

**AT A MEETING OF THE BOROUGH COUNCIL held as a Virtual Meeting on Tuesday, 23rd February, 2021**

PRESENT: The Mayor (Councillor John Story), The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Gary Muir)

Councillors John Baldwin, Clive Baskerville, Christine Bateson, Gurpreet Bhangra, Simon Bond, John Bowden, Mandy Brar, Catherine Del Campo, David Cannon, Stuart Carroll, Gerry Clark, David Coppinger, Carole Da Costa, Wisdom Da Costa, Jon Davey, Karen Davies, Phil Haseler, Geoff Hill, David Hilton, Andrew Johnson, Greg Jones, Lynne Jones, Neil Knowles, Ewan Larcombe, Sayonara Luxton, Ross McWilliams, Helen Price, Samantha Rayner, Joshua Reynolds, Julian Sharpe, Shamsul Shelim, Gurch Singh, Donna Stimson, Chris Targowski, Helen Taylor, Amy Tisi, Leo Walters and Simon Werner

Officers: David Cook, Emma Duncan, Louise Freeth, Hilary Hall, Kevin McDaniel, Duncan Sharkey, Adele Taylor, Andrew Vallance, Karen Shepherd and Adrien Waite

ONE MINUTE SILENCE

A one minute silence was held in memory of former Councillor John Fido who had passed away recently.

STATEMENT FROM COUNCILLOR BALDWIN

Councillor Baldwin made the following statement:

*At full Council on the 15th of December 2020 I was heard to make what appeared to some Members to be an outburst directed at Councillor McWilliams.*

*That was not my intention at all. I had unmuted my microphone to raise a point of order just as the study door was opened to let in the family dog, Tito. The angry comments you may have heard were aimed at the two and four-legged miscreants within the Baldwin household and not to Council.*

*I would like to take this opportunity to apologise directly to Councillor. McWilliams for improperly cutting across his remarks as well as to any other Member who took exception.*

*The necessary remedial measures have been taken, i.e. a latch on the study door and I can assure Council that there will no repetition of this unfortunate and embarrassing event. Thank you.*

76. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None received

77. COUNCIL MINUTES

**RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That:**

- i) **The minutes of the Annual meeting held on 15 December 2020 be approved**
- ii) **The minutes of the ordinary meeting held on 15 December 2020 be approved.**

78. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Price declared a personal interest in relation to item 8i as she was a member of Maidenhead Golf Club. She was advised by the Monitoring Officer that although there was a financial element, the decision on item 8 did not directly relate to the potential payment to members of the golf club. She should however request a dispensation as appropriate for future related decisions.

Councillor C. Da Costa declared a personal interest in item 8i as her son was a Community Warden.

Councillor W. Da Costa declared a personal interest in item 8i as his step-son was a Community Warden.

Councillor Baldwin declared a personal interest in relation to item 8i as he part-owned a property located close to the golf course.

79. MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Mayor had submitted in writing details of engagements that the Mayor and Deputy Mayor had undertaken since the last meeting, which had been limited due to COVID-19. These were noted by Council.

80. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

- a) Ed Wilson of Clewer and Dedworth West ward asked the following question of Councillor Hilton, Lead Member for Finance and Ascot:**

If RBWM want to increase their reserves beyond those required to deal with its residual risks could this not be achieved through deferring loan repayments to HM Treasury et al rather than reducing services to residents?

*Written response: Any deferral of loan payments would have to be by agreement with HM Treasury which we do not believe is possible according to their terms and conditions of loans. Even if we were to secure agreement, according to the lending terms of the Public Works Loan Board (PWLb) any late payments are potentially liable for interest payments from the date they are due and therefore this would add to our revenue costs overall. This would therefore not be prudent and in fact achieves the converse impact to the one that is trying to be achieved.*

By way of a supplementary question, Mr Wilson asked if the Lead Member could advise which schemes he had considered that would increase the reserves of the borough without reducing discretionary services?

Councillor Hilton responded that every issue, discretionary or otherwise, had been considered in detail and there was nothing in the budget that he would choose to change. The approach to arrive at sustainable finances would continue to tackle the issues head on.

**b) Sharon Bunce of St Mary's ward asked the following question of Councillor Carroll, Lead Member for Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Health and Mental Health:**

Budget Saving #49 will cut £200k from supported living packages. How many adult residents with Learning Disabilities are in supported living within the Borough vs outside the Borough and how many are waiting for a supported living place?

Written response: *The savings proposed in adult social care are aligned with the already published adult social care transformation strategy, which was unanimously agreed through the cross-functional Health and Well-being Board and with NHS colleagues, and which is being implemented within the context of the Care Act and the core purpose of adult care and support is to help people to achieve the outcomes that matter to them in their life. The saving proposed is based on a full analysis of those packages to determine the appropriate level of need and funding required. They are not cuts but savings as part of transformation. The council will continue to meet its statutory responsibilities to meet people's assessed and eligible care needs, whilst embracing best practice and emerging evidence on how best to deliver services. Overall, the council is spending more on adult social care in future so whilst there are some savings from existing packages, there is also funding to pay for increased packages if that is what the assessed need is. There are 85 residents with learning disabilities in supported living accommodation, 68 in the Royal Borough and 17 outside of the borough. At the current time, there is no one in immediate need of a placement.*

Ms Bunce was not present at the meeting but had submitted a supplementary question in advance, which was read out by the clerk:

Just 85 Adults with Learning Disabilities in the borough are in Supported Living and will be affected by the budget saving of £200,000. Your response to my written question states "The saving proposed is based on a full analysis of those packages to determine the appropriate level of need and funding required." Has this analysis been completed and how many of the 85 are budgeted to have a cheaper package of support?

Councillor Carroll responded that the analysis had been fully completed. He would need to defer on the specific question to the Director of Adult Social Care. He would ensure that the detail would be duly followed up and he would write to Ms Bunce with the additional clarity.

**c) Sharon Bunce of St Mary's ward asked the following question of Councillor Carroll, Lead Member for Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Health and Mental Health:**

Budget Saving #50 will cut £200k from community / home care packages. How many adult residents with Learning Disabilities currently have a community / home care package and how many are waiting to be assessed for such a package?

*Written response: The savings proposed in adult social care are aligned with the already published adult social care transformation strategy, which was unanimously agreed through the cross-functional Health and Well-being Board and with NHS colleagues, and which is being implemented within the context of the Care Act and the core purpose of adult care and support is to help people to achieve the outcomes that matter to them in their life. The saving proposed is based on a full analysis of those packages to determine the appropriate level of need and funding required. They are not cuts but savings as part of transformation. The council will continue to meet its statutory responsibilities to meet people's assessed and eligible care needs, whilst embracing best practice and emerging evidence on how best to deliver services. Overall, the council is spending more on adult social care in future so whilst there are some savings from existing packages, there is also funding to pay for increased packages if that is what the assessed need is. There are 68 residents with learning disabilities with community/homecare packages, 54 in the Royal Borough and 14 outside of the borough. At the current time, there is no one in immediate need of a placement.*

Ms Bunce was not present at the meeting but had submitted a supplementary question in advance, which was read out by the clerk:

There are 68 Adults with Learning Disabilities in the borough who have care packages enabling them to live at home or in the community. Saving £200,000 from this budget works out at just under £3,000 per person. What reassurances can you give these adults and their families that a reduction in the care offer will not reduce their safety or wellbeing?

