



## Cabinet minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Tuesday 15 February 2022 in The Oculus, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, HP19 8FF, commencing at 10.00 am and concluding at 12.05 pm.

### Members present

M Tett, A Macpherson, G Williams, S Bowles, S Broadbent, J Chilver, A Cranmer, C Harriss, N Naylor and P Strachan

### Others in attendance

K Bates, P Martin, R Stuchbury, S Wilson and M Winn

### Agenda Item

#### 1 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cllr Ralph Bagge regarding the budget scrutiny item as Chairman of Finance and Resources Select Committee.

#### 2 **Minutes** **RESOLVED –**

**That the Minutes of the meeting held on 6 January, 2022, be approved as a correct record.**

#### 3 **Declarations of interest**

John Chilver and Nick Naylor declared a personal interest as Members of the London Housing Consortium (item 12).

#### 4 **Hot Topics**

The following hot topics were discussed:

Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing

The Cabinet Member thanked officers and partners, particularly the NHS for the reopening of Olympic Lodge, Stoke Mandeville which was a step down facility to relieve the pressure on hospitals; this was a 22 bed facility and currently 16 people were using the facility. The facility was up and running within 19 days which was a tremendous effort.

Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Property and Assets

The Cabinet Member reported that there had been a delay in rolling out the County wide IT network due to the worldwide shortage of microchips but having worked closely with BT and Open Reach the necessary microchips had been secured so this programme could be rolled in July which would also include the NHS.

#### Cabinet Member for Communities

The Cabinet Member reported that funds from the Household Support Grant had been allocated to help provide support for families who were eligible for free school meals during half term. Parents and carers would receive a £30 digital food voucher through their school which they could use at any leading supermarkets.

In reference to the Proud of Bucks awards they had received nearly 500 nominations with 43 winners and 48 highly commended and all but one Community Board would announce their winners next month. Amersham Community Board had already done theirs with a celebration event on 12 February which had been well attended. Residents had been very complimentary about the role Community Boards were playing as a key part of the localism agenda.

#### Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services

The Cabinet Member reported on the Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services which was held in December 2021 and the judgement made rating the service as 'Requires improvement to be good'. This was good news as the last two Ofsted inspections had judged the Council as inadequate. The Cabinet Member reported that the service was constantly improving and a report would be submitted to the 1 March Cabinet meeting providing more detail. The Leader congratulated all staff, the Cabinet Member and recent and previous Corporate Directors for the improvements in the service.

## 5 Question Time

### **Question from Councillor Stuart Wilson to Councillor Steve Broadbent, Cabinet Member for Transport**

#### **"Excessive Traffic Congestion, Delays and Carbon Emissions for Residents and Businesses: An Overhaul Required for the Buckinghamshire Permit Scheme**

In line with the Buckinghamshire Permit Scheme (BuPS) Objective to manage and maintain the local highway network "to maximise the safe and efficient use of road space and provide reliable journey times" and with Paragraph 1.8.2 Improving Performance, what efforts are being made on non-emergency works to **put residents and local businesses first** by:

- Enhancing coordination and cooperation.
- Encourage partnership and collaborative working between all stakeholder groups.
- Provide more timely information including members of the public.
- Improve timing and duration of activities, particularly the busiest streets.
- Promote dialogue on how activities will be carried out.
- Enhance programming of activities and better forward planning by all promoters

and, in line with Paragraph 18.4, which provides for an evaluation of the Permit Scheme following the first, second, and third anniversaries of its inception and every third year thereafter, will the Cabinet Member for Transport commit to a **thorough overhaul of the BuPS to put the interests of residents, local business and the environment first** rather than the current sole focus of Key Performance Indicators on parity for the activity promoters?”

#### **RESPONSE from Councillor Broadbent**

“In response to the various elements of the question, please see the following:

##### Background

Buckinghamshire County Council went live with a Permit scheme on its strategic roads in November 2013. This proved effective in improving the management and coordination of streetworks on those roads. Subsequently, in April 2020, to widen its ability to manage such works, a new, extended scheme, covering all roads was introduced.

##### **Enhancing coordination and cooperation.**

Utility companies and others working on the highway have statutory rights and obligations to do so.

National and local targets for housing and development mean there is a much greater need for further infrastructure to provide more housing, schools and commercial areas. Alongside this, there has been a huge increase in telecommunication works to install the superfast broadband network. All of this, together with utility replacement programmes for ageing infrastructure, such as gas and water mains, has led to a massive increase in the number of permits to work that we issue. This was 20000 permits in 2018/19 and is now already over 63000 in the current financial year. Superimposed on this work, are emergency works which we have no control over, and this can sometimes occur close to other works taking place, leading to disruption and congestion that is difficult to manage. In such case, we will always try to ask works promoters to pause and remove traffic management, but this is not always practical depending on the progress of their work. So far this financial year (2021/22) we have issued 1756 Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN'S) to Utilities for their breaches of legislation along with 124 occasions of overruns. Furthermore, we have issued a total of 1547 refusals, duration challenges modification requests and revoked Permits to Utility Companies Instructing them to do things on the Network differently. We have also issued 2511 defects against their poor quality of workmanship on the Network which instructs them to carry out the works again in accordance with legislation.

