



Council minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on Wednesday 21 February 2024 in The Oculus, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury HP19 8FF, commencing at 4.00 pm and concluding at 7.24 pm.

Members present

P Birchley, M Harker OBE, S Adoh, A Alam, M Angell, K Ashman, M Ayub, D Barnes, S Barrett, K Bates, A Baughan, J Baum, D Blamires, A Bond, M Bracken, S Broadbent, N Brown, S Bowles, P Brazier, T Broom, T Butcher, M Caffrey, R Carington, D Carroll, B Chapple OBE, S Chapple, Q Chaudhry, J Chhokar, S Chhokar, J Chilver, L Clarke OBE, A Collingwood, M Collins, C Cornell, A Cranmer, E Culverhouse, I Darby, D Dhillon, T Dixon, P Drayton, T Egleton, C Etholen, P Fealey, M Flys, M Fayyaz, R Gaster, E Gemmell, P Gomm, D Goss, C Harriss, D Hayday, O Hayday, C Heap, G Hollis, T Hunter-Watts, A Hussain, I Hussain, M Hussain OBE JP, Majid Hussain, Maz Hussain, N Hussain, T Hussain, C Jackson, S James, D Johncock, C Jones, J Jordan, S Kayani, P Kelly, R Khan BEM, D King, S Lambert, S Lewin, J MacBean, A Macpherson, I Macpherson, F Mahon, N Marshall, P Martin, R Matthews, Dr W Matthews, Z Mohammed, H Mordue, S Morgan, N Naylor, J Ng, R Newcombe, C Oliver, A Osibogun, A Poland-Goodyer, C Poll, S Raja, W Raja, N Rana, M Rand, S Rouse, G Sandy, A Schaefer, G Smith, L Smith BEM, M Smith, B Stanier Bt, M Stannard, P Strachan, R Stuchbury, L Sullivan, D Summers, M Tett, N Thomas, D Town, J Towns, A Turner, M Turner, P Turner, G Wadhwa, A Waite, H Wallace, L Walsh, M Walsh, J Ward, J Wassell, J Waters, D Watson, A Wheelhouse, G Williams, S Wilson, M Winn and K Wood

Agenda Item

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors R Bagge, M Baldwin, A Christensen, P Cooper, M Dormer, T Green, P Griffin, S Guy, G Harris, T Hogg, P Irwin, M Knight, J Rush, N Southworth, D Thompson and A Wood. Apologies were also received from Countess Howe, his Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire, and from Dame Ann Limb DBE DL, High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire.

1A His Majesty King Charles III and Catherine, Princess of Wales

On behalf of the Council, Councillors, staff and residents of Buckinghamshire, the Chairman extended thoughts and prayers to His Majesty King Charles III and Catherine, Princess of Wales, on a speedy recovery to full health.

1B Right Reverend Dr Alan Wilson Bishop of Buckingham, Jean Teesdale and Jennifer Woolveridge

Tribute was paid to the Right Reverend Dr Alan Wilson Bishop of Buckingham who had passed away unexpectedly on Saturday, and to former Councillors Jean Teesdale and Jennifer Woolveridge who had recently passed away. The Chairman recorded sincere condolences to their families on their sad losses.

Bishop Wilson had served as the Bishop of Buckingham for over 20 years and had spent his entire ordained ministry within the Diocese of Oxford. Prayers had been said at Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford on Saturday and across the county on Sunday. Bishop Wilson was an exceptional teacher and preacher and would be deeply missed. The Chairman has sent a handwritten note to Mrs Lucy Wilson on behalf of the Council.

Councillors Lesley Clarke OBE, Julia Wassell and David Carroll paid tribute to Jean Teesdale who had been a Member of Wycombe District Council from 1978 to 1999 and again from 2003 to 2020, serving as Chairman of the Council during 2006-2007. She had also served as a Councillor for Buckinghamshire County Council from 2013 to 2020 representing the Chiltern Villages Electoral Division, and as a Member of Buckinghamshire Council from 2020-2021. Jean had been appointed as an Honorary Alderman of Buckinghamshire Council in July 2021 for her services to Local Government.

During her time at Wycombe DC, Jean represented the West Central (HW) Ward and then the Cressex and Frogmoor Ward during her initial period of service and was also the Town Mayor during 1983 – 84. Jean had been subsequently elected as Ward Member for the Chiltern Rise Ward in 2003. Over the years she had served on many Committees from the Environment Services Committee to the Planning Committee and as Cabinet Member for Planning then Environment for a number of years.

