



Cabinet minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Tuesday 12 December 2023 in The Oculus, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury HP19 8FF, commencing at 10.00 am and concluding at 11.50 am.

Members present

M Tett, A Macpherson, G Williams, S Broadbent, J Chilver, A Cranmer, C Harriss, A Hussain, P Strachan and M Winn

Others in attendance

D Barnes, P Martin and R Stuchbury

Agenda Item

1 Apologies

There were no apologies.

2 Minutes

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 14 November 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

3 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Hot Topics

The following hot topics were reported :-

Cabinet Member for Transport

The Cabinet Member referred to the home to school transportation consultation, which had just been launched.

<https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/news/have-your-say-on-home-to-school-transport/>

Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services

The Cabinet Member reported that Year 12 students from five secondary schools in Buckinghamshire had taken part in a green schools Dragons' Den-style challenge. Students from Sir Henry Floyd Grammar School won over the panel of judges, who

were impressed by the students' idea of creating an app for students and parents to sell old uniforms. This would help reduce waste and save money. This had been organised in partnership with Bucks Skills Hub and local businesses. The event enabled Year 12 students from Aylesbury High School, Buckingham School, Buckinghamshire College Group, Sir Henry Floyd Grammar School and Waddesdon Church of England School to learn from professionals in the field of green technology and sustainable business practices – helping them to develop and display a range of green skills, employability, technical, creative and academic skills.

Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure

The Cabinet Member encouraged residents to support their local theatres by watching the Christmas Pantomines with Snow White at Aylesbury and Beauty and the Beast at High Wycombe.

Leader

The Leader made reference to the Inspire Bucks charity which helped donate presents for children who were in temporary accommodation over Christmas. He paid tribute to Cllr Paul Irwin who had helped organise this.

<https://www.inspirebucks.charity/our-projects1/christmas-appeal>

5 Question Time

Question from Councillor Robin Stuchbury to Councillor Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services

Education and children's services currently have a variance of £9.8 million on their budget. The client cost went up by £1.5 million to support children with complex needs in the community. The cost of occupation therapy equipment (£0.4 million) and transport (£0.6 million) will continue to rise with more demand. After-care costs were £0.7 million higher as more young people turn 18 this year combined with a lack of housing for people leaving care, while social care staff cost had a £1.3 million underspend. Buckinghamshire Council's education budget was £0.9 million overspent partly because of pressures related to SEND. If this reflects the current state of your portfolio budget as Buckinghamshire Council sets its precept, I'm worried that Buckinghamshire Council will maintain sufficient funding for your portfolio and would like reassurance that we have enough funding to raise our standard for children's services and SEND and the improvements required by OFSTED.

RESPONSE from Councillor Cranmer

As you will be aware, the Q2 budget position was presented and scrutinised at Cabinet on 14 November 2023. Whilst the financial challenges faced by the Council and specifically children's services are significant, delivering on the corporate and political ambition to provide a financially sustainable service that secures better outcomes for children and young people remains one of the top priorities for this Council. Buckinghamshire Children's Services is not alone in its position with an

increasing number of councils citing this area of responsibility as their key source of financial pressure and overspend. The scale of these challenges has prompted local authorities, including Buckinghamshire, to consider new approaches to the way in which services are delivered to children and families. Where necessary, these proposals will be incorporated within the 2024/25 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) that will be presented to Council on 21 February 2024. However, spending money is not the only solution to achieving better outcomes for children and families. We also need to ensure that our services are efficient, effective and aligned with our vision of being a learning organisation that strives for continuous improvement. That is why we have embarked on a transformation programme that aims to redesign our services around the needs and strengths of children and families, ensuring that children receive a consistent, purposeful and child centred approach wherever they are on their journey of need from early help through to being in care. By focusing improvement activity in these areas, we hope to reduce the demand and costs of statutory interventions, such as placements, and promote the wellbeing and resilience of children and families in Buckinghamshire.

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 reports would be discussing at forthcoming meetings.

