



# Buckinghamshire Council

## Finance & Resources Select Committee

### Minutes

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCE & RESOURCES SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY 22 FEBRUARY 2024 IN THE PARALYMPIC ROOM, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL, GATEHOUSE ROAD, AYLESBURY HP19 8FF, COMMENCING AT 1.00 PM AND CONCLUDING AT 2.56 PM**

#### **MEMBERS PRESENT**

R Bagge, M Walsh, K Ashman, S Bowles, M Bracken, S Chhokar, P Cooper, D Dhillon, G Harris, I Macpherson, R Newcombe and S Wilson

#### **OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE**

R Stuchbury (in part), G Cole (AVE), N Dicker (Consilio), R Harrington (BA), J Kingsnorth (Consilio), S Moore, S Murphy-Brookman, D Pearce (Consilio), M Preston (AVE), J Reed, D Skinner and C Ward

#### **Agenda Item**

##### **1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE / CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP**

Apologies were received from Councillors Ayub, Dixon, Oliver and Tett, and Steve Bambrick.

##### **2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor S Bowles declared a personal interest in Item 10 as the Chairman of Buckinghamshire Advantage.

Councillors R Newcombe and P Cooper declared personal interests in Items 10 and 11 as members of the Strategic Sites Committee which would be considering a planning application at the Stoke Mandeville former sports and social club having been deferred at its meeting on 15 December 2023.

##### **3 MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 30th November 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

##### **4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

There were none.

##### **5 BUDGET INQUIRY 2023 RECOMMENDATIONS: 12-MONTH REVIEW**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor J Chilver, Cabinet Member for Accessible Housing and Resources, who gave a summary of the report:

- Most of the actions detailed in the report had been completed.
- Capital schemes were in progress. Cabinet had not agreed to capital-based recommendation of the Scrutiny Committee in January 2024 as Cabinet Members had not wanted to create unrealistic expectations.
- The capital budget for the next 4 years had been agreed. There was uncertainty due to the unpredictability of government grants, inflation, CIL funds available and difficulties with supply chains.
- Recommendation 4 – Changes to Community Board boundaries would take place in 2025. The Cabinet Member for Communities would progress this with Members and Community Board Managers.
- Recommendation 5 – CCTV was in progress. £868,000 was budgeted for 2024-25 to digitise the control centre in High Wycombe. Town and Parish CCTV systems would be able to connect to the control centre.
- Recommendation 7 – There will be a Cabinet paper in March 2024 dealing with the re-location of the Archives and the museum's reserve collection housed at RAF Halton. This should use funding available for high street development and be cost neutral to the Council.

Questions from Scrutiny Committee Members were invited. During the discussion, the following points were noted:

- The Committee would receive a confidential report on investment in children's homes and temporary accommodation in due course.
- Members felt the recommendation relating to developing the business case for a CCTV framework was completed due to capital funding being allocated to the project. The Cabinet Member for Accessible Housing and Resources agreed that this project could now be shown as "completed".
- The proposal for the new facility for housing the Archives and museum collection was welcomed. It was noted that plans for the re-development of the Halton site and the relocation of the museum collection should be integrated.

## **6 Q3 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2023-24**

The Cabinet Member for Accessible Housing and Resources introduced the report, highlighting the following points:

- The report set out details of revenue and capital and included figures from the quarter October to December 2023.
- There was an improvement in the deficit from £8.6 million to £4.5 million. This reflected prudent financial management combined with the successful delivery of planned savings.
- Inflation had meant that higher interest had been earned on investments.
- Demand-led services had continued to experience pressures, notably adult and child social care, temporary accommodation and home to school transport.
- Four portfolios were showing favourable variance from budget, notably Accessible Housing and Resources.
- From a target figure of £30.8 million savings, a £25.4 million saving had been achieved. This had been due to a reduced income from the Energy from Waste plant, which was affected by volatility in the electricity market.
- The overall forecast financial slippage from budget was £1.2 million, around 1% of the

total budget.

- Overall debt had fallen in the last quarter, aided by a debt reminder system. Prompt payment of invoices was currently above the 95% target.

Questions from Scrutiny Committee Members were invited. During the discussion, the following points were noted:

- It was noted that service risk contingencies had not been used. A Member asked if contingencies would be used in the last quarter of the financial year. £5 million spend had been set aside for road repairs which was offset by the extra £5 million from the government for adult social care. The anticipated position for the end of the financial year was positive and the Council was successfully reducing costs. There was some uncertainty in the costs for adult social care, but they were expected to be as forecast.
- The two projects which did not progress were related to property. Often, contracts had to be re-negotiated due to rising costs and this had caused a delay.
- There was a discussion on the unsecured debt relating to Adult Social Care (ASC). A Member asked if invoices were being issued frequently enough. Mention was made of the review into ASC debt, and it was explained that some debt had been re-categorised from secured to unsecured after the review. Process improvements were detailed in the report. Payments could be delayed by the court process necessary to secure a charge on a property. A new process had been helping but there was a backlog of work.
- All debts were pursued – some using payment plans, others are paid late. Most of the outstanding debt will be recovered. A Member asked for a written summary of debt including how much was lost and how much it was hoped could be recovered which the Cabinet Member for Accessible Housing and Resources agreed to.

**Action:** John Reed

- A Member had expected to see the quarterly performance report, including KPIs, which had gone before Cabinet. The Scrutiny Officer advised that these Cabinet reports were available for other Select Committee members to view.

## **7 WORK PROGRAMME**

- A Member noted that the academy had been mentioned a number of times during the budget scrutiny process. The main purpose of the academy had been to train social workers. The Member did not recall that the committee was notified that the academy had been discontinued and had heard various explanations for this. The Member wondered if the financial element of this topic could be considered in the future work programme.

**Action:** Scrutiny Officer

- A Member suggested a review of the council's capital investment programme, particularly regarding temporary accommodation and children's homes.
- A report on Home to school transport would be considered at the July meeting.

## **8 DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING**

Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> April 2024 at 2.00 pm in the Oculus, The Gateway

## **9 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

To resolve that under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item(s) of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

*Paragraph 3 – information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)*

**10 EXTERNAL PROPERTY COMPANIES**

The Committee received a report providing an update on the Company activities and the work undertaken by the Council's Shareholder Committee in overseeing the activities. A number of topics were discussed including business plans, commercial activities and governance arrangements.

**11 ESTATES STRATEGY**

During the confidential discussion, Members commended the speed of the delivery of the Estates Strategy.

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