



Cabinet minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Tuesday 13 February 2024 in The Oculus, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury HP19 8FF, commencing at 10.00 am and concluding at 12.25 pm.

Members present

M Tett, S Broadbent, A Macpherson, J Chilver, A Cranmer, A Hussain, P Strachan and M Winn

Others in attendance

D Barnes, J Jordan, P Martin, R Stuchbury and M Walsh

Apologies

T Broom and C Harriss

Agenda Item

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors T Broom and C Harriss, and from Nick Graham. Councillor Jilly Jordan (Deputy Cabinet Member – Environment) attended in place of Councillor Broom.

2 Minutes

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 4 January 2024 be approved as a correct record.

3 Declarations of interest

Cllr Arif Hussain declared a prejudicial interest as he owned investment properties in High Wycombe. He left the room while the changes to council tax discounts and premiums was considered.

4 Hot Topics

The following hot topics were discussed:-

Cabinet Member for Transport

Buckinghamshire Council had been given £1,991,000 in funding recently granted

from the UK Government's [Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure \(LEVI\)](#) capital fund, which was 100% of the bid submitted. LEVI aimed to support those who could not install their own charge points at home and so would enable more people to be able to make the switch to EVs. The new LEVI-funded installation programme would be a step change and help the Council work towards their target of 1,000 publicly-accessible charge points in Buckinghamshire by the end of 2027, as set out in the [Buckinghamshire Council's 5-year Action Plan](#). The new LEVI funding built on the Council's earlier successes with the [Wendover electric vehicle charging trial](#) that was already underway.

Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services

A lunch had been held to celebrate apprenticeships which also included their managers. There were currently 133 staff undertaking an apprenticeship with 23 new starters. The apprenticeships were wide ranging from legal and surveying skills to occupational therapists. Staff from Adult Learning and Buckinghamshire New University also attended.

Deputy Cabinet Member Environment

The Deputy Cabinet Member referred to tree planting in Wing wood. 132,000 trees would be planted across a 51-hectare plot of council-owned land (previously used as farmland) by the end of the 2023 to 2024 planting season. There were local members at the event including 30 members of the public. The Council had pledged to plant a tree for every resident in the County.

Cabinet Member for Planning and Enforcement

As part of its long-term plan for housing, the government had announced today that every council in England would be told that they would need to prioritise brownfield developments and instructed to be less bureaucratic and more flexible in applying policies that halt housebuilding on brownfield land. There would be a consultation on this to which the Council would respond on a package of measures aimed at making it easier for developers to get permission to build on derelict sites in urban areas. The Leader commented that it would be helpful to obtain a definition of a brownfield site.

Leader

The Leader as Chairman of the People and Places Board at the LGA gave evidence at a Parliamentary Select Committee on the transition from education to employment for young disabled people. This included providing evidence on what Buckinghamshire Council had been doing in this area.

5 Question Time

Question from Councillor Robin Stuchbury to Councillor Angela Macpherson, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing

Adult Social Care Precept

The government has allowed councils which provide social care to adults to increase their share of council tax by up to an extra 2% in comparison to last year's council

tax. This additional council tax charge is called the adult social care precept. What is the level in percentage terms of the total amount of the Buckinghamshire Council precept which is made up from the social care precept element collected from council tax payers, since its introduction in 2015/16, and what is the total amount in monetary terms which the social care precept brings into the local authority as a financial figure to be used to fund adult and social care since 2015/16 to support this important service?"

RESPONSE from Councillor A Macpherson

The Adult Social Care Precept was introduced by the then Government for the financial year 2016/17. It allows those councils with responsibilities for Adults Social care to levy an additional precept, 'the 'Adult Social care precept', on its Council Tax bills. This additional locally raised funding is ring-fenced to Adult Social Care, and the percentage by which it can increase each year is announced through the Local Government Settlement and forms part of the Council tax referendum threshold.

The table below shows the Basic and Adult Social Care 'ASC' precept amount (£s) and % for each year from 2015/16. In 2024/25 the ASC precept is £255.17 or 13.9% of the total amount collected from council taxpayers. This is projected to generate £59.0m of funding for the delivery of adult social care services in 2024/25 compared to the net Adult Social Care budget of £197.4m and represents 4.9% of the Council's gross budget for 2024/25 or 11.0% of the net budget.

Basic Council tax precept and Adult Social care precept by year

Financial Year	Basic precept	ASC precept	ASC as a %age of Total CT	Total ASC precept income
2015/16	£1,115.67	£ -	0.0%	£ -
2016/17	£1,137.87	£22.32	1.9%	£4,690,626
2017/18	£1,160.96	£57.12	4.7%	£12,191,167
2018/19	£1,196.34	£94.70	7.3%	£20,497,872
2019/20	£1,234.94	£94.70	7.1%	£20,762,189
Creation of Buckinghamshire Council – Basic precept increases to reflect incorporation of average District Council Tax				
2020/21	£1,422.26	£123.49	8.0%	£27,223,788
2021/22	£1,452.92	£154.51	9.6%	£34,368,129
2022/23	£1,484.33	£186.66	11.2%	£42,004,238
2023/24	£1,534.35	£220.08	12.5%	£50,397,869
2024/25	£1,586.86	£255.17	13.9%	£58,985,559

ASC precept compared to the total Council budget.

