



# Buckinghamshire Council

## Finance & Resources Select Committee

### Minutes

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCE & RESOURCES SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY 17 FEBRUARY 2022 IN THE OCULUS, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL, GATEHOUSE ROAD, AYLESBURY HP19 8FF, COMMENCING AT 2.00 PM AND CONCLUDING AT 3.03 PM**

#### **MEMBERS PRESENT**

R Bagge, D Anthony, K Ashman, M Ayub, S Chhokar, T Egleton, D Goss, G Harris, J Ng, M Walsh and S Wilson

#### **OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE**

T Butcher, J Chilver, R Ambrose, R Daniels, T Lane, I Thompson and C Ward

#### **Agenda Item**

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

Apologies were received from Councillors T Dixon, I Macpherson and K Wood.

**2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor J Ng declared a personal interest as a member of Beaconsfield Town Council.

**3 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

**4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

No public questions had been received.

**5 CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE**

The Chairman reported that the Budget Inquiry report was presented to Cabinet on Tuesday 15 February. The report was well received and thanks were passed on from the Leader and Cabinet to Members of the Inquiry Group. Each recommendation was considered by the relevant portfolio holder and the formal response had been published on the council website. The Chairman thanked all Members involved for their work in the Inquiry.

**6 12 MONTH UPDATE ON BUDGET SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Committee received a report which provided an update and narrative for each of the recommendations made by the 2022 Budget Scrutiny Inquiry Group.

During the Member discussion it was noted that the inquiry had raised areas of concern over the past two years (e.g. resource for Planning with the pending White Paper and affordable housing

in Buckinghamshire). Addressing these would be subject to either national guidance or council strategy being published. The 2022-23 budget inquiry process may benefit from re-visiting the previous year's recommendations.

## **7 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee received an updated version of the work programme to cover the remainder of the municipal year.

## **8 OVERALL PROPERTY STRATEGY**

The Committee received a report on the Overall Property Strategy which was presented by Councillor J Chilver, Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources, Property and Assets. The report also provided an overview of Council Access Points, customer usage and plans to utilize Council Property. The following key points were highlighted by the Cabinet Member:

- The Strategic Asset Management Plan would be refreshed by the end of Q2 2022. The Plan would be an amalgamation of various strategies, policies and plans. An Agricultural Estate Management Plan would be promoted over the same period.
- The Council's property portfolio comprised of multiple areas including operational, community, highways, agricultural estate, investment portfolio & development opportunities and regeneration opportunities. The Council also owned/partly owned property companies: Conseil, Aylesbury Vale Estates and Buckinghamshire Advantage.
- The estate was valued at £1.978b across over 1,700 properties. Assets under management were over £70m. The annual revenue budget was £41m and there were around 120 staff working across the property team.
- The Overall Property Strategy had several aims including:
  - Support the Council's Corporate Plan objectives and the medium-term financial planning of the organization;
  - Support provision of the housing including market, key worker and affordable;
  - Support the wider decarbonization agenda;
  - Reduce operational footprint of the corporate estate and roll out the wider corporate landlord across the estate.
- Council tenants had been supported through the pandemic through signposting to grant opportunities.
- The office estate had been adapted to meet social distance guidance during the pandemic and was now being adapted further to support hybrid working.

During the open discussion, Members raised the following points:

- Developing the strategy had been challenging due to harmonising five legacy processes, data and property information into one single unitary database. The Cabinet Member gave an example of the legacy County Council putting aside 5% of its property income into reserves to cover voids and rental income fluctuation whereas other legacies did not. The new harmonized policy was 2.5%.
- Covid had impacted rental income as well as the delivery of new construction projects through delays in the supply chain and contractor staff availability. This had led to some capital slippage increase. Inflation had led to increased costs of construction and energy.
- Property data had been collated whilst maintenance collation was ongoing. An options review of assets was also in process. A Member had hoped that the service would be further ahead on this project after two years.
- The Cabinet Member had limited involvement in the timetables, processes and procedures relating to devolution as this was within the Communities portfolio. It was acknowledged that the transfer for Green Street Community Centre, High Wycombe, had

taken a long time in part due to extensive community consultation. Any transfers needed to ensure the business could be supported by due diligence. A pilot transfer was commencing soon for a community centre in Aylesbury to the Town Council.

- Highways had a large number of small pieces of land that was surplus to requirement. These may have been a result of potential Highway improvement schemes such as bypasses or road widening. One Member noted that a similar Highways asset exercise had been undertaken by the legacy County Council and sought assurance that plans would develop. The Chairman noted that the Committee would be interested to have further information on this in future once the Asset Management Plan had been completed.
- £12m had been secured for the Future High Streets fund with the council adding £5m. The programme aimed to acquire vacant or underused properties in High Wycombe town centre, repurpose them and bring them back to use. Two shops had been acquired (Church Street and High Street) and Cabinet had recently agreed a scheme to acquire and repurpose a unit in the Eden Shopping Centre. Redevelopment of the Chiltern Shopping Centre was also being facilitated into a new residential development. Part of the programme would also improve the Guild Hall and the Little Market House in the town centre. The funding, which was being allocated in consultation with the High Wycombe town Committee and the High Wycombe Community Board, was on track to be spent within the stipulated three years.
- Around £150m had been invested into eight properties by the legacy councils with the majority being funded.
- The Cabinet Member would follow up with a Member regarding progress on Beaconsfield Town Council's town hall.
- The Cabinet Member was aware of vacant space adjacent King George V House, Amersham. The service was involved in the One Public Estate scheme with funding from Government to explore joint working with other public sector bodies.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for the update on the Strategy.

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

Thursday 7 April 2022.

## **10 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

RESOLVED –

That pursuant to Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of Minute No 12, on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act as defined as follows:

Minute 11 – Overall Property Strategy

Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) (Paragraph 3, Part 1 of Schedule 12A, Local Government Act 1972) (The need to maintain the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure, because disclosure could prejudice the Council's position in any future process or negotiations).

## **11 OVERALL PROPERTY STRATEGY**

This item was undertaken in confidential session as part of the confidential appendices related to Minute Item 8.