Councillor Carroll responded that the important initial point to make was that no care order was being reduced; this was about transformation and hence why there was a saving to pull through from the transformation. The other vital consideration was that the council had a duty of care that was not just an ethical consideration but a legal requirement under the Care Act to ensure that service user's needs were duly met. On all those levels a very firm and clear assurance could be provided. He would be happy to speak with any individual with concerns to provide additional reassurance.

**d) Lisa Hughes of Furze Platt ward asked the following question of Councillor Carroll, Lead Member for Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Health and Mental Health:**

Budget Saving #47 halves the spend on Day Services for Adults with Learning Disabilities: Only one English council ranks lower than RBWM in the NHS Digital Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework measure for the percentage of adult social care users who have the amount of social contact they would like. How will RBWM ensure this doesn't worsen?

*Written response: The council currently spends £2.3m on day and other care for people with learning disabilities so the saving represents just over 10% of the total*

*spend. We will continue to meet the needs of all clients who have been assessed as requiring day service support; however, the proposal in relation to the day centres is part of a wider programme to transform the day opportunities offer in the borough. Our aim is to ensure that there are things on offer that appeal to everyone and meet their individual needs, not a one size fits all approach. This is an imperative emerging evidence and independent best practice is encouraging. The only choice that people currently have is to go to a day centre or not go – we want people to have more choices than that. Feedback from clients over the last 12 months has shown that many users of our day services are interested in accessing a wider range of activities, including the opportunity to learn new skills and have new experiences. The new Community Lives day service programme incorporates a blend of traditional services and alternative offers, including an Out and About service which will offer customers a wide range of stimulating new activities as soon as it is safe to do so. We will match the service offer for each customer to their particular needs. We absolutely recognise that there will be a need for some people to have building based services and where needed, that will be provided but on a smaller scale as many of the people currently using the day centres do not need to be building based. What is recognised nationally is that a blend of building-based services, community opportunities including volunteering and leisure, along with direct payments for people who want them, is considered best practice and through our transformed offer, we expect to significantly improve the percentage of adult social care users who have the amount of social contact they would like.*

By way of a supplementary question, Ms Hughes stated that people with the most profound and complex learning difficulties any changes to routine such as the closure of Oakbridge day centre would be extremely traumatic. How would each such person's transition to another location be managed to minimise any distress?

Councillor Carroll responded that as part of the proposal there would be a full open 12 week public consultation. Under the ethical and legal framework the council followed on these matters, it would speak with each individual and their family and carers. He would also be happy to speak with any individual or their family should they wish to have additional assurance about that process and next steps.

**e) Lisa Hughes of Furze Platt ward asked the following question of Councillor Carroll, Lead Member for Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Health and Mental Health:**

Budget Saving #48 will cut £200k from residential care for adults with Learning Disabilities: How many Adults with Learning Disabilities have a residential care place in the Borough vs outside the Borough and how many are waiting for a place?

Written response: *The savings proposed in adult social care are aligned with the already published adult social care transformation strategy, which was unanimously agreed through the cross-functional Health and Well-being Board and with NHS colleagues, and which is being implemented within the context of the Care Act and the core purpose of adult care and support is to help people to achieve the outcomes that matter to them in their life. The saving proposed is based on a full analysis of those packages to determine the appropriate level of need and funding required. They are not cuts but savings as part of transformation. The council will continue to meet its statutory responsibilities to meet people's assessed and eligible care needs, whilst*

*embracing best practice and emerging evidence on how best to deliver services. Overall, the council is spending more on adult social care in future so whilst there are some savings from existing packages, there is also funding to pay for increased packages if that is what the assessed need is. There are 58 residents with learning disabilities in residential placements, 11 in the Royal Borough and 47 outside of the borough. At the current time, there is no one in immediate need of a placement.*

By way of a supplementary question, Ms Hughes stated that £200,000 was a lot of money to save from the 58 residents with learning disabilities who lived in residential care. 8 of them were already accommodated outside of the borough. As the aim of the budget saving was to deliver value for money, how likely was it that some people would be moved further away from Windsor and Maidenhead if cheaper residential care places were identified elsewhere?

Councillor Carroll responded that the short answer was that they would not be moved further away. There would be a commitment under the framework outlined earlier to ensure that their package of care remained within the borough. The council would work through that with individuals and their carers to ensure the best package of care was provided. This would be subject to consultation and discussion and based on the needs of the individuals.

**f) Andrew Hill of Boyn Hill ward asked the following question of Councillor Hilton, Lead Member for Finance and Ascot:**

Given the admission by RBWM that the CTRS consultation was unlawful (CO/1251/2020), why wasn't a public paper brought to Cabinet or Council under paragraph 7.2(b) of the Part 5 Scheme of Delegation to Officers, **before the reconsultation**, informing Members and the public of this unlawful act, in order to scrutinise and inform the reconsultation process?

Written response: *There was no requirement for the Monitoring Officer to prepare a report because the decision of Full Council made on 25 February 2020 had already been implemented (Council Tax Bills were issued 11 – 13 March 2020) and the Council was subsequently bound by the Consent Order dated 9 July 2020.*

By way of a supplementary question, Mr Hill commented that in the written Councillor Hilton appeared to claim that councillors need not expect a formal scrutiny meeting in such circumstances. This did not come from scrutiny, and perhaps that had contributed to the hurried paper that was reissued just a few hours ago. He asked Councillor Hilton to explain in his own words what he understood to be the fundamental things that went wrong when conducting last year's CTRS consultation?

Councillor Hilton responded that he personally did not think anything went wrong. When the council was invited to take it to Judicial Review, at the time, rather than fight the case and spend more council money than was necessary it decided to concede and accept the view that the consultation was unlawful. That did not change the fact that the council was proceeding with the process of the decision made in council to change the discount level.

**g) Andrew Hill of Boyn Hill ward asked the following question of Councillor Hilton, Lead Member for Finance and Ascot:**

Why has RBWM continued to take the elevated sum (20%) from CTRS recipients, after admitting that the necessary **statutory precondition** for changing the taxation rate - namely, a lawful mandatory consultation by March 11th 2020 - was in fact unmet?