During her time at BCC, some of Jean's appointments had included Chairman of the Development Control Committee, serving on a number of Select Committees and the Bucks & Milton Keynes Fire Authority, and as Deputy Cabinet Member for Children's Services (2015-2017) and Deputy Cabinet Member for Communities (2018-2019).

Councillors Santokh Chhokar and Isobel Darby paid tribute to Jennifer Woolveridge who had been a Member of South Bucks District Council from 1995 to 2015 representing the Gerrards Cross South Ward. During her time on the Council she had served on the Housing and Health Committee and then Environment and Housing Committees, the Planning Committee from 2002-2015, and was Cabinet Member for Health and Housing from 2005-2015. She had served on the Chiltern and South Bucks Joint Committee from 2012-2015.

She had also been a founder Board Member of the Padstones charity which provides supported accommodation to young people aged 16 to 25 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and was awarded a British Empire Medal (BEM) in 2019

for services to older people and to the community in South Buckinghamshire.

Members then observed a minute's silence in memory of the Right Reverend Dr Alan Wilson, Jean Teesdale and Jennifer Woolveridge.

2 Minutes

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 6 December 2023 be approved as a correct record.

3 Declarations of Interest

Councillors A Alam, M Angell, M Ayub, A Baughan, A Bond, N Brown, R Carington, D Carroll, L Clarke OBE, E Culverhouse, I Darby, M Fayyaz, P Gomm, C Harriss, G Hollis, A Hussain, I Hussain, Mahboob Hussain OBE, Maz Hussain, A Macpherson, P Martin, R Matthews, M Rand, Sir B Stanier, P Turner and J Ward declared a personal or prejudicial interest relating to Agenda Item number 7 (Changes to Council Tax Discounts and Premiums) and left the Council Chamber whilst this item was discussed and decided.

Councillors A Collingwood and K Wood declared a personal interest (relating to Agenda Item number 7) and remained in the Council Chamber whilst this item was discussed and decided.

4 Chairman's Update

The Chairman congratulated Councillor Mahboob Hussain who had been awarded an Order of the British Empire (OBE) for services to the community in Buckinghamshire in the King's New Year's Honours List.

The Chairman also informed Members that this would be the last Council meeting attended by Nick Graham, the Service Director of Legal and Democratic Services. Nick had joined the Council in 2020 and would soon be leaving the Council to take on a Coroners role in Oxfordshire. On behalf of all Members, the Chairman thanked Nick for all his hard work with the Council and with Members.

Since the last Council meeting, the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Council had attended a number of events including the Council's Proud of You Awards, where the Council acknowledged the hard work of staff, and Wendy Morgan-Brown had been awarded the Council's Employee of the Year.

The Chairman and Vice Chairman had attended Carol Services, Christmas concerts and the pantomime, and on 10 January 2024 had attended the Guarantor's Christmas lunch for the oldest residents in Wycombe. They had attended the graduation ceremonies last week at the Buckingham New University and attended six citizenship ceremonies in January and February.

On 20 February, the Chairman and Councillor Gomm had attended Clarence House

for the 15th anniversary celebration of the Medical Detection Dogs. They had both met the Queen and talked about the support the Council gave to the charity through the Community Boards and as the Chairman's nominated charity. On behalf of Buckinghamshire Council, the Chairman had expressed best wishes to his Majesty King Charles and learnt that he was making good progress.

Finally, the Chairman mentioned that 24 February would be the second anniversary of the start of the war in Ukraine. Almost a thousand Ukrainian families were living in Buckinghamshire and on behalf of the Council sincere thanks were sent to the 292 sponsors, Community Boards and others who did such a magnificent job in supporting the families.

5 Petitions

There were none.

6 Chief Financial Officer's Statutory Report

The Chairman welcomed Mr D Skinner, the Council's Section 151 Officer to the meeting. Mr Skinner presented his report and highlighted that he was statutorily required to report to the Council on the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the calculations of the budget and on the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves. The Council was required to have due regard to the report when making decisions on the budget.

It was highlighted that the Medium-Term Financial Plan had been subject to frequent and rigorous challenge and review during its development which had started in March 2023 soon after the last budget had been agreed and had included the public meetings of the Budget Scrutiny Inquiry group held in January 2024.

