



## Council minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on Wednesday 22 February 2023 in The Oculus, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury HP19 8FF, commencing at 4.00 pm and concluding at 7.42 pm.

### Members present

D Dhillon, P Birchley, S Adoh, A Alam, D Anthony, K Ashman, M Ayub, R Bagge, D Barnes, S Barrett, A Baughan, D Blamires, A Bond, M Bracken, S Broadbent, N Brown, S Bowles, P Brazier, T Broom, T Butcher, M Caffrey, R Carington, D Carroll, B Chapple OBE, S Chapple, Q Chaudhry, S Chhokar, J Chilver, P Cooper, C Cornell, A Cranmer, E Culverhouse, I Darby, T Dixon, P Drayton, T Egleton, C Etholen, P Fealey, M Flys, R Gaffney, R Gaster, E Gemmell, P Gomm, D Goss, T Green, S Guy, G Hall, G Harris, M Harker OBE, C Harriss, D Hayday, O Hayday, C Heap, T Hogg, G Hollis, T Hunter-Watts, A Hussain, I Hussain, M Hussain JP, M Hussain, N Hussain, T Hussain, Cllr C Jackson, D Johncock, J Jordan, S Kayani, R Khan BEM, D King, M Knight, S Lambert, S Lewin, Cllr A Macpherson, I Macpherson, F Mahon, N Marshall, P Martin, R Matthews, Dr W Matthews, Z Mohammed, H Mordue, S Morgan, N Naylor, J Ng, R Newcombe, C Oliver, A Osibogun, A Poland-Goodyer, C Poll, S Raja, W Raja, N Rana, M Rand, S Rouse, J Rush, G Sandy, L Smith BEM, M Smith, B Stanier Bt, P Strachan, R Stuchbury, L Sullivan, M Tett, N Thomas, D Thompson, D Town, J Towns, A Turner, M Turner, P Turner, A Waite, H Wallace, L Walsh, M Walsh, J Wassell, J Waters, D Watson, A Wheelhouse, W Whyte, G Williams, S Wilson, M Winn and A Wood

### Agenda Item

#### **1 Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors M Angell, M Baldwin, P Bass, K Bates, J Baum, A Christensen, L Clarke OBE, A Collingwood, M Dormer, M Fayyaz, P Griffin, P Irwin, S James, C Jones, P Kelly, J MacBean, G Smith, M Stannard, D Summers, G Wadhwa, J Ward and K Wood. Apologies were also received from Lady Howe, Lord Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire, Ms Debbie Brock, High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire, and from Nick Graham.

#### **1A Dr John Warder MBE and Mrs Gillian Miscampbell OBE DL**

Tributes were paid to Dr John Warder MBE, a past Leader and Chairman of Chiltern District Council, and to Mrs Gillian Miscampbell OBE DL, a past Buckinghamshire County Council Chairman and Honorary Alderman of the County Council and then the Buckinghamshire Council. The Chairman recorded sincere condolences to both families on their sad losses.

Dr Warder was a Member of Chiltern District Council from 1991 to 2015 representing the Central Ward. Some of his appointments during 24 years on the Council included Cabinet Member for Environmental Services Management 2000-2007(a portfolio which included licensing & regulation, homelessness, and Personnel (2004-2007); Leader of Chiltern District Council 2007-2010; Chairman of Chiltern District Council 2011-13 (2 years); and work on other Committees including Standards, Boundaries & Electoral Arrangements, Constitution Review, and Personnel.

Mrs Miscampbell was a Member of the Buckinghamshire County Council from 1977 to 1993 representing the Waddesdon Electoral Ward. Some of her appointments during 16 years included serving as Chairman of the County Council from 1989 to 1993. In 1982 she was awarded an OBE for Public and Political Services and in 1993 was appointed Deputy Lieutenant for the county of Buckinghamshire. She was appointed in 2010 as an Honorary Alderman by the County Council.

Members then observed a minute's silence in the memory of Dr John Warder MBE and Mrs Gillian Miscampbell OBE DL.

## **2 Minutes**

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2022 be approved as a correct record.