RESOLVED – That the Cabinet Forward Plan be noted.

7 Select Committee Work Programme

The Leader introduced the Select Committee Work Programme and commended it to all Members of the Council and the public, as a document that gave forewarning of what Select Committees would be discussing at forthcoming meetings.

RESOLVED – That the Select Committee Work Programme be noted.

8 Buckinghamshire Serious Violence Response Strategy 2023-2026

In line with the statutory requirements of the Serious Violence Duty, the Serious Violence Response Strategy 2023-26 had been produced. The Strategy outlined the following five priorities: -

- **Priority 1** – Raise awareness of serious violence through communication, education and training.
- **Priority 2** – Support early intervention for vulnerable young people and those becoming at risk.
- **Priority 3** – Develop awareness of, and embed, the Serious Violence Agenda, and Duty requirements amongst the partnership.
- **Priority 4** – Enhance appropriate support for those who are released from custody who are most risk of reoffending.

- **Priority 5** – Undertake a proactive partnership response to cohorts and locations vulnerable to serious violence.

A multi-agency Serious Violence Reduction Delivery Plan would be produced to support the delivery of the priorities over the next three years. The delivery plan would be overseen by the multi-agency Serious Violence Reduction Delivery Group, with updates going to the Safer Buckinghamshire Board on a quarterly basis.

At present, all Community Safety Partnerships received a Community Safety Grant from the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) that was to be used to fund projects, which would assist with the delivery of their community safety strategies. The Safer Buckinghamshire Board, in conjunction with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), managed the Community Safety Grant, which for 2023/24 was £486k. This could be used to support the five priorities outlined in the Safer Buckinghamshire Strategy. At present £373k had already been allocated to local projects, which left £113k for any of the Safer Buckinghamshire Board subgroups to submit applications. Obviously, not all of this would be available to support serious violence work, however the Serious Violence Reduction Delivery Group could apply for funding from this grant to support the implementation of the Serious Violence Response Strategy.

During discussion the following points were made :-

- The Leader referred to the geography of crime in Buckinghamshire and that Aylesbury, Wycombe and Chesham were the main hotspots although there was crime reported in rural areas. The main crimes were related to drug dealing, which was prevalent in cities and rural areas due to county lines.
- In terms of sufficient funding being available to deliver the Strategy Cabinet Members were reassured that there was enough funding for the first year but the following years might need to be reviewed. A case had been made to the Home Office for PCC funding. All Partners had committed to the Strategy.
- Whilst Buckinghamshire was reasonably safe, it was important not to be complacent. In 22/23 for violence with injury for 1000 population the Buckinghamshire figure was six, for Thames Valley 7.1, for the South-East 8.5 and for England 9.6. However, any crime had a devastating impact on the victim. A Cabinet Member gave an example of good work between adult social care and the police to help protect the vulnerable from drug gangs.
- Reference was made to the Opportunity Bucks project which focused on tackling poverty, employment and health issues. There were other Strategies, which this Strategy linked in with including Combatting Drugs and Violence Against Women and Girls Strategies. Whilst work was being undertaken with perpetrators of crime, good quality victim services was crucial. The Corporate Director reported that the Safer Bucks Board prioritised the needs of victims.
- A Cabinet Member referred to the five priorities and mentioned that a group of residents had approached him regarding the increasing incidence of robbery in the Chesham and Amersham area. In response, Thames Valley Police organised a public meeting and provided information on data

intelligence and dispelled some of the myths around this, but also said that they would increase patrols. Robbery had decreased over a five year period by 45% and also the PCC had visited Chesham, which showed good partnership working.