Members were informed that the budget proposals recommended by the Cabinet were robust and sustainable. There were risks associated with the budget proposals that were set out in the budget papers and summarised at paragraph 4.5 of his report to Council. These included but were not limited to demand and complexity in adults and children's social care and client transport, wider inflationary pressures, the delivery of savings, the degree of income expectations in the medium term, and uncertainty around the future of local government funding.

The budget had some contingencies to mitigate these risks, as detailed at Section 5.1 of the MTFP, alongside the development of the budget review of reserved undertaken during the year. The level and usage of reserves was detailed at Appendix A. General Fund Reserves (i.e. unallocated reserves) was currently £42.8m or 7.9% of net operating expenditure, which was above the generally accepted minimum recommended level of 5%.

As such, the Section 151 Officer had concluded that he considered the budget proposals recommended by the Cabinet to be robust and sustainable. The Section 151 Officer also stated that he was aware of a proposed amendment to the budget to allocate an additional £5m to road maintenance. If passed, this would reduce the

level of reserves held but they would still exceed the minimum best practice amount.

Members were informed that information on the additional monies that the Government had allocated for social care was set out in the budget papers. The money had been allocated to social care contingency.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

7 Change to Council Tax Discounts and Premiums

The Cabinet Member for Accessible Housing and Resources introduced the report and informed Members that following a review of Council Tax discounts and premiums Council was being recommended to:

- Remove the current discounts for empty properties with effect from 1 April 2025, that would simplify Council tax administration and bring Buckinghamshire Council in line with most neighbouring authorities.
- Amend the 100% premium currently charged on empty homes, so that it applied after one year, rather than two years. This could be done through a power granted by last year's Levelling Up and Regeneration Act and was intended to encourage the bringing of empty properties back into active use as soon as possible.
- Adopt the policy with effect from 1 April 2025, in order to give relevant homeowners a year's notice of the proposed changes.

Members were informed that the circumstances under which empty homes premiums should not be applied was still awaiting the outcome from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities consultation, as detailed at paragraph 3.4 of the Council report.

The Chairman informed Members that an amendment on this item had been received that she intended to deal with next. The amendment was proposed by Councillor S Wilson, seconded by Councillor R Stuchbury. The amendment wording was:

“This Council notes that:

- Buckinghamshire faces considerable pressure on housing in line with the wider national picture. In turn, this puts pressure on Buckinghamshire Council to facilitate the delivery of new housing at all levels of the market, including more affordable housing, as well as providing infrastructure and additional public services. The negative impact of an increase in second home ownership can be measured in terms of the supply of homes available to meet local housing need. Second homes can also result in residents being priced out of the housing market in certain situations. The rationale behind increasing council tax on second homes is to encourage lower levels of second home ownership or to increase contributions for those who continue

- to own second homes to help fund vital local services.
- At the Full Council meeting on the 22 February 2023 the Council made the decision to remove the 10% discount on second homes to help encourage the active occupation of properties as a primary residence in Buckinghamshire. This covered 753 homes at that point resulting in approximately £157k to the Council and £27k to other preceptors. From 1st April 2023 there was no discount available for second homes outside of approved exemptions.
- On 26 October 2023, The Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023 (LURA) received Royal Assent and Section 73 of The Act provides councils the discretion to charge additional council tax of up to 100% on all residential dwellings which are occupied periodically, substantially furnished and no one is resident for council tax purposes i.e. second homes.
- Under Section 73(2)(3), any decision to increase the council tax on second homes must be made at least one year prior to the beginning of the financial year from which it relates, hence can only take effect from 1st April 2025 at the earliest. Should Council agree the recommendation, a notice will be published in a local newspaper within 21 days of the decision date.
- Cabinet (February 13th 2024) recommends this Full Council today makes a Change to Council Tax Premiums and Discounts on empty homes to incentivise bringing homes back to the market and enable the Council to reinstate planned cuts previously noted in the initial draft Budget.
- The Council also faces considerable financial pressure over the course of the MTFP requiring it to propose an increase in Council Tax of 4.99% allowed before a referendum is required.
- Some neighbouring councils, such as Wokingham Borough Council, Slough Borough Council and Milton Keynes City Council, are choosing to update their second homes premium in accordance with the discretion provided by the LURA as part of their Budget processes. Others have yet to publish their position.