## **3 Declarations of Interest**

Councillors M Ayub, A Bond, R Carington, E Culverhouse, P Gomm, A Hussain, C Jackson, D King, R Matthews, S Raja, S Wilson and A Wood declared a prejudicial interest in Agenda item number 10 (Council Tax changes to the second home discount) and left the Council Chamber whilst this matter was discussed and decided.

## **4 Chairman's Update**

The Chairman informed Members that this would be the last Council meeting attended by Gill Quinton, the Corporate Director for Adults and Health.

Gill had joined the County Council in 2005 and would soon be leaving the Council after 18 years working for the County Council and the Buckinghamshire Council. On behalf of all Members, the Chairman thanked Gill for all her hard work with the Council. The Chairman invited Cllr A Macpherson, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Adults and Health, who similarly thanked Gill for all her support, assistance, and hard work over a number of years, most recently since the formation of the new Council and work associated with the Council's response to the Covid pandemic.

On behalf of all Members and the staff of the Council, the Chairman extended thoughts and prayers to everyone impacted by the recent earthquakes in Turkey and

Syria, including Buckinghamshire residents who had family and friends in those countries. The Chairman also extended thoughts and prayers to Ukraine and the Ukrainian people as the first anniversary approached of the conflict and invasion of that country.

Since the last Council meeting, events the Chairman had attended had included the 'Knife Angel' opening and closing ceremonies in Milton Keynes; Chairman's presentation to John Campbell OBE on his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday; Carol Services for the Aylesbury Town Mayor, BMKFA and Chesham Town; Proud of Bucks 2022 Staff Awards; National Paralympic Heritage Trust tree planting event; the Aladdin pantomime gala night; switching on the Christmas lights at Marlow Park; judging the Council's Christmas jumper competition; RAF Halton graduation ceremony; Chinese New Year celebration event, Honorary Alderman afternoon tea and garden party draw; and 2 citizenship ceremonies. The Chairman thanked everyone who had attended a charity event at Pinewood studios on 30 January and the showing of the movie 'Grease' that had raised over £3,400 for Macmillan Cancer Support.

Members were reminded that a Civic Service was being held on Sunday 12 March 2023 at All Saints Church, High Wycombe.

The Vice Chairman of the Council also detailed events she had attended since the last Council meeting which included the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary event for the Royal Latin School, the Chairman's charity event at Pinewood studios, the Mayor of Wycombe's Civic Service, the memorial service for Mrs Gillian Miscampbell OBE DL, and a number of citizenship ceremonies.

## **5 Petitions**

There were none.

## **6 Chief Financial Officer's Statutory Report**

The Chairman welcomed Mr D Skinner, the Council's Section 151 Officer to the meeting. Mr Skinner presented his report and highlighted that he was statutorily required to report to the Council on the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the calculations of the budget and on the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves. The Council was required to have due regard to the report when making decisions on the budget.

It was highlighted that the Medium Term Financial Plan had been subject to frequent and rigorous challenge and review during its development, including the public meetings of the Budget Scrutiny Inquiry group held in January 2023. Members were informed that the budget proposals recommended by the Cabinet were robust and sustainable.

There were risks associated with the budget proposals and these were set out in the budget papers and at paragraph 4.5 of his report. These included inflation and national economic conditions, central Government funding, complexity and demand in social care and client transport, increased demand for temporary accommodation,

and the sustainability of providers within the Social Care market and Care Reforms. The budget did however contain contingencies that were detailed in Appendix 1 to the budget papers.

Alongside the development of the budget proposals, there had been consideration of the level of reserves held by the council and the likely balances going forward. A ratio of 5% of net revenue expenditure was the generally accepted minimum prudent level of General Fund reserves. The forecast Council's General Fund reserves of £47.8m were 9.5% of net operating expenditure at the end of 2023/24. As such, the Section 151 Officer had concluded that he considered the budget proposals recommended by the Cabinet to be robust and sustainable.

The Section 151 Officer also stated that he was aware of a proposed amendment to the budget to allocate an additional £5m to road maintenance. If passed, this would still leave the Council's General Fund reserves at £42.8m or 8.5% of net operating expenditure at the end of 2023/24 and would still be deemed to be adequate. The level of reserves held would still exceed the minimum best practice amount of 5% and exceed the reserves held by similar sized unitary authorities, in both percentage terms and absolute value.

