



Cabinet agenda

Date: Tuesday 15 February 2022

Time: 10.00 am

Venue: The Oculus, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, HP19 8FF

Membership:

M Tett (Leader), A Macpherson (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing), G Williams (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration), S Bowles (Cabinet Member for Communities), S Broadbent (Cabinet Member for Transport), J Chilver (Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources, Property and Assets), A Cranmer (Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services), C Harriss (Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure), N Naylor (Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness and Regulatory Services) and P Strachan (Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment)

Agenda Item	Page No
8 Budget Scrutiny 2022 report	3 - 12

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Budget Scrutiny 2022 – Recommendations from the Budget Scrutiny Inquiry Group

Chairman – Cllr Ralph Bagge

Response from Cabinet – Cllr Martin Tett, Leader

Recommendation	Cabinet's Response – Y/N & comments	Lead Member/Officer & Timelines
1. The Corporate Plan be reviewed prior to the end of this financial year. The Corporate Plan is vital in providing the vision that drives the strategies, programme, and budget.	Yes. The Corporate Plan is currently under review, and the intention is to take a refresh of the Plan to Council later this Spring.	Martin Tett Rachael Shimmin
2. A timetable of key strategies which are in development across the Council, with target dates for key milestones, should be shared with all members on a quarterly basis. This would provide renewed focus on delivery of strategies and enable members to identify opportunities for consultation or pre-decision scrutiny by the relevant select committee and local members where appropriate.	<p>Yes. A list of strategies is in development and will be shared with Members on a regular basis. This will include key milestones, although recognising these are subject to change. All strategies will also be included on the Forward Plan which sets out the anticipated timing for decision making.</p> <p>Individual Cabinet Members have a clear focus on the development and delivery of strategies for their respective portfolios and are responsible for ensuring appropriate consultation arrangements, including with local members and other non-Executive members through Task and Finish groups where appropriate. The Select Committees will play an important role in reviewing the impact of the Council's strategies in the medium/longer term.</p>	Martin Tett Sarah Ashmead

<p>3. Beyond the Better Buckinghamshire Programme, all services should constantly be reviewed and challenged for demonstration of best value. Members note that service areas such as Policy and Communications have had the capacity to cope with exceptional demand throughout the past two years due to COVID whereas other service areas have tended to hire interim staff to cope with times of higher demand. Members welcome an ongoing assessment of how each service is delivering value and question whether this level of budget would be necessary as the Council returns to a 'business as usual' footing. Publishing headcounts to understand staffing levels across all areas would support this assessment. A further review should be considered post-unitary and COVID to consider further reductions and potential outsourcing of non-core activities to save costs.</p>	<p>In part.</p> <p>Cabinet Members will consider the potential of outsourcing on a case by case basis where this could deliver better value and improved customer service, but this is not necessarily always the most appropriate means to secure best value for the Council.</p> <p>The Better Buckinghamshire Programme is the Council's framework for reviewing and improving service delivery to ensure that we operate in the most cost efficient a way as possible to deliver services to an acceptable standard to the public, meet the needs of the organisation and deliver on member priorities within the best value cash envelope. The methodology includes a rigorous review of staffing structures, digital processes and delivery models, alongside a comparison against external benchmarks.</p> <p>Given our finite resources and demand pressures we also need to progress our improvement and change work alongside business as usual. This has to take account of being able to flex to respond to any new government initiatives including but not limited to COVID. Our existing prioritisation reflects the detailed work needed post unitarization as well as improvement and change work in Children's and Adults services. Once the first cycle of Better Buckinghamshire Reviews has been completed, we will develop plans for the ongoing review of all service areas to ensure a continual focus on efficiency and continuous improvement. Alongside the Better Buckinghamshire service improvement programme there are also a number of smaller improvement projects appropriately managed within services.</p>	<p>Martin Tett Sarah Ashmead</p>
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	<p>Headcount information is published as part of the Cabinet's performance dashboard. However, directly employed headcount does not in itself enable us to assess value for money. A number of posts are externally funded, a number of services are insourced or outsourced and some roles are covered by agency staff. Given the size and complexity of the organisation, our total workforce is dynamic and needs to flex based on individual service demand, issues and delivery models. For example, in the context of COVID, none of our services were able to routinely respond to the exceptional staffing demand arising alongside delivering business as usual activity. Across the Council, service areas, including Policy and Communications, managed the exceptional workloads through a combination of bringing in additional temporary staff, funded through COVID grant funding, and putting on hold core activities.</p> <p>Oversight of improvement activity is a key activity for and reviewed regularly by Cabinet Members. Cabinet Members are also responsible for regular challenge of all services in order to ensure efficiency and this includes identifying opportunities to reconsider delivery models where appropriate.</p>	
<p>4. Greater visibility should be given to contingencies contained within the budget, as well as any in-year release of contingencies so that residents can see and understand how decisions are reached and what pressures there are on the budget. Consideration should be given to including an additional appendix in the final budget paperwork to be approved by Cabinet. Graphical representation grouping portfolio areas would be helpful for Members and residents.</p>	<p>Yes. Corporate Contingencies will be presented to Cabinet in February to ensure visibility. Furthermore, in 2022/23 quarterly budget monitoring reports to Cabinet will include the status of the contingencies, including details of any that have been released to Portfolio areas.</p>	<p>Martin Tett Richard Ambrose</p>

