

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting of the Buckinghamshire County Council convened and held on Thursday 21 February 2019 in The Oculus AVDC Gatehouse Way, commencing at 9.30 am and concluding at 12.15 pm.

PRESENT

Ms N Glover in the Chair;

Mr M Appleyard, Mr W Bendyshe-Brown, Mrs P Birchley, Ms J Blake, Mr N Brown, Mr T Butcher, Mr D Carroll, Mr W Chapple OBE, Mr J Chilver, Mr A Christensen, Mr C Clare, Mrs L Clarke OBE, Mr A Collingwood, Mrs A Cranmer, Mrs I Darby, Mr D Dhillon, Mr C Etholen, Mrs B Gibbs, Lin Hazell, Mr M Hussain, Mr N Hussain, Mr P Irwin, Mr R Khan, Mr S Lambert, Ms A Macpherson, Mrs W Mallen, Mr D Martin, Mr P Martin, Mr I Rashid, Mr R Reed, Mr B Roberts, Mr D Shakespeare OBE, Mr M Shaw, Mrs J Teesdale, Mr M Tett, Ms J Ward, Julia Wassell, Mr D Watson, Mr W Whyte and Ms A Wight

DIGNITARIES AND OTHERS PRESENT

Sir H Aubrey-Fletcher, Mrs C Aston, Mrs M Aston, Mrs A Davies,
Mrs G Miscampbell OBE DL and Mr R Pushman

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mr R Bagge, Mr S Bowles, Mr C Harriss, Mr D Hayday, Mr A Hussain, Mrs L Sullivan, Mr G Williams, Ms K Wood, Mr B Allen, Mrs M Clayton, Mr M Colston, Mrs P Crawford, Mr P Lawrence, Mrs V Letheren, Mr D Polhill, Mr K Ross MBE DL and Ms R Farwell

1 MINUTES

A minutes silence was held for County Councillor Chaudhary Ditta who had passed away in November. The Chairman paid tribute to Mr Ditta and also read a letter written to the Council from his wife and children.

RESOLVED: The minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2018 were AGREED as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

2 PETITIONS

The following petitions were handed to Ms R Shimmin, Chief Executive.

Mr J Chilver presented a petition on Thrift Farm regarding a campaign to stop the closure of Thrift Farm which was currently out for consultation. The petition had 6789 signatures to date.

Mr W Whyte presented a petition on A421 improvements The petition was on behalf of residents in Thornborough and Nash and was for sign and road improvements on the

A421. The petition had 200 signatures to date.

Mr D Dhillon presented a petition on behalf of the residents of Burnham regarding the need for a pelican crossing on Stomp Road. The petition had 1100 signatures to date and was supported by a letter from the school and local MP.

3 COMMUNICATIONS

Apologies were received from Mr Bagge, Mr Bowles, Mr Harris, Mr Hayday, Mr A Hussain, Mrs Sullivan, Mrs Ward, Mr Williams, Ms R Farwell, Mr Colston, Mr Lawrence and Mrs Letheren.

Written Questions: The Chairman advised Members that responses to written questions had been published online.

Chairman's report: The Chairman welcomed two new councillors following recent by-elections, Mr I Rashid and Mr A Christensen. The Chairman reported on events since the last Council meeting and highlighted in particular:

- Recent bad weather had stopped the Chairman attending a number of events which included the Chinese New Year celebrations.
- The Chairman looked forward to attending the Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace on 15 May. Mrs Glover would be attending with County Councillors Mrs Cranmer, Mr Harriss and Mr Williams and 6 BCC staff who were nominated by their colleagues which included the County Council's oldest member of staff - a 90 year old School Crossing Patroller.
- In December the Chairman had attended 3 Queen's Award for Enterprise events for Monodraught and Focusrite in High Wycombe and Trio Healthcare at Great Missenden. The awards were presented to the Chief Executives of each of the companies by His Royal Highness the Duke of Kent.
- The Chairman had also attended the opening of new premises for medical detection dogs.

The Chairman then introduced Mr P Irwin, County Councillor who addressed the Council and gave his experiences of the recent Time to Talk Day and the activities that had taken place and his own experience of mental health issues.

The Chairman then paid tribute to two former county councillors, Maurice Oram and Dennis Green who had recently passed away. Members stood for a minute silence

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

5 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICERS STRATEGIC REPORT

Mr Ambrose, Director of Finance and Procurement and Chief Financial Officer presented his strategic report and outlined the following:

- Mr Ambrose was required to report to Council on robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the budget and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves.

