

# CABINET

THURSDAY, 4TH FEBRUARY, 2021

At 6.15 pm

in the

VIRTUAL MEETING - ONLINE ACCESS, RBWM YOUTUBE

## SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA

### PART I

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>PAGE NO</u>
3.	<u>MINUTES</u>  To consider the Part I minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2021	3 - 14
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# Agenda Item 3

## CABINET

THURSDAY, 28 JANUARY 2021

**PRESENT:** Councillors David Cannon, Andrew Johnson (Chairman), David Coppinger, Samantha Rayner, Stuart Carroll (Vice-Chairman), David Hilton, Gerry Clark, Donna Stimson and Ross McWilliams

Also in attendance: Councillor Christine Bateson, Councillor Julian Sharpe, Councillor Maureen Hunt, Councillor John Story, Councillor Simon Werner, Councillor John Bowden, Councillor Lynne Jones, Councillor Geoffrey Hill, Councillor Phil Haseler, Councillor Gurch Singh, Councillor Ewan Larcombe, Councillor Shamsul Shelim, Councillor Helen Taylor, Councillor John Baldwin, Councillor Mandy Brar, Councillor Amy Tisi, Councillor Gurpreet Bhangra and Councillor Simon Bond. Barbara Richardson (RBWM Property Company)

Officers: Duncan Sharkey, Adele Taylor, Andrew Valence, Kevin McDaniel, Tracey Hendren, Louisa Dean, Shilpa Manek and David Cook.

### APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies of absence received.

### DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Cabinet.

Cllr Hill declared an interest on the Broadway Car Park report as he had a property opposite.

### MINUTES

**RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Part I minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2020 were approved.**

### APPOINTMENTS

None

### FORWARD PLAN

Cabinet considered the contents of the Forward Plan for the next four months and noted the changes made since last published, including:

- Position Statement on Sustainability and Energy Efficiency Design to February 2021 Cabinet.
- AFC Reserved Matter to March 2021 Cabinet.
- Housing Strategy moved to March 2021 Cabinet.

### CABINET MEMBERS' REPORTS

A) LIBRARY TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY 2021-25

Cabinet considered the report regarding the proposed Library Transformation Strategy going to public consultation.

The Deputy Leader of the Council, Resident and Leisure Services, HR, IT, Legal, Performance Management and Windsor informed Cabinet that the Library Transformation Strategy would contribute to and support the Corporate Transformation Strategy by helping to build a “Community Centric Borough of Opportunity and Innovation” while achieving essential savings for the Council.

She informed that up until the start of the pandemic, more people visited libraries than attended Premier League football games, the cinema, and the top 10 UK tourist attractions combined. Maidenhead Library regularly had more than a thousand visits a day. The under 24 demographic had the highest usage prior to Lockdown. Visits and loans increased every month when compared to the same month of the previous year, with almost a million visits and over 700,000 loans in 2019-20.

Cabinet were also informed that the Royal Borough’s library service was the first RBWM council service to introduce many innovations such as tablets, wifi, interactive webpages, social media, interactive facilities, extensive volunteer programmes including one for teenagers and virtual reality, The service had a dedicated fantastic team. The “Digi-offer” was expanded within the initial Lockdown and online events had been held, the last event had over 300 virtual attendees.

The report contained draft saving proposals with decisions not taken lightly, it was therefore important that people take part in the consultation.

The Chairman said he was pleased to see a transformation strategy being presented as it showed that the administration continued to push forward new thinking, new ways of working and better smarter delivery of services. Going forward we are committed to delivering a comprehensive library service for the future we are also committed to ensuring that we infuse that with the highest degree of creative thinking innovative thinking and transformational thinking to make sure that the service remains relevant not only for the coming decade but beyond that as well without losing sight of the core principles and indeed the core fundamentals and values of the library service particularly looking to cater for those most vulnerable in society. The strategy is by the needs to not only to keep the service relevance in the post Covid world but also to keep us at the vanguard of clever and creative thinking.

The Lead Member for Climate Change, Sustainability, Parks and Countryside informed that she felt that this was a fantastic paper and that it was really important to ask the community and the residents about this transformation strategy. It was important to hear their views as we had found out with the climate change strategy and budget consultations. She was a great believer in the importance of libraries and how they could also help with sustainability. They were fantastic in reaching our communities and the staff were wonderful.

The Lead Member for Finance and Ascot informed that the pandemic had shown the drive of residents who had worked so hard. This transformation strategy showed one of the strands in how we could make things happen and how the library service was embedded in our communities. It was important that we engage with residents on this so the consultation was important.

The Lead Member for Public Protection and Parking said that

The document was very informative and explained to everybody the route for the future with libraries unfortunately it has raised some concerns which i think we're all aware of from the some of the proposals where people have raised alarm that the possibility of libraries being closed and i would just like to reinforce that these proposals are out for consultation, any concerns about the proposal and the impact then you needed to be part of that consultation. Alternative proposals needed to be passed back whether from parish councils, from

communities or yourself as a resident. We need to hear views to help make an informed decision to deliver the service that the community require.

The Chairman informed that Mr Hill had registered to speak on this item.

Mr Hill said that Boyne Grove library was well used by everyone in the area and it was astonishing that it was proposed to be closed. It was in walkable distance of multiple schools, parking and accessibility was excellent and was used by residents with dementia. It had high levels of book borrowing and it holds special events that attracted families. For many this was the main contact with the council and its services, the staff are astonishing in their dedication and knowledge they are librarians but also they are ambassadors for RBWM. He went on to mention comments from residents on Facebook supporting the library showing its importance and diversity.

Mr Hill also said that one of the ward councillors, Cllr Carol, had said that local residents were the boss, well the boss more than 170 residents had signed a petition in just 24 hours. He felt that the consultation was a waste of money as nothing in the paper would change. He said that there were sufficient resources to maintain the library for example he said RBWM were currently paying for two managing directors; one for the council and one for the property company and were also paying £224000 in special responsibility allowances.