Gross operating expenditure budget 2024/25 £1,207,923,000

ASC precept – 4.9% of gross budget

Net operating expenditure budget 2024/25 £538,028,000

ASC precept – 11% of net budget

[Footnote:

In December 2021, a similar table was produced based on average band D (in all years) as the actual Band D was not available for 2022/23. This table is based on actual band D as this is now known in all years. The calculation using actual band D provides a more accurate representation.]

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 Budget Scrutiny 2024 Report

Cabinet were asked to consider the recommendations of the Budget Scrutiny Inquiry Group which was formed to scrutinise the Draft Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2026/27 and Capital Programme 2024/25 to 2027/28 that Cabinet approved on 4 January 2024. As the Chairman, Councillor R Bagge, had given his apologies, the Vice Chairman (Councillor M Walsh) presented the report.

In January, the Finance and Resources Select Committee carried out its review of the draft budget. This involved three full days of questioning with each portfolio session attended by Cabinet Members and their deputies, the Section 151 officer, Corporate Directors and Heads of Finance. It was a cross-party constructive review on behalf of residents for Cabinet to consider. The report included 5 recommendations across the portfolios. Overall, the Inquiry Group supported the budget proposals and increase in Council Tax and acknowledged the tough decisions proposed in a difficult financial climate and rising social care costs. It was clear that there was not much room to manoeuvre given increased cost pressures for the Council through increased demand and complexity. In particular the Inquiry Group wanted to highlight three key areas of the budget:

1. The use of capital expenditure across a number of portfolio areas to alleviate revenue spend over the MTFP and the need to safeguard against project slippage;
2. The significant savings built into the budget through increased foster families and;

3. The risk of the Dedicated Schools Grant deficit growing.

The Budget Scrutiny Inquiry Group's observations, key findings and recommendations were set out in the report attached at Appendix 1 to the Cabinet report. The Vice-Chairman extended his thanks to all Members of Cabinet and officers for attending the sessions and their contributions as this helped the Inquiry Group gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities for the Council. He also thanked the review group, Councillors R Bagge, M Ayub, P Cooper, D Dhillon, G Harris, I Macpherson, S Morgan, R Newcombe, A Schaefer, C Oliver and S Wilson for all their hard work and the Section 151 Officer Dave Skinner and Chris Ward, Senior Scrutiny Officer for his support in producing the report.

The Leader thanked the Vice-Chairman and the Review Group for the constructive cross party work that had been undertaken and then went through the proposed Cabinet response to the recommendations in the report. In particular, the following points were made:

Recommendation 1: That Cabinet was recommended not to agree this recommendation. The MTFP set out how the Council was deploying its resources and included those schemes that were to be delivered within the available resources. As agreed in the response to the recommendation in 2023, the capital element of the MTFP would make clear which of the projects in the capital programme had an agreed business case, and which still required a business case to be approved before the allocated funding could be released. This would provide greater clarity about the status of projects in the programme and manage expectations.

Recommendation 2: That this recommendation be agreed in part, as per the proposed Cabinet response, as the Council had already undertaken significant work to consider the viability of the provision of an in-house transport fleet.

Recommendations 3-5: That Cabinet was recommended to agree these recommendations, as per the proposed Cabinet response:-

- The Finance & Resources Select Committee should receive an in-depth confidential report on Home to School Transport costs which also includes information on the growth model.
- In light of historic and ongoing concerns raised by the Audit & Governance Committee, the financial management model and/or the adverse financial position of Farnham Park Trust must be resolved in 2024-25 in conjunction with the delivery of the Leisure Strategy.
- The Finance & Resources Select Committee should receive a report on the Dedicated Schools Grant deficit and the Delivering Better Value programme in 2024 year once figures have been finalized following year-end.

During discussion the following points were noted:-

- The Dedicated schools grant was passported through schools so the Council did not have much control over this budget. The budget for special

educational needs was a national issue and was so substantial that there was a statutory override by Government as a national solution was required. If all councils had to provide funding for this area all Councils would be in financial difficulties.

- The Adult Social Care budget had the highest net expenditure. The Cabinet Member thanked Budget Scrutiny for understanding that there was no wriggle room in the budget and that portfolios were working hard to control expenditure and focus on key strategies such as the Better Lives Strategy and enablement to provide the right service at the right time.
- Statutory inspections and changes such as the National Living Wage put additional budgetary pressures on councils.
- The Cabinet Member for Homelessness and Regulatory was working hard to mitigate budget risks on his service area but commented that it helped to become a unitary council to address the problem on a county wide basis and work closely with other service areas.
- The Cabinet Member for Transport confirmed that he was on target for addressing the Parking Strategy which was being discussed at Cabinet on 22 February 2024. He commented that this was now the right time for a Strategy once normal working patterns had been established post covid.
- In terms of home to school transport the Cabinet Member for Transport reported that a report had gone to the TECC Select Committee and he was happy to provide a briefing for the Finance and Resources Select Committee in relation to the budget. The Service area was looking at widening out the use of capital to help mitigate that cost pressure and to look at alternative ways of getting to school, focusing on having the right service for the right child at the right time.