Written response: *The decision of Full Council made on 25 February 2020 had already been implemented and Council Tax Bills had already been issued. The Consent Order did not quash the decision of Full Council and it did not require the fresh consultation and subsequent re-making of the decision to be carried out within a particular timescale.*

*The cost of a re-billing exercise in year would be in excess of £50k.*

By way of a supplementary question, Mr Hill asked Councillor Hilton to state whether the council tax reduction scheme consultation last year was, in his view, lawful or unlawful? If unlawful could he explain why RBWM considered it fair to continue to collect the elevated tax from those residents with least when he knew the council had not complied with all the statutory preconditions? Was it lawful and was it fair?

Councillor Hilton responded that the question of whether it was lawful or unlawful was irrelevant because it was accepted by officers at the time that it was unlawful. However that did not change the consent order which did not require the council to change the decision. The consent order required the council to reconsult, produce a new Equalities Impact Assessment and remake the decision, with no set time period in which to do that.

**h) Alan Gass of Eton and Castle ward asked the following question of Councillor Johnson, Leader of the Council:**

How many people:

a) in receipt of CTRS benefit and

b) not in receipt of CTRS benefits

were posted a full paper copy of the consultation including the questions and associated explanatory information?

Written response: *One copy was requested; the person requesting the full paper copy declined to confirm whether they were or were not in receipt of CTRS benefits.*

Mr Gass was not present in the meeting to ask a supplementary question.

**i) Alan Gass of Eton and Castle ward asked the following question of Councillor Johnson, Leader of the Council:**

Why did RBWM not post a complete paper copy of the consultation including the questions and associated explanatory information to all recipients of CTRS benefits?

Written response: *There was no legal requirement to post a complete paper copy of the consultation. Please see Paragraph 8 of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme report for further details of the various methods used in promotion of the consultation.*

Mr Gass was not present in the meeting to ask a supplementary question.

**j) Craig McDermott of Riverside ward asked the following question of Councillor Hilton, Lead Member for Finance and Ascot:**

In what way do the budget proposals meet the demands of the council's Environment and Climate Strategy and will they change to reflect the fact that, to avoid climate and environmental catastrophe, the borough will need to reach zero carbon emissions by 2030, as recognised by Slough Council, Wokingham Council and numerous other administrations around the globe?

*Written response: When the Environment and Climate Strategy was approved by Cabinet in December 2020 it was made clear that it would be delivered across the council and could only be achieved if everyone worked together from individual residents, to businesses, community groups, as well as external organisations and central government.*

*Therefore, delivery of the strategy is spread across both our revenue and capital budgets. Some examples include changing the way that waste is collected to help increase recycling rates and supporting investment in digital and transport infrastructure to reduce emissions from transport. We have secured external funding to reduce carbon emissions and energy use from our own estate, investigating alternative approaches to providing heat and will be showing leadership in reducing single use plastics from the council's own activities.*

*We are committed to the borough being net zero by 2050 at the latest with a credible plan to reduce emissions. The advice prepared by the Climate Change Committee to Government in May 2019 indicated that whilst some sectors could be net zero before 2050, for most sectors the earliest credible date would be 2050. We will continue to review the science and technical advice to make sure that our targets are ambitious and credible.*

*Our strategy adopts a trajectory of carbon emissions reductions developed by the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research. The approach is derived from the commitments within the Paris Agreement, informed by the latest science on climate change. This will accelerate reductions in carbon emissions with a 50% reduction by 2025 and 75% by 2030 and 94% reduction by 2040.*

By way of a supplementary question, Mr McDermott asked how much money had been allocated in the budget to tackle climate change?

Councillor Hilton responded that £570,000 had been included in the budget.

**k) Mike Copland of Bisham and Cookham ward asked the following question of Councillor Stimson, Lead Member for Climate Change, Sustainability, Parks and Countryside:**

Under the proposed budget proposals, will the overall number of Tree officers be maintained, and will the overall number of Planning officers be maintained? This is important to clarify in light of the increasing number of tree-related applications coming forward and the nature of consents required combined with the Council's stated policy to sustain the tree cover.

Written response: *The proposal is to reshape the service to deliver efficiency savings and focus on high priority work. As set out within appendix 1 of the budget report on the agenda, delivery of the saving would involve a reduction in posts.*

By way of a supplementary question, Mr Copland explained that he was speaking on behalf of the seven 'Wild' Groups. There appeared to be an increasing number of applications involving trees and no let-up in the cases of trees being cut down in contravention with planning conditions. Given the intention to focus on high priority work which must risk inadequate oversight in less priority situations, could the Lead Member say what new steps would be taken to ensure those who undertook unapproved 'act first, pay later' destruction of trees were punished to the maximum.

Councillor Stimson responded that work was currently taking place on the tree function. It would move across from planning so ecology, sustainability and planning would all be working together to make the most efficient model and ensure best practice. She therefore did not have the answer immediately as the team had not yet been created. She would therefore ask the Head of Planning to come back to Mr Copland at a later date.

**I) Mike Copland of Bisham and Cookham ward asked the following question of Councillor Stimson, Lead Member for Climate Change, Sustainability, Parks and Countryside:**

What steps are being taken, in line with the Council's Environment and Climate Strategy, to accelerate specific arboricultural as well as ecology training of Planning officers who, following these cuts, would be responsible for caring for our trees?

Written response: *The responsibility for trees within the borough is currently shared by a number of services, teams and officers, including planning officers, who work collaboratively to deliver outcomes and the proposals would not alter these existing responsibilities. A significant number of planning officers have already attended training courses and webinars in relation to the habitat regulations, ecological issues and biodiversity net gain in the autumn of 2020. Planning officers currently work collaboratively with the trees team to deliver the right outcomes and the proposal would not change this, however if a need for additional training is identified it will be provided.*

By way of a supplementary question, Mr Copland suggested that the council should ring fence payments made in relation to tree protection order conditions so that they could be devoted to maintenance of trees. This would give further reassurance that the council was genuinely concerned about the issue.

Councillor Stimson responded that she thought it was an excellent suggestion and she would put it forward to the tree team, Head of Sustainability and Head of Planning as they planned their new function.

81. PETITIONS

No petitions were submitted.

82. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME

Members considered consultation feedback on a proposal to change council tax reduction levels to bring them into line with other neighbouring authorities and the administration arrangements adopted for Housing Benefit and Universal Credit.

The Monitoring Officer explained that following issues being raised over the lawfulness of the proposed decision, she had sought counsel's advice on the report. Counsel's advice was that the consultation scheme and the decisions proposed were lawful. On the basis of that advice a number of amendments and one correction were made to the published report to clarify the position for Members in reaching their decision at the meeting.

Councillor Baldwin stated that he was very reassured that the intention was to give Members some grounding that what they were being asked to act in a lawful manner. The CTRS Amendment England Regulations 2017 set in law 11 March of the financial year preceding the one in which the proposed revisions would take effect as the deadline for making such a decision. Notwithstanding the Consent Order, Councillor Baldwin questioned why Members were being asked to make the decision for 2020/21 348 days after the statutory deadline.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that the terms of the Consent Order required the council to remake the decision.