This Council further notes that:

- Based on information provided by the Finance team (reviewed by the s151 Officer and Deputy Chief Executive), there are 718 second homes equating to 852.8 Band D equivalent dwellings that would qualify for a second home premium for council tax.
- Based on a Band D council tax of £1842.03, this would generate incremental gross receipts of approximately £1.571m.
- When adjusted for the Council Tax collection rate of 98.4% proposed in the MTFP, this reduces to £1.546m.
- The s151 Officer has proposed a further prudent discount of 25% to account for a potential reduction in the number of second homes and Government exemptions as yet unspecified. This results in incremental net receipts of approximately **£1.159m from April 1st 2025.**
- The benefit to other preceptors would be approximately £0.2m based on the current 84:16 ratio split.
- The additional receipt could allow the Council to:

- reinstate cuts to planning enforcement in 2025/2026 and 2026/2027 (£300k).
- introduce an additional cycle of weed spraying (£230k).
- reinstate voluntary and community sector funding (£50k).
- partially reinstate Community Board funding (£579k)

This Council agrees to amend the motion as follows:

Recommendations: (page 7)

Recommendations 1-3 unchanged.

Then to insert the words:

(4) Council is asked to APPROVE the introduction of a 100% Council Tax premium on second homes effective from 1st April 2025.”

Councillor Wilson introduced the amendment and explained some of the key points about it including that the Council faced considerable pressure on housing in line with the wider national picture. The amendment was an opportunity to introduce a Council Tax premium that would encourage more housing back into the marketplace. The Council also faced considerable pressure over the course of the MTFP and the amendment would help to generate additional income that could be used to reinstate cuts to services such as planning enforcement, an additional cycle of week spraying, and reinstating volunteer and community sector funding and, partially, Community Board funding.

Following the amendment debate, Councillor Stuchbury, in seconding the amendment supported the points that had previously been raised by Councillor Wilson. A requisite number of Members present then requested that a recorded vote be held.

Following a recorded vote, the motion was declared to be **LOST**. Voting was as follows:

FOR (23): Councillors Bates, Dixon, Drayton, Gemmell, D Hayday, O Hayday, Hunter-Watts, Majid Hussain, N Hussain, James, Kayani, Lambert, Lewin, Morgan, Poland-Goodyer, Shaefer, G Smith, M Smith, Stuchbury, Wadhwa, Wassell, Wheelhouse and Wilson.

AGAINST (71): Councillors Adoh, Ashman, Barnes, Barrett, Baum, Birchley, Blamires, Bowles, Bracken, Brazier, Broadbent, Butcher, Caffrey, B Chapple OBE, S Chapple, J Chhokar, S Chhokar, Chilver, Collingwood, Collins, Cornell, Cranmer, Dhillon, Egleton, Etholen, Flys, Gaster, Goss, M Harker OBE, Heap, Jackson, Johncock, Jones, Jordan, Kelly, King, MacBean, I Macpherson, Mahon, Marshall, W Matthews, Mohammed, Mordue, Naylor, Newcombe, Ng, Oliver, Osibogun, Poll, Rana, Rouse, Sandy, L Smith BEM, Stannard, Strachan, Summers, Tett, Thomas, Town, Towns, A Turner, M

Turner, Waite, Wallace, L Walsh, M Walsh, Waters, Watson, Williams, Winn and K Wood.

ABSTENTIONS: There were none.

The original motion was then debated, after which it was –

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the following discretionary Council Tax empty house discounts be removed effective from 1 April 2024:**
 - (i) Empty and unfurnished (100% discount for first month).**
 - (ii) Empty discount for property undergoing major structural repairs (50% discount for up to 12 months)**
- (2) That the Council Tax Discounts, Exemptions and Premiums Policy (Appendix 1), that reflects the removal of discounts at recommendation (1) above, be approved.**
- (3) That a 100% Council Tax premium be introduced from 1 April 2025, on empty homes after they have been empty for 12 months.**

NOTE: Declarations of Interest made by Councillors on this item are recorded at Agenda Item number 3.