The Lead Member responded that she loved libraries and as mentioned it was a great local resource in a wonderful place. Lots of people used it and it was not a decision taken lightly. The council was faced with making some very difficult decisions. This is why the consultation was very important as we may find some solutions. She would be glad to be happy to save the library. They would be engaging with partners and the community and have written to stakeholders so this paper was not a surprise.

The Chairman said that he endorsed the Lead Member's comments and he had been committed to undertaking consultation since becoming Leader. He mentioned the budget consultation as an example as this was the first time a major budget consultation had been run. This consultation also offered an opportunity for partner organisations to be able to take advantage of any area we may vacate.

Cllr Bond addressed Cabinet and said the report was interesting reading especially the case study of Deadworth library in the work they do and that it was based on the recent report by Mr Kruger MP into volunteering and the levelling up agenda. With regards to Boyne Grove library this was highly regarded by residents. The library had an excellent collection of children's books, worked with schools introducing children to the joys of reading and there was valuable work there for people with learning difficulties. He also mentioned that it had been less than six years since the library was opened which seemed very short-term to spend all the money and then to be thinking of closing it.

Cllr Larcombe mentioned that there were also other libraries that were on the list for potential closure such as Sunninghill, Datchet and Old Windsor.

Cllr Jones asked if the first consultation would be implemented before consultation two had finished, or would they be implemented as one. She also mentioned that the total savings from the current budget paper and this transformation is in the region of £440 000, a lot of money to take from the service. Will the consultation follow the Government guidelines of 12 weeks and also align with the Climate Change Strategy as there will be extra vehicle movements to access central libraries. She asked if other bodies had been contacted before starting the consultation or is this the first time they will see the proposals. She raised concern about the Old Windsor statement as it's only been open for five months since refurbishment.

The Lead Member responded by saying that the opening hours consultation was delayed until September 2022 due to the pandemic. If approved by Cabinet it would be implemented. The consultation for this paper, if approved, would start in February and last 12 weeks. With

regards to savings some were from last years budget and the rest were dependent on the transformation strategy. With regards to climate change the strategy showed that there were other ways of accessing library services such as the digital offer. Other bodies would be contacted as part of the consultation.

Cllr Werner mentioned that he had to comment on the spin presented at the meeting, the Lead Member talked about the benefits of libraries but it was proposed to close them. Transformation seemed to be about closures and cuts. Can libraries be the heart of the community when they are closed. We had already seen youth centres and children's centres being closed. Closure libraries would increase pressure on other services such as Adult and Children social care.

The Chairman responded by reminding Cllr Werner that this was a document going for consultation and he looked forward to seeing his detailed responses as well as those from the community. He mentioned that Cllr Werner had only offered negativity instead of an alternative proposal.

The Lead Member said that as a Cabinet member they had a responsibility to present a legal balanced budget and that this meant that difficult decisions had to be made. The consultation would help make mindful decisions and help guide the transformation of the service making it robust and agile.

Cllr Brar highlighted Cookham library that was well used and also was supported by the local parish council with a £2,000 grant. The proposed savings was only £3,000 and by doing this we could lose the parish contribution towards the opening hours. The Lead Member mentioned that there were plans to hold discussions with the parish council.

Deputy Chairman of Cabinet, Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Health and Mental Health mentioned that transformation was about looking at improving the offer via things such as the digital offer that had been very successful during the pandemic. Expert organizations such as the Mental Health Foundation, Mind, the NHS and other Government departments had been calling for a greater focus on the digital offer. Transformation was not that idea presented by Cllr Werner. There were many sections of our community with mental and physical conditions that would benefit from the offer. He also wished to correct the comments made by Cllr Werner regarding children's and youth centres as they were implementing a family hub model, which had already been debated by the council and supported by Government.

With regards to comments made by Mr Hill Cllr Carroll said that her was right to say that residents in his ward were the boss and that he and his other ward councillor would be happy to have a discussion with Mr Hill. He would be reaching out to the community as a whole and not just those on social media. He asked the Lead Member to meet with him and Cllr Bhangra to look at options such as working with local schools, Optalis and AFC. The Lead Member said she welcomed the discussions and any ideas to save our libraries.

Cllr Hill mentioned that when he was a Lead Member he felt strongly that the digital offer should not be the default offer but one of choice. There were a lot of residents who were deprived with regard to technology or are afraid of using computers. There was a risk of excluding sections of our community.

The Lead Member for Housing, Communications and Youth Engagement highlighted the benefits of the Cox Green model that could be a pathway for other areas. The library had been set up and funded by the school, parish council and local authority. There was a wide range of users and it was economically viable. We needed to look at having long term viable community assets. He encouraged everyone to take part in the consultation.

**Resolved unanimously: that Cabinet notes the report and agrees to:**

- i) **Commence a full Public Consultation and extensive engagement with stakeholders on the proposed Library Transformation Strategy**
- ii) **Review the consultation outcome in April 2021 and consider approving a Library Transformation Strategy to shape the service, in line with the Corporate Transformation Strategy, until 2025.**

B) **ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD PUBLIC LIBRARIES  
OPENING HOURS REDUCTION / CLOSURES**

Cabinet considered the report regarding the results of the recent consultation and its implementation.

The Deputy Leader of the Council, Resident and Leisure Services, HR, IT, Legal, Performance Management and Windsor informed Cabinet that the report for consideration was regarding library opening hours following the delayed public consultation. On 25 February 2020 the budget was passed and it was agreed to conduct a public consultation to reduce library opening hours in order to make a saving of £145,000. It was also proposed to close Eton library and closing one of the container stops.