<p>5. Consideration be given to running the Social Worker Academy with a smaller cohort on an ongoing basis to mitigate issues of recruitment shortages and a reliance on high cost agency staff. Metrics should be developed to measure the success of the delivery of the programme and Cabinet should explore whether this is a model that can be replicated in other hard to recruit areas such as planning.</p>	<p>Yes. The ASYE Academy will expand to a cohort of 60 in the financial year 2022/23. The size of the Academy in future years will be determined by need, recruitment strategy and budget priorities.</p> <p>The model will be actively considered in other directorates where recruitment challenges exist. The metrics to measure success will include; the proportion of successful candidates who join the staffing establishment and retention rate at month 24 after leaving the Academy.</p>	<p>Anita Cramer John Chilver Richard Nash Sarah Murphy-Brookman</p>
<p>6. The Council's property rationalisation strategy should have a clear vision of future ways of working and be delivered at a greater pace, with regular updates provided to Finance and Resources Select Committee. Acknowledging that an Estates Strategy is under development, the Council can shape its own future with new ways of working and targeting an earlier date for downsizing of the council estate will bring greater efficiency savings. Should the Council return to pre-pandemic work patterns there would still be excess office space, therefore decisions to dispose or repurpose some assets should be made within the coming financial year.</p>	<p>Yes. The Cabinet fully supports the ambition to downsize the Council's estate in order to deliver efficiency savings as early as possible. There are a number of complexities to manage with this, including the uncertainties about future working patterns and space requirements arising from the pandemic, as well as the interdependencies with our town centre redevelopment plans. That said, considerable work has already taken place to establish how the revenue saving of £2.4m from accommodation might be achieved in the medium term financial plan period, with the full saving due to be achieved by 2026 (in line with the lease end at Capswood). There is a targeted and realistic delivery programme in place to support this, assuming that a further variant of covid does not materially affect the programme.</p> <p>The Estates Strategy, and accompanying rationalisation plan, is being developed for Cabinet consideration in July 2022. A number of steps are being taken to inform the development of this strategy over the next six months. In terms of the requirement for office space, a pilot is due to take place from March 2022 to assess the potential of moving to a desk to staff</p>	<p>John Chilver Ian Thompson</p>

	<p>ratio of 1:4 and a ratio of 1 person to 100 sq. ft. It would not have been possible to commence this at an earlier date because staff have not been in the office sufficiently to be able to undertake a pilot study that would realise tangible results. In advance of the pilots, we are due to commence the implementation of a new desk and meeting room booking system by the end of February. In tandem with this work, preliminary master planning of the Amersham and Wycombe offices is being undertaken to give an indication of what is possible on the Council owned sites, if we are to reduce the operational footprint. The planned result of these steps will be a roll out estates strategy for the organisation, meeting the requirements of the medium term financial plan, regeneration considerations and opportunities in Aylesbury, Wycombe and Amersham together with operational need.</p> <p>The Council has had significant success in letting out surplus operational buildings over the past 18 months. We have recently had letting success of surplus space at 66 High Street Aylesbury (now fully let, 30,000 sq. ft) and Easton Street (fully let to Oxfordshire Mental Health Trust, 30,000 sq. ft). The Council also sublets space at Wycombe offices and has recently achieved a new letting of 10,000 sq. ft of accommodation, bringing the total space let at Wycombe to about 25% of the office space. Additionally, the Council lets surplus space at Amersham and a small amount of space at New Council Offices to the CCG. We continue to actively market and seek occupational tenants for vacant space within the Council's portfolio and are pleased to note that, excluding those in an approved capital or regeneration scheme, just 0.33% of the properties across the Council's estate have been vacant for more than 2 years which is an improving</p>	
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	<p>position. The only large operational vacancy we have is at Capswood. We are actively seeking to identify a solution that will reduce our costs linked to this asset and will report to Cabinet as things progress.</p> <p>Regular updates on the development and delivery of the Estates Strategy will be provided to the Finance and Resources Select Committee.</p>	
7. Additional funding should be set aside for the development of the Local Plan as £750k p.a. over the next three years is likely to be inadequate, particularly in light of possible changes arising when the Planning White Paper is taken forward.	No. We are confident that the current budget for preparing the Buckinghamshire Local Plan is adequate to make good progress. We will, however, keep it under review, so we can respond to any changes as a result of the Planning White Paper.	Gareth Williams Ian Thompson
8. Cabinet should agree a clear strategy which includes a delivery target for affordable homes. This strategy and target number should be produced in 2022/23 and cover a greater scope for targeted housing for Key Workers, Social Rent and Supported Living and demonstrate the Council's desire to move at pace in this area. The Cabinet Members for planning and regeneration, finance, resources, property and assets and housing, homelessness and regulatory should work together to deliver these affordable homes in the most cost-effective way for residents (similar to last year's recommendation 12).	<p>Yes. The Housing Service is working with other teams in the authority to prepare an Overarching Housing Strategy in 2022/23. This overarching strategy will sit above the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy which is currently in draft form and being consulted on. The Overarching Housing Strategy will cover our ambition for the provision of affordable, key worker, socially rented and specialist housing, amongst other issues.</p> <p>An interim 'position statement' on affordable housing will be reported to Cabinet in March 2022. This position statement has been developed following work done by a member led Task and Finish Group, chaired by the Cabinet member for Housing and Homelessness. A review of possible schemes for development on Council owned land is also being worked on, currently. This review will highlight the various options that will be open to</p>	Nick Naylor Ian Thompson