8 Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2026/27 and Capital Programme 2024/25 to 2027/28

The Chairman invited Councillor M Tett, Leader of Buckinghamshire Council, to introduce the report to Members on the proposed Medium Tern Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2026/27 and Capital Programme 2024/25 to 2027/28. The following key points were highlighted:

- Councillor Tett thanked all those who had helped shape the budget, this included majority members of the Portfolio Challenge groups, Cabinet and Deputy Members, the cross-party Budget Scrutiny Inquiry Group, the Chief Executive and her Senior Leadership Team as well as the Section 151 Officer and his finance team.
- That there had been considerable risks involved in putting together the budget, which had been impacted by uncertainty, with international turmoil, the ongoing war in Ukraine, recent disruption and strikes, cost of living pressures through the year, political uncertainty with a general election looming, all alongside significant increased demand for Council services. One of the biggest surprises was the rise in the national minimum wage which while very welcomed also added a £3m pressure to the budget. Inflationary pressures would add £36m to the budget over the 3 year MTFP period.
- That a lack of clarity on the Local Government Finance Settlement until a couple of weeks ago had created uncertainty for Council budget setting.
- That the whole local government was under intense pressure, with a number of

Councils really struggling with their finances.

- That the budget building principles had included a return to a 3 year revenue budget, continuing to deliver the Corporate Plan and Manifesto commitments, a 4 year capital budget to provide investment in key schemes and to support local economic recovery and growth, and to open about risk so that it was identified, quantified, where possible mitigated.
- £45m savings had been achieved between 2020 and 2022, with £30.4million savings being delivered in 2023/24. This would mean that £75.4m of savings (17.1% of the 2020/21 net budget had been achieved in the first 4 years of the new unitary Council. Further major new efficiencies, savings and additional income of £95.3m would be generated over the course of the MTFP meaning that by the end of 2026/27, £170.7m in income and savings will have been realised in the first 7 years of the new unitary Council.
- That there were very strong demand pressures within the budget in four key areas: adults and children's social care, temporary accommodation, and Home to School Transport (£97.4m). These problems were common across the local government sector.
- That the MTFP recognised the importance of having corporate contingencies in place to mitigate very high financial risks / uncertainties.
- That key changes since the draft budget included intense lobbying of central Government for additional funding for local government, which had led to an announcement of £600m additional funding for all of local government and a one-off social care grant and funding guarantee of £5m.
- That changes to Council Tax Premiums around empty homes (under the Levelling Up Act) had allowed the following planned savings to be removed from the final budget (reinstate litter collection £200k, reinstate gully cleansing £350k, reinstate weed spraying £230k and reversing plans to close HRCs 1 day per week £300k).
- On how the Council was funded through Council tax, Business Rates, the Adult Social Care precept, plus some grants monies.
- That the level of General Fund Reserves was expected to be 8% of net revenue operating expenditure, equating to £42.8m.
- A high-level breakdown was given of the £600m earmarked for major capital programme expenditure 2024-2028. This included £179.8m for strategic infrastructure, £168.3m for the schools programme, £107.9m for roads, £37.1m for Town Centre regeneration, £34m for HRCs and Waste Vehicles, and £26.1m for housing and homelessness.
- Information on how the capital programme was being funded.
- That the budget included for a basic increase in Council tax of 2.99% for 2023/24 and a 2% increase in the Adult Social Care precept. This would be the equivalent of an increase of £1.69 per week for a Band D property.
- The risks and uncertainties faced in setting the proposed budget.

Councillor Tett commended the budget to Council and moved the recommendations

as per the report. This was seconded by Councillor A Macpherson.

The Chairman informed Members that as the earlier amendment at agenda item number 7, proposed by Councillor Wilson, had been lost that she did not intend to deal with the second amendment he had submitted, so would move straight to the budget amendment that had been received from Councillor Williams and seconded by Councillor Blamires. The amendment wording was:

“This council notes that yet again we have seen a prolonged period on incessant rain throughout the late Autumn and Winter months. This, combined with freezing weather, has resulted in a significant deterioration in the condition of many roads across Buckinghamshire.

This council believes that, from a resident perspective, one of the key measures of success is the condition of our roads. The Budget today already proposes a record level of expenditure upon repair and resurfacing of our roads with the current £100m+ programme now being extended into a further year in order to continue the ‘member led’ rolling maintenance programme. Nevertheless, since this Budget was developed, it has become apparent that further action is again required to address the now evident need.