Every Permit to work is coordinated by a team of Permit Coordinators. This team has recently been increased by four to accommodate the increase in Permit numbers over the past two years. We are currently recruiting for these posts.

##### **Encourage partnership and collaborative working between all stakeholder groups**

We always encourage collaborative working with works promoters, but we have no

powers to force them to do so. Very often, such coordination is impractical, given competing needs for space within the highway and working practices. For example, works combining water and electricity are usually not possible, neither are electricity and gas. Broadband and telecoms companies are also very reluctant to collaborate as they are all in competition with each other.

#### **Provide more timely information including members of the public**

All works that happen on the Network are visible on one.network. Residents and stakeholders can set up alerts so that they are notified of any works on the Network in their area or on routes they use. This is a live system and it also displays congestion levels, and contact details for each item of work. For High Impact works, Advance Warning Signs will be put out advising road users. These can be in the form of Electronic Boards, or VMS as well as traditional A boards. We also encourage letter drops and the use of Social Media to engage with residents and road users. For our own planned works, we will issue notices to residents and send out a weekly Roadworks press release to the media and stakeholders. In addition, we also use social-media channels to alert the public to disruptive works wherever possible.

#### **Improve timing and duration of activities, particularly the busiest streets**

We currently attach conditions to Permits which restrict when works can take place and to carry out manual control of temporary traffic lights during peak times. We will encourage working at nights when not in residential areas, though this is dependent on the works and traffic management being able to be taken down during the day. Our Streetworks Technicians have the authority to impose financial penalties to any works promoter in breach of their permit conditions.

#### **Promote dialogue on how activities will be carried out**

Utilities have a legal, statutory right to maintain and install their apparatus in the Highway. Where larger works take place site meetings are arranged with them to discuss works and timings, including consideration of working longer hours and in school holidays.

We also regularly challenge works promoters on the appropriate use of traffic management, to try and ensure the least disruptive method is used where appropriate, whether that be using lights instead of a road closure, or working entirely within the verge instead of lights. Ultimately though, the type of traffic management used is a decision for the works promoter based on their own risk assessments, which need to take into account safety of both their workforce and the travelling public.

- Enhance programming of activities and better forward planning by all promoters and, in line with Paragraph 18.4, which provides for an evaluation of the Permit Scheme following the first, second, and third anniversaries of its inception and every third year thereafter, will the Cabinet Member for Transport commit to a thorough overhaul of the BuPS to put the interests of residents, local business and the environment first rather than the current sole focus of Key Performance Indicators on parity for the activity promoters

For larger works, we always encourage works promoters to hold information meetings with local Councillors and stakeholders to explain why the works are taking place and what they will entail. Our street works team will have planning meetings with the works promoters to discuss the potential impact of the works on businesses, residents and the local environment, using their experience and local knowledge.

### **Overhaul of the Permit Scheme**

Our permit scheme is reviewed in line with the DfT requirements to ensure we are compliant with the latest legislation and that we are carrying out our enforcement duties correctly. The first review report for the first year of the current Permit scheme is due in the next few weeks and will be available on the Buckinghamshire Council website.

Alongside the Buckinghamshire Permit scheme we have to work to five other pieces of legislation relating to Streetworks which sets out the powers we have over works promoters, balancing this with their statutory right to work on the Highway.

The performance indicators referred to are specified by the DfT to measure parity of our own works with utility companies to ensure we are treating them fairly. These are not optional. We do, however, have a range of other management and performance indicators to track our own performance in carrying out our Network Management Duty, as well as a system of fines and improvement notices for poor performance by the utility companies. These include the number of works where coordination of different promoters has been achieved, the number of inspections carried out to review safety and congestion during works and the quality of reinstatements at various periods after the work is complete.”

### **Question from Councillor Robin Stuchbury to Councillor Nick Naylor, Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness and Regulatory Services**

#### **“Social Housing Provision**

At the Council meeting on 9 December 2020, a Notice of Motion was considered on ‘Buckinghamshire Council becoming a Social Housing Provider’. It was resolved to call on Cabinet to instruct Officers to commission a report detailing both current and future possible affordable housing delivery models, including local authority owned social housing, which would maximise the provision of the best range of good quality affordable housing appropriate to the needs of residents.