#### **RESOLVED –**

**That the report be noted.**

### **7 Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 and Capital Programme**

The Chairman invited Councillor M Tett, Leader of Buckinghamshire Council, to introduce the report to Members on the proposed 2023/24 revenue budget and capital programme for Buckinghamshire Council. It was noted that the Council Tax Resolution (Appendix 4) was found in the supplementary agenda pack. The following key points were highlighted:

- Councillor Tett thanked all those who had helped shape the budget, this included majority members of the Portfolio Challenge groups, Cabinet Members, the cross-party Budget Scrutiny Inquiry Group, the Chief Executive and her Senior Leadership Team as well as the Section 151 Officer.
- That a lack of continuity in central Government in the last year (3 Prime Ministers, 4 Chancellors and 4 Secretaries of State for the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) had created uncertainty for Council budget setting.
- That the Council had focussed on delivering 'front line' services, alongside the ongoing improvement journey, despite the many challenges faced in the past year.
- That external influences such as the war in Ukraine and significant increases in inflation and fuel prices had a major impact during the last year on the Council's finances, as well as imposing cost of living pressures on a significant number of residents.
- That the Helping Hands service had taken near 14,000 calls this year. Working

with the voluntary sector the Helping Hands programme had provided critical help to those in need, with a crisis fund with the Heart of Bucks having raised over £180K to date.

- That while there would be continued pressures from the war in Ukraine and economic uncertainty, there was a prospect of some economic and social recovery during 2023 although it was still unclear what the new 'normal' would be. However, the Buckinghamshire Council would be there to support that recovery for all.
- That while the Council had set a Revenue Budget for 3 years last February, the continuing financial uncertainty meant that the Budget this year was now a one-year Revenue plan.
- That the Council was impacted by the current Government's strategy of moving funds away from the South East as part of the Levelling Up programme.
- That, as set out last year, Reserves would be used this year to help balance the budget.
- That the Council was in a better financial position than many other Councils, some of whom were on the edge of bankruptcy through heavy expenditure, lost income, deferred savings, lack of financial control or poor governance.
- On the budget building principles – one-year revenue budget, 4-year capital budget to provide investment in key schemes and to support local economic recovery and growth, whilst also identifying and mitigating risk and always remembering that this was taxpayers' money.
- On the Revenue Budget principles and the Council's Core Spending Power.
- On the revenue budget trends for individual portfolios, which highlighted the main growth areas / expenditure for Health and Wellbeing, Education and Children's Services, and for Transportation. The budgets for Accessible Housing and Resources and Homelessness and Regulatory Services were also increasing as a result of pressures in housing supply and the rising need to support temporary accommodation requirements. While the Climate Change and Environment portfolio was showing a fall in expenditure, this position actually reflected additional income from the sale of electricity from the Energy from Waste plant.
- On how the Council was funded through Council tax, Business Rates, the Adult Social Care precept, plus some grants monies.

Partway through the budget introduction the Leader was unwell and left the meeting. Following a short break, the meeting resumed and Councillor G Williams, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change, completed introducing the report to Members on the proposed 2023/24 budget and capital programme for Buckinghamshire Council. The following key points were highlighted:

- That it was planned to use £1.36m to balance the budget, as agreed in last year's budget.
- That, as mentioned by the Council's Section 151 Officer, the level of General Fund Reserves was expected to be 9.5% of net revenue expenditure.
- A high-level breakdown was given of the £500m earmarked for major capital

programme expenditure 2023-2027. This included £106m for roads, £91m for Strategic Infrastructure, £33.7m for Town Centre regeneration, £20m for Housing and homelessness, £8.6m for pavements and £8m for drainage.

- Information on how the capital programme was being funded.
- That the budget included for a basic increase in Council tax of 2.99% for 2023/24 and a 2% increase in the Adult Social Care precept. This would be the equivalent of an increase of £1.61 per week for a Band D property.
- The risks and uncertainties faced in setting the proposed budget.