This council therefore resolves to release £5m from the ‘mitigating future financial risk’ Reserve and add this to the 2024/2025 Revenue for Highways road maintenance. This will amend the Budget proposals as follows:

- **Overall Revenue Budget (p75)**
Replace Transport Portfolio gross budget £86,514,000 and amend to £91,514,000
Replace Corporate items, Revenue Reserves -£2,476,000 and amend to - £7,476,000
- **Undertaken the consequential amendments to the net budget lines, total budget lines and the Transport Portfolio Budget lines (p167).**

Additionally, Council is asked to further approve additional resolutions to those on page 45 of the Council papers; namely that:

- **The Cabinet Member for Transportation should begin immediate planning for the urgent deployment of this funding.”**

Councillor Williams highlighted recent terrible weather, significant rainfall and flooding, and then the freeze thaw had wreaked havoc on local roads. Releasing £5m additional funding for road maintenance, in addition to the £100m 4 year programme, would help the Council to further target maintenance of arterial roads, link roads and key busy roads. It was mentioned that the Council had 29 crews out repairing roads, clearing gullies, fixing potholes via plane and patch, and the additional money would really help to target more roads before Spring and Summer. Feedback from residents was that they were happy with the quality of

road surface repairs being delivered through the new contract.

In seconding the amendment, Councillor Blamires stated that it was entirely right for the Council to use reserves to provide additional funding for road maintenance in response to the recent weather and that over half of residents surveyed during the budget setting process and stated that road maintenance was their second highest funding priority. Following the recent storms there had been a staggering 540 emergence call outs for road maintenance in 3 weeks. Council highway teams were commended for the work that was being done around the clock to fix potholes and make road repairs.

Following debate on the amendment it was put to the meeting and was **CARRIED**.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rules, the Chairman then invited Councillor Morgan, Leader of the Alliance Group (main opposition group), to comment on the budget proposals. The following main points were highlighted:

- Councillor Morgan thanked the Section 151 Officer and his finance team for their tireless work in preparing the budget.
- That central government needed to do more to restore local authority funding to sustainable levels, particularly relating to funding for adult and children's social care.
- That she believed the scrutiny process had been limited in scope and time, with insufficient time being allowed for enough questions to fully understand the decisions being made.
- That alternative options for the future use of King George V Council offices in Amersham for social/affordable housing should have been explored rather than selling the offices.
- That an Amersham hub on the ground floor should be created to encompass essential frontline services to the community including the Fire Authority, NHS, Thames Valley Police and the South Central Ambulance Service.
- That more needed to be done in response to the severe housing crisis relating to reducing housing waiting lists and providing more affordable housing through new developments.
- That critical issues such as climate change, ending rough sleeping and homelessness should be the Council's top housing priorities.
- That the Council should give greater consideration to becoming a social housing provider.
- That the Council should be doing more to devolve community centres, sports pitches and green spaces to Town and Parish Councils, to invest in and regenerate town centres, and to establish a High Wycombe Town Council.
- That she was not supportive of the reduction in funding to Community Boards, nor believed that the budget provided a comprehensive solution to address the ongoing financial crisis the Council was facing.
- That there had been a lack of transparency and consultation in the budget process.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Morgan for her comments and invited Councillor Wilson to speak on behalf of the IMPACT Alliance grouping. The following main points were highlighted:

- Councillor Wilson expressed serious concerns for public services in Buckinghamshire by 2030 and stated that central government needed to do more to restore local authority funding to sustainable levels, including for adult and children's social care.
- That the Council was increasingly outsourcing services to third parties and becoming a commissioning service for private companies and agencies.
- That the MTFP was inadequate because it lacked the vision, ability and resolve to address the expenditure issues in a meaningful and timely way.
- Concerns were expressed about the business rate resets of £8m and the Dedicated Schools Grant deficit of £3m.
- That the initiatives on temporary accommodation in children's homes was welcomed, although more material solutions were required for adult social care, housing and home-school transport.
- That the current registered housing providers were failing the most vulnerable, the Council needed to do more in response to the severe housing crisis.