In light of the fact that the Council will be setting a budget next week and that it should reflect previous commitments and agreements, could the Cabinet Member please update me on the progress that has been made with this important issue?”

#### **RESPONSE from Councillor Naylor**

“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 considered by Cabinet, before a public consultation commences. The overarching Housing Strategy will cover targets for the provision of affordable, key worker, socially rented and specialist housing, amongst other issues.

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 myself.

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 members when giving consideration to the use of Council owned land.

Uncommitted capital funding of £4.0m is available to support the delivery of affordable housing projects once they are agreed.

I am 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."

**Question from Councillor Karen Bates to Councillor Martin Tett, Leader of the Council and Councillor Peter Strachan, Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change**

**"Greatmoor Energy from Waste Facility**

Buckinghamshire Council has a 30 year contract with FCC for the management of residual waste at the Greatmoor Waste Incinerator near Buckingham. This contract was drawn up between BCC and FCC in 2013.

Yet in 2021 there was a dispute resulting in a High Court case. Buckinghamshire Council won on all counts except one. However, this one dispute resulted in Buckinghamshire Council being ordered to pay FCC £504 000 which including interest came to £812 000.

It is good that there is now legal clarification on all aspects of the income share element but please could Members be informed of

- the full cost including legal fees to BC and residents
- how this will be accounted for in the current financial year, the Budget and the MTFP
- whether this has contributed to the forced cuts elsewhere, such as Community Board funding."

**RESPONSE from Councillor Strachan**

As noted the Council won all counts with the exception of one issue following the dispute with the current contractor for the Energy for Waste facility. Following this ruling the Council has engaged the contractor to review the detailed financial assumptions in order to determine the payments owed to the Council. These are complex contractual and financial issues and the parties are not yet in a position to agree the payments but it is anticipated that this will result in a net financial payment to the Council which will include the payment made by the Council to the Contractor in respect of the one claim which the court found in the contractor's favour.

The payment made by the Council to the Contractor was made in this financial year (21/22), in accordance with the instruction from the Court and was budgeted from a dedicated financial reserve for the waste service which ensured there was no wider impact on the Council's General Fund. This also ensures that there is no impact on the Council's revenue budget or the future Medium Term Financial plan.

Given that the overall position is anticipated to result in a net income to the Council, this situation has not resulted in any determinantal impact on the Council's revenue position and has certainly not contributed to the need for any reduction in financial expenditure elsewhere for any other Council services.

**6 Forward Plan (28 Day Notice)**

The Leader introduced the Forward Plan and commended it to all Members of the Council and the public, as a document that gave forewarning of what Cabinet would be discussing at forthcoming meetings.

**RESOLVED –**

**That the Cabinet Forward Plan be noted.**

**7 Select Committee Work Programme**

**RESOLVED –**

**That the Select Committee Work Programme be noted.**

**8 Budget Scrutiny 2022 report**

Councillor R Bagge, Chairman of the Finance and Resources Select Committee (Budget Scrutiny Inquiry Group) was unable to attend the meeting. The Leader referred to the recommendations following the intensive budget scrutiny process that had taken place over 3 days in January 2022. The Inquiry had scrutinised the Draft Revenue Budget 2022/23 to 2025/26 and Capital Programme 2022-2026 which had been approved by Cabinet on 6 January 2022.

The Budget Scrutiny Inquiry Group had met in public and questioned each Portfolio Holder on their revenue budget and capital programme proposals with a view to making recommendations to Cabinet for consideration prior to submitting the final budget to Full Council for approval on 23 February 2022. The public had been able

to submit questions via email or social media channels.

The Inquiry Group had recognised the hard work of members and officers in preparing a balanced budget in light of a number of ongoing uncertainties. Members were aware that issues outside of the Council's control could change key assumptions significantly, particularly if inflation was higher than 5%, Government funding changes, White Papers came forward significantly changing policy, Covid restrictions were re-introduced at any point, or further lockdowns were enforced. However, having recognised this, the Budget Scrutiny Inquiry Group acknowledged that the Council must move forward with the 'new normal as business as usual'.

The Budget Scrutiny Inquiry Group recommendations had been developed from studying the proposed budget and capital programme, and through questioning of each Portfolio Holder. The report also made a number of observations. The Budget Scrutiny Inquiry Group's key findings and recommendations were set out in Appendix 1 to the Cabinet report.

The Leader and relevant Cabinet Members summarised their responses to the recommendations. The full detailed responses are available to view on the Council website.