- Another Cabinet Member commented on the map of crime and Group 1 particularly referring to acquisitive crime and the level of rural crime and farm theft. He referred to the recent Private Members Bill put through by MP Greg Smith on farm theft. He asked a question on the Thames Valley Together data project and what new data would be made available. The Corporate Director reported that it was more about how the partnership shared data rather than new data and a member of staff had been seconded to Thames Valley Police to work on this project. The data sets would be reported to the Safer Bucks Board who would have a single view of the information rather than it being disparate.
- The Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services reported that work was being undertaken with the Youth Offending Service, the Family Service and courts to identify families at risk and any previous knowledge of offending and relationship with the courts, which would provide useful information.
- In terms of the communication plan, it was noted that there would be an ongoing engagement piece with partners and communities which would be particularly proactive in the Opportunity Bucks areas. Community Boards were also important partners and actions which were required would be addressed at a local level.

RESOLVED –

(1) That the Serious Violence Response Strategy 2023-26 be APPROVED.

(2) That the next steps to be taken be NOTED, namely:

- (i) Publication of the Serious Violence Response Strategy 2023-26 and submission to the Home Office.**
- (ii) Development of a detailed delivery plan.**

9 Visitor Economy Strategy [WITHDRAWN]

10 Fly-Tipping Enforcement Policy Review and Government Fixed Penalty Notice Increase to Fly-tipping and failure in Housholder Duty of Care

The Buckinghamshire Fly-Tipping Enforcement Policy was adopted by Cabinet in April 2020. The Policy was reviewed periodically in order to remain appropriate to meet the necessary compliance requirements. Cabinet was requested to agree to the revised Fly-tipping Enforcement Policy 2023 (Option 2a) with two key changes:

- a) An increase in Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) limits
- b) New criteria to issue an FPN to an offender based on admissions being made.

The amendments were highlighted in Bold and Italics in the revised Policy, which was attached at Appendix A to the Cabinet report.

The Government had confirmed the desire for local authorities to take a more robust approach to tackle waste crime and toughen existing deterrent measures to change behaviours. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) announced an increase in statutory Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) upper limits effective from 31st July 2023, which supported DEFRA's wider work to tackle waste crime. Local authorities had the freedom to determine fixed penalty rates within the limits set out below. The FPN maximum levels had been confirmed as:

- Fly-Tipping – increase from £400 to £1,000.
 - Failure in Householder Duty of Care – increase from £400 to £600.
- and
- Littering – increase from £150 to £500. Changes to the litter FPN Upper limit were not being considered as part of this report. A Littering Enforcement Strategy was being progressed and a separate report would consider appropriate litter enforcement.

Should the recommendations in the Cabinet report be agreed, and following the call-in period, the Fly Tipping Enforcement Policy 2023 would become effective. Public communications were planned for December 2023 and January 2024. Published policy documents and the Council website would be updated to replace the existing 2020 policy to reflect the amendments.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment stressed that the Council had a 'Zero Tolerance' position in respect to fly-tipping and welcomed the Government's decision to enable Local Authorities to increase the upper limits of FPNs for Fly-tipping and Failure in Householder Duty of Care. It was hoped that the setting of fixed penalty rates at the highest level would act as a greater deterrent against fly tipping. The Council would also not be allowing for early payment discounts like some other authorities to send out a clear message that fly-tipping in Buckinghamshire would not be tolerated. The Council would continue to use all available means to make sure that anyone who did carry out this crime would be caught and prosecuted, including the use of cameras and dashboard footage.

In relation to Duty of Care, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment urged all householders to fully check the credentials of any waste carrier they employ to dispose of waste on their behalf. The Council had issued numerous Duty of Care Notices over the last year.

The Leader stated that fly-tipping, which took place in Buckinghamshire and around the country, was a blight on the landscape and would not be tolerated in Buckinghamshire. There were too many people predominately coming out from the surrounding big towns and cities using Buckinghamshire as a convenient place to dump their waste, often with links to criminal gangs. The Leader highlighted the Council's 'Zero Tolerance' position and stated that he fully supported the proposal to set fixed penalty rates at the highest level, with no discount for early payments,

to help deter people from fly-tipping which was an abhorrent act.