- There had been detailed scrutiny of the proposed budgets at various points in the process including the budget scrutiny process carried out by the Finance, Performance and Resources Select Committee, which had resulted in a number of recommendations and changes made.
- The risks were set out in the report which included future funding, demand pressures and care market sustainability.
- Mr Ambrose stated there were reasonable assurances and that level of reserves was sufficient.

Recommendation:

Council were asked to NOTE the Chief Finance Officer's Report.

6 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

Mr D Watson, Chairman of Finance and Resources (FPR) Select Committee Chairman, addressed Members and reminded them of the recent robust scrutiny process the budget had undergone in January 2018. Mr Watson thanked his colleagues on the budget scrutiny committee for their hard work, colleagues in Democratic Services for their support and Cabinet Member, the Leader and senior officers who appeared before the committee.

Mr Watson highlighted the 10 recommendations in the report put forward by the FPR Select Committee and summarised them as:

1. Additional monies to be added to the 2019-20 contingency budget, to supplement the current unitary reserve of £7.7m.
2. An improved level of visibility in individual budget lines across all portfolios for future Budget Scrutiny Inquiries.
3. That balance sheet and cash flow budgets would be prepared to support the capital, treasury investments, borrowing and revenue costs over the four year period.
4. Concerns that issues driving the increase of Looked After Children would continue to grow over the coming years and therefore there was the possibility that the budgeted growth in demand would not be sufficient.
5. A realistic figure to be included in the final Children's Services budget for legal fees.
6. The Health and Wellbeing contingency would need to be reviewed to ensure that it offset the key risk areas identified by the Committee.
7. A minimum 5% per annum uplift to be applied to the Strategic Highways Maintenance capital budget line to take into account inflation, growth of the asset and impact of increased traffic on the highways.
8. Additional funding for gully cleansing and weed management had been added into the budget as a result of Budget Scrutiny recommendations over the past two years needed to be maintained.
9. A Street Lighting Survey should be undertaken to establish the location, ownership and condition of all columns in the County and recommended an additional £2m from the Capital budget to be added to fund an acceleration of Column Replacement works. The use of smart technology should also be investigated.
10. Preparations for the new authority should include both the Unitary Opportunities and Future Budget Scrutiny recommendations.

Mr Watson stated that a lot of thought had been put into the preparation of the budget and that there was little choice but to increase council tax, the need for which was reflected in salary inflation projected to be 2%, the inexorable rise in demand in Children's Services and Adult Social Care and cost inflation from outsourcing.

During the debate Members raised the following matters

- Mr A Collingwood raised concerns related to the £123m spend on outsourcing with lack of clarity on where that money was being spent and that the money could be better spent on services such as short break respite provision. Mr Watson stated that there had been requests for detailed breakdown of spend on outsourcing as budget of the budget scrutiny process. He also stated that respite savings required had been identified as part of the MTP process.
- Julia Wassell raised the issue of predictability of costs in Children's and Adults services and the need to have contingencies in both those areas and a mechanism to predict costs better.

Mr M Tett, Leader of the Council, presented his report, the presentation of which is appended to the minutes. Mr Tett thanked colleagues involved in the budget scrutiny process, which had been webcast and thanked them for their detailed response and recommendations which has been considered and agreed by Cabinet.

Mr Tett's presentation highlighted the following:

- This was the last budget to be set by the County Council before becoming a unitary authority. It was the 130th budget of the County Council and Mr Tett reflected on the changes that had taken place over the years.
- The challenges and pressures put on services and the difficult decisions that have needed to be made. Mr Tett paid tribute to staff and members past and present and was particularly proud of the fact that the Council had an excellent record of strong and prudent budgetary control year on year and had consistently produced a balanced budget despite the huge financial pressures
- From 2020/21 the budgets from all five Buckinghamshire councils would be amalgamated and future decisions on finances would be made by the new single unitary Buckinghamshire council.
- The public consultation that had taken place on two occasions and the feedback taken on board from the cross party budget scrutiny process.
- The national context and in particular mentioned the growing demand in adult social care and children's services and the loss of all main central government funding.
- The opportunities the creation of a new council, bringing together the best of all five councils.
- The work the council had and continued to do to generate income, in particular the Adult Social Care Transformation Programme, with the projected savings for the first year alone were £5.2m.
- The council had been shortlisted as part of the governments Housing Infrastructure Fund which would see £1.4bn allocated to projects to support growth and development. The Council's bid for nearly £200m for Aylesbury Garden Town now needed to be developed into a business case.
- There were plans for a further £19m investment in roads which included early repairs as soon as the weather conditions improved. There had also been a budget set aside of £500k for weed removal in some town and village centres.