The consultation had to be delayed due to the pandemic and went live in September 2020 for 12 weeks. She was pleased to say that there were 1850 responses which was the highest for any consultation undertaken by the Royal Borough. The consultation had been extensive using a variety engagement methods. The results had been used to adapt the original proposals and this included later opening times and weekend opening hours. It was clear that those who used the service appreciated the offer. The digital offer was praised, but residents also appreciated being able to browse books. Our libraries ranked third in the country for visits per 100,00 per head of population.

Cllr Jones informed that she wished to comment on the feedback from Old Windsor that showed they were understanding of the need for the council to save money but they were willing to work with the council with reduced hours. They therefore feel let down by seeing proposals to close the library in the previous report.

Cllr Bhangra reiterated what was said in the previous report regarding trying to keep Boyn Grove library operational. It was an important centre for the community servicing children and adults, including those with learning difficulties. He wanted assurance that everything possible was being done to keep libraries open. The Lead Member responded by saying they would be doing everything possible to keep libraries open.

Cllr Sharpe mentioned that he was a big supporter of libraries and that they were important community assets. He said he was concerned about those who may be excluded by the digital offer especially as many libraries were used by the elderly. Reduced opening hours in the morning, especially over winter months, would make it harder for them to access services. There needed to be a balance between opening hours so the facilities could be used to their full potential.

The Deputy Chairman of Cabinet, Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Health and Mental Health reiterated what Cllr Bhangra had said and asked if the Lead Member would join with them to put a letter together to the minister asking for contingency funding for libraries.

**Resolved unanimously: that That Cabinet notes the report and:**

- i) **Subject to the outcome of the Library Transformation Strategy Consultation, approves the new schedule of Library Opening Hours detailed in Appendix B.**
- ii) **Delegates authority to the Director of Resources in consultation with the Lead Member for Lead Member for Resident and Leisure Services, HR, IT,**

**Legal, Performance Management and Windsor, to make minor adjustments to library opening hours schedules as the need arises.**

**C) FINANCE UPDATE: JANUARY 2021**

Cabinet considered the latest financial update report.

The Lead Member for Finance and Ascot informed Cabinet that the headlines were an adverse movement of £591K from the November position, however, the outturn had improved with a projected positive variance of £3.74Million. This position had been helped by an increase in COVID-19 funding of £2.243 million. As appendix A showed the Council's COVID-19 costs of £15.4 million were forecast to be fully mitigated by Government funding.

The Lead Member informed that this meant that the projected outturn represents the financial position of the Council with COVID-19 stripped out. The forecast of £3.74M positive variance was quite remarkable and officers across the Council deserve our thanks. £2.374 of the variance is attributable to delivering services below budgeted costs and £1.4M to none service budgets.

It was proposed to transfer £3 million to a COVID-19 general reserve which would be used to support the 2021/22 budget and mitigate some of the £9.2 million projected COVID-19 costs and a further £300K will be moved into an Optalis Development reserve to cover additional overhead costs to be incurred next year. These movements reduce the general reserve to £6.75million which remains above the minimum level of £6.37Million

Some think that government funding had bailed us out and created the increase in reserves. Anyone who thought this was under a misapprehension as they fail to consider for one the opportunity cost of £2.3 million transformational savings COVID had prevented us from making.

The Lead Member provided the following highlights; given the latest advice from Government on travel, parking income was predicted to be lower by £241K but we should, through the sales, fees and charges scheme be able to recover 71% of any loss.

Industrial and commercial estates had taken a prudent approach and negotiated payment plans and other arrangements with tenants to secure longer term recovery and minimise expensive voids. The projected outturn has improved by £394k

Children's Services were projection an increased overspend of over £418K

Council Tax and business rates provide £88M of our income, pleasingly collection rates are holding up remarkable well.

He also drew Cabinets attention to appendix I which detailed the COVID-19 funding we have received from Government currently a totalling £94M. This was dedicated to supporting the impact of COVID-19 on Council services and a range of business support schemes that were administered by revenues and benefits. This continued to place significant pressure on the team who were doing a great job.

Mr Hill addressed Cabinet and welcomed the level of detail within the report. He asked if the funding from the Homeless Support Grant was still available, he questioned the reference to the Sainsbury's Rotunda and the £72,000 parking pressure. He also asked about the reference to the new polling station program for the May 2021 elections and the hiring of tablets as he would have thought this required a separate Cabinet paper.

The Lead Member replied that the tablets were to be used in polling stations for the registration and allocation of ballot papers. This helped remove an element of contact during the pandemic. With regards to Sainsbury's this related to historical maintenance issues.



With regards to the homeless grant officers confirmed that this was still received but was now called the Flexible Homeless Support Grant for 2021.

The Lead Member for Transport and Infrastructure reiterated the great turnaround in finances during the pandemic. He thanked his fellow Cabinet Members, officers and the work done by Cipfa. We were providing sound financial management with great service delivery.

The Lead Member for Climate Change, Sustainability, Parks and Countryside said Cabinet had followed sound principles supported by excellent work by officers. However she pointed out that there was no dedicated line for climate change. Although there was a surplus we had to be mindful of pressures for next years budget.

Cllr Jones said that in September we were told that the net effect of Covid was about £1,2 million. We have received a one off grant so could we be informed of what the estimated year end position is. She also mentioned that during the pandemic there were savings of about £2 million for areas such as home care placements. So we can not put Covid behind use as there was a commitment from Government for funding. Next year she expected things to be harder. She also said that there had been a great improvement in the monitoring reports.

Cllr Larcombe mentioned that the report showed that borrowing was increasing by £76 million. He was informed that the budget report showed the cash flow forecast and certain long term expenditure that the authority was committed to that will drive borrowing up due to capital projects.

Cllr Tisi said that she had looked at the transformation savings in adult social care and it said £120,000 to deliver assistive technology solutions reducing the need for care home visits. The pandemic had caused delays in delivering these plans however in appendix B it says that implemented technology enabled care across the service have been expedited due to Covid and will be delivered in full. So has the pandemic slowed down or sped up delivery of the savings. The Managing Director informed that the savings would have been delivered in year but it may be that the wording using expedite may not be as clear as it should. The savings had been delayed but they were still expected to be delivered. The original planned schedule was off track but other things had been implemented above the original plan.