Councillor Williams commended the budget to Council and moved the recommendations as per the report. This was seconded by Councillor A Macpherson.

The Chairman informed Members that an amendment on the budget had been received that he intended to deal with next. The amendment was proposed by Councillor G Williams, seconded by Councillor S Broadbent. The amendment wording was:

“This council notes that the prolonged period on incessant rain, combined with the extended freezing weather, has resulted in a significant deterioration in the condition of roads across the country, including within Buckinghamshire. The Budget already proposes a record level of expenditure upon repair and resurfacing of our roads with the current £100m+ four-year programme now being extended into a 5th year with over £5m of additional expenditure to continue the member led rolling maintenance programme. Nevertheless, since this Budget was proposed, it has become apparent that further action is required to address the immediate need.

This council therefore resolves to amend the Budget proposals as follows:

- **Amend Appendix 2 (Buckinghamshire Council Capital Programme) Transport Expenditure 2023/24 by leaving out ‘£47,430’ and replacing it with ‘£52,430’. Also, insert an additional line “Funding from General Fund Balance “£5,000” in column 2023/24.** This will amend the Budget by releasing £5m from General Fund Reserves and adding this to the 2023/24 Revenue for Highways road maintenance.

**As a consequence, Council is asked to further approve additional resolutions to those on page 27 of the Council papers, namely that:**

- **The Cabinet Member for Transportation should begin immediately planning for the urgent deployment of this funding.**
- **The Leader to write to the Secretary of State for Transport stating the need to increase capital funding for roads given the recent weather impacts.”**

Councillor Williams highlighted that the severe weather experienced over the winter had damaged many local roads. It was proposed on adding in £5m from reserves for additional highways road maintenance in 2023/24, which would be a 20% in-year increase to £30m. This would still leave the General Fund Reserves in a good position at 8.5% of net revenue expenditure.

During debate of the amendment, Members commented that they were in favour of the additional expenditure on roads maintenance although they would like to see a clear plan on how the additional monies would be spent. It was also mentioned:

- that the amendment had been raised very recently which had meant that there hadn't been an opportunity to scrutinise the issue.
- that a strategic plan for fixing roads might avoid the annual pressures experienced every winter to fix potholes.

In seconding the amendment, the Cabinet Member for Transport highlighted the record investment in the current MTFP on roads and provided statistics on the large increase in the number of road repairs/maintenance and additional road gritting required in January 2023 when compared to January 2022. The Cabinet Member stated that he would ensure that the additional road maintenance work was incorporated into the new highways contract arrangements, and through the supply chain when it is the right time to do road repairs in April.

The amendment was then put to the meeting and was CARRIED.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rules, the Chairman then invited Councillor Morgan, as Deputy Leader of the Alliance Group (main opposition group), and in the absence of the Group Leader of the Alliance Group, to comment on the budget proposals. The following main points were noted:

- that the budget savings in Appendix 3 added up to £9.675m and not £10.1m, as stated, which included a missing £13K savings in climate change.
- That the savings could be split into 3 categories – efficiency savings (£7.985m), better Buckinghamshire Programme (£1.26m) and contract savings (£520K). It was stated that efficiency savings were a smoke screen to cut staff and Departments and to outsource services to help balance the budget.
- That the £580K reduction in costs for grass cutting and weed spraying would require Town and Parish Councils to provide these services, that in turn would see local precepts increased.
- The £160k efficiency savings in SEND transport provision were questioned, including the reduced demand for SEND transport (£100k) and reduction in Personal Transport budgets (£210k)
- That the Equalities Impact Assessment should have included more information on possible positive and negative impacts rather than stating that the details of the impact of changes would not be known until the projects were delivered.
- That while there were plans to devolve 3 services to the Aylesbury Town Council, the Council needed to go further and, where possible, look to devolve services to other Town and Parish Councils.
- That more should be done to maintain sports pitches and their associated facilities such as changing rooms.
- That her Group could not support further cuts in the funding to Community Boards, including to Aylesbury and High Wycombe.
- That it was regrettable that the Aylesbury eastern link road would not be built

until 2025/26.