- Mr Tett thanked 'Team Bucks' including the local NHS, Community and mental Health services, the parish, town and district councils, Bucks MPs, the voluntary and community organisations across the county, the Police, the fire and emergency services and Bucks LEP. Mr Tett also extended his thanks on behalf of all members to all staff of the County Council who worked tirelessly for residents and frequently went 'above and beyond' to deliver the very best. Mr Tett thanked Mr R Ambrose and his team for the huge amount of work done to produce yet again a balanced budget.
- Bucks and Dorset were first county councils to receive no Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and in the coming year would have moved into 'negative RSG' however following consultation and lobbying the government had decided to remove the further reduction which benefitted the budget by £10.95m.
- The Council Tax referendum threshold had remained at the same level as last year.
- The council had benefitted from an additional one off fund of £4.55m for adult social care and for general social care pressures. Mr Tett reiterated that it was a one off payment and did not guarantee any sustainable funding beyond next year.
- The county and district councils had been accepted as a pilot of the government's new 75% business rate retention scheme. The scheme allowed a greater percentage of the growth in business rates to remain within county which was estimated to be worth over £7m with the county share being 50% of the increased receipts.
- In the coming year price inflation and increase demand would cost the council an extra £27.2m and an additional £53.9m across the four year period.
- Social care remained the largest area of demand and price growth which was not unique to Buckinghamshire.
- Portfolio efficiencies were assumed at £10.3m for the next year, rising to £19.7m by the end of the four year period. Mr Tett clarified that the council continued to work closely with colleagues in the Health Service to deliver integrated services and continued to deliver shared outcomes with colleagues across the whole of the public sector in Bucks.
- The council would also continue to seek out income generation opportunities which included working with public sector and voluntary bodies and the increased of the council's property investment portfolio which was generating more income than ever before. Mr Tett also highlighted the active management of the Energy from Waste (EfW) contract.
- Overall there was an assumption that in 2019/20 there would be additional income of £1.9m which was expected to increase to £3.2m by 2022/23.
- The council's General Fund reserves had increased back to their historic and prudent level of £30m.
- There was a plan to spend £86m in 2019/20 and £362m over the four year life of the Capital programme with a priority placed on the highways network which included a commitment to spend at least £15m each year on the strategic roads network and an additional £4m in 2019 calendar year on the plane and patch programme.
- There was also a commitment to spend £1.5m each year of the programme on repairs to footways and £1.5m a year included to replace street lighting columns. There would also be £1m each year on the drainage systems essential to keep roads protected from the damage caused by excess surface water.

- The Capital programme also included £35.2m in 2019/20 and £140.9m over four years to invest in Bucks schools and other education needs. 2020/21 would see the Basic Need funding reduce to zero even though there continued to be a growing number of children requiring school places.
- It was proposed the Council Tax would be increased by 2.99% which equated to 71p per week for a Band D property.

Mr Tett concluded by stating that it was the final budget of Buckinghamshire County Council with the exciting development of the new unitary structure that would deliver the best savings and simplifying services for residents. Mr Tett wanted to ensure that the new organisation started out on the best financial footing possible and would need to consider what measures the council can put in place to help the new council hit the ground running on 1 April 2020. The new authority will combine the best of the County and Districts and will be - *simpler, stronger, better value and more local*.

Mr S Lambert, Leader of the Opposition Group, thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to speak in the budget debate and to respond to the Leader and the budget proposals for the 2019/ 20 year. Mr Lambert highlighted the following:

- The opposition group agreed that the council's Strategic Plan and its three key themes remained fit for purpose in the changing local and national context.
- Mr Lambert stated that he was proud of how the authority approached their budget setting with the involvement of members and members of the public. Mr Lambert referenced his place on the council's budget scrutiny committee for the past six years and paid testament to the work of members across this council, across the political spectrum - cabinet members, select committee chairs and back benchers. Mr Lambert also stated that with meetings being fully webcast and all the detailed papers published, meant transparency.
- Mr Lambert stated that the move by some district councils to launch a Judicial Review on the unitary decision was a waste of public money and there appeared to be a lack of clarity within those councils around the decision making to go to Judicial Review.
- Mr Lambert requested that the Leader update on the position of the unitary project as it had been four months since the decision by the Secretary of State and wanted assurances that any costs incurred due to the judicial review would be recovered from the petitioner councils. Mr Lambert stated that their actions were destabilising for staff across county and district councils, impacted budgets and affected corporate policy making and engagement with communities and residents.
- Mr Lambert made reference to no longer being in the predicted position of negative RSG, the extra funding received for adults and children's social care of approximately £1.7m and the business rates retention pilot that would be bring an additional £3.5m to the council. In addition there would be approximately £2.3m from the uplift in Council Tax collection.
- Mr Lambert welcomed the additional money put into reserves for unitary given the extra cost of 147 members.
- Mr Lambert was deeply concerned over the Seely's House and Aylesbury Opportunities Centre bids attached to the Capital programme and the reasons for the decision.
- There were concerns raised over the reduction in service hours and closure of Bledlow household recycling centre and the commencement of charges to residents for a small financial saving this year and tying the successor authority