Cllr Baldwin mentioned that he was surprised to hear the Lead Member mention that there was good news coming out of the pandemic or if he meant other members were suggesting this. With regards to the report he referred to pages 164 and 165 regarding parking income. Windsor parking was skewed due to tourism and thus the ups and downs were due to lockdown. He wanted to know if the slow recoveries was down to retail opportunities or the removal of resident parking.

The Lead Member responded that he had mentioned the impact of the pandemic on our finances and that we had been supported by the Government. He was deeply upset by the impact the pandemic has had on residents with the deaths being a great tragedy.

The Lead Member for Public Protection and Parking said that he could not see the correlation in the data about the removal of the Advantage Card discount and what took place in this years budget as mentioned by Cllr Baldwin.

**Resolved unanimously: that Cabinet notes the report and:**

- i) Notes the Council's projected revenue & capital position for 2020/21;**
- ii) Notes the budget movements;**
- iii) Agrees the capital variances and notes the slippage which will be recommended to Council for formal approval.**

D) RENEWAL OF CONTRACT IN SHARED LEGAL SERVICE

Item withdrawn prior to the meeting.

E) VICUS WAY CAR PARK, MAIDENHEAD

Cabinet considered the report regarding the development of a new Multi-Storey Car Park at Vicus Way.

The Leader of the Council and Chairman of Cabinet, Business, Economic Development and Property informed Cabinet that the report was for the approval for the development of a new multi-storey car park at Vicus Way. Permission had been given on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2018 and Council approval the capital budget on 19th July 2018. The initial budget of £13,207,249 was approved from which £350,000 was vired to fund additional car parking provision at Braywick Park in June 2020.

Cabinet were informed that the construction of the new car park was formally tendered via the OJEU procurement process and Buckingham Group were selected as the main contractor and the contract was due to be entered into March 2020. As a result of Covid19 lockdown it was necessary to postpone entering into the contract whilst the impact of Covid19 was assessed and better understood both in terms of site management and delivery, the potential impact on demand for spaces and the Council's review of its car parking strategy.

Mr Hill addressed Cabinet and said that he welcomed the transparency and the honest comments he mentioned how Cllr Hunt had undertaken scrutiny on this by reviewing many of the earlier court documents. He asked about the £2.2 million of savings that will go into the revenue budget. If this is not approve is there a contingency savings or does this mean approval is required. The report also mentioned the Royal London Asset Management expressing an interest in car parking spaces depending on their planning application. Should you not wait until planning has been determined and if I fails is there any underwriting into the plans. What happens if they decide they do not want the 200 spaces.

Mr Hill also informed that the report talked about Stafferton Way being in the BLP for residential use, however why not just rebuild a new car park on this site as you were doing with Broadway. The proposed plans on Vicus Way were very unpopular and it is a strange time to commit £12 million of public money especially when parking income is not being achieved and the way we work is changing.

The Chairman replied that in terms of the mention £2.2 million this was a capital cost to date due to general design project management, planning fees and professional fees. If we proceed theses capital costs would have to be transferred to revenue costs. This was not a driver in bring this forward, the business plan had been reviewed and he believed that this was a robust case for approving the plans. This also provided an holistic solution working in conjunction with other plans for development in Maidenhead. With regards to the London Assey Management application he was right that planning had not yet been determined, however even if this did not go ahead intelligence suggested that there was still sufficient demand for parking.

The Lead Member for Planning, Environmental Services and Maidenhead said that the future of Maidenhead depended on projects such as this as we were very much at the beginning of the rebirth of the town. There were a number of projects happening at he same time. There was the Broadway and reduction in spaces, Stafferton Way coming to its end of life and the possible redevelopment of Braywick Gate and Statesman's House. There was a need to move long term parking spaces out of town that would also have appositve impact on pollution.

Cllr Taylor mentioned that as ward member her objection to this was well known. She was speaking tonight on behalf of her residents she represented and as a member of the council.

She had concerns about the business plan, we were also not out of the woods with regards to the pandemic and its long term effects were not known. There were unknowns such as the future use of office space and the Elizabeth Line. She also mentioned that planning was held on 16th January but the report stated 8th March. She also questioned why it was felt that having long term parking away from the town centre would reduce traffic movements and pollution as having more short term parking would increase traffic movements. With regards to the London application she questioned why they would request 200 spaces when their application said there were 197 on site. She also mentioned that it was along walk from the proposed site to the town centre, why would people move season tickets from the town centre to this site. Cllr Taylor asked that by bringing this to Cabinet today had anything to do with the planning application saying work had to begin within three years.

The Chairman said that he would invite the Managing Director of the RBWM Property Company to speak but he just wanted to say that the Elizabeth line between Reading and Paddington was in operation so commuting to London would continue. Also overall there would not be an increase in car parking spaces for Maidenhead.

The Managing Director of the RBWM Property Company informed that they had spoken those who leased parking spaces at Nicholson's and 90% of those questions did not have a problem moving to the new car park. Even if we discounted the spaces that Royal London had indicated they wanted there was still 700 long term spaces in Heinz Meadow car park that would be used for short term parking. We will be engaging with these 700 about moving. It was appreciated that the pandemic had impacted parking need but when we went back to the norm it was felt that there was sufficient demand and given the level of development demand would be high.

The Lead Member for Climate Change, Sustainability, Parks and Countryside Informed that the reduction of car parking spaces was with the climate change strategy and that short term spaces would be more expensive than the long term offer out of town.

Cllr Haseler clarified the dates from the planning application, he said that the planning meeting was held as reported but the decision notice was not issued until March.