Cabinet Members welcomed the scrutiny process and the fact that it was hard to provide a balanced budget in such difficult times. A comment was also made that becoming a unitary council had helped Buckinghamshire take a holistic approach to ensuring value for money in each service area. The Leader also emphasised that there were risks with this budget, risks had been mitigated where possible but contingency budgets had been cut significantly.

A complete breakdown of the scrutiny recommendations and Cabinet's responses can be found [here](#).

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 2024 and recommendations, as detailed at the meeting, be agreed.**

9 Change to Council Tax Discounts and Premiums

Cabinet received a report and was informed that following the consolidation into a single Revenues and Benefits system there had been an opportunity to review the

existing discretionary Council Tax discounts. Two of the discounts that had been reviewed were the one month empty and unfurnished 100% Council Tax discount and the 50% discount for up to 12 months for properties undergoing major structural repairs.

Prior to the formation of Buckinghamshire Council, all of the legacy District Councils had a one month empty and unfurnished discount, and Aylesbury Vale DC and Wycombe DC had an additional discount for properties undergoing major structural repairs. The removal of the discounts was aimed at encouraging bringing properties back into active use at the earliest opportunity. The first of these discounts cost the Council approximately £336k per year, while the second of the discounts relating to undergoing major structural reports currently cost £756k for the Council.

A review of neighbouring authorities had identified that Buckinghamshire Council was an outlier in still providing these discounts and therefore it was proposed to remove them with effect from 1 April 2024.

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 made provision for Billing authorities to introduce additional premiums for empty homes and second homes. It was proposed to change the 100% empty home premium to come into effect after a property had been empty for 12 months, rather than the current position that was after a property had been empty for two years, with effect from 1 April 2025. The introduction of the empty home premium after one year would bring an estimated additional Council Tax revenue for the Council of £0.490m from 1 April 2025.

That Council be RECOMMENDED to:

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

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

Cabinet received a report on the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2024/25 to 2026/27 and Capital Programme 2024/25 to 2027/28 for Buckinghamshire Council. 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 2024 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 Revenue Budget was for the financial years 2024/25 – 2026/27. The financial position for the Council was extremely challenging with significant pressures identified in relation to both inflation and ongoing increases in demand for key services, in line with those being experienced nationally. The Council discharged more than 1300 statutory duties and was facing increased demand pressures in key services such as Adult Social Care, Children’s Services, Home to School Transport and Temporary Accommodation. This year had become the most difficult to date in responding to these challenges whilst delivering a balanced budget, and this had been achieved through a significant programme of additional savings and income.

The Council had a strong track record of delivering savings with £45m delivered in the first 3 years following the inception of the new unitary Council, a further £30.4m of income and savings currently on-track for delivery in 2023-24. A further programme of £95.3m of new income and savings had been identified as part of the 2024-25 to 2026-27 Revenue Budget.

The Final Local Government Settlement was announced on 5 February 2024 and included an increase in funding for Social Care through the Social Care grant, and an increase in the Minimum Funding Guarantee from 3% to 4%. Whilst these funding announcements were welcome the expected increases in funding were not likely to be sufficient to address either the recently experienced high levels of inflation (circa 10%) or the broadly recognised structural issues of underfunding and increasing demand which currently exist across both the sector as a whole and within Buckinghamshire. The budget proposals were based on the figures published within the Final Settlement. The one-off additional funding was allocated to the contingency budget for Social Care (approx. £5 million). The Council had played a key part in lobbying the Government for further funding.

Overall, the key elements of the final revenue budget portfolio proposals include unavoidable growth of **£47.2m**, Inflation of **£14.2m**, and net savings and income changes of **£28.3m** in 2024/25. The budget proposed had been built on the agreed Council Tax base and assumed a 2.99% increase in basic Council Tax and a 2% increase for the Adult Social Care Precept, giving a total increase of 4.99%. This was the maximum allowable without triggering a local referendum and was below the average rate of inflation experienced during 2023/24.

Whilst the budget provided the best available estimates for the 2024/25-2026/27 financial years, there was significant risk around future income, cost, and funding projections. The external environment was continuously monitored, and financial risks were managed through revenue contingency budgets contained within these budget proposals.

The Capital Programme covered 4 years as many schemes spanned multiple financial

years. In total the programme included £666.3m of projects. As with previous years it was proposed that a recommendation be made to Council in February for delegation to be given to Cabinet to add up to £100m worth of schemes to the capital programme, to be funded through prudential borrowing, subject to a robust business case being approved. This would enable additional priorities, such as regeneration and housing projects, to come forward and be added to the capital programme once positive business cases were fully developed. Key areas of investment within the programme were: a) £179.8m on Strategic Infrastructure (including HIF). b) £168.3m on schools' capital programme. c) £107.9m on roads including pothole repairs. d) £37.1m to support regeneration projects. With the additional funding from Government some savings could be reinstated which included litter clearing, gully emptying, the number of days Household Waste Recycling Centres were open and to re-introduce one cycle of weed spraying.