Councillor Hilton introduced the report. He explained that following a challenge in the courts the council accepted that the consultation relating to the 2020/21 CTRS did not meet the required standard and was considered by the judge in the Consent Order to be unlawful. The judge required the council to undertake a fresh consultation, draft a fresh Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) and remake the decision in relation to the 2020/21 scheme. As directed, councillors had been provided with the outcome of the refreshed consultation and EqIA, so the council had met all of the conditions of the Consent Order. This was detailed in paragraph 1.8 of the updated report.

The proposal made last year to change the CTRS to a 20% contribution was proposed to continue in 2021/22. As was shown in the table in paragraph 1.11 this level of payment was aligned with the most generous of the six Berkshire unitary authorities where contributions ranged from 35% to 20%. It was not the percentage discount that was important but the actual sum that claimants would pay. The Royal Borough had the lowest council tax outside of London and by far the lowest in Berkshire and the payments that would be made by claimants were therefore lower than the other Berkshire Authorities. The table in paragraph 1.12 showed the level of council tax levied by the Berkshire authorities at band D in 2020/21 and what a claimant on maximum assistance would pay per year. In the Royal Borough it was £278.52, or £62.15 less than the next lowest, and £161.73 less than the average, and he suspected amongst the lowest in the country.

Paragraph 6.2 explained that unlike some, the council retained existing protection for vulnerable customers within the scheme. However, where an affected customer believed they have suffered financial hardship as a result of these changes, the council had existing powers under S13A(1)(c) of the 1992 Act to reduce the amount which a council tax payer was liable to pay, so a safety net was also provided.

Councillor Hilton explained that nothing he had said had changed from the 2020/21 budget. What had changed was the new and more extensive consultation which was

described in paragraph 8 of the report. Additional activities included: a paper flyer on all current consultations that was delivered to all households; a newspaper advert on all live consultations placed with the local press; emails issued to 303 community groups and an email with a copy of the leaflet was sent to over 10,000 council tax payers being the number of email addresses held. The consultation ran for a full 12 weeks. It had solicited 191 responses, 50 more than the previous year. Not surprisingly most of the respondents (58%) did not agree with the reduced discount. In making the decision Members must conscientiously take into account the feedback from the consultation process.

Councillor Hilton commented that the other ways in which people had proposed to save the money included cutting councillor allowances (13), cutting staff and salaries of senior management (7), and 35 had suggested a council tax increase. The last suggestion was not possible because it would take the council tax above the cap.

Councillor Price stated that she was against the increase as it was unfair that the most vulnerable residents were having to generate £300,000 a year to shore up the books. She was going to look back over the last year as to what had happened and what in her opinion should have happened. Over a year ago in January 2020 the proposal to significantly increase the council tax paid by the poorest residents was considered at the Overview & Scrutiny Panel but as the consultation had not yet been completed the debate, and hence scrutiny, was severely limited. The paper was considered last February at Council and she had spoken then, warning that she feared the consultation was unlawful. Her concerns were dismissed. She had been informed by the Leader that "the consultation had been thorough and robust".

Council had approved the increases with the poorest residents facing on average a doubling of their council tax. Then COVID hit. Central government had issued a hardship fund "to reduce the...council tax bills of ... people receiving Local Council Tax Support." She doubted that central government even contemplated that after the application of this fund some poor residents would still be facing an increase, which was what happened in the Royal Borough. The EQIA claimed this was used as mitigation but she questioned what would be used as mitigation when the fund was withdrawn by central government in future years. She also questioned whether it was right for local government to use central funds to mitigate discrimination.

The council decision was challenged in the High Court and a Consent Order was made in July 2020 where the Royal Borough accepted it had failed to carry out a lawful consultation. The Members should have been informed that they had made a decision based on an unlawful consultation. They were not, and were also not informed that this had cost £40,000 in legal costs. If Members had been informed the consultation was unlawful, she suggested they would have examined why to ensure the same mistakes were not repeated and agreed the relevant Scrutiny Panel should look at it in detail. Members were told that the consultation was to be rerun and it would be taken to the Scrutiny Panel, but it was not. She questioned who decided it would not be scrutinised and why.

Members had learned that evening that CTRS recipients were not posted individual letters informing them of the consultation despite the Consent Order stating the Borough "will undertake a fresh consultation in which it consults those persons likely to have an interest in the CTRS". She felt that meant, without fail, the council should make every effort to consult with each CTRS recipient, but it had not. The council had found the money to post information on the budget consultation (a non-statutory

optional consultation) to 10,000 households, but not for 2,600 of the poorest residents, when this was a mandatory statutory consultation.

Only 27 out of the 2,600 CTRS recipients had responded, which represented 1% (compared to just under 1% the previous year). Councillor Price felt that something must have gone wrong with the consultation to elicit such a low response. A higher response rate than 1% should be expected on something that was going to have such a negative financial impact. Only a total of 191 responses were received, which was incredibly low. According to her calculation, 79% of respondents said no to the increase, a higher proportion than a year ago.

The Consent Order stated that the council would “remake the decision ... in light of the fresh consultation and the fresh EIA”. It had been claimed in the last few weeks that the administration listened and that consultations were held to hear the views of residents, which were valued. Councillor Price commented that their views had been ignored a year ago and if the proposal was approved that evening, residents would be ignored again. Respondents gave their reasons for disagreeing and suggestions for saving money. In both cases she suggested they should these be analysed into key themes. She questioned whether residents’ ideas had been taken on board in the budgeting process

In conclusion, Councillor Price commented that she feared the council had got it wrong again. If the proposal was approved she feared it would be inevitable that the council would be challenged again. The claim from the administration that this was a budget protecting the vulnerable was pure spin. It was not right to place the burden on the poorest residents, and she feared once again for the reputational harm to the Royal Borough. Given the fact that only 1% of CTRS recipients responded she asked the Monitoring Officer to advise again why the report has not been withdrawn.

Councillor Brar commented that the first consultation had been flawed and the decision challenged in the High Court. The council had accepted it was not lawful. As a councillor she had not been informed of this or how much the legal proceedings had cost. The second consultation had run from 14 October 2020 – 8 January 2021. The total response rate had been 191 versus 141 the previous year. Whether 59% or 79%, the majority were against the proposal.

Councillor Davey referred to the previous comments that the borough had the lowest council tax, particularly in comparison to its neighbours. He had calculated that it was between 22%-42% lower but he questioned whether those councils were better equipped to look after the most needy in the community.

Councillor Hill recalled the brief time he was the lead member for the relevant portfolio. He had deliberately set the amount those with the least ability to pay at 10% as he had felt this was only fair. He questioned why the council had continued to ask them to pay during and post-COVID.

