



Budget Scrutiny 2021 – Recommendations from the Budget Scrutiny Inquiry Group

Chairman – Cllr Ralph Bagge

Response from Cabinet – Cllr Martin Tett, Leader

Recommendation	Cabinet Response	Cabinet Agreed Actions/Timelines	Lead Cabinet Member/Officer
<p>1. In future years:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) A zero-based budget be prepared to help drive out further savings and efficiencies b) A four-year revenue budget be prepared to enable an assessment of the Council's financial sustainability c) Budget Scrutiny members should receive more detailed information in good time and should be involved earlier in the budgeting process, attached to portfolio budget review groups d) There should be consistency in presentation from all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) A zero-based budgeting approach is a core element of the Better Buckinghamshire Service Review process, which is helping to deliver the Unitary Transformation savings, and so this approach is already being piloted. At the end of the Better Buckinghamshire programme, an evaluation will be undertaken based on the learning and experience gained. This will also then consider how a ZBB approach can become integrated into the MTFP process (including adults and children's). b) It is always the Council's intention to set a medium-term budget over a period which is sufficient to evidence financial sustainability, and which support strategic decision-making. This year's one-year revenue budget is a direct response to the uncertainties the Covid-19 pandemic has brought, layered with the uncertainties in local Government funding beyond 2021/22. c) The MTFP process aims to ensure that a robust budget is set and that it receives proper scrutiny. Early conversations with the 	<p>An evaluation of the ZBB approach and proposals for integration into the MTP process will be produced - July 2021</p> <p>Discussions will take place with the Scrutiny Chairman in to agree the format and detail of paperwork for the budget scrutiny process – July 2021:</p>	<p>Martin Tett, Leader Richard Ambrose, Service Director (Corporate Finance)</p>

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<p>directorates using the same presentation template.</p>	<p>Chairman of the scrutiny committee will help ensure that paperwork is provided in the most suitable format and detail.</p> <p>d) All directorates provided a slide pack of information for the scrutiny committee in a broadly consistent format. The level of detail included will be discussed with the Chairman of the Committee.</p>		
<p>2. Cabinet Members should revisit their budget assumptions and outcomes for the current year prior to the final budget being presented to Full Council for approval, particularly the assumptions around income for 2021/22 as income streams such as parking, planning and leisure centres are likely to continue to be significantly reduced into the 2021/22 financial year.</p>	<p>The budget assumptions have been kept under constant review as the impact of the pandemic have become apparent. Following the third lockdown the key assumptions and risks associated with the pandemic have been reviewed again and we have made a number of changes to the final budget proposals in line with the Scrutiny recommendations.</p> <p>The final budget proposals now include a contingency in relation to local taxation receipts (council tax and business rates) of £2m. Furthermore, the general contingency of £1m, included within the draft budget, relating to Covid-19 / economic uncertainties has been increased by a further £2m (to £3m) to reflect the risks linked to the pandemic (including provider support, further losses of income and other additional expenditure such as rising placement costs).</p>	<p>The final budget proposals to be amended to include a £3m general contingency related to covid-19/economic uncertainties – February 2021</p>	<p>Martin Tett, Leader/ Richard Ambrose, Service Director (Corporate Finance)</p>
<p>3. The Capital programme should be divided into those schemes which are fully funded, with deliverable business cases and those that are more aspirational, in order to give members and residents a clearer understanding of the programme. This detail should</p>	<p>A review of the existing capital programme, approved by the Shadow Authority in February 2020, was undertaken as part of agreeing the proposed programme. This involved ensuring consistency in approach meaning that the proposed programme does not include aspirational projects as we need to make sure that we have a balanced and affordable programme. The approach that has been taken should help minimise the amount of slippage in the capital programme and funding risk, as schemes have only been included where there is</p>	<p>A medium/longer term strategic capital programme to be developed as part of the MTFP process for next year – December 2021</p>	<p>Katrina Wood, Deputy Leader/Richard Ambrose, Service Director (Corporate Finance)</p>

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<p>be included in the final budget (Last year's recommendation 8).</p>	<p>reasonable certainty that there is funding available. Therefore, the schemes that have been included are either committed, fully funded (and meet the Council's strategic priorities), provide a net revenue or capital benefit or helps the Council to meet its statutory responsibilities (including health and safety).</p> <p>The schemes that have been removed from the formal programme are those where the business case is not sufficiently developed and clear but can still be included through use of the £100m prudential borrowing facility, providing there is a viable business case. Unfortunately, the inclusion of more aspirational projects that aren't confirmed as being fully funded, would necessarily be to the detriment of other priorities in order to demonstrate a balanced capital programme over the 4-year period.</p> <p>However, we do accept the comments by the Budget Scrutiny Committee that the programme does not perhaps reflect the full scale of the ambition of the Council but feel that approval via the formal capital programme is not the place to achieve this. Instead, we propose to develop a medium to long term strategic capital programme as part of the MTFP process for next year, which will enable the inclusion of the aspirational projects and also reflect a longer time horizon so that a clear line of sight can be given to potential future capital commitments and ensure that these satisfy the Capital & Investment Strategy objectives.</p>		
<p>4. An increased contingency be considered for Children's services,</p>	<p>An increased general contingency is being recommended as part of the final budget proposals (see Recommendation 2 response). This is designed to recognise the increased risks as a result of the third lockdown, including potential increases in costs linked to children's</p>	<p>See Rec 2 above</p>	<p>Mark Shaw, Cabinet Member for Children's Services/ Tolis Vouyioukas</p>