The Leader reported that some of the savings/increases in income made within the budget would be unwelcome to some residents and community groups for example increases in car park charges but the Council had to balance the budget alongside dealing with difficult financial challenges.

The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing commented that whilst the additional funding was welcomed it should be highlighted that this was for one year only and this allocation could not be built into the base budget which was what was needed to address future demand and complexity.

RECOMMENDED to Full Council to –

- (1) Approve the Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2026/27 and Capital Programme 2024/25 to 2027/28.**
- (2) Approve the 'Special Expenses' budgets, precepts and associated services for Aylesbury Town, High Wycombe Town and West Wycombe Church Yard (Appendices 2 & 3).**
- (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 Business Rates Discretionary Rate Relief Policy (Appendix 5).**
- (5) Note that a supplementary report, the formal Council Tax Resolution, will accompany the final budget to full Council.**
- (6) Note the Bucks Business Group response to the budget (Appendix 6).**
- (7) Note that a supplementary report, the formal Council Tax Resolution, will accompany the final budget to full Council.**
- (8) Note the Equality Impact Assessment for the proposed budget (Appendix 7).**

11 Capital and Investment Strategy

The Council was required to approve its Capital and Investment Strategy on an annual basis. The draft Strategy was included at Appendix 1 and provided the framework within which to deliver its Corporate Plan objectives through the

effective investment of its limited capital resources.

As well as the Councils 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 existing Capital & Investment Strategy remained fundamentally fit for purpose, and therefore only minor amendments were proposed to keep the document up to date and relevant to the current Capital Programme.

- Update the list of Strategies which underpin the Capital Programme to include the recently approved Regeneration Strategies, the in-train Housing Strategy, and the future Local Plan and Local Transport Plan.
- Expand on the definition of what Community Infrastructure Levy could be invested in, as it is restricted by Statute to specific types of infrastructure.
- Clarify the rules around prudential borrowing to support regeneration.
- Updated the Governance arrangements:
 - The Property, IT and Highways Capital Boards would be disbanded. Member briefings and updates could continue as part of regular Cabinet Member engagement by Service Directors.
 - Oversight of the Capital Programme overall would be undertaken by Corporate Capital Investment Board ('CCIB').
 - CCIB to review business cases and recommend changes to the Capital Programme to Cabinet for decision, including the release of funding.

RESOLVED –

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

12 Q3 Capital Budget adjustments and Reprofileing

The Capital Programme for 2023-24 to 2026-27 had been approved by Full Council in February 2023, with an expenditure budget of £505.9m. The programme had been revised to £556.8m following additions agreed by Cabinet in July 2023 and to £582.6m by Cabinet in November 2023.

The Council often received ringfenced funding in-year from Government and developers that were added to the programme in a supplementary budget change. Additionally, the programme was reviewed quarterly to check that the profiled spend remained realistic.

The Cabinet report set out the recommended additions and reprofiling for Quarter 3, and recommended the projects listed in Table 3 to be reduced or removed from the programme. These budget changes would ensure the programme remained realistic and deliverable, and released budget for reinvestment. The recommended changes would reduce the 2023-24 current year budget from £124.5m to £119.6m.

RESOLVED –

- (1) The addition of £4.602m in the current year 2023/24 for new externally funded ringfenced grants, Section 106 developer contributions, or ringfenced capital receipts (Table 1).
- (2) The release of £5.56m the Schools Secondary Schools places and SEN budgets (Table 2).
- (3) The removal of £0.185m where borrowing requirements no longer apply (Table 3).
- (4) The reallocation of £5.106m consisting of £4.653m from projects budgets recommended for reinvestment in priority projects with the Final Budget and Capital Programme 2024-25 to 2027-28, and an increase of £0.638m in the Capital Contingency from underspend released on the Ashwells project (Table 3).
- (5) Reprofiling of £9.3m from 2023/24 into future years (Table 4).

13 Q3 Budget Monitoring Report 2023-24

Cabinet received a report on the forecast Revenue and Capital outturn position for Buckinghamshire Council for the financial year 2023/24 as at Quarter 3. The Council continued to experience significant financial pressures due to continued increase in demand and complexity of need in key services, such as Adults Social Care and Children's Social Care. The forecast revenue outturn position at Quarter 3 was an adverse variance of **£4.5m**, (1% of Portfolio budgets), a reduction of £4.1m from the Quarter 2 reported position of **£8.6m**. The adverse variance remained primarily due to pressures in Health and Wellbeing and Education and Children's Services from demand and market insufficiency issues, coupled with pressures in Housing and Homelessness & Regulatory Services in Temporary Accommodation budgets and Transport budgets.