- That as well as additional expenditure on road maintenance, the Council should also be investing more to maintain footways and pathways.
- That there were concerns that some of the £41m in unspent Section 106 funding and £172m in HIF funding would not be spent in time and could be at risk of being paid back to developers or the Government.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Morgan for her comments and invited Councillor Wilson to speak on behalf of the IMPACT Alliance grouping. The following main points were noted:

- Councillor Wilson thanked the Officers and the Budget Scrutiny Inquiry for their hard work on the budget and on budget scrutiny.
- That the Council needed to develop a Strategy to look at long term solutions to systemic issues such as children's and adult services, address the dearth of key workers and social housing accommodation, and deliver the Climate Change and Air Quality Strategy. This could be done by having a long-term revenue strategy linked to the Capital and Investment Strategy.
- That important issues the Council also needed to look at included affordable housing, temporary accommodation, and the aging population, managing surplus assets and the repurposing of assets to generate income.
- That the budget was lacking details on how £15.5m in contingencies were being planned for and allocated against risks.
- That there were concerns that the budget was highly dependent on income from the Energy from Waste plant (net of energy producer levy), and of the financial resilience of education and children's services.
- That savings were mostly made up of cuts.

At the conclusion, the Chairman thanked Councillor Wilson for his comments. The Chairman then opened up debate on the budget and invited questions and comments from Members, who highlighted the following:

- (i) Looking at access arrangements and parking for the planned woods in Wing.
- (ii) Concerns that the £10.1m savings were actually cuts in core funding that would increase the risks in delivering services in areas including adults' services and for education and children's services.
- (iii) Concerns on the further cuts in the funding to Community Boards.
- (iv) That it would be important for the Council to deliver Opportunity Bucks and to reduce entrenched systemic inequalities.
- (v) That the Council should be doing more to devolve services to Town/Parish Councils and to not cut grant to third sector partners.
- (vi) That the Client Services transport budget had been increased from £33m to £38m as a part of the budget proposals. It was highlighted that some of the efficiency savings identified area were related to schemes that boosting the independence of children moving into adulthood and was not moving money out of budgets.
- (vii) Concerns that attainment gaps in Bucks were some of the biggest in the country.
- (viii) Concerns for High Wycombe relating to CIL and Community Board funding



and to the level of temporary accommodation.

- (ix) That the Council's Helping Hands initiative continued to help local people with heating and household bills, buying or accessing food, and with benefits, debt, and money advice.
- (x) That it had been particularly difficult to put together a budget this year in the face of the continued pressures from the war in Ukraine, economic uncertainty, and significant increases that inflation and fuel prices had on the Council's finances.
- (xi) The Cabinet Member for Communities stated that the Council remained fully committed to devolving assets identified in the first tranche of projects. He also stated that Community Boards had funded 841 projects, invested £5.6m in local projects and total spending with contributory funding was approximately £9m.

In seconding the budget proposals, Councillor A Macpherson spoke in support of the budget proposals, which she stated sought to protect the most vulnerable in society. Councillor Williams then responded to provide clarification on some of the concerns and issues that had been raised during the main debate. This included that Appendices 1 and 3 did add up in terms of savings as Appendix 1 included some multi-year items, that 450 personal transport budgets had been agreed to date, that Section 106 monies were closely monitored and had never been returned to developers (although £23m of it had yet to be allocated), that there was a Corporate Risk Register and Directorate Risk Registers that were regularly scrutinised by the Audit and Governance Committee, that the EfW income was supported by a significant contingency reserve, agreed that it was important to deliver Opportunity Bucks, and mentioned about town centre regeneration in High Wycombe.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their questions and comments and reminded members that there was a legal requirement for a recorded vote to be taken on the budget. The Chairman also informed Members that he intended to take a recorded vote, en bloc, for all 7 budget recommendations, which were the 5 recommendations in the main agenda plus the additional 2 recommendations resulting from the amendment.