Councillor Johnson stated that it was clear from the report and Councillor Hilton’s comments that it had been recognised that the consultation had not been right the first time. However this had been rectified and Counsel’s opinion was that the reconsultation was legally robust. Overall he believed the proposal was the right thing to do. The council’s positive legacy of a low council tax meant those who had to pay a proportion had to pay less than in other Berkshire authority and most other local

authorities across England. A 20% figure still put the borough in the lowest quartile in Berkshire. Councillor Johnson questioned the suggestion that the council would inevitably be challenged again given the QC opinion. However, if a challenge came it would be dealt with appropriately.

Councillor Hilton concluded the debate. He explained that there was an error in the original report in relation to the percentage of people who did not agree. The correct figure was 59% rather than 79%, with 42% supporting. The margin between the two views was therefore narrower. At the same time as the consultation, 1800 responses were received on libraries which set in perspective the number of people who saw it as an important issue. In the current year, the government had provided £564,000 of funding to support a council tax hardship fund. This was a prescribed scheme of £150 additional reduction in council tax. In the coming year the council would receive £599,000 for a scheme that the council could devise itself. The council planned to replicate the same scheme but it would need to take into consideration the number of people who may be affected. If all else failed, the council had existing powers to reduce the amount a council tax payer was liable to pay and that safety net remained. This should give all Members reassurance if there was a significant requirement it would be supported.

It was proposed by Councillor Hilton, seconded by Councillor Johnson, and:

**RESOLVED: That Council notes the report and in particular notes the feedback from the consultation and:**

- i) Approves the existing 20% contribution level for the 2020/21 Council Tax Reduction scheme with effect from 1 April 2020.**
- ii) Approves the continuation of the 20% contribution level for the 2021/22 Council Tax Reduction scheme with effect from 1 April 2021.**
- iii) Re-approves the associated changes to the Council Tax Reduction scheme to align them to rules governing Housing Benefit and Universal Credit.**

<b>Council Tax Reduction Scheme (Motion)</b>	
Councillor John Baldwin	Against
Councillor Clive Baskerville	Against
Councillor Christine Bateson	For
Councillor Gurpreet Bhangra	For
Councillor Simon Bond	Against
Councillor John Bowden	For
Councillor Mandy Brar	Against
Councillor Catherine del Campo	Against
Councillor David Cannon	For
Councillor Stuart Carroll	For
Councillor Gerry Clark	For
Councillor David Coppinger	For
Councillor Carole Da Costa	Against
Councillor Wisdom Da Costa	Against
Councillor Jon Davey	Against
Councillor Karen Davies	Against
Councillor Phil Haseler	For

COUNCIL - 23.02.21

Councillor Geoffrey Hill	Against
Councillor David Hilton	For
Councillor Andrew Johnson	For
Councillor Greg Jones	For
Councillor Lynne Jones	Against
Councillor Neil Knowles	Against
Councillor Ewan Larcombe	Against
Councillor Sayonara Luxton	For
Councillor Ross McWilliams	For
Councillor Gary Muir	For
Councillor Helen Price	Against
Councillor Samantha Rayner	For
Councillor Joshua Reynolds	Against
Councillor Julian Sharpe	For
Councillor Shamsul Shelim	For
Councillor Gurch Singh	Against
Councillor Donna Stimson	For
Councillor John Story	For
Councillor Chris Targowski	For
Councillor Helen Taylor	Against
Councillor Amy Tisi	Against
Councillor Leo Walters	For
Councillor Simon Werner	Against
<b>Carried</b>	

83. REFERRALS FROM OTHER BODIES

i) Budget 2021/22

Members considered the recommendations on the 2021/22 budget from Cabinet.

Mr Ed Wilson, lead petitioner, addressed the meeting. Mr Wilson stated that he was presenting the petition on behalf of 3352 residents who would be holding councillors to account on the matter. The petition requested the council to invest in waste collection services, look after the people who delivered the services and keep the weekly black bin collection. Mr Wilson explained that in 2020 nearly 5000 people signed a petition to return the weekly bin collection post-COVID-19. The council stopped this petition when it had confirmed the return to weekly bin collections. Following that promise in July, there were issues with the collections in August and September. The council had apologised for the shambles in October and told residents in December that they did not need weekly black bin collections after all. He asked if it was any wonder that residents were now calling out the actions of their councillors. Moving to fortnightly black bin collections was a major change to a core service. The majority of councillors had been elected on a clear and unambiguous promise to keep weekly bin collections. Residents had not asked for the change. Councillors therefore had no mandate for the change.

Mr Wilson argued that if the local authority wanted to make the change, it should formally reassess the situation, review the policy and consult on a new one. None of this had happened. The Lead Member has said the council should have changed its policy in the previous year but he had had no mandate to make the change then and he had no mandate to make the change now. There was no policy document, it had just come out drip by drip. Apparently the council was still going to send a bin lorry down each street every week. If there were blue bins half full they would be collected

and if there were black bins overflowing they would be left. If you lived in a flat above shops you would see no change to your service but if you live in houses next door your service would be reduced. If you lived in a block of flats with a communal bin, no change to your service; if you lived in a block with wheelie bins your service would be reduced. If you were unhappy with all that you would get a lecture on recycling, but some of the most ardent recyclers in the borough had signed the petition. Many had said that fortnightly collections would make no difference to their recycling habits whatsoever. RBWM had produced no evidence to prove it would. The council had said that there was no evidence that fortnightly collections would reduce landfill waste so Mr Wilson questioned why councillors were trying to make the proposal out to be a great recycling initiative. Residents would have to put up with three months of turbulence to make this unwanted change according to council staff. After everything that residents had been through in the last year, he questioned if RBWM really wanted to give £4m of new taxes, lectures about recycling and another three months of turbulence. Mr Wilson felt it was just a cost saving in search of a policy. The council was claiming to have consulted residents on the new policy. He did not understand how that could be claimed without a formal policy document or resorting to voodoo. In December councillors told residents that the change had nothing to do with money and that people should take part in the budget consultation. Mr Wilson commented that people could not see what they were being consulted on, could not leave comments or make alternative suggestions. By any standard, no attempt had been made to undertake a clear and fair consultation on such a major change to a core service.

Councillor Hilton thanked Directors and officers across the council, particularly the finance team, for their professionalism and the way they had worked with their respective Cabinet Members. Councillor Hilton explained that the difficult decisions taken in the previous year to correct the cultural and governance issues of the previous leadership, which CIPFA identified, had enabled the council to set aside £3m to reduce the impact on savings this year.