During discussion the following points were made:-

- Cabinet Members expressed their support for setting fixed penalty rates at the highest level.
- Buckinghamshire Council would seek to prosecute all cases at court where FPNs had been issued but not paid. In response to a question on whether there was appropriate resource in place to manage the non-payment process, it was noted that there was sufficient resource to manage current levels of prosecution and this would be monitored through implementation should the recommendations in this report be agreed. The Policy had been drawn up in conjunction with the Council's Legal Team. The Council was careful as to which cases it sought to prosecute to ensure that there was a realistic prospect of conviction.
- In response to a question regarding whether an analysis had been undertaken, which showed whether those paying the fixed notice penalties could afford the increase, it was noted that a large proportion of people who fly tip were traders and therefore they were earning an income. In the case of a prosecution being sought for non-payment, it would be down to the Court to decide how much a Defendant could afford based on their income. The repayment rate would be closely monitored.
- A Cabinet Member stated that it was important to ensure that the public were aware of the high number of successful prosecutions, which had taken place over the last few years. Since 2003, the Council had succeeded in achieving between 800-900 convictions.

Members agreed that recommendation 3 in the report should be removed as any proposed changes to the enforcement policy should be considered and agreed by Cabinet in line with the Councils 'Zero Tolerance' position in respect to fly tipping.

RESOLVED –

- 1. That the revised Buckinghamshire Council Fly-Tipping Enforcement Policy 2023 be AGREED and ADOPTED, which sets out criteria to issue a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) to an offender based on admissions being made.**
- 2. That the revised FPN upper limits approach (Option 2a) be AGREED and ADOPTED, to address the recent Government change to increase the upper limits of FPNs for fly-tipping and failure in householder duty of care.**

11 Proposed changes to the Waste Access and Acceptance Policy for the Household Recycling Centres (HRC) for charges relating to DIY waste

The Council was the Waste Disposal Authority (WDA) and was under a statutory duty to provide Household Recycling Centres (HRCs) under the Environmental Protection Act (EPA) 1990 Section 51 and the WDA provided 10 sites across the County operated under contract by FCC. Under the EPA, 'household' waste had to be accepted without charge at HRCs and the existing legislation allowed the WDA to

charge for certain 'non-household' or DIY/ construction/ demolition type waste streams. The Council introduced charging for these non-household waste streams in April 2019.

On 18 June 2023, the Government announced their intention to abolish charges on small amounts of DIY wastes brought to HRCs by setting a minimum threshold level to be accepted without charge. On 21 November 2023, the new regulations were laid in Parliament and stated that:

Waste from construction or industrial waste, demolition works, including preparatory works is to be treated as household waste for the purpose of (a) Section 32(2) and (2a) of the Act, (disapplication of Section 34(1) and duty of the occupier of domestic property to transfer household waste only to an authorised person or for authorised transport purposes); and (b) section 51 of the Act (functions of waste disposal authorities, but only where-

- i. The waste is produced at a domestic property by occupiers of that domestic property carrying out their own construction or demolition works, including preparatory works;*
- ii. The waste is not from construction or demolition works, including preparatory works, for which payment has been or is to be made;*
- iii. The amount of waste delivered to any disposal site in a single visit is either –*
 - a. Less than 100 litres and capable of being fitted into two 50 litre bags OR*
 - b. a single article of waste no larger than 2000mm x 750mm x 700mm in size and;*
- iv. Waste delivered to waste deposit sites does not exceed four single visits per household in any four week period.*

The current Waste Access and Acceptance Policy (WAAP) charged for all non-household waste streams. Under the legislative changes any DIY waste produced by a tradesperson, including landlords, would remain liable to a charge without any free threshold. As such, no changes to WAAP were required in respect of tradespersons or commercial waste. The changes required to WAAP related only to the charges for Buckinghamshire Council residents for household DIY waste over the free threshold of one load per week at HRCs and non-Buckinghamshire Council residents for all waste types. Due to the short timeframe, the Council might not be able to implement a robust management system, which would have been more streamlined (likely to centre around a revised version of the Council's current e-permit system), by 31st December 2023. The Council was working on this to understand the requirements in order to implement the new e-permit system and this would be implemented during 2024. Therefore, a phased approach with full implementation no later than the July 2024 was being recommended. The Cabinet report set out the changes and how this would be implemented.