At Quarter 1, an adverse variance of £8.3m had been reported, and action plans were formulated in order to contain pressures as much as possible. The Quarter 2 budget monitoring report provided an update on these measures and reflected positive movements across several Portfolios linked to the delivery of action plans. The overall forecast at Quarter 2 deteriorated due to increasing pressures within Education and Children's Services. Between Quarter 2 and Quarter 3 the Council had additionally developed enhanced spending and vacancy controls to further contain the overall budget pressure and these were detailed in the main report.

Within the overall position there was an adverse variance of £13.6m (3%) in Portfolios (£15.2m last quarter) offset by a £9.1m (£6.6m last quarter) favourable variance in Corporate & Funding. The Capital Programme had been updated for proposed Quarter 3 Budget Adjustments, subject to Cabinet approval. Capital spending was forecast to be 99.0% of the updated budget, a variance of (£1.2m). Figure 5 in the report showed the summary Capital Budgets by portfolio and Appendix 2 was a breakdown of the programme in detail. Spend to date was £66.9m (56.3% of budget). There were five key projects with £14.7m of budget as yet

unspent, where the majority of the budget was expected to be spent in the final quarter. These were outlined in Section 4.2 of the Cabinet report.

The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing commended her team for overdelivering on their savings target by £1.4 million which reflected the vigorous work being undertaken in the portfolio area.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That Cabinet note the report and risks and opportunities within it.**
- (2) That Cabinet note the actions being taken to mitigate pressures as set out in paragraph 1.3 of the Cabinet report.**

14 Q3 Performance Report 2023-24

The quarterly performance report provided details of the key performance measures reported through the corporate performance framework for 2023/24 and the performance scorecard, which provided information on four key elements of performance for the Council covering Finance, Customer Service, Performance and Human Resources indicators. Within the performance report and performance scorecard, outturns which were performing at or better than target were classified as Green, those which were within 5% of the target are Amber and those which were more than 5% of the target were Red. At the end of Quarter 3, 93 indicators had outturns reported with a Red, Amber or Green status. Of these, 54 were Green (57%), 18 were Amber (19%) and 22 were Red (24%).

The Leader asked each Cabinet Member to comment on the red indicators in their portfolio area:-

Leader

Strategic Infrastructure projects: percentage profiled spend achieved
Performance in Q3 was 47% which was lower (worse) than the target of 75%. Actual spend on SE Aylesbury Link Road Phase 1 to date was £1,474,870 against a budget of £4m. Phase 2 spend to date was £622,923 against a budget of £500,000. The lower expenditure of Phase 1 was partly due to slower than anticipated progress on construction and land acquisition while the Housing Infrastructure Fund reallocation was awaited. This was a very difficult and complex project and a meeting was being held shortly to address this.

Cabinet Member for Accessible Housing and Resources

Average Call Wait Time

Q3 performance was 3 minutes 33 seconds against a target of 3 minutes. This was an improvement in performance compared with Q2 (4 minutes 16 seconds). The focus this quarter continued to be to help residents who were online to remain online, thereby reducing the number of calls to the Customer Service Centre (CSC). Use of call back queues and chat bots were being promoted. This quarter the CSC had launched the new Abavus Customer Relationship Management (CRM), which once fully implemented would replace all of the legacy systems. However, it should

be noted that the service area was well above target with the percentage of phone calls answered in the Customer Services Centres which was 95.5% against a target of 90%. Customer satisfaction was also above target at 82%. The Leader welcome the use of Microsoft co-pilot which was being trialled, although it was recognised that currently this was for basic tasks.

£ value of unsecured debt

This indicator measured the value of unsecured debt greater than 90 days (excluding Business Rates, Housing Benefit and Council Tax, and not secured against a property or asset). Q3 performance was £14.9m against a target of £10m. The outstanding debt in this category had increased by £0.8m since Q2. This was mainly due to:

- Reclassification of £1.4m Adult Social Care debt from secured to unsecured as the legal proceedings to secure a charge against a property were not yet complete.

There were currently delays with Government departments: Adult Social Care debts, with waits of 9-12 months for the grant of probate; 6+ month waits for Land Registry charges; and waits of 1-2 months for Court Orders relating to Deputyship.

- An increase in debts across Strategic Assets and Estate Management over 90 days due to the recent film strikes as the Council received revenue from filming from its properties.

- Increased levels of billing in Adult Social care as processes were improved and automated

- Year-on-year billing had increased by approximately £30m and the current challenging economic conditions were having an impact both on residents and corporate businesses which was influencing the delays in settlement of debts by customers

Average time for processing new Housing Benefit claims or any changes to claims (days)

The performance was impacted by the backlog of claims following the single-system merger although it was steadily coming down. There were also pressures in relation to the annual billing process and year end so some of the team would be focussed on this area. There should be a positive trend in the new financial year. In terms of any changes to claims the service area was on target and for new claims additional resources were being utilised.

Deputy Cabinet Member – Climate Change and Environment Portfolio

Percentage of waste collected for recycling, reuse, composting or anaerobic digestion from household sources (Amber indicator)

Recycling was just below target – food waste was lower compared to last year and there was evidence of some food waste being disposed of in the wrong bin. A strong and sustained communications campaign would be undertaken to promote positive behaviour change. Clarification was given that this target applied to all waste including Household Waste Recycling Centres.