Cllr Hill said that he endorsed everything that Cllr Taylor and Mr Hill had said. He said that this was one of the most controversial planning applications that he had seen with so many community groups coming together. There had been two high level legal cases around this application, it also went against council policy for where long term parking should be placed. If this is built it would be an intrusive ugly building with light and noise pollution. So why given the level of objection is this proposed to go ahead.

Cllr Hill also said that Maidenhead now had a gigabit telephone exchange. As more people get this broadband over the next few years there would be less demand for office space and more virtual offices. Would it be better to have commercial space and residential on the site. Why increase our debt when this could provide a capital receipt.

The Chairman responded that a valid planning application had been granted so we were dealing with a proposal that had full planning consent. This was concerning the proposed delivery of the project. He understood that there had been considerable opposition to this prior to him becoming a councillor. But since this had been proposed he had had limited contact about opposition to the project. He said he was not ignoring previous concerns but this had been transparent. The Chairman agreed that working patterns would change but there would still be a demand for office space, even if it was shared, and a demand for parking. He also expected that there would be firms looking to move out of London.

The Managing Director of the RBWM Property Company said that when looking at the site we did not just consider current demand but also the future economic development of the area. There was a substantial amount of development in the pipeline and a demand for long term

parking. The site could be sold for a one off capital receipt, but the market was recessed and this site would help replace the old dilapidated site, meet demand and bring in revenue.

Cllr Taylor said that if this was to be approved then could she ask for a commitment on three things. One could a residents group be set up to work in collaboration with the construction company, two to make the outside of the building as attractive as possible such as green planting and finally that the car parking management plan agreed at planning be enforced and that consideration be given to allowing local residents using the car park in the evening. The Chairman agreed with these points and discussions already held with Cllr Taylor apart from the final one regarding free parking for local residents as he could not commit to this but he would look into it.

**Resolved unanimously: that Cabinet notes the report and:**

- i) Approves the entering into a construction contract with the selected main contractor to build the new car park.**
- ii) Approve the leasing of the car parking spaces to long term users of the car park on commercial terms.**
- iii) Delegates authority to the Managing Director, in consultation with the Lead Member for Business, Economic Development & Property to conclude the appropriate construction and leasing contracts.**

F) BROADWAY CAR PARK, MAIDENHEAD

Cabinet considered the report regarding the delivery of the new Broadway Car Park.

Leader of the Council and Chairman of Cabinet, Business, Economic Development and Property informed Cabinet that they had approved the development of a new multi-storey car park to replace the current Nicholson's Car Park in September 2018.

The initial budget of £35,313,163 was approved from which £470,000 was vired to fund legal, valuation and project management fees to negotiate the land sale agreements for the sale of Nicholson's Centre freehold, Central House land Freehold and land swap of the Broadway Car Park in April 2019 and a further £480,000 was vired to fund associated Covid cost at Braywick Park in June 2020.

The car park was being delivered as part of the wider Nicholson's Quarter Masterplan. The initial planning application was submitted to the Local Planning Authority (LPA) in May 2020 following public consultation and pre-application advice from the LPA. Following further consultation and feedback a revised application was submitted in November 2020.

The Council had agreed to enter into a new 125 year lease to enable Denhead S.A.R.L. to construct a self-contained basement car park beneath the MSCP at its own cost and a separate 50 year lease over 188 car parking spaces in the upper level on commercial rental basis, subject to a break option in the favour of the council after 30 years.

A new facility would be provided for Maidenhead Shopmobility and Changing Places on the ground floor of the car park along with active units for commercial uses on both Brock Lane and Broadway.

Mr Hill addressed Cabinet and said that this application was huge and questioned how members had not taken a predetermined view as this scheme was an important part of the biggest changes to the town centre. It was a shame that Denhead S.A.R.L. had not attended the BLP hearing meetings so show what their vision was. He asked if the 125 year lease was subject to planning, how much were they paying and when was it entered into. He also mentioned that there would be a special planning meeting taking place in quarter 4, was this a mistake. He also referenced the heritage centre as they had not agreed to any of the offers to move.

The Chairman replied that just because it was an important application we should not suggest that there has been any predetermination. With regards to the Heritage Centre there had been communication with them and a potential offer of an alternative site was made. They never responded to the offer so it had been rescinded, however, for the foreseeable future the centre would remain at its current location. If there was a need to move in the future we would discuss alternative locations.

The Managing director of the RBWM Property Company informed that no leases had been entered into and that they would not be until planning consent had been granted and the car park was built. With regards to planning it was proposed to go on 3rd March 2021.

Cllr Singh mentioned that with regards to the Heritage Centre it has been mentioned that no offer for an alternative location had been accepted and that there was no threat of them being moved, however they were part of phase two. He also raised concern about the loss of short term parking and that there were a lot of flats being built without parking. There had been a commitment to build a new car park before this one was demolished.

The Chairman replied that there had been a commitment to build a new car park first but he would remember the meeting where it had been agreed to shorten the overall development time by adopting this new approach to shorten the construction program and minimize disruption to the town. He could not go onto too much detail as there was a planning application to be determined. With regards to new build not having parking hem mentioned his new party supported less traffic within the town centre and alternative forms of transport.

Cabinet were also informed that the Heritage Centre was in phase three of the York Road Development so no need to be vacant until 2024-25 so alternative locations could be considered.