At the conclusion, the Chairman thanked Councillor Wilson for his comments. The Chairman then opened up debate on the budget and invited questions and comments from Members, who highlighted the following:

- (i) The ambitious capital programme expenditure 2024-2028 that had been highlighted by the Leader of the Council, and was investing in the priorities of local people.
- (ii) That the Budget Scrutiny Inquiry process had provided plenty of opportunities for all Members of the Inquiry Group to ask additional questions.
- (iii) On whether the Household Support Fund would continue to be funded into the future.
- (iv) Information was provided on the various work and initiatives being undertaken to provide housing, including social / affordable housing for local people.
- (v) That a Town Council for High Wycombe would be more effective if it worked in a non-political way,
- (vi) That £200m in investment had been made into the High Wycombe town centre over the last 20 years, as well as in other major infrastructure projects such as junction 4 of the M40 and the Amersham Lifestyle Centre. All these brand new schemes and the other expenditure detailed in the capital programme 2024-28 highlighted the ambitions of the Council and that it was investing large amounts in the priorities of local people.
- (vii) Concerns were expressed at the amount of money that had to be raised locally by Council through the adult social care precept due to the inability of

central Government to properly fund this sector.

- (viii) That the budget included for major new efficiencies, savings and additional income during the MTFP period, and built on the savings and income generation that had already been achieved during the first 4 years of the new unitary Council.

In seconding the budget proposals, Councillor A Macpherson spoke in support of the strong and prudent budget being proposed, of the additional funding being provided for road maintenance and repairs, and on the Budget Scrutiny process that was described as being rigorous, transparent and thorough. Councillor Tett then responded to provide clarification on some of the concerns and issues that had been raised during the main debate.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their questions and comments and reminded Members that there was a legal requirement for a recorded vote to be taken on the budget. The Chairman also informed Members that she intended to take a recorded vote, en bloc, for all 7 budget recommendations, which were the 6 recommendations in the main agenda plus the additional recommendation resulting from the amendment. The vote was recorded as follows:

FOR (91): Councillors Adoh, Alam, Angell, Ashman, Ayub, Barnes, Barrett, Baum, Birchley, Blamires, Bond, Bowles, Bracken, Brazier, Broadbent, Brown, Butcher, Caffrey, Carington, Carroll, B Chapple OBE, S Chapple, Chaudry, J Chhokar, S Chhokar, Chilver, Collingwood, Collins, Cornell, Cranmer, Culverhouse, Darby, Dhillon, Egleton, Etholen, Flys, Gaster, Gomm, Goss, Harker OBE, C Harriss, Heap, Hollis, A Hussain, Mahboob Hussain OBE, Maz Hussain, Jackson, Jones, Jordan, Kelly, King, MacBean, A Macpherson, I Macpherson, Mahon, Marshall, Martin, R Matthews, W Matthews, Mohammed, Naylor, Newcombe, Ng, Oliver, Osibogun, Poll, S Raja, Rana, Rand, Rouse, Sandy, L Smith BEM, Sir B Stanier, Stannard, Strachan, Summers, Tett, Thomas, Town, Towns, A Turner, M Turner, Waite, Wallace, L Walsh, M Walsh, Ward, Waters, Williams, Winn and K Wood.

AGAINST (26): Councillors Bates, Baughan, Dixon, Drayton, Fayyaz, D Hayday, O Hayday, Hunter-Watts, Majid Hussain, N Hussain, T Hussain, James, Kayani, Khan BEM, Lambert, Lewin, Morgan, Poland-Goodyer, W Raja, Schaefer, G Smith, M Smith, Stuchbury, Wassell, Wheelhouse and Wilson.

ABSTENTIONS (1): Councillor Gemmell.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the Medium-Term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2026/27 and Capital Programme 2024/25 to 2027/28 be APPROVED.
- (2) That the Council Tax Resolution (Appendix 1) be APPROVED.
- (3) That the Special Expenses budgets, precepts and associated services for Aylesbury Town, High Wycombe Town and West Wycombe Church Yard (Appendices 2 and 3) be APPROVED.

- (4) The Cabinet be delegated authority to make decisions to add up to £100m to the Capital Programme, to be funded by Prudential Borrowing, subject to a robust business case being approved.
- (5) That the Council Tax Reduction Scheme Policy (Appendix 4) be APPROVED.
- (6) That the Business Rates Discretionary Rate Relief Policy (Appendix 5) be APPROVED.
- (7) That the Cabinet Member for Transport should begin immediately planning for the urgent deployment of the £5m released from the 'mitigating future financial risk' Reserve that has been added to the 2024/25 Revenue for highways road maintenance.

9 Treasury Management Strategy 2024-25 to 2026-27

Councillor Butcher, Deputy Cabinet Member for Resources, introduced the Buckinghamshire Council's Treasury Management Strategy 2024-25 to 2026-27. The Local Government Act 2003 ("the Act") and the Regulations made under the Act required the Council to have regard to the Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities and to set Prudential Indicators for the next three years to ensure that the Council's capital investment plans were affordable, prudent and sustainable.