Flytipping

The Council had increased fines to £1000 which was nationally recommended and a person had been prosecuted for depositing a black bin bag in a layby in Denham

who was caught on camera. The person had paid the fine without going to court. The Leader reported that on this issue the Council had been mentioned in the House of Commons, the Today Programme and BBC Breakfast.

Cabinet Member for Communities

Household Support Fund (Helping Hand): Percentage of profiled spend achieved Q3 performance was 70% against a target of 75%. This was the first time there had been 12 months of funding rather than six months. £3,363,128 of the total funds (£4,798,381) was disbursed by the end of Q3. Spend to date in 2023/24 was lower than in 2022/23, however the variance from the target of 75% was primarily due to the requirement to provide vouchers for 2 school holidays in Q4, which would increase spend in this quarter, and retention of sufficient funds to provide support to targeted cohorts in Q4. The full fund allocation was expected to be spent by the end of the year. The lower direct spend reported to date in 2023/24 compared to 2022/23 was largely due to the cessation of provision of funding for carpets, with residents requiring carpets now signposted to other sources of support and a policy change (scheme to allow reuse of floor coverings for tenants) effected within Housing Associations.

Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure (Matt Everitt)

Number of visitors to Country Parks

Performance in Q3 is 881,143, which was below the target of 930,203. Visitor numbers in Q3 2023/24 were 3% lower than for the same quarter in 2022/23, but this was a slight improvement on the shortfall in Q1 (-4.1%) and Q2 (-5.9%); and overall visits for the year to date remain 10% higher than pre-pandemic levels (799,790 Q1-Q3). The poor weather through the summer and autumn was likely to be the main cause.

Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services

% of children's social care assessments completed in 45 working days

During Q3 (October - December 2023) 1,515 assessments from referral were completed, with 73% completed within 45 days. This was below target and below latest available published benchmarks. The Q3 position was an improvement compared to Q1 (62%) and Q2 (67%).

The Chief Executive reported that in relation to this indicator there had been a Joint Targeted Area Inspection which looked at a whole range of issues including the Councils use of the front door (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub). There was an issue which the Corporate Director had already identified which was the extent to which the Council was properly triaging and considering the areas of risk for young people when they came through that front door. This was a serious professional judgement that was required to be made by social workers and Team Managers and if this judgement wasn't quite right there could be more children coming in for assessment. If a slightly different approach was taken and support was provided for those families outside of a formal assessment the social work intervention would not have been required. The work and oversight of the social workers and Team Managers was really critical.

In addition the Council was also rethinking about how they provided that support for children and their families by moving to a locality model of service in April so that children have continuous involvement with their social worker.

In terms of children not seen within their target timescales or reviews completed the Chief Executive confirmed that there was serious oversight of those cases where managers identified children most at risk to ensure the correct support and intervention was given.

% of children with Initial Child Protection Conferences completed within 15 working days of the strategy discussion

During Q3 (October - December 2023) 195 children were subject to an ICPC, of which 77% (150 children) were completed within time. This was an improvement on Q2 (61%).

% of Children in Need seen within 4 weeks

At the end of Q3 (December 2023) 85% of children were seen within 4 weeks. This remained an area for continued improvement. Managers were aware of those children not seen within statutory timescale and record an oversight of the reason and actions taken to mitigate against the risk on the child's case file. Visits to children most at risk of harm were prioritised.

Percentage of new Education, Health and Care plans issued within 20 weeks (excluding exceptions)

During Q3 (October - December 2023) 28.2% of EHCPs were issued within 20 weeks. This was below target and below latest available benchmarks for the 2022 calendar year, when 67% of Buckinghamshire EHCPs were issued within 20 weeks. The drop in performance was due to both a continuing increase in requests for EHC Needs Assessments and vacancies within the educational psychology team (currently 11.38 out of 16 FTE's in post). Over this quarter the numbers of children waiting for assessment had decreased (from 411 to 333). As the backlog of assessments was steadily addressed through the use of associate Educational Psychologists (EPs), the performance had decreased as they were issuing a higher number of plans outside the statutory timescales.

The Chief Executive referred to the huge increase in demand and reported that the Council was working with health partners to provide support to children and families while they were on the waiting list.

% of initial Family Support Plans completed within 31 working days

During Q3 (October - December 2023) 78% of Initial Plans were completed within 31 working days of the start of Family Support Service involvement. This was 2 percentage points more than Q2, although 7 percentage points below the target of 85%. This area of the service had been affected by changes in management and ongoing changes to working practices made to improve the quality of the work. This had continued to impact on timeliness of assessments in Q3. This part of the service

also reported an increase in demand of Level 2 and 3 work since appropriate and necessary changes in the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) came into effect to ensure children and families receive the right level of service. This had led to an increase in what is deemed as Family Support casework and had led to this performance indicator remaining relatively unchanged. As part of the Transformation and change programme in Children's Services currently underway, work would be focused on ensuring the work of FSS was correctly targeted.

Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) Annual Reviews - % of CYP with an EHCP who have had an annual review within the last 12 months

At the end of Q3 (December 2023) 71% of children and young people with an EHCP had an annual review in the past 12 months. This was below the agreed target of 75%. This was recognised and agreed as an area where further resource would be required for the financial year 2023/24. Despite successful recruitment other vacancies in the Education, Health and Care Coordinator Teams had impacted on performance.

Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing

Number of younger people (aged 18-64) admitted to permanent residential or nursing care homes per head of 100,000 population

Between 1 April 2023 and 31st December 2023, 41 younger adults (12.5 per 100,000 population) were permanently admitted to care homes. This was 6 people above the target of 35 people (10.6 per 100,000 population) at the end of Q3, which was set at the 2021/22 South East benchmark level. 2022/23 benchmarking data was now available, and the pro-rata regional figure for this measure at Q3 was 11.6, which equated to 38 people admitted, 3 below the current Buckinghamshire outturn. During Q3, 13 younger adults were admitted - 7 from their own home and 6 transferred from supported living/hospital into care homes. New provider opportunities for the younger adult's admission cohort were being explored to offer more accommodation options and better choice.

% of young people whose Adult Social Care Assessment was completed before they turned 18 years old

Between April and December 2023 57% (13 out of 23) of young people that moved into adult services, were assessed in time. This was lower than Buckinghamshire's position for the same period last year (80%) and the target of 65% (16 out of 20). The 10 people whose assessments were delayed were due to the reasons set out below. All 10 assessments have now been completed.

- 6 cases were delayed allocations due to workforce pressures and prioritisation of higher risk young adults.
- 4 cases were delayed due to a late referral into Adult Social Care Services.

In keeping with the rest of Adult Social Care across the region, demand management was a challenge. Steps were being taken to address workforce issues across the service. The Council would continue to prioritise young people needing Care Act assessments, which might result in some young people not being assessed as timely as liked and closer working with Children's Services.

% of those who have set a quit smoking date who have successfully quit at 4 weeks
In Q2, 164 people set a quit date and had the opportunity to achieve their 4-week quit date. Of those, 71 smokers successfully quit smoking at their 4 week quit date (43%). The indicator was 7 percentage points below the target of 50%. The proportion of residents living in deprivation quintiles 4 & 5 (our most deprived areas) who successfully quit by their 4-week set date was 34% (34 out of 99 clients). Q2 had been impacted by the performance of the Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) products supplier. The current supplier had a limited range of products, just offering patches and gums, whereas some clients would prefer to use inhalators to replace the hand-to-mouth action. Limited stock had also resulted in delays to dispatching NRT to service users, leading to disengagement and drop-out.

Cabinet Member for Homelessness and Regulatory Services

Whilst the Cabinet Member did not have any red indicators he commented that he was looking at his performance indicators as he felt that they did not reflect the challenges being experienced by the service area. The Chief Executive reported on the positive news that at the end of Q3 there were no applicants with/expecting children who had been in non-self contained B&B accommodation for longer than 6 weeks.

Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration

Percentage of Planning Enforcement Notice Appeals Upheld

The Q3 outturn was 28% against a target of 20%. In Q3, 14 appeal decisions were made, of these 4 appeals were upheld. One of these decisions followed retrospective refusal of planning permission at Planning Committee. Q3 performance was better than Q1 (40%) but slightly worse than Q2 (21%).

The Cabinet Member reported that this was a difficult area as the Inspector could be inconsistent occasionally with their decision making. Appeal decisions were reviewed and discussed by the team so learning points could be taken away for use in future cases to ensure continual learning and development within the service. The Leader expressed concern also at some of the decisions which the Inspector overturned as residents then suffered from unauthorised activity. The Corporate Director reported that there was a common misunderstanding that residents who chose to build without planning permission could be served an immediate enforcement notice. The Council had to go through a proper legal process which often took a long time to complete. In the majority of cases the Council did win at appeal.

Percentage of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Liability Notices issued within 12 weeks of planning permission being granted

In Q1 performance was 48% which was below the target of 90%. Performance varied across the East/South (57 applications, 54% of Liability Notices issued within 12 weeks) and West areas (32 applications, 38% of Liability Notices issued within 12 weeks). The low performance was due to the challenges of recruiting and training new staff and introducing new processes. However, most of the Liability Notices were issued by the end of Q3 for permissions granted in Q1 (91% in East/South area

and 94% in West area). The remaining cases were more complex and took longer to assess. Due to staffing issues and legacy responsibilities this target remained challenging.

Number of uncommitted s106 contributions that must be used within two years
A new process to approve the allocation of s106 contributions was being put in place in Q4 which would reduce the overall number that were uncommitted.

Cabinet Member for Transport

Percentage of reported Rights of Way issues dealt with in target time

Performance in Q2 was 52%, which was lower (worse) than the target (70%) and a drop from Q1 (54%). Performance had been impacted by staff vacancies (1.5 FTE), which reduced the number of issues that could be resolved in the target time. A similar number of issues had been resolved in Q1 to Q3 as the previous year, however, there had been an increase in the number of issues reported by 12 – 15% and these have added to the backlog of work. Staff training for the new members of staff was ongoing.

