

SHADOW EXECUTIVE

TUESDAY, 28TH JANUARY, 2020

Present: Councillor Martin Tett in the Chair

Councillors K Wood (Vice-Chairman), S Bowles, B Chapple OBE, J Chilver, A Cranmer, I Darby, T Green, C Harriss, P Hogan, A Macpherson, D Martin, N Naylor, M Shaw, W Whyte and G Williams

Also in Attendance:

Councillor R Stuchbury

Apologies: F Wilson

1 Apologies

Apologies had been received from Cllr F Wilson. Cllr L Walsh attended as deputy.

2 Minutes

RESOLVED: The minutes of the meeting held on 7 January were **AGREED** as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

3 Declarations of interest

Cllr A Macpherson declared that she was a paid board member of The Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust and under advice from the Monitoring Officer would withdraw from item 11.

4 Question Time

Question- Cllr R Stuchbury

The Shadow Executive, the body overseeing transition of Local Government in Bucks, has now issued initial budget plans for Buckinghamshire Council over the next three years (2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23). The full plans can be viewed [here](#):

Does the Shadow Executive recognise these figures below taken from their own published accounts forming part of the precept for the new Buckinghamshire Council, and do they believe the proposed reduction in spending will make it difficult for the new Buckinghamshire Council to meet its obligations in all those areas of service delivery referred to in the attached:

- Overall spending on council services in 2020/21 will be £374 Million, the same as in 2018/19
- Capital expenditure (investment in infrastructure etc) will be £163 Million, 25% lower than in 2018/19
- Capital expenditure in 2022/23 will be 40% lower than in 2018/19
- Proposed cuts of £11 Million in placements of Children in Care between 2020 and 2023

- Proposed cuts of nearly £19 Million in SEND and Early Help services between 2020 and 2023
- Capital investment in strategic road maintenance will be £15 Million in each of the next 3 years, which is £1 Million/year less than previously planned

Response – Cllr M Tett

Looking at how we're spending council money can be complicated and confusing when you don't look at the whole picture.

At a time when all local councils are facing financial challenges the proposed budget for Buckinghamshire Council aims to address the unavoidable cost pressures the council faces with the growing costs of looking after our elderly and most vulnerable children and young people.

Our plans for 2020 therefore propose much needed additional funding in these areas - £9.5m to care for our older people and adults with learning disabilities and difficulties (£23.2m by 2022/23) and £4.2m to protect our vulnerable young people and children (£6.9m by 2022/23).

We've proposed a substantial capital investment programme of £163m for 2020/21 which includes an additional £4m to fix the county's roads and £2.3m to clear blocked gullies to help prevent road flooding issues in the future which we know are really important issues for residents.

Over the next 3 years we'll be investing £494m which will see £111m to improve and enhance our town centres in Aylesbury and Wycombe and £69m for maintaining and improving our roads, street lights, pavements, and bridges. A further £62m will be invested in new roads in Princes Risborough, Abbey Barn (High Wycombe) and Aylesbury. Some £107m is earmarked for new and existing schools and school places, including the new Kingsbrook Secondary School. And a further £18.3m has been set aside to support housing and homelessness including affordable housing action plans and disabled facilities grants.

It's difficult to compare capital spend from one year to the next. This type of investment goes up and down depending on the major projects at the time, based on the needs of our services. For example, one year there could be a higher capital spend due to building a new school, which isn't something the council would need to do every year – a bit like buying a car!

The proposed day to day budget of £435m for Buckinghamshire Council brings together all the current council budgets. These budgets have naturally increased over the last couple of years due to rising costs of living alongside the growing need for some of our most complex and costly services such as looking after our most vulnerable elderly and young people. This has been partly funded by council tax alongside grants and other funding to make sure we are able to protect the frontline services that our residents rely on every day.

It's no secret that councils across the country continue to face financial challenges and there continues to be significant uncertainty on the level of funding for local councils. We are always working to make best use of council tax money and deliver the right services in the best way for our residents - and we'll continue to do this in the new council. In particular we have focused our efforts in the last few years on increasing the use of our own foster carers and children's homes to reduce the need for costly external placements – which we know is much better for our children.

Similarly, the level of service provided by the council on important services to support children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities hasn't reduced and in fact has been enhanced through a review of how the service is provided. We are working closely with schools to help them meet pupils' needs more quickly and effectively at school as part of our early intervention programme.

Protecting our vulnerable is and will continue to be our top priority and I'm confident that as a new council we'll be able to meet these challenges head on and improve services for our residents, communities and businesses."

5 Forward Plan (28 Day Notice)

Members considered the 28 Day Notice of executive decisions due to be taken.

The Leader advised that the forward plan was available for members of the public to review online and that it was regularly updated.

RESOLVED: The Shadow Executive NOTED the forward plan.

6 Treasury Management Strategy

Cllr K Wood introduced the item and stated that the strategy was compulsory for all local authorities and conformed to statutory requirements.