The Act also required the Council to set out a statement of its treasury management strategy for borrowing and to prepare an Annual Investment Strategy (AIS) (as shown in Appendix 1). This set out the Council's policies for managing its investments and for giving priority to the security and liquidity of those investments. The Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy both had to have regard to guidance issued by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and must be agreed annually by Full Council.

Treasury management at the Council was conducted within the framework of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's Treasury Management in the Public Services: Code of Practice 2021 Edition (the CIPFA Code) which requires the Council to approve a treasury management strategy before the start of each financial year. The Council report fulfilled the Council's legal obligation under the Local Government Act 2003 to have regard to the CIPFA Code.

The Investment Strategy was considered separately within the Capital and Investment Strategy. The TMSS and AIS formed part of the Council's overall budget setting and financial framework.

The Deputy Cabinet Member mentioned the importance of the strategy to the Council as it set out how the treasury management team was able to invest monies and to maximise income from investments that helped to support the delivery of Council services. The Treasury Management Strategy had already been considered and agreed by the Audit and Governance Committee.

It was moved by Councillor Butcher, seconded by Councillor Newcombe, and

RESOLVED –

That the Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2024/25 be approved which includes:

- (1) The Treasury Management Strategy Statement.**
- (2) The Borrowing Strategy as set out in Section 4.**
- (3) The Prudential Indicators (PI) set out in Sections 3, 4 and 5.**
- (4) The Annual Investment Strategy set out in Appendix 1.**
- (5) The Minimum Revenue Provision Policy set out in Appendix 2.**

10 Capital and Investment Strategy

Councillor Chilver, Cabinet Member for Accessible Housing and Resources introduced the draft Capital and Investment Strategy 2024/25, attached as Appendix 1 to the report. It was noted that the Council was required to approve this strategy on an annual basis and that it had been developed in line with the CIPFA and DLUHC guidance.

The Capital and Investment Strategy provided the framework within which to deliver the Council's Corporate Plan objectives through the effective investment of its limited capital resources. As well as the Council's immediate statutory responsibilities, the strategy also reflected the important role that it had to play in the regeneration and growth, affordable housing and climate change agendas, especially in the context of significant housing growth in the area. The latest update to the strategy, Appendix 1, proposed minor amendments to keep it up-to-date and in alignment with the Corporate Plan priorities and these included recent new strategies such as the Regeneration Strategy and Accommodation Strategy, and a revised section on corporate capital development.

It was proposed by Councillor Chilver, seconded by Councillor Butcher, and

RESOLVED –

That the Capital and Investment Strategy (Appendix 1) be agreed.

11 Appointment of Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer

In accordance with Section 35 of the Representation of the People Act 1983, the Returning Officer was required to be appointed from among the officers of the Council by the Council. The role of the Returning Officer was one of a personal nature and distinct and separate from their duties as an employee of the council. Section 8 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 also set out that a Council should designate an individual to the role of Electoral Registration Officer.

The role of the Returning Officer was to ensure that all elections were administered effectively and conducted in accordance with the law. The role was separate from duties as an employee of the Council, and the Returning Officer was not responsible

to the Council. The role was directly accountable to the courts as an independent statutory office holder. Similarly, the role of Electoral Registration Officer was to ensure the delivery of the electoral registration function, maintaining the electoral register and managing all electoral registration functions.

Part I, Section 3 of the Council's Constitution set out the list of Statutory and Proper Officers for the Council. The Service Director for Legal and Democratic Services was the current Council Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer, however following the resignation of the existing postholder, there was a need to appoint a replacement officer to these roles with effect from 8 March 2024. This was particularly important as the Police and Crime Commissioner elections would be held on 2 May 2024, and the next General Election also had to take place no later than January 2025. The next local council elections would be held on 1 May 2025.

RESOLVED –

That Sarah Ashmead (Deputy Chief Executive) be appointed as the Council's Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer with effect from 8 March 2024, and the Constitution be updated to reflect the appointment.

12 Report for information - Key Decisions Report

A list of decisions taken by Cabinet Members since the last Full Council meeting on 6 December 2023 were received and noted.

13 Date of Next Meeting

The next full Council meeting was scheduled to take place on Wednesday 17 April 2024 at 4pm.