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where there has been a history of overspends in recent years.	placements. This is in addition to the contingency of £2.5m for placement cost already included within the proposed budget.		Corporate Director, Children's Services
5. Additional funding should be set aside for the Local Plan reserve as £3m over the next three years is likely to be inadequate (last year's recommendation 22).	Work has commenced on the new Buckinghamshire Local Plan. As work continues, we will develop a detailed project plan including estimated costs for supporting evidence and the eventual Examination in Public. Many of the aspects of the new Local Plan are still unknown given the proposed changes to the planning system through the Governments Planning White Paper. There is also no evidence to suggest that the budget set aside is not appropriate. Therefore, we will review the figure in the reserve on the basis of this work in the next 12 months.	The local plan reserve to be reviewed in the context of further work on the development of the plan - January 2022	Warren Whyte, Cabinet Member for Planning & Enforcement / Ian Thompson, Corporate Director, Planning, Growth & Sustainability
6. Key Performance Indicators around planning enforcement should be robust and regularly monitored to ensure that the strongly supported increased investment delivers an improved service and value for money.	During 2020/21 Cabinet has introduced a suite of robust enforcement indicators that are monitored on a quarterly basis. These include measuring number of new enforcement cases logged each quarter; the number of cases closed; the number of enforcement notices issued, and the number of cases closed through amicable negotiation. These indicators have shown a considerable increase in the number of cases being logged since the start of the year but also a very substantial increase in the number of formal actions that the Council has taken to resolve them.	The Cabinet member to continue to keep this under review and introduce new indicators where appropriate - ongoing	Warren Whyte, Cabinet Member for Planning & Enforcement / Ian Thompson, Corporate Director, Planning, Growth & Sustainability
7. The Corporate Plan for Buckinghamshire Council should include a stronger commitment to Climate Change, with the aim of the Council being net Carbon Neutral by 2035 (subject to consideration of the	The Corporate Plan sets out a clear ambition to address climate change. The Council in July agreed a motion on climate change and this motion sets the direction and scope of the Council's ambitions on climate change. Council agreed that the Cabinet should produce proposals to work alongside national Government with the objective to achieve net carbon zero for Buckinghamshire as a whole by 2050. The council should also evaluate reaching 'net zero' for its own	Cabinet to consider the Climate Change Strategy – February 2021	Bill Chapple, Cabinet Member for Environment/ Ian Thompson, Corporate Director, Planning, Growth & Sustainability

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<p>results of the Council’s Carbon Audit), and the County generally by 2050. This commitment should be explicit and transparent and will require strong political leadership to ensure delivery and should focus on carbon reduction rather than buying in savings in order to become carbon neutral (last year’s recommendation 2).</p>	<p>emissions no later than 2050 and possibly before this, potentially by 2030, subject to resources.</p> <p>Development of a Climate Change Strategy, to cover how this ambition can be met, is underway and is due to be reported to the February Cabinet meeting. This strategy will play a major part of further reducing carbon on a year by year basis. The focus of the new strategy will certainly be on carbon reduction and we will look to build upon the excellent work of the previous Councils in reducing our carbine emissions</p>		
<p>8. A specific Portfolio and Portfolio Holder should be nominated to be responsible for driving the Climate Change & Carbon Neutral agenda forward across Buckinghamshire Council and to take a leading role in championing this across the County and beyond (last year’s recommendation 4).</p>	<p>The current Cabinet has a Portfolio Holder leading on the Environment, who is responsible for championing the Council’s developing approach to climate change. The organisation of future portfolios will be the responsibility of the new Leader of Buckinghamshire Council, following the elections in May.</p>	n/a	Martin Tett, Leader
<p>9. That further contingency funding be allocated to property rental income loss. This is an area where the Council does not receive any Government support and will likely be significantly</p>	<p>The Council continually monitors its rental income and is in direct conversation with its tenants where they are experiencing difficulty. Lockdown 3 and the prolongation of Covid 19 has resulted in a re-evaluation of the potential loss of rental income in financial year 21/22 from £1.2m to £2m. An additional contingency of £800k has been included in the budget proposals for this purpose.</p>	<p>The final budget proposals to be amended to include an additional £800k contingency related to property rental income February 2021</p>	<p>John Chilver, Cabinet Member, Property & Assets/Ian Thompson, Corporate Director, Planning Growth & Sustainability</p>