into a real front line service reduction before the chance to review and before the review all the waste contracts for collection and disposal. There were also concerns that this would add extra pressure onto parish and town councils if there were an increase in illegal dumping of waste.

- Mr Lambert highlighted that this all came at a time when additional money was being put into reserves and that the Planning and Environment portfolio generated approximately £650k income and were still had to make efficiencies in order to contribute to other portfolios. Mr Lambert had considered to move an amendment regarding the HWRC's but understood that alternative options were being explored in regard to the site that was due to close.
- The issue of insufficient budgets in Adult Social Care and Children's Services in previous years was highlighted and the Early Help decision last year that had impacted on budgets. There had also been extra costs associated with the Ofsted Improvement plan; however Mr Lambert and his group supported the Ofsted recovery plan. Mr Lambert also welcomed the additional money into the Children's Services legal fees budget.
- Mr Lambert also thanked staff and colleagues for keeping our vulnerable safe and our services running. Mr Lambert urged staff to watch the Chief Executive's 'One news' blog posts, videos and roadshows to find out more information about unitary and urged district councils to share this with their staff too.
- Mr Lambert made reference to the reduction in the local member road scheme budget in order to put money into reserves. This had been the most tangible element to the council's budget for local members; reductions to Local Member's Highways schemes and street light issues in order to put approximately £4m into reserves was not credible
- Mr Lambert made reference to the Community Engagement and Public Health portfolio and in particular mentioned the Aylesbury project to support young people which had not progressed, low visitor numbers to libraries and the demise of the mobile library. Mr Lambert did praise the developments of the County Museum.
- It was highlighted that Brexit was a risk to the Bucks business community but the council's budget was presented reasonably healthy with about 8% back up in reserves.
- Mr Lambert stated that the budget did not meet the priorities of his grouping and could not suggest that it was a robust budget and that forecasting was right, given this years' experience of contingency use. The opposition group's priority would have been to remove the extra provision to reserves and put £2m into the highways budget to restore the local member highways schemes and make provisions for street lighting upgrades and a further £1m each into Children's and Adult Social Care to provide the financial insurance that these essential front line services needed.
- Mr Lambert thanked the Chairman in how she had carried out her role and looked forward to working with her successor in the coming year.

During the debate Members raised the following matters

- Members were pleased with the additional funding for weed spraying but raised the issue of setting money aside for County Council reserves while reductions to budgets in others areas such as the local member highways scheme. Mr Tett responded by stating that he was pleased with the money to be spent on weed spraying and that this would be carried out in major town and village centres. He highlighted that the council had fought to preserve the HWRC sites as they were but with budget pressures of £1.2m this was no longer an option.

- Julia Wassell stated that local members were faced with residents who continued to deal with problems arising from long term austerity which included debt, homelessness, housing issues, excluded children and road schemes. Mr Tett responded by saying that he talked with residents on a regular basis was aware of what those residents priorities were. The budget had been shaped around resident's priorities and had been consulted on twice. There was also a reliance on those members in the room to feedback resident's priorities.
- It was confirmed that there had been no reduction in budget for roads, maintained at £15m year on year and an additional £4m had been added for the plan and patch programme.
- Concerns were raised regarding the Children's Services budgets' drawing from contingency year on year and it was confirmed that there had been a children's services budget increase since 2015 which had not been enough and there was now an additional £11m put into the budget and also additional money for increasing legal costs.
- Members urged colleagues to work together on the transition into the new unitary authority.
- The Short Breaks consultation was raised and Mr Tett stated that Cabinet Members would work closely with the local member to ensure concerns and views were taken into account.

In summary, Mr Tett thanked all members for the good debate and the leader of the opposition group for his speech. There was a requirement to put forward a balanced budget and that reserves could not be spent on everyday expenditure on an ongoing basis.

The concerns regarding an increase in fly tipping would continue to be monitored and extra money had been put into the budget for that.

Mr Tett was pleased to ring-fenced money for the Ofsted improvement plan and additional money being budgeted for legal fees in children's services. Mr Tett stated that it was always a difficult area to budget for that contingency had also been put aside.