<https://buckinghamshire.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=337&MId=16785&Ver=4>

1. The **Corporate Plan** was currently under review, and the intention was to take a refresh of the Plan to Council later this Spring.
2. A list of **strategies** were in development and would be shared with Members on a regular basis. This would include key milestones, although recognising these were subject to change. All strategies would also be included on the Forward Plan which set out the anticipated timing for decision making.
3. Beyond the Better Buckinghamshire Programme all services should be reviewed and challenged - Cabinet Members would consider the potential of outsourcing on a case by case basis where this could deliver better value and improved customer service, but this was not necessarily always the most appropriate means to secure best value for the Council. The Leader referred to the Council's waste collection in the North of the County and reported that this was in-house and a very successful service.
4. Greater visibility to Corporate Contingencies - these would be presented to Cabinet in February to ensure visibility. Furthermore, in 2022/23 quarterly budget monitoring reports to Cabinet would include the status of the contingencies, including details of any that have been released to Portfolio areas.
5. Running the Social Worker Academy with a smaller cohort - the ASYE Academy would expand to a cohort of 60 in the financial year 2022/23. The size of the Academy in future years would be determined by need, recruitment strategy and budget priorities. The Cabinet Member reported that the Council still had to employ some agency staff so increasing the intakes to three per year would be extremely helpful including having a retention measure at month 24 after leaving the academy. The Leader



reported the other Service area that might want to look at this recommendation was the Planning Department.

6. The Council's property rationalisation strategy should have a clear vision of future ways of working and be delivered at a greater pace - The Cabinet fully supported the ambition to downsize the Council's estate in order to deliver efficiency savings as early as possible. There were 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 town centre redevelopment plans. That said, considerable work had 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. The Council has had significant success in letting out surplus operational buildings over the past 18 months and reference was made to the letting out of offices at Amersham to the NHS.
7. Additional funding should be set aside for the development of the Local Plan as £750k p.a. over the next three years was likely to be inadequate, particularly in light of possible changes arising when the Planning White Paper was taken forward – Cabinet were confident that the current budget for preparing the Buckinghamshire Local Plan was adequate to make good progress. However, this would be kept under review, so that the Council could respond to any changes as a result of the Planning White Paper.
8. Cabinet should agree a clear strategy which included a delivery target for affordable homes - The Housing Service was working with other teams in the authority to prepare an Overarching Housing Strategy in 2022/23. This overarching strategy would sit above the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy which was currently in draft form and being consulted on. The Overarching Housing Strategy would cover the Council's ambition for the provision of affordable, key worker, socially rented and specialist housing, amongst other issues. The Cabinet Member reported that there was a shortage of land in Buckinghamshire, which was also expensive so it was important to identify any opportunities in the Councils' estate and to convert properties to residential use. They were also working closely with Children's Services with care leavers so they could bid on properties.
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 - The revenue and capital budgets that have been proposed were consistent with previous years' allocations with the significant exception that, for 2022/23 the capital budget had been increased by £442k to fund the replacement of Berryhill footbridge and the Denham Bridleway bridge. This extra funding, and these works, enable the Council to fulfil their statutory duty to keep the Rights of Way (RoW) network open.
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 be obtained within the budget allocated, the potential income streams and to

ensure there was a consistent approach to deliver these in the most cost effective way - 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 future. A draft EV Study and Action Plan have been developed. The Action Plan had gone out to all members for their comments, with a supporting presentation, using the platform YourVoice. A finalised draft would be brought back to Cabinet later in 2022. Suppliers would be able to put forward match funding.

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- A package of climate change support for Members would be developed with input from the Member Development Working Group to ensure its suitability. A long term communications campaign had been launched (the Bucks Climate Challenge) and further content to educate and inform residents on how to reduce their impacts on the climate was being drafted. This campaign would also inform residents of the work the Council had undertaken to address climate change.
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 was in an unparished area whilst the other was not, the Committee believed that the term 'special expenses' should only be used in the budget to denote a one-off financial commitment - A review of special expenses arrangements in Aylesbury and High Wycombe would be undertaken in 2022/23.

Cabinet thanked Budget Scrutiny Members and the Officer for the work undertaken in putting forward their recommendations.

#### **RESOLVED –**

- (1) That the Budget Scrutiny Inquiry Group, as well as the supporting Officers, be thanked for their work and subsequent recommendations.**
- (2) That Cabinet's responses to the Budget Scrutiny report 2022 and recommendations, as detailed at the meeting, be noted.**

#### **9 Medium Term Financial Plan 2022/23 to 2024/25 and Capital Programme**

Cabinet received a report on the 3-year revenue budget for 2022/23 to 2024/25 and 4-year capital programme for Buckinghamshire Council covering the period to 2025/26. These proposals were based on the latest known funding position, service budget pressures and the key financial risks facing the Council both now and in the future. They also took account of the findings from the recent budget scrutiny inquiry.