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impacted by the effects of further lockdowns.			
<p>10. Broadband coverage across Buckinghamshire be reviewed and plans submitted to ensure Buckinghamshire is one of the most connected counties in the country. A number of Community Boards have already set up sub-groups to investigate this and we recommend this be replicated across all Community Boards that cover rural areas. A budget should be set aside to do this.</p>	<p>The Cabinet strongly supports the ambition to ensure that Buckinghamshire is one of the most connected counties. However, the scale of funding required to deliver this ambition is such that it relies on funding from Government. It is not something we can resource from the Council’s budget. The Council has recently submitted an ambitious Recovery and Growth proposition to Government. One of our core asks is for a £60m Digital Infrastructure Investment Fund to enable Buckinghamshire to operate as a fully connected rural economy with every premise connected to gigabit capable broadband. If successful, this fund will provide the budget to help towards delivering against this recommendation.</p> <p>We welcome the priority that some of our Community Boards are attaching to this at a local level. It is for each individual Community Board to set its own priorities, however we will share these examples as a model for other Boards to consider.</p>	<p>Examples of Community Board activity in relation to Broadband to be shared across all Boards – March 2021</p>	<p>Martin Tett, Leader/ Ian Thompson, Corporate Director, Planning Growth & Sustainability</p>
<p>11. Cabinet should consider increasing the levels of investment in the capital programme for both footway repairs (as suggested in last year’s report Page 48) and drainage issues, as both were highlighted as areas of priority for residents.</p>	<p>Over recent years, footway investment has been at a raised level with £2m committed as part of the budget proposals for 21/22.</p> <p>Additional capital investment in highways drainage assets also forms part of the current proposed budget. However, recent weather events have highlighted problems with the highway drainage systems leading to highway flooding, some damage to properties and disruption to the use of the highway and it is recognised that the highway drainage assets would benefit from increased investment levels.</p>	<p>The final budget proposals to be amended to include an additional £2m one off investment in highways drainage - February 2021</p>	<p>Nick Naylor, Cabinet Member for Transportation/ Richard Barker, Corporate Director, Communities</p>

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	We have therefore included an additional £2m one off investment to further improve the Council's highways drainage assets as part of the final budget proposals		
12. Cabinet should define a delivery target for affordable homes and the Cabinet Members for planning and enforcement, property and assets and housing and homelessness should work together to deliver these affordable homes in the most cost-effective way for residents. This project should be regularly monitored and we recommend that the Growth, Infrastructure and Housing Select Committee should be engaged in the development of such plans.	<p>Targets for affordable housing delivery are already included in the existing local plans and will feature in the new Local Plan for the County. A delivery programme would flow from this work and will be monitored by all Cabinet members involved in the Planning, Growth and Sustainability portfolio of services. It is also part of our Recovery and Growth Deal to build high-quality, carbon-neutral, digitally enabled, affordable homes for life. These will be adaptable, accessible and suitable for key workers, home working, family living, and healthy, independent living in older years, for instance through a care village model.</p> <p>An evaluation is currently being undertaken of Council owned property assets (excluding the agricultural estate) that might be released for affordable housing, key worker housing and homelessness and papers are being developed for Cabinet to consider including financial appraisals.</p>	PGS Portfolio to report to Cabinet on the release of council owned land for affordable and key worker housing – June 2021	Warren Whyte, Cabinet Member for Planning & Enforcement/ John Chilver, Cabinet Member for Property & Assets/ Isobel Darby, Cabinet Member for Housing & Homelessness/ Ian Thompson, Corporate Director, Planning Growth & Sustainability
13. A Task and Finish Group should be established to review the Council's real estate portfolio with a view to identifying suitable sites/buildings that could be converted to residential dwellings for key workers and the homeless (see recommendation 8 last year).	Alternative options for developing Key Worker housing will be reviewed and business cases developed over the next year (see response to Recommendation 12 above)	As per Rec 12 above	John Chilver, Cabinet Member for Property & Assets/Ian Thompson, Corporate Director, Planning Growth & Sustainability

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<p>14. In anticipation of the May 2021 local elections being postponed a contingency provision of £325k should be factored into the budget to cover members' allowances for a six-month period. If it is known by the time of the budget being approved by Full Council that there is a longer postponement period, a provision of £745k should be made to cover a twelve-month period.</p>	<p>A contingency of £326k has been added to the final budget proposals to mitigate the risk of elections being delayed by 6 months.</p>	<p>The final budget proposals to be amended to include a contingency of £326k for election delay - February 2021</p>	<p>Martin Tett, Leader/ Sarah Ashmead, Deputy Chief Executive</p>
<p>Cultural Strategy</p>	<p>The Budget Scrutiny Committee advised that, given the delivery of the Cultural Strategy is a Council priority, a specific budget should be considered to drive the strategy forward and promote culture and tourism in Buckinghamshire. Whilst this was not a specific recommendation, the Cabinet noted the suggestion and has included a specific budget of £100k in the final budget proposals for this purpose.</p>	<p>The final budget proposals to be amended to include a budget of £100k to support the Cultural Strategy - February 2021</p>	<p>Patrick Hogan, Cabinet Member for Culture/ Richard Barker, Corporate Director, Communities</p>