Mr Tett stated that he respected the decision of colleagues to exercise their lawful right to undertake judicial review regarding the transition into a new unitary authority, however stated that if the decision had been to approve the other business case he would not have challenged it and worked with colleagues. Unitary was an enormous task with a number of workstreams still to define, but there was a need to move at pace. Mr Tett commented that it was important that the council implement the spirit of the business case and to co design the details to get the best of heritage from all five councils.

Out of the 37 Members present a recorded vote was taken as follows:

Members for: Mr Appleyard, Mr Bendyshe-Brown, Mrs Birchley, Mrs Blake, Mr Brown, Mr Butcher, Mr Carroll, Mr Chapple, Mr Chilver, Mr Clare, Mrs Cranmer, Mrs Darby, Mr Dhillon, Mr Etholen, Mrs Gibbs, Mrs Glover, Lin Hazel, Mr Irwin, Mrs Macpherson, Mrs Mallen, Mr D Martin, Mr P Martin, Mr Reed, Mr Roberts, Mr Shakespeare, Mrs Teesdale, Mr Tett, Mr Watson, Mr Whyte, Mrs Wight.

Members against: Mr Christensen, Mr M Hussain, Mr N Hussain, Mr R Khan, Mr S Lambert, Mr I Rashid, Julia Wassell

The motion was carried with 30 in favour, 7 against and no abstentions.

RESOLVED:

Council APPROVED:

1. **The Revenue Budget for 2019/20 (and indicative budgets for the following three years) as set out in Appendices 1, 2 and 3 and a Net Budget Requirement of £356.310m in 2019/20;**
2. **A Council Tax Requirement of £293.124m and a Band D council tax, for County Council spending of £1,329.64 in 2019/20;**
3. **The Capital Programme as set out in Appendix 5;**
4. **Noted the Budget Scrutiny Report**
5. **Noted the Business Unit Plans.**
6. **Noted the response to the budget proposals from Bucks Business Group**

7 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Mr J Chilver, Cabinet Member for Resources presented the report to Council to consider the Treasury Management Strategy 2019/20. Mr Chilver highlighted the following points:

- CIPFA required the Council to approve a treasury management strategy before the start of each financial year.
- The only change was the increase in money market to facilitate council's cash flow requirements.
- The strategy had been reviewed by the Council's Regulatory and Audit Committee.

Mr S Lambert raised concerns about the little detail in the strategy related to the impact of Brexit and wanted assurances that risks were being identified and managed. Mr Chilver responded by stating that there was a risk monitoring process in place which included those related to Brexit. Mr Chilver drew member's attention to the Brexit update on their desks and the date of the next Buckinghamshire Brexit Summit.

Recommendation:

Council were asked to APPROVE the Treasury Management Strategy Statement.

RESOLVED: Council APPROVED the Treasury Management Strategy Statement.

8 CAPITAL AND INVESTMENT STRATEGY

Mr J Chilver, Cabinet Member for Resources presented the report to Council to consider the Capital and Investment Strategy. Mr Chilver highlighted the following points:

- The strategy was a statutory requirement in accordance with the CIPFA Prudential Code.
- Ensure that Capital investment proposals were affordable prudent and sustainable.
- Non-financial investments that related to the Council's property portfolio.
- The need to look at new ways to generate income, with financial return of property investments being one approach.
- The Finance, Performance and Resources Select Committee had commented

on the strategy and would have as an item later in the year.

Members raised and discussed the following points:

- Mr Appleyard, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills supported the strategy and highlighted the result of the strategy over a number of years had led to positive results which included Aylesbury Vale academy being rated as a good school and the opening of the new school. Mr Chilver welcomed the comments and celebrated the success of the school and the capital building programme.
- Members raised issues relating to unitary including moving capital reserves from county to districts and the need to allow flexibility for parishes to manage assets within their local area going forward. Mr Chilver stated that both of these areas would be a matter for the new authority once it had been legally formed.

Recommendation:

Council were asked to APPROVE the Capital and Investment Strategy.

RESOLVED: Council APPROVED the Capital and Investment Strategy.

9 PROPORTIONALITY REPORT

This report set out the allocation of Committee seats in line with legal requirements on political proportionality.

Recommendation:

Council were asked to confirm the political balance in the distribution of seats across Committees to be as set out in the report, to accord with the rules on proportionality.

RESOLVED: Council AGREED the recommendation.

10 NOTICES OF MOTION

There were none.

11 CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS TAKEN - INFORMATION ONLY

RESOLVED: The Council NOTED the report.

12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

25 April 2019.

CHAIRMAN