The Council Tax Resolution report would be presented as a separate report as part

of the budget to Council in February and would contain the final information from the other precepting authorities leading to the total Council Tax for the area, which Full Council would be required to approve.

The report included Special Expenses that were particular costs specific to an area not covered by a local town or parish council (e.g. recreational grounds, allotments, community centres markets etc.) There were three special expense areas within the overall Council area; High Wycombe Town Committee, West Wycombe Church Yard and Aylesbury Town. The proposed budgets and precepts were presented in Appendix 5.

Although the current Government's Spending Review covered a 3-year period, the Local Government Settlement announcements were only from 2022/23. This reflected the significant changes that were planned to Local Government funding from 2023/24. These changes would not impact the quantum of funding available to Local Government, but rather the mechanism (the Fair Funding Review) and policy objectives (Levelling Up) to be funded through the previously announced funding envelope.

Whilst recognising the ongoing impact of Covid-19 on Local Authorities the provisional settlement did not include any specific funding for the ongoing impacts of the pandemic. Given the current Government approach of one-off interventions when circumstances required national policy intervention it was likely that if impacts increased in future years then specific one-off funding would be announced alongside any response measures.

The Leader made the following points in presenting the budget:-

- The Council had been working to provide services whilst dealing with the pandemic for the past two years and this had produced a significant impact on the Council's income e.g. car parking (£1.2 million a month pre-pandemic), leisure centres, commercial and rental investments. It was uncertain whether these levels of income which helped support frontline services, would ever return to historical levels.
- Uncertainty around Government funding which was only for one year although the Council had undertaken a three-year budgeting process for the revenue budget in line with the timeframes of the government's Spending Review announced in October 2021. Reference was made to the Levelling up agenda where priority had been given to the Midlands and the North of England and the Fair Funding Review currently being undertaken.
- Significant upturn in demand for Council Services, particularly increases in social care costs following Covid, significant additional referrals for children and also adults, with increasingly complex cases. Protecting the vulnerable remained a key priority for the Council.
- There was a weakened provider market for those who provided domiciliary services or care homes for short or long term care. This market had been destabilised with the impact of Covid. There was a demand for higher care fees

from providers, some of whom may be economically fragile which would again impact on the Council to ensure that the vulnerable were looked after.

- There were various contingencies and reserves to mitigate all the impacts and risks outlined above.
- The business environment was uncertain and with the funding from business rates the Council were aware of the pressures of the local economy due to the levels of inflation, shortages of staff, uncertainty around the retail industry and the move to online shopping.
- The Government had now commented that the Country needed to live with Covid and that future variants could be possibly more mild but more virulent and transmissible. The Council needed to be cautious about returning to normal when there was uncertainty about future variants.
- Whilst it was important to provide Home to School Transport, particularly for children with Special Educational Needs, it was a substantial cost to the Council and this needed to be kept under review.
- The Council also recognised the pressure on resident's finances with rising petrol and energy prices, cost of living increases with supermarkets and the need to provide value for money for residents.
- The Council would focus on protecting the vulnerable and residents' priorities such as roads and pavements with a £100 million budget over 4 years to improve this network. There was concern that the Government could significantly reduce funding on roads however, the Council was committed to maintaining this level of spending on the road and pavement network. There was also a focus on clearing drain and gullies in the County and an additional £400,000 to clear litter, particularly focusing on the County's major A roads to take place imminently.
- Additional funding had been found to support the warden scheme in High Wycombe to help support community safety.
- The budget had been funded through efficiencies/additional income (£43.7 million) and reluctantly an increase in Council Tax. This had fallen into two parts; the increase for general services as inflation was running at 5% which required an increase in Council tax of 1.99%. Secondly the increase in social care, where the Government was looking to increase National Insurance contributions by 1.25% but in the first three years of this the money would go mainly to the National Health Service to cope with the backlog particularly during Covid (currently £6 million likely to rise to £9 million). Therefore, the Government were expecting the Council to raise an extra precept for social care. This equated to a further 2% so 3.99% in total for the Council, alongside precepts from parishes, the police and fire authorities.
- There was a capital programme of £524 million over 4 years to provide some certainty for projects and to provide infrastructure such as link roads around Aylesbury, infrastructure around Princes Risborough and High Wycombe. The Council continued to lobby the Government to increase funding for road repairs.