The Leader reported that this was a piece of Government legislation, which would impact on Council tax payers and moved away from the principal of the user paying. He personally did not support this change, but would comply with it to the extent required.

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change reported that 93% of fly tipping was unaffected by HRC charges; 47% trade waste and 46% household waste that could have been recycled for free. Therefore, as a Council they did not believe that by allowing this legislation that there would be a decrease in fly tipping. There were cost implications as outlined in the report between £850,000 to possibly £1.7 million with a potential increase of 7,000 tonnes of household DIY waste plus an additional 7,000 of other waste streams. An electronic permit would enable residents once a week to bring in less than 100 litres and capable of fitting into two 50 litre bags OR a single article of waste no larger than 2000mm x 750mm x 700mm in size. This would be clarified at waste sites and also on the Council website. There were other options considered but this was considered the best recommendation for council taxpayers. They wanted to avoid trade waste being dumped at the council taxpayer's expense.

The Leader expressed concern about putting an additional pressure on council tax payers of between £1.7-1.8 million a year to enable this legislation.

During discussion the following points were made:

- This was a new burden on Councils and usually this burden was offset by Government funding. The Service Director of Finance confirmed that no funding was available for this new pressure.
- A question was asked whether a 4 week period of waste could be combined into one week. The Leader reported that they would work strictly within the rules. He had written to the Government Minister and the legislation had been written specifically not to allow traders to abuse the system. A question was asked what was meant by weekly. The Service Director reported that it was 7 days from the date of application as they would get the permit instantly and the home address would have to be used to stop abuse. The allocation was one permit per household. A new permit cannot be applied for until the old permit had expired.
- Concerns were expressed about congestion near HRCs due to the new legislation and rising demand and the environmental cost to car engines idling. There were also additional pressures on staff having to apply this complex new legislation and an increase in disputes. The Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change reported that there would be measuring facilities at the site similar to measuring airport luggage and if there was any excess a payment would be required. Any disputes would be mitigated where possible.

In relation to recommendation 4 reassurance was given that Cabinet Members would be informed and consulted on any significant amendments in the finalising and adopting of the revised Waste Acceptance and Access Policy, which would be submitted to Cabinet, if necessary.

RESOLVED –

That the following take effect from the date of compliance on 31 December 2023:

- (1) That the principles as set out in the draft Waste Access and Acceptance Policy (WAAP Appendix 1) be AGREED, which stays the same except for charges for non-household waste under the legislative threshold are to be removed, and in principle approval of the draft policy in line with the changes set out in the legislation.
- (2) That charging for non-household DIY waste be removed for those eligible below the free threshold in line with the legislation for Buckinghamshire Council residents and noting that charging remains in place for above the threshold for all DIY/construction and industrial waste (also known as non-household) for Buckinghamshire users across the HRC network.
- (3) That charging be maintained for all waste types for non-Buckinghamshire residents across the HRC network, with no free thresholds to apply (for waste quantity and frequency of visits) unless a Service Level Agreement is in place.
- (4) That authority be delegated to the Service Director of Legal Services, Service Director of Neighbourhood Services and the Head of Strategic Waste Management and Enforcement, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment, to undertake all necessary appropriate steps in relation to finalising and adopting the revised Waste Acceptance and Access Policy (WAAP Appendix 1), after considering relevant Equality Impact Assessment and Data Protection Impact Assessment, and to make necessary changes arising from any enacted legislation.
- (5) That it be NOTED that the financial implications associated with the recommendations form part of the Council's budget setting process Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2024/25 to 2027/28.