COVID-19 had had the biggest financial impact on local authority finances for decades, pushing some to the point of seeking Government support. It was a testimony to the council's increased financial capability that it would manage the £9.25m impact of COVID-19 in 2021/22 and deliver a balanced budget that set the council on a path to true financial sustainability. Through sound financial planning he was presenting a budget that increased support to the most vulnerable residents and made a significant investment into the borough's local economic recovery post-COVID. This was a budget that continued the transformation and modernisation programme that would ensure the sustainability of crucial frontline services, harness the power of new technology and latest expert thinking, and put the needs of residents at the heart of everything the council did to create a community-centric and data-driven organisation. The council would continue technological innovation in Adult Social Care to improve the quality of life of people leaving hospital through re-enablement so they could remain in their homes and live happy, sustainable lives. The council had strengthened its housing service to ensure that residents sleeping rough or facing homelessness were provided with the best possible help and support. Digital technology would become increasingly important in the delivery of council services. The introduction of Robotic Process Automation, software that could manage routine tasks, would free up staff time so they may have a greater focus on residents.

The council's response to the climate change emergency was part of the transformation. The council wished to encourage recycling rates to rise and it would

change the municipal waste collection to a bi-weekly service. In December Cabinet approved the updated Environment and Climate Strategy. The strategy was created with residents at the centre, not only would they hold the council to account but they would help the council achieve its shared ambitions. To move the strategy into the delivery phase, the budget included £570,000 funding for district heat networks and solar projects as well as to deliver against schemes in the cycle action plan. In support of the strategy in March the Pension Panel would adopt a responsible investing policy and would join with the Local Authority Pension Fund Forum in raising climate change as an issue with the companies with whom it was invested.

Councillor Hilton stated that the budget would continue to support the most vulnerable residents with almost £50m million committed to Adults, Health & Commissioning. It proposed to spend £24m in support of Children's Services, an increase of £1.2m. In such difficult times the council should applaud the success of the Children's Services and Youth Offending Team in achieving an OFSTED rating of good and welcome the £1.5m secured to continue supporting residents facing homelessness.

The budget invested in the future of the borough by taking measures to support the local economic recovery post-COVID through an ambitious capital programme: £35m in new, modern, more environmentally friendly car parking; £16m to support Maidenhead's regeneration, which was crucial to the financial health of the whole borough; £2.3m into ensuring Windsor continued to be a destination post-COVID; and £1.6m into ensuring borough roads were well-maintained.

The budget would maximise the social and financial value of the commercial portfolio. Examples were the refurbished and highly successful York House in Windsor which delivered £680,000 a year in rental income and the plans to invest £11.5m to develop a number of council-owned sites to deliver 56 affordable homes and generate a financial return to the council. The council had made a commitment to regenerate Maidenhead and it welcomed Areli Real Estate's £300m Nicholson Quarter proposals which would transform an ageing town centre into a modern mixed-use space adding bars, cafes, restaurants, homes and flexible working space. The council's joint venture schemes, the Watermark and St Clouds Way, were progressing well and would deliver 653 much needed homes with 33% as affordable including new socially rented homes.

Councillor Hilton commented that the level of development activity in Maidenhead had not happened by chance. The council's determination to regenerate the town, its dynamic property company and pro-growth policies such as a zero rate of Community Infrastructure Levy continued to attract investments. The inward investment would regenerate the town, energise businesses and revitalise the local economy which would be needed more than ever to help recover from COVID-19. The council also had ambitious capital plans for Windsor including working on a £2.3 million plan to improve the public realm and support the visitor, retail and hospitality economy, which did so much to support vital public services.

Working with the LEP the council had secured funding for a review of the A308 from Maidenhead to Old Windsor. A review of Ascot High Street had been completed; the bid made for funding was ranked second in a priority list that could deliver £6m. The council would build on its relationship with the LEP and anticipate opportunities to secure future big highways infrastructure funding packages. The Oaks Leisure Centre remained a key administration priority. In addition, the council was committed to working with the Environment Agency to identify and progress affordable and deliverable flood alleviation schemes that would protect residents' homes from flooding in Datchet and Wraysbury.

Councillor Hilton concluded that the robust budget was agreed only after careful

consideration of all of the options. The leaders of the opposition groups had been asked by the Director of Resources if they wished to table amendments; tellingly none were forthcoming. The council saw it as a duty to continue to support the most vulnerable in the community, particularly during the global pandemic. It would invest in the local economic recovery as people were losing their jobs, their livelihoods and facing difficult economic times. The council was here to say "we are on your side" and use all the levers available to ensure the borough continued to thrive after the pandemic had passed. The council had established a path to financial sustainability and would fulfil its duty to be prudent with taxpayers' money. For next year, it was proposing a Council Tax increase of 1.99% together with a 3% Adult Social Care Precept. Councillor Hilton was confident that residents would not begrudge the additional average £1 a week they would pay to support the most vulnerable residents and to support the council staff. The Royal Borough would still have the lowest council tax in the country outside of London, over £350 less than the Berkshire average. COVID-19 had demonstrated how quickly its officers could successfully adapt to new circumstances. It would not go back to old ways of working but would capitalise on learnings from the past year and continue transformation with innovation, opportunity and financial responsibility at its heart. He commended the budget to Council.

Councillor Johnson thanked the 800 residents, partners businesses and stakeholders who had taken the time to take part in the budget consultation. He noted that no alternative proposals had been submitted by the opposition. He thanked those who made contributions during the scrutiny process.

Councillor Baldwin raised a point of order, quoting Part 9C 3f. The Mayor ruled that this was not a point of order.

Councillor Johnson referred to the budget meeting in 2020 when a difficult budget had been set, a budget to reset the financial trajectory of the council. This was overtaken by the COVID-19 pandemic however had it not been for this the council would have been well on the way to achieving what the budget had been set out to achieve. The opposition had made bold statements in February 2020 that by January 2021 the council may have had to issue a section 114 notice. In fact, last month had ended with a £3m underspend. Councillor Johnson turned to the proposed budget which he stated was a credible and deliverable plan for the borough. It was a plan that would deliver a balanced budget for 2021/22 and the stabilisation of the council's finances during a time when some of the council's neighbours were requesting a government bailout. The budget proposed some difficult decisions and it would be wrong to claim otherwise. It was not a budget that would be proposed in normal times. The administration was proposing a fully costed, consulted upon and balanced budget which continued to see investment in the key areas of adult and children's services, infrastructure and economic growth whilst still retaining the status of one of the lowest levels of council tax in England. This was more important than ever given the financial difficulties many households were facing.

The budget mapped out the long term future of the borough and how it could maximise the economic opportunities of the future. The budget also set out the council's commitment to tackling climate change. The budget would facilitate record sums of investment into the borough for regeneration. It was a budget built on solid principles of low tax yet efficient and well-run services. Of course all would not agree but genuine alternatives should be put forward rather than opposition for opposition.

sake. Councillors had a duty to work together in a time of crisis and to promote the borough's interest in the post-pandemic world.

Councillor Bhangra raised a point of order that Councillor Baldwin had deliberately misused the constitution in his earlier point of order. The Mayor ruled this was not a point of order.

Councillor Jones, Opposition Spokesperson, commented that before Members was a comprehensive document detailing the budget proposed for the coming year. She thanked the finance team for providing the more detailed information and officers across the council for their efforts to minimise the drastic cuts proposed that affected council operations and services to residents.