During discussion the following points were made:

- A Cabinet Member reported that this was a carefully crafted and prioritised budget prepared in difficult financial times for resident's needs. These were difficult post covid recovery times and many Councils in similar areas had not managed to present a balanced budget. Some other Councils were in debt but this Council continued to be cautious.
- The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing referred to the Adult Social Care budget of £164 million and the importance of levying the 2% increase in Council tax; there was huge uncertainty for adults and children with an increasing elderly population and people with complex needs which impacted on the cost of nursing care. The provider market was not stable currently which was a national issue. Contingencies were required to deal with any unexpected crisis in this area which included the impact of the Government's White Paper Putting People at the Heart of Care and enabling self funders to access council rates of care of which there were over 60% in Buckinghamshire. The potential equalisation of the care market was a big financial risk for Councils. Other areas within the portfolio included adults with learning disabilities of which there were higher than average numbers in Buckinghamshire and people with physical disabilities.
- The Finance and Resources portfolio was committed to delivering an £11million net budget reduction over the next three years which was 20% of their budget. There were challenging targets in income streams and delivering efficiencies in back office services. Income generation would be through the Council's land and property assets and savings through staffing efficiencies, contract harmonisation such as the IT network contract and also the plans for property rationalisation and the downsizing of office space. Reference was made to using general fund reserves (of which the Council had £47 million) to cover a deficit in the second year of £1.4 million. In terms of the capital budget the Cabinet Member welcomed the new Household Waste Recycling Centre in Buckingham as it had been recognised existing facilities were inadequate.
- In terms of transport, a Cabinet Member particularly made reference to funding into Active Travel Schemes over the 4 year period which cost £4.6 million eg Emerald Way connecting to Haydon Hill cycle path, the Green Wheels in Motion COP event to provide a Green Way throughout the County. It was important to also allocate funding to mitigate the impact of HS2 and East/West Rail. The Council was being cautious currently about parking income. The Home to School Transport Team had made £3 million efficiencies through their re-procurement but the Council still had to fulfil their statutory duties.
- The Cabinet Member for Communities reported that they were looking for efficiency savings through undertaking a voluntary grants review through a commissioning approach and reducing the funding to Community Board which should help them to focus funding on projects that added value to the community and produced outcomes. A Task and Finish Group had been set up to reset and streamline the process. The Service were looking at devolving special expenses in Aylesbury by devolving the Community Centres and playing fields. In High Wycombe similar facilities were run by

the Town Committee.

- The Schools budget was large but most of the funding came from DSG (£532 million). The spend for the 100,000 children in Buckinghamshire was £4,265 per child for primary schools and £5,525 per pupil for secondary schools.

The Finance Team were congratulated on their work on the balanced prudent budget.

#### **RESOLVED –**

**That Council be recommended to:**

- (1) Approve the Revenue Budget and Capital Programme (Appendices 1-3).**
- (2) Approve the 'Special Expenses' budgets, precepts and associated services for Aylesbury Town, High Wycombe Town and West Wycombe Church Yard (Appendices 5 & 6).**
- (3) Support the proposal to delegate to Cabinet decisions to add up to £100m to the Capital Programme, to be funded by Prudential Borrowing, subject to a robust business case being approved.**
- (4) Approve the Council Tax Reduction Scheme Policy (Appendix 7).**
- (5) Delegate authority to the Leader, in consultation with the s.151 Officer, to make any technical changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme as required from legislation concerning the £150 Council Tax Energy Rebate Scheme, together with any changes required to implement any new discretionary schemes linked to the discretionary funding allocated.**
- (6) Approve the Schedule of Fees & Charges as set out in Appendix 8.**
- (7) Note that a supplementary report, the formal Council Tax Resolution, will accompany the final budget to full Council.**

#### **10 Capital and Investment Strategy**

Cabinet considered a report on the Capital and Investment Strategy that full Council was required to approve on an annual basis. The draft Capital and Investment Strategy (Appendix 1 to the Cabinet report) provided the framework within which the Council would deliver its Corporate Plan objectives through the effective investment of its limited capital resources. As well as the Council's immediate statutory responsibilities, the strategy also played an important in 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 for Finance, Resources, Property and Assets highlighted the main changes from last year's Strategy:-

- Section 2.4 provided an update on the impact of Covid and the post Covid landscape.
- Section 1.7 referenced the new CIPFA Code for capital finance including the tightening of criteria for Public Works Loans in that they could no longer be used for property investments solely for income yield.

- Section 2.2 referred to the Housing Infrastructure Fund income for the Aylesbury Garden Town/ Princes Risborough expansion and Abbey Barn Lane Projects which were now reflected in the Capital Programme.
- Section 2.3 showed the creation of an earmarked reserve for a new ERP system which was the Council's main Finance and HR system with the flexibility for it to be used for capital or revenue.
- There was an update on governance arrangements for capital spend and the Appendix set out the various Boards responsible for capital decisions which fed into the overarching corporate Capital Investment Board who recommended capital allocations and monitored progress in capital project delivery.
- The updated Strategy reflected the Council's priorities and processes.