The vote was recorded as follows:

**FOR (94):** Councillors Adoh, Alam, Anthony, Ashman, Ayub, Bagge, Barnes, Barrett, Birchley, Blamires, Bond, Bowles, Bracken, Brazier, Broadbent, Broom, Brown, Butcher, Caffrey, Carington, Carroll, B Chapple OBE, S Chapple, Chaudry, Chhokar, Chilver, Cornell, Cranmer, Culverhouse, Darby, Dhillon, Drayton, Egleton, Etholen, Flys, Gaffney, Gaster, Gemmell, Gomm, Goss, Green, Hall, Harker OBE, G Harris, C Harriss, Heap, Hollis, A Hussain, Mahboob Hussain JP, Jackson, Jordan, King, A Macpherson, I Macpherson, Marshall, Martin, R Matthews, W Matthews, Mohammed, Mordue, Naylor, Newcombe, Ng, Oliver, Osibogun, Poll, S K Raja, Rana, Rand, Rouse, Rush, Sandy, L Smith BEM, Sir B Stanier, Strachan, Sullivan, Thomas, Thompson, Town, Towns, A Turner, M Turner, P Turner, Waite, Wallace, L Walsh, M Walsh, Waters, Wheelhouse, Whyte, Williams, Wilson, Winn and A Wood.

**AGAINST (14):** Councillors Cooper, Dixon, Hunter-Watts, N Hussain, T Hussain, Khan BEM, Knight, Lambert, Lewin, Morgan, Poland-Goodyer, W Raja, M Smith and Wassell.

**ABSTENTIONS (10):** Councillors Baughan, Guy, D Hayday, O Hayday, I Hussain, Majid Hussain, Johncock, Kayani, Stuchbury and Watson

**RESOLVED –**

- (1) That the Revenue Budget and Capital Programme (Appendices 1-3), as amended earlier, be APPROVED.
- (2) That the Council Tax Resolution (Appendix 4) be APPROVED.
- (3) That the 'Special Expenses' budgets, precepts and associated services for Aylesbury Town, High Wycombe Town and West Wycombe Church Yard (Appendices 5 & 6) be APPROVED.
- (4) That Cabinet be delegated authority to make decisions to add up to £100m to the capital programme, to be funded by Prudential Borrowing, subject to a robust business case being APPROVED.
- (5) That the Council Tax Reduction Scheme Policy (Appendix 7) be APPROVED.
- (6) That the Cabinet Member for Transport should begin planning immediately for the urgent deployment of the additional 2023/24 Revenue for Highways road maintenance.
- (7) That the Leader of the Council would write to the Secretary of State for Transport stating the need to increase capital funding for roads given the recent weather impacts.

## **8 Council Tax Support Fund**

Councillor Chilver, Cabinet Member for Accessible Housing and Resources introduced the report and explained that Central Government had provided funds to the Council under S31 of the Local Government Act 2003 with the proviso that all monies were paid strictly in accordance with S13a (1) (c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and in line with guidance issued on 23 December 2022.

The fund, named by Central Government as the 'Council Tax Support Fund' was designed to meet the immediate needs of all taxpayers who were currently claiming Council Tax Reduction (CTR). The mandatory element was to award all recipients of Council Tax Reduction (both working age and pension age) with a further reduction in their annual council tax bill of up to £25. This reduction would apply to all Council Tax Reduction recipients who had an outstanding liability for the 2023-24 financial year.

Buckinghamshire proposed after applying the mandatory reduction in liability above, that the Council would continue to make similar discretionary payments to all applicants who became eligible for Council Tax Reduction for the first time after 1

April 2023. The report proposed an additional policy framework that set out the Council's approach to the award of the mandatory and discretionary elements of the Council Tax Support Fund from 1 April 2023, that was a new policy in addition to the existing Council Tax Reduction Scheme Policy.

It was proposed by Councillor Chilver, seconded by Councillor Butcher, and

**RESOLVED –**

**That the discretionary Council Tax Support Fund policy for Buckinghamshire local Council tax support claimants be ADOPTED, as detailed in Appendix A to the Council report.**

## **9 Care Leaver Council Tax Disregard**

Councillor Chilver, Cabinet Member for Accessible Housing and Resources introduced the report on a Discretionary Council Tax (CT) Discount scheme for Buckinghamshire Council Care Leavers, which would work alongside the Local Offer to support young care leavers in taking on the responsibility of having their own property and being able to support themselves financially.