In the report it stated: 'Unlike many other councils, low levels of reserves and the lowest Council Tax in the country outside London, coupled with increasing levels of borrowing, have made the RBWM financial position more challenging'.

The administration had continually said that if it were not for COVID the council would be in a much better place, and what a wonderful success their financial strategy had been in 20/21 with a £3m underspend. In 2020/21 the council had used its £8m contingency therefore the £3m underspend was really just the contingency brought forward.

COVID did affect both costs and Income figures so it was not possible to look at a true comparison to the budget but luckily, central government had ensured that any costs or income losses throughout the year had been fully compensated. So COVID had not affected the council's finances this year. The financial challenge was set out in paragraph 13.2: 'A key risk for the Council is that its finances are not sustainable in the long term and it doesn't have enough reserves to enable it to effectively manage the financial risk it faces in the Medium Term.' Despite the assumption that the council would continue to increase council tax by the maximum allowed for the next 5 years at least, the council was still having to implement £23m of cuts by 2025. Even with all the cuts to services and increases in charges, residents paying a Band D council tax would pay 12.5% more in 2024. In 2020 Councillor Hilton had highlighted the administration's aim to 'future-proof the borough, allow it to protect the vulnerable while supporting the discretionary services enjoyed by residents.' It was clear from the equality impact statement and from the public questions that the vulnerable would be impacted by the cuts.

In relation to discretionary services, Councillor Jones highlighted closing day-centres while reducing the service budget by half was not supporting services in her book. The library service saw a cut to their budget of £265,000 in the current year, another cut of £121,000 was proposed next year and a consultation was out asking to cut the libraries budget of another £292,000 in the future. These were reductions in hours across the borough and closures of the village and community libraries. That was a total of £638,000 pounds from an original budget of just over £2m, a third of the budget gone in two years.

Community wardens was another service applauded by all councillors and at the heart of borough communities. In March 2018 the Cabinet committed to increasing the wardens to 25, last year the cuts to services reduced the number of wardens to 19 but, according to the Lead Member the core aims of the warden team was 'remaining unchanged, namely to build community cohesion and to provide a visible deterrent to crime'. A further cut to community wardens and community safety was proposed of

£300,000. The budget included cuts proposed to day centres, arts centres, community programmes, libraries, bin collections, youth services, council tax discounts, community wardens, and flower displays. There had been increased charges for parking permits, green waste and services to schools. The promised review of discounted resident parking had not seen the light of day and more severe cuts were to follow.

In 2019 Councillor Hilton had stated 'several other councils' compared unfavourably to RBWM and were 'struggling to make ends meet'.... 'proposing cuts to arts funding, road maintenance, libraries, weekly bin collection, while using reserves to support their budget'. It sounded like that RBWM had entered that select group. The reserves were just above the minimum at an estimated £6.7m at the end of the year; just 'adequate' to cover known risks. Recently the River Thames was approximately 30cm away from reproducing the floods of 2014 but there was no budget for emergency response so it would have to come out of reserves and so take the council below the minimum required.

In 2019 the Lead Member at the time stated that the council would be 'debt free, including the pension deficit, in the medium term future'. There was zero chance of that happening, as the council debt in 2024 would hit £250m and the pension deficit was currently over £80m. Last year Councillor Hilton stated that 'The Oaks Leisure Centre remained a borough priority and, in addition, the council was committed to supporting the Lower Thames Scheme that would protect residents' homes from flooding.' Looking at the Capital cashflow in Appendix 4, there was only £10m of the promised £50m expenditure detailed for the River Thames Scheme and there was no mention of the Oaks Leisure Centre despite the report going out to 2035.

Councillor Jones explained that she had asked at Cabinet whether there was a priority list for removal of savings should there be a further underspend. This was not answered so she had assume the answer was 'no'. This was a failure to plan, a failure during the last administration to provide a Corporate Plan that was more than a selection of vote winning proposals. There was still no Corporate Plan for the future and no priorities. The administration had failed in their obligation to set a direction. Due to there being no priority list if there were additional 'one off' funds available during the year she asked for the cuts to community wardens to be postponed to undertake a full review as to the impact on the council and its engagement with communities, of reducing the wardens further and whether there could be a merger of some of the DECO role.

Councillor Jones stated that the decisions the council needed to take were difficult but it should not be in the position of reducing services so far that it would be delivering statutory services only. If Cabinet really wanted to work collegiately then she requested transparency, not a vote for the savings proposals and then a public campaign against them as had been seen in recent weeks which she felt was duplicitous and misleading for the residents. The next couple of years were going to be challenging, the council was not in a good position at the start of the pandemic and it was obvious it did not have the reserves to absorb any negative effect of COVID next year. There were some large assumptions made to balance the budget, including £1m of COVID mitigation from government for Quarter 2. This was not yet guaranteed and may have to be found from the contingency. She questioned whether parking income would start to return to previous levels. It may take time, and it may not ever recover to the same level. The administration was warned about the rising demand on

social care and waste, about officer redundancies and the hollowing out of the core of the council, that excessive borrowing without a cohesive repayment plan was opening the council up to extensive borrowing costs. The warnings were ignored. If the warnings had been heeded, the council would not be in the current situation but it was and it was left with no options as the council was cut to the bone. The administration had failed the electorate and it was now down to the officers, the professionals, to put the council on a firmer footing.

Councillor Jones concluded that cuts were being made to services because there was no choice, and the budget indicated service cuts would continue for the next five years unless there was an increase in funding and a focus on providing a different direction and strategy. Councillor Jones stated that she agreed with the need to increase council tax by the maximum allowed given the financial situation the council was in, there was no choice. She did not agree with the savings proposals as no priorities were set. The administration had been led by opportunists and politicians without any thought as to the consequences of their actions on the council or the residents. Voting for the budget appeared to be comparable to investing in a company without a business plan. To residents this was a 'pay more for less services' budget.

The Head of Governance explained that the petition item at number 6 on the agenda allowed Members to hand in a petition on behalf of residents if notification was given in advance. There was no debate on such petitions. However the council's petition scheme allowed for petitions relating to an item already listed on an agenda to be considered as part of that debate. The petition referred to at the start of the item related to the budget proposals. The lead petitioner therefore had the opportunity to address the meeting. Members should take the petition and the lead petitioners' comments into account during the debate and in the final vote.