**RESOLVED –**

- (1) That the Capital and Investment Strategy (Appendix 1) be agreed.**
- (2) That Council be recommended to APPROVE the Capital and Investment Strategy.**

**11 Buckinghamshire Council Homelessness Strategy**

The Transitional Arrangements No.2 Regulations 2008 required a new Buckinghamshire Council Homelessness Strategy in place by 1 April 2022. Following delays arising from the pandemic and service restructure, work had now been undertaken to develop a new draft strategy for consideration and adoption. To ensure that the Council could adopt its new Homelessness Strategy within a reasonable timeframe, Cabinet was asked to consider and comment on the draft strategy ahead of a public consultation process, with a view to the final version of the Strategy being submitted to full Council for consideration and adoption on 27 April 2022. The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities had been updated and notified of the timetable for adopting the Strategy by the end of April 2022.

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness and Regulatory Services reported that this Strategy would replace the existing legacy Councils Strategies. A series of stakeholder events had been held during November and December. Due to the tight timescales it had not been possible to go through a full public consultation before Cabinet but this was being undertaken alongside Cabinet. The Strategy would be reviewed annually to ensure that it was fit for purpose. It was currently a high level plan which would need to be formulated into a costed action plan. There were some existing capital budgets committed which were earmarked for delivery for the affordable housing and homelessness strategies. There was no growth for additional funding set aside but there was flexibility in the Annual Homelessness Grant of £1.4 million and a further opportunity to bid for the Rough Sleepers Grant. The Service Director for Housing and Regulatory Services reported that the proposed Strategy gave seven key challenges which had led to five priorities for the Council and the Service and under those priorities there were 43 proposed actions which support the service delivery.

Cabinet sought additional information on the Strategy and during the discussion the following points were noted:-

- This was an important piece of work and tribute was paid to the work of moving people into alternative accommodation during the pandemic. The Strategy emphasised the need to work across all portfolios e.g. teenagers who were presenting as homeless which had been raised in the recent Ofsted report, the links to Safeguarding Boards and Community Safety Panel and domestic abuse strategy. The Cabinet Member reassured Members that the service area worked very closely with other portfolio areas and becoming a unitary council had meant even closer liaison.
- Reference was made to the hidden homeless where people were staying temporarily with friends and families or people being evicted by private providers.
- There were 300 people housed during the covid period which was an immense task. Buckinghamshire had been rough sleeping free. It was confirmed that the Voluntary and Community Sector, other partners such as Housing Associations and the Covid Recovery Board had been consulted in putting together the Strategy. The Cabinet Member congratulated officers for their work on the Strategy. The Deputy Cabinet Member referred to the work during the pandemic; pre pandemic there were 34 rough sleepers and there were now 7 rough sleepers and 4 of those had been offered accommodation. There had been 200 rough sleepers during the pandemic. With reference to the VCS there was the Outreach Programme where they go out to speak to the homeless and help deal with their issues to refer them to Oasis (Addiction Service) or Probation, where people have been released from prison with no accommodation. There was some homeless accommodation coming on line for 34 people which included Hightown Housing and Wycombe had 11 units coming on board and the Council were working with the YMCA. The key factor was to address the issues that had caused homelessness in the first place e.g. employment agencies that help people who had left prison find work.

#### **RESOLVED –**

- (1) That the draft Buckinghamshire Council Homelessness Strategy be noted.**
- (2) That authority be delegated to the Leader of the Council to make any final amendments to the draft Strategy (following feedback from Members and the completion of the public consultation exercise), and to agree the final version of the Strategy in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness and Regulatory Services.**
- (3) That the final version of the Homelessness Strategy, as agreed by the Leader of the Council, be submitted to full Council for consideration and adoption.**

#### **12 Withdrawal from the London Housing Consortium Joint Committee**

The Council had been a Constituent Authority of the London Housing Consortium



(LHC) since May 2006 and had nominated Elected Members to serve on the LHC Joint Committee. The rationale for joining the LHC Joint Committee had been to work collaboratively with other London Councils to improve the procurement of housing and construction products and services. The London Housing Consortium had been set up for that purpose in 1966.

The Council no longer relied on LHC for procurement solutions, preferring instead to use a mixture of its own procurement capability, main contractor services, alternative procurement consortia and sometimes including LHC. LHC surpluses were now shared widely across the country resulting in a reduced annual return for the Council. As a Constituent Member of LHC the council received an annual community benefit fund from LHC surpluses (conditional on attendances by Elected Members at LHC meetings) of £10,000. It was envisaged that in a new LHC corporate entity such funds would continue to be available for former LHC Constituent Authorities.