Mr R Ambrose, Section 151 Officer and Mr M Preston, Head of Finance - Investments and Projects gave an overview of the report and highlighted the following points in response to questions raised by members:

- Interest rates had been increased by the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) and other options were being considered for future borrowing.
- The total combined borrowing figure for all Buckinghamshire local authorities was £330.7 million with combined investments of £192.6 million.
- The authorised limit for gross borrowing was £630 million. The limit could not be exceeded without approval from the shadow authority. The budget was calculated based on the current borrowing levels, current borrowing plans and an allowance for future budget requirements. It was highlighted that the operational boundary was a more accurate estimation of what was expected to be borrowed.
- Treasury Management advisors would provide advice and guidance over investments.
- The current five existing authorities followed similar institutions and policies regarding cash investments.
- A large percentage of five year debt had matured. The borrowing rates continued to remain low despite the increase in interest from the PWLB.
- The investments in the property fund were not counted as capital investment. This was a safe fund which helped to diversify the investment portfolio. The total investment figure across the Buckinghamshire authorities was £21.2 million.

RESOLVED: Shadow Executive CONSIDERED and APPROVED the draft Treasury Management Strategy for the new Council.

7 Revenues and Benefits Policies and Schemes

Cllr Wood, Mr Ambrose, Section 151 Officer and Mr A Green Revenues and Benefits Service Manager provided an introduction to the item. An overview was given of the scheme as an amalgamation of the existing policies used by the district councils to ensure safe and legal operations as of 1 April 2020. It was highlighted that the first two recommendations as laid out in the report were the most significant. The recommendations were explained in detail for context and the following points were highlighted in response to questions raised by members:

- Housing benefits would be automatically calculated on 1 April 2020 and residents in receipt of the benefit would be notified of their calculation for the financial year.
- Funding for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) was provided from central government and dispersed via local government. The agreement of the updated policy would have no effect on the application or allocation process for residents.
- The policy around Business Relief had taken into consideration changes to the national government policy. All elements listed within the policy would be in addition to these changes.
- The introduction of Local Access Points would promote the various benefit schemes available to residents and how they could be accessed. The information around available schemes was also made known to the public via information bills.
- The council tax discretionary policy was reviewed on a case by case basis by officers.
- It was unknown how much funding for DHPs would be allocated in the next financial year. The aim of officers was to delegate the full amount of allocated funding.

RESOLVED: Shadow Executive AGREED:

1. **To recommend to the Shadow Authority that effective from 1 April 2020, 100% of all income from War Disablement or War Widows Pension be disregarded when calculating entitlement to Housing Benefit in line with the resolution at Appendix A.**
2. **To adopt the Discretionary Housing Payments & Discretionary Award Policy set out at Appendix B & B(ii).**
3. **To adopt the attached Council Tax Discretionary Discount Policy at Appendix C.**
4. **To adopt the Business Rates Revaluation Support Scheme set out at Appendix D.**
5. **To adopt the Business Rates Hardship Relief Policy set out at Appendix E.**
6. **To adopt the Local Business Rates Discretionary Relief Policy set out at Appendix F.**

8 Learning Disability Strategy

Cllr Macpherson, Cllr W Whyte and Ms J Bowie, Service Director for Integrated Commissioning provided an introduction to the item and gave an overview of the strategy. It was emphasised that the strategy focused on an important and fast growing group of people and that it was of high importance that the model of service did not become outdated. The detailed implementation plan was in place and had been developed using engagement events. The following points were highlighted in response to questions raised by members:

- The cohort was growing rapidly in line with the demographic growth area. The death rate in older people was lower than in other parts of the country. The pattern needed to be researched and explored further.
- Carers had been involved with devising the strategy to promote enablement. Other existing strategies had been referred to in order to avoid duplication of services.
- The budgetary constraints of provisions for learning disabilities needed to be communicated to central government to ensure that the essential services could continue to be provided.
- The strategy provided an opportunity to make better use of the current resources held.
- The strategy strongly endorsed the smooth transition of children to adult services.

RESOLVED: Shadow Executive AGREED the Adults with Learning Disabilities Strategy.

9 Capital Investment Strategy

Cllr Wood, Mr Ambrose, Section 151 Officer and Mr Preston, Head of Finance - Investments and Projects introduced the item and provided members with an overview of the strategy. The

strategy was developed in line with compulsory guidelines and highlighted the strategic approach to capital investment with a focus on restructure and development opportunities for the new council.

It was highlighted that with the current climate and increases from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) there would be a decrease in opportunities for pure investment but the strategy considered alternative borrowing opportunities that would come into play at an appropriate time. The following points were highlighted in response to questions raised by members:

- Alternative loan opportunities would be considered if they were of higher value than the current PLWB rate. Available market opportunities would be low therefore this would not be a key focus in the initial stages of the new council. The strategic approach would be regularly reviewed to explore potential opportunities.
- A sub analysis would be provided on property investments used to generate income in order to provide more insight into the property portfolio and avoid any misunderstanding from members or residents.
- There was a significant capital programme that included various projects at different stages of development and progress. The proposed strategy would ensure that a consistent approach was used going forwards into the new council.
- Sustainability targets were included in the strategy.
- Different projects received funding from different sources. Therefore certain projects would need to undergo separate scrutiny processes. The proposed governance arrangements took into account the growth board that would focus on significant regeneration schemes.
- Members were pleased that regeneration featured in the strategy. This would allow derelict properties to be renovated and put to good use.

