see recommendation 4.***



## Education & Skills

**Home to School Transport** – The Committee heard that the Home to School transport budget, particularly SEND transport, was significantly overspent due to increased demand, price inflation and an additional requirement at Easter 2016 that had not been anticipated.

The Cabinet Member advised that whilst the Council had statutory duties in this area, some provision was still being made available to a number of families who would not qualify under current policies.

**Recommendation 10 - That the provision of Home to School Transport, both mainstream and SEND, by the Council meets national statutory guidelines only, and that parents/guardians are provided with reasonable notice for any policy changes.**



# Community Engagement & Public Health

- The Cabinet Member reported that a forecast overspend of £100k for year end, due to a delay in delivering a new digital service in the Contact Centre.

The portfolio was very wide-ranging and priorities for next year included:

- Developing a new model of service delivery for Libraries
- Supporting community integration
- Community Safety – addressing changing crime patterns and protecting the vulnerable
- Promoting leisure, tourism and cultural activities in Bucks, including celebrating the Paralympic legacy

**Public Health** - The Committee heard that Public Health were planning to use digital channels as a means of delivering mandatory services at a reduced cost.

***The Committee welcomed the trialling of digital initiatives and hope that a full evaluation will be undertaken to demonstrate how effective this new model of service delivery could be.***





# Community Engagement & Public Health

**Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs)** – The Cabinet Member expressed regret at the proposed cut in funding for PCSOs, as she believed they played a vital part in Community Safety and protecting the vulnerable.

**Recommendation 11 – That there is no further reduction in funding for PCSOs in light of the public concern expressed in the budget consultation and the fact that these posts are match funded by the Police and Crime Commissioner.**

**New Model of Service Delivery for Libraries** – The Committee noted that whilst different options for the Library Service had been considered, a final decision had been delayed pending the outcome of the Unitary debate in Bucks. The Committee agreed that this was sensible, given the important role that libraries have within their communities.

***The Committee expects that a robust, fully-costed business case, which has carefully considered the pros and cons of all options, will support any decision on the future of the library service.***



# Community Engagement & Public Health

**Aylesbury Wellbeing Project** – This project was not included in the portfolio's draft budget - an early MTFP bid had been submitted for additional funding of approximately £180,000, but had been unsuccessful.

The Committee heard that the Wellbeing Project is working well in Chesham and High Wycombe and supports the Cabinet Member's aspiration to replicate this in Aylesbury, where the Index of Multiple Deprivation demonstrates that there is a need for this service.

**Recommendation 12 – That Cabinet should provide funding from outside of the portfolio, to extend the Wellbeing Project into Aylesbury.**



# Planning & Environment

- The Cabinet Member reported a small forecast underspend at year end and the Committee were reminded that £5m of the £11m budget was generated from income.
- The biggest challenges for the portfolio in the coming year included;
  - pressures from housing growth
  - a need for astute contract management, particularly in Waste
  - the development of a plan for Household Recycling Centres (HRCs) to ensure they are accessible and fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- In order to meet these challenges it was vital to recruit and retain skilled professionals across all service areas.
- The Committee noted that one of the Council's largest investment projects, the Energy from Waste (EFW) plant, had been led from planning through to implementation and operational phases by the Waste team. Members were assured that any risks were being well-managed.



# Planning & Environment

- **Household Waste Recycling Centres (HRCs)** - It was noted that most local authorities were trying to cut costs in this area and the Cabinet Member wanted to undertake a full review, which would take into account plans for future housing growth.

***The Committee suggests that the Waste team discusses proposals for future changes to the HRCs with the Transport, Environment and Communities Select Committee.***

- Members noted the recent announcement of Aylesbury's successful bid for Garden Town status.

***The Committee recognises the importance of continued collaboration with the Local Planning Authority on the detail of the Garden Town plans, in order to fully understand the implications for the Aylesbury area.***



# Transportation

- The Cabinet Member reported a forecast overspend of £52k for year end.
- The growth agenda would be a significant pressure going forward. In the past ten years, adoption of new roads had resulted in a 1% increase in the asset per annum – with proposed housing growth, this would increase more rapidly, resulting in additional cost pressures. Whilst S106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) could be accrued from developments, this did not help with ongoing maintenance costs of roads, street lighting, bridges etc.
- Local Transport Plan 4 was published in 2016 and the Strategic Transport team worked with developers to try and secure a link road around Aylesbury. In addition, an Aylesbury Transport Plan was being developed to support the local housing plans.

***The Committee was concerned to hear that the Supported Transport Programme had been delayed because of issues with liaising with colleagues in other portfolio areas – please see Recommendation 4.***



# Transportation

**Local Area Technicians (LATs)** – The number of LATs has been reduced to 14, working out of 3 depots, alongside 3 Compliance Officers. The proposal to reconfigure the Southern Depots in Amersham and Handy Cross might lead to further savings.

In 2016, Budget Scrutiny asked for Members to be involved in any proposed restructuring of the LAT structure, as they were a valued resource.

Roads remain one of the top concerns for residents and the LATs have been reviewed and restructured on a number of occasions.

The Committee was concerned at suggestions that the LAT structure could be further reduced this year, without reference to the relevant Select Committee.

**Recommendation 13 - That there should be no further reduction in the number of Local Area Technicians and that funding for this should be reinstated in the MTFP, given that they are a key access point for both Members and the public.**

# Transportation

**Gully Emptying** – The Committee remains concerned about provision in this area and is disappointed that the 2016 Budget Scrutiny recommendation was not implemented. This was compounded by the news that one of the three tankers had been removed from the fleet.

The Committee believes that there is no coherent strategy in place to manage this important area of highways maintenance effectively. Gully cleansing should move from being a reactive service to a proactive service, which would prevent gully blockages and flooding occurring. Failure to address this issue is extremely expensive as it increases the frequency of carriageway repairs; and further enforces residents' perception of our lack of effectiveness in maintaining highways.

**Recommendation 14 – That the Council's approach to gully cleansing is urgently reviewed and if appropriate, further resources reallocated to ensure there is full provision across the County. This should be considered as an invest to save approach.**

# Commendations

The Committee would like to record the following 'good news' stories from Budget Scrutiny:

- Significant reduction in capital slippage due to the new gateway process being diligently applied by the Asset Strategy Board.
- New appointment of a Head of Digital and ICT, which the Committee hopes will lead to robust and agile ICT systems and increase the pace of digital change.
- A 'grow our own talent' approach in the Highways Development Management team appears to be working well, with response times to applications improving and income generation targets now in place.
- Proactive income generation being demonstrated across the Council, particularly in Planning & Environment and Resources.
- Joint Trading Standards with Surrey County Council is being held up as an exemplar model by the Local Government Association.
- Appointment of additional School Place Commissioners, with one post being funded by S106 funding.
- Reconfiguration of the Winslow Centre is part of the Council's 'One Public Estate' bid, aiming to deliver retirement housing and a medical centre.