12 Contract Award - Leisure Centre Management

As a new unitary authority, Buckinghamshire Council inherited five different operator contracts for its leisure facilities from the legacy councils. This procurement delivered the first stage of the Council's plans to review and rationalise operating arrangements as contracts come up for renewal. It would replace the three contracts for Aqua Vale Swimming and Fitness Centre (Aylesbury), Swan Pool and Leisure Centre (Buckingham), Little Marlow Athletics Track, Evreham Sports Centre (Iver) and the Beacon Centre (Beaconsfield) with a single new contract, which would run for a term of five years and three months. This contract period aligned to the expiration of the legacy Wycombe area contract, enabling a further opportunity for contract harmonisation if desirable at that time, to provide for greater economies of scale and efficiencies; and to allow the Council time to determine future needs for leisure facilities into the longer term, informed by the developing Local Plan.

The procurement approach was informed by external specialist consultancy support

including soft market testing undertaken for Buckinghamshire and across the wider leisure industry around the Country, with consideration of the changed market circumstances post-pandemic. The soft market testing exercise identified that operators were carefully considering the new contracts they bid for, as many had several contracts coming up for renewal (due to the pandemic, re-procuring leisure contracts was put on hold during 2020-2022, with many councils extending contracts where end dates were due). The Council carefully considered its specification and contract clauses to ensure that the tender was attractive to the market but offered residents value for money.

The Council had followed a competitive procedure with negotiation tender process, using Sport England template documents (contract and services specification) which were tailored to reflect the Council's outcomes and requirements for service quality and financial outcomes. The full procurement evaluation report, financial information and details on the preferred bidder were set out in the Confidential Appendix 1 to the Cabinet report.

It was confirmed that quality was integral to the service offered by the preferred bidder. The Corporate Director of Communities confirmed that the evaluation criteria had been weighted on 60% quality and 40% commercial. Of that 40% commercial 15% of that was around the operator's ability to demonstrate that their business plan was viable in terms of their financial operating model and 5% was weighted around the terms and conditions in the contract. The specification in the contract was set at the national standards for indoor sports and leisure provision and the bar for quality had been set high. There were mechanisms in the contract to take action if required. The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure confirmed that he was happy with the due diligence that had taken place and ensuring a quality service would be provided to residents.

RESOLVED –

That the contract to operate the Council's leisure facilities at Aqua Vale Swimming and Fitness Centre (Aylesbury), Swan Pool and Leisure Centre (Buckingham), Little Marlow Athletics Track, Evreham Sports Centre (Iver) and the Beacon Centre (Beaconsfield) be AWARDED to the preferred bidder, as detailed within confidential Appendix 1 of the Cabinet report.

13 Units 1-3, Vale Retail Park – Capital Works and New Lease

There had previously been negotiations with a supermarket occupier to secure tenancies on Units 1-3 in Vale Retail Park and the Vale Retail Park revenue budget was set on the assumption that they would be in place by October 2023, providing rental income and picking up rates and utilities costs. As the deal did not happen there was an in-year Revenue pressure in Property budgets, currently being met by a Voids contingency.

Units 1-3 had been re-marketed for over 6 months, following the previous

prospective tenant walking away from the transaction as a result of a change in the company's acquisition criteria. In total, the three units had been vacant for over 2 years. Units 4 and 5 were let to tenants with good quality covenants.

Following the remarketing of the site, there had been limited interest in the property being let as individual units as well as a whole block. Negotiations had been undertaken with a supermarket occupier for Units 1, 2 and part of 3, however the terms were appearing unviable in respect of the proposed income and capital expenditure, along with issues in agreeing the enabling works. Heads of Terms had been agreed in principle (subject to Council approval and contract) with the supermarket occupier to take all the available space.

The Managing Agents (Carter Jonas) had advised that Units 4-5 had indicated that they would be inclined to exercise their right to break unless there was progress in letting the vacant units. Without complimentary occupiers on the Estate, the lack of footfall could result in the Tenants reviewing their options and vacating, resulting in further pressures on the Property Budgets. The focus was to secure new leases on the Retail Park to further reduce the voids, loss of income and holding costs.