RESOLVED: Shadow Executive AGREED:

- 1. To CONSIDER and APPROVE the Capital and Investment Strategy.**
- 2. To APPROVE the MRP Policy set out in Section 7.**

10 All Age Mental Health Strategy

Cllr W Whyte, Cllr Macpherson and Ms Bowie, Service Director for Integrated Commissioning provided an introduction to the item and gave an overview of the strategy. National statistics around mental health were highlighted to provide context for the importance of ensuring correct provision of services. The strategy reflected the national standards and would combine two previous strategies to produce a four year plan that included children to adopt an “all age” approach. Extensive consultation had taken place which had included workshops and conferences.

RESOLVED: Shadow Executive AGREED the All Age Mental Health Strategy.

11 A Proposed Single Housing Enforcement, Improvement Grants and Adaptations Approach for Buckinghamshire

Cllr I Darby and Ms A Starsmore, Private Sector Housing Team Leader introduced the item and highlighted that the aim of the paper was to streamline housing enforcement, improvement and adaptation policies from District Councils. It was essential that all items were in place by vesting day.

The private sector was currently a larger housing association than the public sector, which emphasised the importance of implementing consistent enforcement to ensure the protection of vulnerable people in that environment. A significant exercise had been carried out in Wycombe to calculate the fees as set out in the report. The following points were highlighted in response to questions raised by members:

- The policy had been designed with Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care services in mind.
- Grants were offered to carry out necessary adaptations to properties to aid a timely discharge from hospital.
- Grants would be provided to fund adaptations as a preventative measure to avoid hospitalisation. There would be a benefit of moving into a unitary authority through closer working between professionals.

RESOLVED: Shadow Executive AGREED:

1. **A single Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy for the new Authority to be adopted for vesting day (in addition to the proposed overarching Regulatory Enforcement Policy) (see Appendix A)**
2. **HMO licence fees and housing enforcement charges for the new Authority to be harmonised for vesting day adopting the model currently used by Wycombe District Council (see Appendix B)**
3. **A single Housing Improvement and Adaptations Policy for the new Authority to be adopted for vesting day (see Appendix C)**
4. **A decision for the new Authority to remove the separate grant offerings currently provided by Chiltern District Council and South Bucks District Council for measures funded by them separately and outside of the proposed harmonised Housing Improvement and Adaptations Policy (see Appendix D).**

12 Spend Protocol - High Wycombe New Cemetery

Cllr Darby and Mr N Dicker, Head of Housing, Environment and Community Standards introduced the item and provided an overview of the plans already advanced by Wycombe District Council to create a new cemetery in Hazlemere. Members were asked to endorse the existing plan and release funds in order to begin building work. Planning permission had already been obtained. The following points were highlighted in response to questions raised by members:

- The need for a new cemetery was now critical due to full capacity and had been a priority for eight years.
- A designated area for children and babies would be the first to be laid out in the new cemetery.
- The lifespan of the cemetery before the process would have to be repeated would be 25 years.

RESOLVED: The Shadow Executive AGREED:

1. **To note the content of this report.**
2. **That the Shadow Executive:**
 - (a) **Consents to a project budget increase of £253,210.**
 - (b) **Consents to the release other project funds of £389,790.**
 - (c) **Consents to the grant of delegated authority to enter into a build contract for the project.**
 - (d) **Consents that the £50,000 annual maintenance cost of the new facility will be contained within the Special Expenses Reserve (SER) precept.**
3. **To note that this matter is also being reported to Wycombe District Council's Cabinet on February 3rd 2020.**

13 Programme Update

Mr R Goodes, Programme Manager presented an update on the current progress of the unitary plan as set out in the report. Assurance was given that the plan would be delivered by vesting day, but the level of work required by officers could not be underestimated. The following points were highlighted in response to questions raised by members:

- It was an unsettling time for staff and a strong focus needed to be placed on staff communication, particularly staff members currently based at HQ.
- It was crucial that effective communication was used with members of the public with an emphasis on the expected changes.
- The election process and timings was yet to be finalised. Parish councils would be contacted with information once the process was in place.
- There remained a lot of work still to be delivered prior to vesting day. However there were no particular causes for concern and the programme plan and delivery was monitored regularly.
- Processes were initiated to ensure that the Corporate and Service Director vacant posts were filled by vesting day. In instances where posts were not filled, alternative arrangements would be implemented to support staff effectively.

RESOLVED: Shadow Executive NOTED the update.

14 Exclusion of the public

Exclusion of the public was not required.

15 Confidential Minutes

RESOLVED: The confidential minutes of the meeting held on 7 January were AGREED as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

16 Date of next meeting

18 February 2020, The Oculus, AVDC

Duration of the meeting: 10.03 - 11.40 am

Chairman at the meeting on
Tuesday, 28 January 2020