	<p>members when giving consideration to the use of Council owned land.</p> <p>It needs to be understood that the provision of council owned land at low or zero cost to subsidise less than market rent housing will be a substantial capital loss to the council.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member is working with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member Planning and Regeneration, the Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources, Property and Assets, and Cabinet as a whole, to move this important issue forward.</p>	
9. Cabinet should consider increasing the levels of investment for rights of way repairs to recognise the increased usage and their importance, particularly to rural and semi-rural communities.	<p>No. The revenue and capital budgets that have been proposed are consistent with previous years' allocations with the significant exception that, for 2022/23 the capital budget has been increased by £442k to fund the replacement of Berryhill footbridge and the Denham Bridleway bridge. This extra funding, and these works, enable us to fulfil our statutory duty to keep the Rights of Way (RoW) network open.</p> <p>The baseline level of expenditure is considered to be sufficient to maintain the RoW network and any increase would have to be funded from other services, so a balanced view has been taken. The RoW network will continue to be regularly inspected and if particular work is required, further allocations will be considered.</p>	Steve Broadbent Richard Barker
10. That the Cabinet Member for Transport develop a strategy in 2022 for the £800k (£200k p.a.) investment into EV charging points to assess the current and future need, the number and type of charging points that could	Yes. The Transport Strategy team have been undertaking research into the most effective way to support the exponential increase in electric vehicles in Buckinghamshire, focusing on the provision of electric vehicle charging points now and in the	Steve Broadbent Ian Thompson

<p>be obtained within the budget allocated, the potential income streams and to ensure there is a consistent approach to deliver these in the most cost effective way.</p>	<p>future. A draft EV Study and Action Plan have been developed. The Action Plan has gone out to all members for their comments, with a supporting presentation, using the platform YourVoice. A finalised draft will be bought back to Cabinet later in 2022.</p> <p>The draft Action Plan recommends 14 key actions to be delivered over the next 10 years, with short- and medium-term priorities outlined. It is expected that the £200k per year investment will be utilised to deliver these outcomes over the next four years. The number and type of charging points will vary according to the geography, population density, power distribution available and the constraints of the car park. To this end the draft Action Plan also includes an assessment of the suitability of Buckinghamshire Council owned car parks for the installation of faster chargers. The Transport Strategy team are also working with Community Board Coordinators and Parish Councils to support parishes to identify and install further charge points. Each location must be assessed for physical feasibility of installation (whether there is adequate space, street furniture in the way etc) and to identify power supply costs with the Distribution Network Operator (DNOs), which are often significant and limiting. Slow chargers may provide a viable option where there is inadequate power supply.</p> <p>The approach is to be cost effective and consistent which is why we have undertaken a thorough study of the options available to us. To ensure value for money, smooth delivery, ongoing maintenance and a high-quality customer experience when using public chargers, we will procure a delivery partner who will bring their experience to the expansion of our EV charging points. This will include installing publicly available points at low</p>	
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	or zero cost to the Council and/or identification of future revenue sharing possibilities. In addition to this, charge point operators and businesses are investing in the network at key destinations and service stations. We intend to only be a funder of last resort, so that key locations are covered and our funding only utilised where it would be difficult to deliver a charge point commercially.	
11. That the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change should work with officers to develop an offer to improve education for members and residents on climate change and to provide incentives to promote individual action. Other Members should be involved in this piece of work, the TECC Select Committee and/or the Member Development Working Group.	Yes. A package of climate change support for Members will be developed with input from the Member Development Working Group to ensure its suitability. A long term communications campaign has been launched (the Bucks Climate Challenge) and further content to educate and inform residents on how to reduce their impacts on the climate is being drafted which we will seek TECC Select Committee feedback on. This campaign will also inform residents of the work the Council undertakes to address climate change.	Peter Strachan Ian Thompson
12. A review of legacy Council special expenses should be undertaken in the coming financial year. Whilst this might be complicated due to varying arrangements with town and parish councils and recognising one of the special expenses is in an unparished area whilst the other is not, the Committee believe that the term 'special expenses' should only be used in the budget to denote a one-off financial commitment. This would not necessarily impact on current governance arrangements; however, an assessment is required of the need for these and to ensure there is consistency in	Yes. A review of special expenses arrangements in Aylesbury and High Wycombe will be undertaken in 2022/23.	Martin Tett Richard Barker

terms of how services are funded in other areas of the County (e.g. community centres / open spaces).		
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