Securing the Tenant would require the Council to undertake capital works to the property to reconfigure the existing retail space, providing a shell-and-core unit ready for the Tenant to take occupation and undertake their fit-out. Additionally, the Council would be providing a garden centre to the side elevation of the unit. Outline detail of the works including costs were included in the confidential appendix.

The supermarket was currently in positive discussions with the Planning Department, who were providing a helpful steer in order to achieve full permission to go ahead with the proposed works. It was confirmed that the proposed works had already been budgeted for in the current Medium Term Financial Plan.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the Council enters into an Agreement for Lease on Units 1-3 in Vale Retail Park which is in line with the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) income target.**
- (2) That authority be delegated to the Service Director of Property and Assets, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Accessible Housing and Resources, to enter into the Agreement for Lease, including the commitment of a capital sum of funding for the enabling works.**
- (3) That a supplementary budget change to the Capital Programme be APPROVED, to use a capital sum from the Investment Property Reserve to fund enabling works on Units 1-3 in Vale Retail Park.**

The establishment of the unitary council created opportunities to rationalise the office accommodation inherited from the legacy councils. Furthermore, in common with other parts of the public and private sector, the organisational use of office accommodation had changed significantly post-Covid.

The closure of King George V House (KGVH) formed a component part of the Council's Occupational Estates Strategy set out in the Cabinet report of January 2023, which identified the potential closure. Data on operational usage of the Council's main buildings had been collected over a significant period of time post covid and the occupancy data gained for KGVH showed that it was now the least occupied of the corporate buildings. Work had therefore been done to consider future options as set out in this report.

KGVH had the capacity to house over 526 desks on a daily basis. Data collected over a significant period of time post covid suggested it was now occupied at around 16% capacity. It also had the second highest costs. In addition to being significantly underutilized, its closure would contribute to the carbon saving of the Council.

A formal consultation had been held with employees whose contractual location was currently KGVH. Employees who had a contractual location elsewhere but had chosen to work from Amersham for business or personal reasons had also been consulted with. Employees had been invited to comment on the proposals and 1-1 meetings had been held with their Head of Service where the employee had requested it. The results of that consultation had been considered and the majority of employees would move to Queen Victoria Road, High Wycombe.

This initiative also considered how the Council would continue to respond and engage with the community and the proposals to extend the Council Access Points and also the transfer of activities currently undertaken at KGVH such as Planning Committee meetings.

Initiatives already completed to support the achievement of the required Medium Term Financial Plan cost savings and improved efficiencies have included the closure of Capswood; commercial letting of Easton Street Offices and Wycombe Old Library, closure of floors at Walton Street Offices and the re-purposing of office space at The Gateway. As part of the estate's strategy, the Council was awaiting a decision from the Secretary of State regarding the certificate of immunity for the Council Offices at Walton Street. The closure of KGVH contributes to this programme and did not conflict with any of the work undertaken to date or planned moving forward.

The Council's Work Smart Strategy had been designed to enable the organisation to maximise the benefits of flexible working, whilst ensuring that it meets the requirements of residents and continue to drive improvements in productivity. The Council's desk-based teams, in particular balanced the benefits of working in the office and collaborating with colleagues in person, with the opportunity to work at home and reduce commuting. These arrangements had become critical to the Council's ability to attract and retain staff within a competitive labour market. The

Council's experience of this model of working over the past two years had provided the Council with a good dataset about the Council's need for office space.

Bringing forward the closure of KGVH offices from July 2024 to January 2024 meant that the Council could increase its opportunities for savings in revenue and further its ability to rebalance the office estate with actual requirement.

The Cabinet Member for Accessible Housing and Resources reported that there would be a new Council Access Point in Amersham Library which would formally open on 15 January 2024. Residents were already using Amersham Library as a CAP. There would also be provision for Adults and Children's Social Care staff at Chesham Library which should be available from June next year. In the meantime, staff could continue using the Amersham offices (Block C). Blocks A and B would be closed from 12 January 2024. Chesham Library would also be refurbished - the reference library would be located on the ground floor – freeing up the first floor - and the Chesham Library CAP would be enhanced with private meeting space.