**Resolved unanimously: that Cabinet notes the report and:**

- I. Approves entering into the Development Agreement with Denhead S.A.R.L. that commits the Council to delivering the new Broadway Car Park and leasing the podium space above the car park entrance in line with submitted plans.**
- II. Approves obtaining vacant possession of Siena Court and accepting a surrender of the lease from Broadway Centre Limited.**
- III. Approves entering into a new 50-year lease over 188 car parking spaces to Denhead S.A.R.L on commercial terms subject to a break after 30 year in favour of the Council and the retention of the ability to redevelop the site in the future.**
- IV. Approves rescinding the previous offers of accommodation within the new development made to the Maidenhead Community Centre and Maidenhead Heritage Centre.**
- V. Approves the leasing of a new facility to Maidenhead ShopMobility at a peppercorn rent.**
- VI. Approves leasing the remaining space on the ground floor on commercial basis to generate revenue income for the Council.**
- VII. Delegate's authority to the Managing Director, in consultation with the Lead Member for Business, Economic Development & Property to conclude the Development Agreement and appropriate leasing contracts.**

#### LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

**RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public were excluded from the remainder of the meeting whilst discussion took place on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 3 of part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

MINUTES

**Resolved unanimously: that the Part II minutes of the meeting on the 17<sup>th</sup> December 2020 be approved.**

CABINET MEMBERS' REPORTS

A) VICUS WAY CAR PARK, MAIDENHEAD - PART II APPENDIX

Cabinet noted the Part II appendices.

B) BROADWAY CAR PARK, MAIDENHEAD

Cabinet noted the Part II appendices.

The meeting, which began at 6.15 pm, finished at 9.25 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....

## Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel – Comments on the Budget Report

Councillor Hilton, Lead Member for Finance and Ascot, introduced the report and explained that the Panel's views were sought on the main report and five appendices. Appendix A consisted of the Medium Term Financial Plan and incorporated changes that had been made in the current years budget. £895,000 had been allocated as a pay increase for all RBWM staff, while £850,000 had been earmarked for use in corporate capacity areas, giving officers greater capacity to fulfil their roles. The impact of Covid was estimated to have a £9.2 million impact on the budget, while £6 million worth of savings had been identified to cover part of this impact.

A member of the public, Andrew Hill, had requested to speak on the item. Mr Hill said that money had been lost from venue licensing as some had chosen not to renew and asked which venues these were. For the registrars, there was reported to be a £25,000 drop in income predicted in the previous budget but this was inflated in the next budget. Mr Hill asked if these figures were used to try and disguise any financial problems. Concern was raised about the cutting of the audit budget, Mr Hill believed that councillors should be demanding more audit, not less. Regarding schools, they were being charged more and Mr Hill wanted to know what the reason for this was. There was increased data protection across the council, but Mr Hill questioned why a breach was deemed 'likely' if data protection had been enhanced. Mr Hill raised a final concern, that the fee paid to councillors who chaired council meetings was increasing, but arts funding for venues like Norden Farm was being cut.

Councillor Hilton said that he had been involved in discussions with the relevant Lead Member along with officers. It was going to be challenging for the arts sector but there was money in the budget provided which would support grants for the arts.

Adele Taylor, Director of Resources, said that she would pick up and answer Mr Hill's points as the Panel went through the relevant sections of the budget. The Medium Term Financial Plan, which was Appendix A of the report, was part of the draft budget which was presented in December 2020. The plan showed the movement and changes expected in the budget.

Councillor L Jones asked about the estimated total losses from Covid and how the mitigation funding compared to the income lost. There was payment for services at the point of demand and Councillor L Jones wanted to know how this would work for residents who were on a low income. She asked if the pay award for RBWM staff was in the contingency budget.

Adele Taylor said that Covid losses were the estimated income losses for the current financial year. The next budget monitoring report would be going to Cabinet later in the week, with most of the pressures being around the costs to contractors. Income losses had hit RBWM hard, with further detail provided in the monitoring report. Covid costs were being treated as a one off as they were being covered through one off measures. Earmarked reserves would be able to support the budget. The sales, fees and charges compensation scheme was being utilised by RBWM, the council covered the first 5% of losses and then the government covered 75p in every £1 after that. It was important to ensure that there was affordability in the services provided, costs should be covered and it was important that they were reviewed on a regular basis.

Andrew Vallance, Head of Finance, confirmed that the pay rise for RBWM staff was coming out of the contingency budget.

Councillor L Jones commented on the NNDR in Appendix A, the impact of regeneration and whether business viability had been taken into account.

Adele Taylor said the NNDR was holding up at the moment and it could only be based on information that they knew. The NNDR was managed through the collection fund but it was hard to know the future business viability. She was aware that there was the possibility that business rates could change in the future.

Councillor Werner said that the Medium Term Financial Plan showed a spiral of decline for RBWM and that services were starting to dry up. In his view, a lack of strategy to stop this decline could lead to bankruptcy. Insourcing was important to consider as Councillor Werner had seen evidence that it saved money and improved service. He asked what research had gone into looking at contracts and whether an internal bid had been investigated as a viable option. Councillor Werner mentioned 'invest to save' and asked what analysis had gone into assets to see if they could raise revenue. No CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) being charged for developments in Maidenhead Town Centre was an issue, Councillor Werner said that the new Nicolson's Shopping Centre redevelopment not being charged CIL was a significant amount of money that had been 'given away' by the council. For commercialisation, Councillor Werner asked what analysis had been carried out for any potential commercialisation opportunities available to the council.

Councillor Hilton disagreed with Councillor Werner's comments on RBWM being a 'spiral of decline'. He said that there was a positive variance of £3.7 million and that the reserves to cover Covid stood at £3 million. Other money was also being put into the reserves, the budget was in a good place before the pandemic. RBWM had done a good job to get to this point with the current financial position and it needed to ensure that Covid costs were managed effectively over the next year.

Councillor Johnson, Leader of the Council, commented that Councillor Werner should familiarise himself with the Asset Management Strategy. The strategy was focussed on retaining valuable assets and disposing of assets that were no longer needed to raise further capital and fund capital projects. There were many risks in the commercial market and the decline was likely to continue for the foreseeable future for the council's commercial portfolio. On the claim about the Nicolson's Shopping Centre, Councillor Johnson said that if Councillor Werner had any evidence of this statement then it should be presented to support his claim. For insourcing, Councillor Johnson explained that at the point of renewal all contracts were assessed and both outsourcing and insourcing options were explored. CIL was an ongoing issue which was largely driven by market viability and increased costs. Councillor Johnson disagreed with Councillor Werner's statement that the council had given away a significant amount of money.