One of the key points of the Local Offer was for Buckinghamshire Council to meet the obligation of paying Council Tax for the Care Leaver up until the age of 21 where they continued to interact with the Leaving Care team. This included paying any council tax due, after any discounts or benefit have been applied. Under Council Tax legislation the Council could set local discounts that applied to certain properties and/or certain groups of people.

Currently, care leavers were required to pay their CT bill and then forward it to the Leaving Care team, with Children's Services then claiming the discount on behalf of care leavers. It was proposed that it would be more efficient to apply the discount directly to the council tax account. By applying the CT discount upfront it would simplify and streamline the process and reduce administrative work and expenditure.

Several Members spoke and were fully supportive of the proposed new arrangement. It was also mentioned that the new process would also bring Buckinghamshire in line with many other local authorities.

It was proposed by Councillor Chilver, seconded by Councillor Butcher, and

**RESOLVED –**

**That the Discretionary Council Tax Discount Scheme for Buckinghamshire Council Care Leavers be ADOPTED, as detailed in Appendix A to the Council report.**

**10 Council Tax changes to the Second Home discount**

Councillor Chilver, Cabinet Member for Accessible Housing and Resources, introduced a report which proposed the removal of the 10% discount for second homes in Buckinghamshire with effect from 1 April 2023. This would encourage taxpayers to use premises as their main residence or allow others to use the premises as a main residence and raise additional council tax revenue.

There were currently 753 homes in Buckinghamshire receiving a 10% discount for a second home. It was estimated that the removal of the 10% discount on second homes would bring a benefit to the Council of approximately £157k p.a. and £37k p.a. to other preceptors.

Several Members spoke and were fully supportive of removing the second home discount.

It was proposed by Councillor Chilver, seconded by Councillor Butcher, and

**RESOLVED –**

**That the 10% Council Tax discount on second homes be removed with effect from 1 April 2023.**

**Please note:** Councillors M Ayub, A Bond, R Carington, E Culverhouse, P Gomm, A Hussain, C Jackson, D King, R Matthews, S Raja, S Wilson, and A Wood declared a prejudicial interest in this agenda item and left the Council Chamber whilst this matter was discussed and decided.

**11 Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24**

Councillor Butcher, Deputy Cabinet Member for Resources, introduced Buckinghamshire Council's Treasury Management Strategy 2023-24, that was attached at Appendix 1 to the report. It was noted that it was a requirement for each local authority to approve a Treasury Management Strategy by 1 April each year. This strategy had been developed in line with the CIPFA code of practice.

The Council continued to pursue a strategy of keeping borrowing and investments below their underlying levels, sometimes known as internal borrowing, to reduce risk and keep external financing costs low. The Council would continue the strategy of internal borrowing while it made sense to do so. In the current economic climate, it was considered appropriate to maintain a degree of liquidity to cover cash flow needs but the Council would also consider investing for periods of up to 12 months with high credit rated financial institutions, whilst investment rates remain

elevated. The Council was considering opportunities for investments with longer exposure, but also ensuring that there was sufficient liquidity to meeting any short-term significant costs that may arise.

The Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee had made clear at its November 2022 meeting that further rate increases were in the pipeline and markets expect Bank Rate to peak at 4.5%-4.75%. As such, investing in 2023/24 was likely to be conducted, first, in a rising interest rate environment, but then potentially in a falling interest rate environment at the end of the financial year. This would depend on how quickly inflation fell back and on levels of economic growth.

The Council's main objective when borrowing money was to strike an appropriately low risk balance between securing low interest costs and achieving certainty of those costs over the period for which funds are required. The continuation of the Council's strategy of using surplus cash instead of external borrowing, keeping external financing costs low. The Council was actively reviewing opportunities for rescheduling long term debt.

The only proposed change to the 2023/24 TMSS compared to the 2022/23 TMSS was to amend the section for investments with other local authorities so that the investment could only be placed with the prior approval of the Council Leader, the Chief Executive and the Service Director of Finance (Section 151 officer) or deputies in the case of leave. Furthermore, if a local authority that the Council had invested in subsequently issued a section 114 or is given a capitalisation directive, or any other untoward financial event experienced by an authority who the Council held an investment in would be reported to the Audit and Governance Committee at the earliest opportunity. Members were informed that Slough and Thurrock Councils had fully repaid on time the loans made to them.