A report would come to Cabinet in the first quarter 2024 about the proposed disposal. Proposed savings of £2.1 million were expected with £6 million in capital receipts.

During discussion the following points were made:-

- The 'Council Access Point' currently at King George V House in Amersham would move to the new Amersham Library across the road at the Chilterns Lifestyle Centre.
- It was recognised that Amersham and Chesham had different support needs. In both Library CAPs there would be a priority phone line so residents would not be required to 'queue' to contact the Customer Service Centre and would be passed straight through to an agent, this was especially relevant for areas such as homelessness.
- Whilst the KGVH building would no longer be used, residents would still be able to contact the Council through Library CAPs, CAP+ and on the phone.
- The current refurbishment costs had been included in the Medium Term Financial Plan.
- There was spare capacity in the Amersham multi-storey car park near Amersham station.
- Staff would be accommodated in the Queen Victoria Road offices in High Wycombe within the existing office space and this would not impact on tenants.

There was a discussion around the proposal in relation to car parking (2.15 of the report) and providing a 30-minute drop off free of charge within the Chilterns Lifestyle Centre. Following discussion, it was agreed that Cabinet was not minded to pursue this proposal, but noted that the current car parking in KGVH would remain available in the meantime.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the closure of the Council Offices at King George V House, Amersham, be brought forward with:
 - (i) Blocks A and B, and the KGVH CAP+ having a last operating day of 12 January 2024.
 - (ii) Block C closing upon the opening of Chesham Library touchdown.
- (2) That King George V House staff be relocated to the Queen Victoria Road offices, Wycombe, with exceptions where there is a business rationale for an alternative base.
- (3) That the Chesham Library ground and first floors be refurbished to provide an enhanced library offer on the ground floor and Council Officer touchdown space for Adult Social Care, Children's Services/Child Protection Conferencing and Communities on the first floor, in accordance with the plans shown in the appendices.
- (4) That the revenue and capital costs of moving to be all forward funded from the King George V House sale proceeds.
- (5) That a budget supplementary change to the Medium Term Financial Plan for forward funding the implementation costs be APPROVED, as set out in the Cabinet report and the confidential appendix.
- (6) That the Council market for sale King George V House and seek conditional or unconditional offers for the freehold, subject to any contract noting that a further report will be brought to Cabinet in 2024 once marketing and agreement of Heads of Terms have been finalised.
- (7) That the Council move to two Council Access Points (CAP +) locations in Buckinghamshire, one in the north (Walton Street, Aylesbury) and one in the south (Queen Victoria Road, Wycombe).

Note: The CAP+ sites to continue to be managed by Customer Service staff in those locations as they are in main Council buildings and CSC staff provide face to face service for the more complex customer enquiries.
- (8) That a Council Access Point (CAP) offering be created in Amersham Library, ready to operate from 15 January 2024.

Note: Library CAP sites are managed by Library staff and provide a more general set of service enquiries, sign posting, self-service terminals and a telephone service which gives access to a priority phone line into the Customer Service Centre.
- (9) That it be NOTED that the January 2023 Estates Strategy report considered the potential re-provision of a smaller footprint of offices than currently in

Amersham. This will not now be provided as Council Access Points and alternative facilities will be provided at Chesham Library, as set out in the Cabinet report.

- (10) That it be NOTED that this report delivers savings and a capital receipt linked to the Medium Term Financial Plan.**

15 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 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)

16 Confidential Appendix - Contract Award Leisure Services Management

The confidential appendix was considered.

17 Confidential Appendix - Units 1-3, Vale Retail Park – Capital Works and New Lease

The confidential appendix was considered.

18 Confidential Appendix - King George V House, Amersham

The confidential appendix was considered.

19 Date of next meeting

4 January 2024 at 10am.