Much had changed in the operations of the LHC in recent years and Members of the LHC Joint Committee recognised that the dynamic nature of LHC as a commercial enterprise was at odds with the democratic and regulatory processes that were required by local authorities. It was felt that LHC would benefit from having more autonomy around its governance and organisational design, Job design and reward, Future provision of pension and financial modelling and risk management.

Consequently, the members of the LHC Joint Committee had asked for a review of LHC governance arrangements which concluded that the LHC Joint Committee be disbanded, and a new corporate entity established by LHC. If the current lead authority, LB Hillingdon, withdrew from the Joint Committee and two or more Constituent Authorities wished the Joint Committee to continue, then one of them would have to act as lead authority. The requirements for the lead authority were set out in the LHC Constitution.

The governance review leading to the proposal to withdraw from the LHC Joint Committee had identified new governance arrangements that were more appropriate to the current and future operations of LHC. In establishing a new corporate entity LHC would be seeking participation from client organisations and other interested parties from across Great Britain, from local authorities, housing associations and other relevant sectors. The design of the new LHC corporate entity would look to continue to offer grant funding to those Authorities continuing to participate in LHC and would encourage current Constituent Authorities to consider participation in the new corporate entity.

#### **RESOLVED –**

- (1) That Buckinghamshire Council withdraws as one of the ten Constituent Authorities of the LHC Joint Committee, as well as from the LHC Joint Committee, resulting in its potential disbandment in December 2022 at the earliest, thereby foregoing the £10,000 p.a. income from the LHC Joint**

**Committee.**

- (2) That Buckinghamshire Council would consider at a future meeting, the options for continued participation in the new LHC corporate entity when it is known in March 2022.**

**13 Future High Streets**

In June 2021, the Council had received from MHCLG the first tranche of Wycombe's Future High Streets grant ('FHS'). This had been reported to Cabinet in July 2021, and progress had been made on part of the approved 3-year FHS development programme (two vacant shop acquisitions had been acquired and were undergoing re-purposing). It had not been possible to secure another targeted Year 1 project, although this might emerge again as a project in 2022/23.

Meanwhile, it was proposed that an alternative project be substituted (subject to Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities approval), to achieve Year 1 spend profile and thereby secure Year 2 grant. The proposed substitute project comprised the Council co-investing (alongside Eden's owners the long leasehold owners of the centre, the freeholders being the Council), in the proposed re-purposing of Eden's 13,000sm (140,000sqft) House of Fraser building to further economic activity and vitality in the town centre, as well as bringing forward much needed housing and associated benefits with re purposing underutilised space in the town centre.

House of Fraser occupied the building on a temporary short-term arrangement and there was no certainty that they would remain as tenant. Eden were in on-going discussions with them but regarded it as prudent to look at alternative options.

The disposal of 6-8 Frogmoor would facilitate the redevelopment of Chiltern Shopping Centre for predominantly residential development, that would increase economic activity in the town centre and reduce pressures on housing need elsewhere. Work was ongoing with the other tenants and operators that might be affected by the proposed redevelopment of the Chiltern Centre. The terms of the proposed Eden co-investment, along with the terms of the proposed disposal of 6-8 Frogmoor to Dandara, which formed part of their redevelopment proposals, were set out in detail in the Confidential Appendix.

The proposed investment and disposal would have a twofold regeneration benefit to the Council and the town centre. The redevelopment would also generate a capital receipt (from the disposal of 6-8 Frogmoor) and CIL/Section 106 monies for the Council. Cabinet asked the Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources, Property and Assets to look at the potential for reinvesting some of these monies in the regeneration of Frogmoor.

The Leader referred to the area of Frogmoor which had some historic buildings and the need to protect and help revitalise the area and to leverage any opportunities as part of this project.

**RESOLVED –**

**That the Director of Property and Assets, in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration, the Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources, Property and Assets, and the Section 151 Officer, be authorised to:**

- (1) Agree Heads of Terms, authorise and undertake necessary due diligence, agree contracts and exchange and complete contracts for the investment of Wycombe's Future High Street monies into the Eden Centre for the reasons set out in the public report and confidential appendix.**
- (2) Agree the Heads of Terms, agree contracts, exchange, and complete the disposal of 6-8 Frogmoor, High Wycombe, for the reasons set out in the public report and confidential appendix.**

**14 Exclusion of the public (if required)**

**RESOLVED –**

That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

Item 15 – Future High Streets (Paragraph 3)

Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information). The confidential appendices provide financial information about contracts for the provision of services.

**15 Confidential appendices to Future High Streets**

The confidential appendix was discussed in exempt session.

**16 Confidential Minutes**

**RESOLVED –**

**That the confidential Minutes of the meeting held on 6 January 2022 be approved as a correct record.**

**17 Date of next meeting**

Tuesday 1 March 2022 at 10.00am