

Buckinghamshire Business Group

Mr Richard Ambrose
Director of Finance and Procurement
Buckinghamshire County Council
County Hall
Walton Street
Aylesbury
Bucks
HP20 1UA

30 January 2019

Dear Richard

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL BUDGET PROPOSALS 2019/20 TO 2022/23

Many thanks for your detailed presentation and the supporting papers on Buckinghamshire County Council's budget proposals 2019/20-2022/23, provided at the Buckinghamshire Business Group meeting last week.

As agreed at the meeting, I am writing to provide formally the response from the business representative organisations and independent businesses that form the Buckinghamshire Business Group (BBG).

The business representatives note that budget proposals have been prepared prior to announcements being received on the new unitary authority to be created in Buckinghamshire and recognise there will be work required in the future to aggregate County and District Councils' figures from April 2020 onwards. All five Local Authorities will need to deliver identified savings to enable the new authority to start on a good footing and the business community will be keen to see these savings being made, particularly in view of the costs to be incurred through TUPE, novation of contracts and transfer of assets.

Business representatives recognise the continued pressures around Children's and Adults' Social Care budgets and acknowledge the significant risks associated with these budgets, particularly Children's Services where Buckinghamshire, like many other areas, overspent in the last year. BBG members are content that Buckinghamshire County Council are taking active steps to manage social care budgets through a portfolio of measures including insourcing (BCC owned facilities) and prevention (eg early intervention to prevent children being taken into care), and that the county continues to try and increase foster carer numbers.

BBG members are delighted to hear that it has been confirmed recently that Buckinghamshire will become a pilot for the new Business Rates Retention scheme, with an anticipated benefit across Buckinghamshire Local Authorities of £7m in 2019/2020. It is understood these figures are unpredictable and relate to the success of businesses locally in the coming year, and that benefit gained is to be spent on the growth agenda (infrastructure, connectivity, etc) and providing financial sustainability.

BBG members are happy to see continued capital investment in highways improvements, with significant budgets being set aside for strategic road maintenance and addressing potholes; support for East West Rail, and other infrastructure projects; all of which will benefit Buckinghamshire's connectivity and enable growth.

BBG members commend the council's continued work towards financial stability and the measures being taken (eg investment into real estate to create an income stream) to mitigate budget cuts, and understand the council deploys due diligence procedures as part of the risk assessment undertaken on intended investments.

The business community recognises the housing growth taking place in the county which has been considered in estimating council tax receipts, and also recognises that for this additional income there will be associated additional costs; not least in providing additional school places, a significant element of which will be reliant upon section 106 contributions from developers.

BBG members acknowledge the difficulty in preparing a budget when there are significant unknowns relating to continued Government funding on, for example, the Adult Social Care Precept, the impact of the Spending Review in terms of Local Authority grants, and the establishment of the new Buckinghamshire Council; and commend the council on the budget presented and the work being undertaken to ensure financial security.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Stronach', written in a cursive style.

Adam Stronach
Chairman
Buckinghamshire Business Group

cc: Rachael Shimmin, Chief Executive, Buckinghamshire County Council