Several Members commented on the tightening of rules for lending to other local authorities. It was explained that a local authority had never defaulted on repaying a loan to another local authority although it was prudent and reputationally unsound not to lend to any authority that was experiencing financial difficulties. It was further explained that the low interest rates experienced for the last decade had meant that the best returns on investments had often been through lending to other local authorities. However, markets had changed radically now that interest rates had been rising. It was always incumbent on the Council to seek to maximise the interest received on monies when the Council had surplus funds whilst at the same time not putting those monies at risk which was why the Council had a Treasury Management Strategy.

It was moved by Councillor Butcher, seconded by Councillor Newcombe, and

## RESOLVED –

- (1) That the Treasury Management Strategy for 2023/24 be APPROVED.
- (2) That the operational boundary for external borrowing, the authorised limit for external borrowing, the maturity structure of borrowing and the upper limit for principal sums invested for longer than 365 days, and the liability benchmark be APPROVED.

## 12 Capital and Investment Strategy

Councillor Chilver, Cabinet Member for Accessible Housing and Resources introduced the draft Capital and Investment Strategy 2023/24, attached as Appendix 1 to the report. It was noted that the Council was required to approve this strategy on an annual basis and that it had been developed in line with the CIPFA and MHCLG guidance.

The Capital and Investment Strategy provided the framework within which to deliver the Council's Corporate Plan objectives through the effective investment of its limited capital resources. As well as the Council's immediate statutory responsibilities, the strategy also reflected the important role that it had to play in the regeneration and growth, affordable housing and climate change agendas, especially in the context of a post-Covid recovery and the significant housing growth in the area.

The Cabinet Member explained that not all capital proposals could be funded this year however the Council would conduct a full review of future capital funding and of capital receipts as a part of next year's budget process. Section 7 of the Strategy outlined the key risks and Section 8 outlined the governance and processes around capital proposals and budgeting decisions. It was also mentioned that a capital governance review would be undertaken later in the year to ensure that these systems and processes remained fit for purpose. The Strategy as submitted to Council had been approved by the Corporate Capital Board and by Cabinet.

Members asked a number of questions on the strategy and were informed:

- That the Cabinet Member agreed with a Member about the need to consider more capital investment projects, subject to robust business cases, that could potentially offset revenue pressures. This had also been raised by the Budget Scrutiny Inquiry and Cabinet had responded that this was already the approach taken by the Council.
- On the measure the Council was taking in the south of the Council area relating to temporary housing which included Bridge Court and retaining Saunderton Lodge. The Council was always actively on the lookout for additional properties that could be used for temporary and emergency accommodation, and to house refugees.
- That the Council had never had to return Section 106 funding or CIL contributions to parties/developers. The Council was in active discussions with Homes England about HIF Funding, with there being no indication that any of

this funding would be at risk.

- That the Council was continuing to develop the strategy for social and affordable housing.
- That the Council's policy for many years had been to not sell any of the agricultural estate but to maximise income from it. That position remained unchanged.

It was proposed by Councillor Chilver, seconded by Councillor Butcher, and

**RESOLVED –**

**That the Capital and Investment Strategy attached at Appendix 1 be APPROVED.**

**13 Committee Proportionality**

The Chairman stated that a report on Committee Proportionality was included at agenda item number 13.

Members were informed by the Monitoring Officer that Group Leaders had been consulted and had agreed on the allocation of seats on Council Committee to political groups, as detailed at Appendix 1.

**RESOLVED –**

**That the allocation of seats on Council Committees to political groups as detailed at Appendix 1 be APPROVED.**

**14 Report for information - Key Decisions Report**

A list of decisions taken by Cabinet Members since the last Full Council meeting on 30 November 2022 were received and noted.

**15 Date of Next Meeting**

The next full Council meeting was scheduled to take place on Wednesday 26 April 2023 at 4pm.