Councillor Rayner, Lead Member for Resident & Leisure Services, HR, IT, Legal, Performance Management & Windsor, also disagreed with the comments about RBWM being in a spiral of decline. There had been lots of innovation that had taken place across the council. The library transformation strategy was delivering what residents wanted, while there had been an increased investment in leisure services with the new Braywick Leisure Centre opening last year. The IT infrastructure had also been upgraded across the council as part of the Modern Workplace Project, this had proven to be particularly important as it allowed all RBWM staff to work from home throughout the course of the pandemic.

Adele Taylor said that a gap had been identified in the budget which could have come from a variety of options. The Transformation Strategy allowed the council to look at how things were done and how they could be done better in the future.



Councillor Luxton joined the meeting.

Councillor Werner said that the council was not looking at insourcing options because an analysis would have been produced, this analysis was not available. He had been informed by a property expert about the valuation of CIL on the Nicolson's Shopping Centre. Councillor Werner had read the Asset Management Strategy but wanted an approach where land was turned into something that could be used rather than just selling it. Councillor Werner believed that this was a Conservative ideological approach to running the council.

The Chairman said that the administration wanted a well-run council.

Councillor Hilton said that CIPFA had done a review of services across the council and made a number of recommendations, with one being to remain with shared services like Optalis and Achieving for Children. These organisations made up around 70% of spending in the council.

Councillor Johnson was disappointed by the personal attack from Councillor Werner. He said that there was no ideological vision in his view and that his aim was to deliver the best services possible to RBWM residents. The strategy allowed for land to be repurposed, for example the land next to the Town Hall in Maidenhead or the Magnet Leisure Centre.

Councillor L Jones asked if it was possible to see the net impact of Covid, with the figures split into losses and income losses which would allow her to see what impact it had on the finances. She also asked if the Medium Term Financial Plan required £14 million of savings and where these savings would come from.

Adele Taylor said that the cost and impact of Covid on the current finances of RBWM were available in the latest budget monitoring report but it was a rapidly changing situation.

Councillor Rayner said that the transformation strategy showed the direction of travel that RBWM was looking to head in. The library strategy was achievable and would be going out for consultation so it was still open to adjustments.

Councillor Sharpe said that the allowance for RBWM staff pay rise was important along with the allowance in the budget for any extra staff that would need to join the council. Adele Taylor confirmed that there was an allowance in the budget for the pay reward. In terms of growth to the council, there was also dedicated areas that would improve with new Equalities Officer and Monitoring Officer positions being created.

Councillor Werner said that Councillor Rayner, as the Lead Member for Resident & Leisure Services, HR, IT, Legal, Performance Management & Windsor, had been quoted in a news article saying that the library strategy was 'what the residents wanted'. Councillor Werner did not think residents wanted to see their local libraries be closed.

Councillor Rayner, in response, explained that a consultation had been carried out around the libraries and things like the opening times had been adjusted as a result. Under 24s had been found to use the library most often with remote access now provided for books and other resources.

The Panel moved onto Appendix B – Growth Bids.

Adele Taylor explained that a supplement had been issued as some lines had been missed off in the appendix which was included with the original agenda pack.

Councillor Werner said he was concerned that certain activities had stopped due to the current lockdown restrictions but growth issues had been factored in as a result. He expressed concern that decisions on things like licenced venues were taken while the pandemic was still prominent.

Councillor L Jones said that there was a trend seen across the past few years but the target had increased again. Councillor Rayner explained that there were fewer venues requesting licenses to hold weddings in the borough. Over the past year or two the trend on weddings had decreased.

Adele Taylor said that it was important that trends were noted and connected and that these were then used to form achievable targets. Louise Freeth, Head of Revenues, Benefits, Library and Resident Services, said that licences were awarded on a three year contract. Venues that had chosen not to renew now might still do so in future and this would therefore have an impact on the budget.

Councillor Hilton commented on community grants that were being proposed in the budget. It was important to support the arts sector with grants and workable proposals had been developed. Historically, £50,000 was added to capital budget to enable the grant scheme to continue, which would allow £100,000 to be made available to local organisations. A growth bid of £21,000 was being given to the Berkshire Community Foundation, who administered grants to residents and organisations across RBWM. Councillor Hilton said that this showed that sensible decisions were being made when investing money into organisations.

The Chairman asked why the Berkshire Community Foundation grant was ongoing but community grants was a one off.

Councillor Hilton said that was the position that had been taken, but it would be reviewed at the next budget in a years' time.

The Panel moved on to consider Appendix C – Growth Proposals.

Councillor L Jones asked if the rental income losses were just discounts and waivers and it was nothing related to Covid.

Adele Taylor confirmed that it was a mixture, as commercial income was at risk. Things like discounts could be offered to tenants to keep them in the long term.

Councillor L Jones asked where the loss of income came from in relation to pool cars. Was it because the number of cars was reduced or because it would be used less going forward.

Councillor Werner said that these were real people and businesses and that it was important that this was acknowledged. He said that it was important RBWM did everything it could to help local people and businesses.

The Chairman agreed with these comments and thanked officers for all their work and help so far.

In response to Councillor L Jones question, Adele Taylor said that less cars were needed as the way the council was working had changed.

Councillor Hilton said that there were a number of properties in the council's portfolio. There was a recognition that businesses were going through hard times.

Councillor L Jones commented on the reduced wedding income and that it was ongoing. She asked why it was not estimated to return after Covid.

Adele Taylor explained that there was already issues with growth in this area before Covid. The estimation on reduced income was purely based on the Covid impact at this stage, but the note on this column in the appendix could be amended to explain this.

Councillor Rayner said that a number of weddings had been rebooked for future years but this meant less availability going forward. Louise Freeth confirmed that they had been receiving bookings for as far ahead as 2023 but overall there had been a decline in the number of people choosing to get married. This had been seen in the reduction in the number of weddings hosted by the Guildhall in Windsor pre-Covid.