HS2 highways approvals: Percentage responded within time limit

In Q3 performance was 50% which was lower (worse) than the target of 95% and lower than Q2 performance (100%). These delays were due to poorly programmed and poor quality submissions. Further work with HS2 Ltd would be carried out to improve the quality of their submissions and to space out the applications to avoid an influx of submissions where possible and to work with the technical consultants Atkins Realis to ensure more experienced resources were engaged and the applications were responded to in a timely manner.

Average daily cycling count per active cycle counter per day

Q1 and Q2 counts were generally higher than Q3 and Q4 due to favourable weather conditions in Spring and Summer. The wet weather and low temperatures in Summer 2023 could explain the observed reduction in cycling rates.

Reference was made to gully cleaning which had a green indicator with 70,000 gullies cleaned by the end of December. However recent wet weather had disrupted the programme of works due to multiple call outs. This could affect the ability to meet the year end target.

RESOLVED –

That the performance report be noted including the action taken to improve performance where required.

15 Adoption of the Shenley Park Supplementary Planning Document

Supplementary Planning Documents provided guidance to implement Local Plan policies. This Supplementary Planning Document applied to the Shenley Park site allocation (D-WHA001) near Whaddon in the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan. To adopt a Supplementary Planning Document, the Council was legally required to conduct a

public consultation for a minimum of four weeks. A six-week consultation was conducted from 30 August to 11 October 2023 and the report now requested that Cabinet adopted this Supplementary Planning Document.

The Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan set out a vision and framework for sustainable growth across the North and Central planning areas area for the period up to 2033. It promoted new development to meet identified needs, which would contribute to creating a thriving, diverse, safe, vibrant place to live, work and visit.

This policy allocated the site for at least 1,150 homes, forming part of the housing requirement for the VALP. The allocation was for “an exemplar development, of regional significance, which would be a great place to live, work and grow. Built to a high sustainable design and construction standards, the development would provide a balanced mix of facilities to ensure that it met the needs and aspirations of new and existing residents, at least 1,150 homes, 110 bed care home/extra care facility, new primary school, subject to need a site for new secondary school, multifunctional green infrastructure (in compliance with Policies I1 and I2 and associated Appendices), mixed use local centre, exemplary Sustainable Drainage Systems, new link road between A421 Buckingham Road and H6 and or H7 Childs Way/Chaffron Way, public transport and cycling and walking links.”

In addition to infrastructure, the Supplementary Planning Document also set out key principles for design and landscaping to ensure that a new long-term defensible edge and buffer between the village of Whaddon and the new development was created. It also identified an extension to the existing Tattenhoe Valley park in the southern half of the site.

During discussion the following points were made:-

- With reference to the following words in the document “The Development Framework offers the ability to address transport priorities as they evolve” a Cabinet Member asked for further clarification on what this meant. She referred to land being safeguarded for duelling and how this was triggered which would hopefully be before there was major congestion. The Corporate Director reported that there was a planning application for this site already. There was an opportunity through consideration of the planning application to see if there were any traffic solutions that could be implemented as a consequence of the planning application. There was also the ability to future proof the area through the SPD as well as the planning application in terms of responding to any future traffic issues including issues that the Council was not aware of at the moment.
- Reassurance was asked for in that transport modelling would be undertaken at the appropriate time in a holistic manner. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration gave an assurance that the modelling would accurately reflect that part of the SPD. The Corporate Director reported that there had already been various degrees of modelling taking place such as the sites allocated in the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan and there would have been

an extension of that as part of the SPD assessment but there would be further more detailed modelling as part of the planning application and at every single stage these would become more detailed.

- It was noted that the Parish Council had a number of concerns about the development and it was important that there was a continuing dialogue with the developers and planners. One concern was traffic impact, particularly the increased congestion on the A421 and the risk of rat running through the village so it was important that the necessary traffic calming and speed limits were put in place in Whaddon village. The future A421 study should be progressed as quickly as possible and the future cumulative impact of other developments in the area should be considered. Another concern was the maintenance and protection of the green buffer zone and the arrangements for its long term ongoing management. There should be a robust boundary line to the development along the new perimeter link road to avoid any further encroachment to maintain this green buffer. Milton Keynes Council would also like any information on discussions where possible. The Cabinet Member reported that all these points raised by Whaddon Parish Council would be taken very seriously.
- Concern was raised about tree planting along the verges incase this land was going to be used for duelling. The Corporate Director reported that the land set aside would be for future duelling and as part of any detailed development they would make sure that any planting would accommodate that future use. In the SPD they were setting out the principle of having a tree lined road which would need to respect the fact that there might be future duelling. The Leader commented that the trees would need to be set back from the road so it did impinge on any future road plans.

RESOLVED that the Shenley Park Supplementary Planning Document be adopted (site D-WHA001 of the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan).

17 Confidential Minutes

RESOLVED –

That the confidential Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 4 January 2024 be approved as a correct record.

18 Date of next meeting

22 February 2024 at 3.00pm