The Panel considered Appendix D – Savings Proposals.

The Chairman commented on the removal of a benefit assistant post and the possible impact this might have. He asked if appointments would still be offered for both Maidenhead and Windsor despite one post being removed.

Councillor L Jones said that there had been around 1,600 visits to the Benefit Windsor website which was a high number. Given the councils climate change strategy, it did not make sense to her why residents in Windsor may have to drive to Maidenhead to gain access to appointments. Councillor L Jones said there should be a benefits assistant accessible to Windsor residents, even if it was only a few days a week.

Councillor Werner said that from an economic perspective, it made more sense to get the officer to do the travelling between Maidenhead and Windsor rather than having each Windsor resident individually travel to Maidenhead for an appointment.

Councillor Sharpe said that when making savings, the impact on residents needed to be considered. He asked if there were any services in the savings proposals that would have a big impact on residents.

Duncan Sharkey, Managing Director, clarified that the figure Councillor L Jones had quoted was the total number of enquires made to the library.

The Chairman said that it might be good to get an assurance from officers that appointments would still happen in Windsor.

Adele Taylor explained that the post had been vacant for a while and standard advice was available at Windsor Library, it was only the more complex cases which would need a benefit assistant. Residents would still be contacted by the borough for an appointment if they needed it, just this would not be face to face.

Louise Freeth added that a number of appointment slots for complex cases were not taken up, the post had been vacant for quite some time now and RBWM had been able to cope.

Councillor Werner said that he wanted to make sure that the message got through to Cabinet. He did not want residents to have to travel across the Maidenhead to have an appointment.

Councillor L Jones said virtual meetings were good but sometimes they were not enough. She asked officers if it was still possible to keep the option of face to face appointments open.

The Chairman agreed and said that it was ideal to keep the flexibility with there at least being an option there for it.

Looking at the accountancy structure, Councillor Werner commented on the efficiency savings and said it was not defined in the report what they were.

Councillor Hilton said that the Director of Resources had reviewed the situation before making any decisions. There was a long term plan which had been influenced by the CIPFA report.

Adele Taylor said that the processes had been reviewed, a recent resignation had led to the savings. All savings proposals were tested and challenged.

Councillor Werner said it was important that the process was done in a sensible way.

Councillor L Jones commented on the internal audit proposals and asked if the number of days were necessary going forward.

Adele Taylor said that RBWM needed to pay for what it received and therefore needed to be satisfied that the number of days was correct. RBWM had more days than other local authorities but it was important to have the right level of audit.

Councillor L Jones said that charges were going up for schools and asked if this could be maintained.

Councillor Rayner said that they had looked carefully at charges to schools and academies, the charges in the budget reflected the services provided. RBWM had a great relationship with schools across the borough.

Nikki Craig, Head of HR, Corporate Projects and IT, said that RBWM sold a lot of HR services to schools. It was important to ensure that the council received what it cost to deliver the service. The charges were based on ranges, for example the number of staff at the school so that smaller schools would be charged less.

Councillor L Jones asked about the changes to organisational development and also the complaints and compliments team. She asked how the changes would impact the service and if it would still be at a good level.

Councillor Rayner said that the organisation development function was being changed and RBWM would be making a saving of £30,000 this year and £15,000 next year. Complaints would still be handled in the same way, it was just a slight restructuring of the department.

Nikki Craig explained that organisational development covered various tasks. The level of resource at contact level with residents was not changing so there would not be any changes in the quality of the service.

Councillor L Jones asked about facility vehicles which were used mostly by the library. However, if libraries were closed as part of the library transformation strategy then this would not be needed.

Councillor Rayner said that it would be considered in conjunction with the library strategy. Karen Shepherd, Head of Governance, added that the lorry was also used by the facilities team on an ad-hoc basis. For example, it was prominently used at elections to move things like polling station equipment.

Councillor Sharpe asked a question on confidential waste. There were less people using the office so therefore less paper was being used, however this meant that the potential for a data breach was greater. He suggested that RBWM staff were properly trained in handling confidential data.

Karen Shepherd explained that regular training was provided for staff to complete, with reminders put in the Borough Bulletin. The international day of data protection was coming up soon and this would be used to raise awareness.

Councillor Werner said that he supported the digitisation of 'Around the Royal Borough', but more should be done to try and cut the number of paper copies further.

Councillor Sharpe said this was something that he felt residents supported but the council needed to be aware of digital exclusion. Councillor L Jones suggested it could be distributed in libraries so that residents could easily access it.

Councillor McWilliams, Lead Member for Housing, Communications and Youth Engagement, said that lots of residents still requested paper copies. Digital exclusion was a good point and something that needed to be avoided. 18,000 residents were subscribed to RBWM social media channels, 19,000 received emails and around 60,000 got 'Around the Royal Borough' updates.

Louisa Dean, Communications and Marketing Manager, said that around £14,000 was spent per issue on Around the Royal Borough which was mostly printing costs. Going digital would produce a saving of double this amount, although advertising revenue would be lost.

The Panel did not have any further questions or comments for Appendix E – proposed fees and charges or Appendix F – proposed new capital schemes.

Councillor L Jones said that she was surprised not to see cash flow included in the agenda report pack. She asked how officers were sure of cash flow figures coming in and whether they were definite or estimated. It was going to have a big impact on the budget going forward and Councillor L Jones said that she felt the Panel should have sight of it.

Adele Taylor said that some elements of cash flow monitoring would be considered by the Audit and Governance Committee. Cash flow was based on best estimates.

The comments that the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel agreed:

- Revenue and benefit service in Windsor to maintain flexibility and there's an option for it should there need to be.
- To ensure that specialist advice in complex cases was always available from Windsor, whether by phone or face to face.

Councillor L Jones asked for the Equality Impact Assessment links to be included in the report so that they could be easily found.

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