Councillor Werner commented that the development of the budget had been interesting, starting with the financial crisis at the council, followed by the damning CIPFA report and followed again by the horrors of COVID and lockdown, which had made it the toughest budget had had ever experienced. It could have been a great opportunity to open up collegiate working but sadly the administration did not take the chance. Every alternative suggestion was rubbished, with the opposition being told they were being negative and playing politics. Councillor Werner felt it was not playing politics to try and save the libraries, the community wardens and the grants to Norden Farm, the Old Court and the SMILE program. It was actually called doing what was promised. He and his colleagues had stood for the council not to play party politics but because they believed in their communities. The council had a duty and a responsibility to be at the centre of the community, to show leadership. That was why they had been attacked so much, because they disagreed and had different world views. However thus was good as it was what democracy was about. Councillor Werner feared that the budget was based on an ideological belief in the small state. The council removing itself from the community, being invisible, left everything to market forces. The medium term financial plan outlined that there were least 5 more years of savage cuts to communities. There was a need to break out of the spiral of decline.

The opposition had positive alternatives that it had proposed over the last year as a way out of the spiral of decline.:

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- Insourcing – there was a need for resource analysis and bidding properly to prove it would be taken seriously.
- CIL in Maidenhead Town Centre – it was ridiculous that this was currently zero rated
- Service partnership – using the council's gold standard services to sell to other councils
- Invest to earn - not selling off council assets cheaply but turning them into revenue raising initiatives

All these suggestions were either ignored or not resourced. Councillor Werner commented that he presented them again in the hope that you would be treated more responsibly.

Councillor Werner presented what he felt the council would look like with a Liberal Democrat budget. He took Members through the streets of the borough, passing the bin lorries having saved a fortune taking them in-house. Shows were being put on at the Old Court and Norden Farm; both were thriving. Electric cars could be parked in the new car park kitted out properly with electric points, with the electricity produced by a mixture of exciting energy creation projects which were also providing a revenue stream. The town centres were thriving again after COVID with a proper mix of entertainment, independent shops, education facilities and a residents parking discount. Friends could be visited in one of the council's social housing projects, again a social good and a revenue producer

Councillor Werner referred to the fact that he had in recent years given each budget a name. The gamblers budget was one example, the next year was the titanic budget. This year he named it the 'Spiral of Decline' budget or the 'small state' budget'. He requested that the positive alternatives given by the opposition be taken.

Councillor Coppinger referred to the petition relating to waste collections. The proposal to move black bin collections to fortnightly was not about saving money nor was it about making the lives of residents more difficult. It was one of the many steps the council would make in the efforts to achieve Carbon neutrality by 2050 and he sincerely hoped it could be achieved before then. As an added benefit the change would save money through the difference in costs. The change was being made to encourage greater recycling and specifically the use of the food waste bins. It was already known that the government intended to bring in targets for recycling and it was understood that these would be 55% in 2025 and 65% by 2035. Last year 46.8% was achieved although when the services moved to fortnightly collections because of COVID recycling went up to 51%. Overall, the borough was good at recycling and the amount collected in blue bins placed it alongside the top councils although the amount of waste in the black bins put it in the bottom third. It was interesting to look at other councils: 80% collected black bins every two weeks with Bracknell moving to 3 weeks in April. Of the 26 Councils across the country run by Liberal Democrats, 10 did not collect food waste at all, 23 collected waste fortnightly and only 11 collected recycling weekly. There would be a full programme of communication and education before the change happened in June. There was also a large stock of food waste bins available now. This was essential because only a third of all households actually used their food waste bins.

Councillor Coppinger explained that not every property would move to a fortnightly collection. There were 64,000 properties in the borough and 18,000 would stay on a

weekly collection. These included 14,000 who had communal bins and 4,000 with no space for wheeled bins. The council would also continue to collect clinical waste weekly. For a large family of 6 people, the new smaller black bin can be provided with the previous design and of course the council would provide additional blue and food waste bins if necessary. Public health had confirmed that there was no risk with nappies, incontinence wear or dog waste as long as they were in sealed bags.

Councillor Coppinger recognised that the administration did promise to keep a weekly bin collection, but all had learnt so much more about the planet and what each person could do to save it. It was a sign of good governance to be nimble and adapt to changing circumstances. He therefore proposed that the council continue with the change without modification because all knew it to be the right thing to do.

Councillor Coppinger then referred to the issues of CIL and S106 in Central Maidenhead. Developers wanted to build on greenfield sites, not an existing town centre. A site which had ease of access, no demolition problems with high costs, no compulsory purchases orders, low land values and a short build programme. The inward investment that Maidenhead had attracted was estimated at just under £1.4bn. It was important to remember that was not council or ratepayer's money, but for a town that was showing its age and was very tired. In addition were the business rates, council tax income, new homes bonus, and the expenditure that the construction workers would make in the town. Introducing CIL was not just a policy decision. Under the regulations the council could only introduce CIL if it would not make development unviable. Not only did the Inspector not support CIL, the council also had to remove a proposed charge on office development as there was insufficient evidence to support one. The council had of course been able to collect S106 and charged CIL in Maidenhead but outside the centre to a value of almost £3 million.

Councillor Rayner commented that the proposed budget would bring the residents and the local economy to a strong position as it recovered from the pandemic. The investment in services and infrastructure by transforming and modernising would deliver a resilient and agile council taking into account priorities such as governance, climate change and people plans. The priorities were reflected in her portfolio areas. There was still considerable investment in the arts and community of £170,000 which would allow the delivery of services that helped enrich and provide support to residents in relation to loneliness, mental health and education. The museum and tourism information team would be strengthened by sharing premises and help the recovery from COVID. As the museum reopened it would help provide resources and be a destination. The tourism team was vital for the local economy that directly and indirectly benefitted from the huge range of tourism officers in the borough including Windsor Castle, Windsor and Eton Brewery tours, Stanley Spencer Gallery, and Ascot Racecourse. The sector would be critical in the economic recovery.

In relation to IT, Councillor Rayner highlighted the £1.4m investment in Modern Workplace 1 and 2 had created a workforce equipped for Transformation across the council. There was a further £272,000 in the capital budget to strengthen these resources. The library team had released its transformation strategy to show how it would be front facing throughout the borough, meeting the needs of climate change, economic recovery, mental health and digital resources and skills. The consultation would help develop a roadmap of what residents and businesses wanted from their libraries. The budget was also about investing in staff who had brilliantly protected residents, helped businesses and provided essential services during the pandemic. The staff were the best resource in the council and their dedication to residents had

been amazing. She was delighted that the budget included a recommendation for a 2% increase. The administration would bring to April council a motion that councillors should forgo indexation that applied to all allowances.

As Lead Member for Windsor, Councillor Rayner was delighted at the continued investment. In the current year the Clewer Memorial Park project had been completed at a cost of £400,000 which added extra provision for to the local community facilities. Windsor had now achieved Plastic Free status which was a great example how the council was using its resources and engaging with residents to deliver their expectations and vision. The pandemic had opened everyone's eyes to ways to transform communities. One such project was the asset based community project in Clewer and Dedworth. The Castle Hill public realm project of £2.4m continued the work of the Hostile Vehicle Mitigation project which had cost £1m. The scheme was the beginning of a project to give a better look to this area of Windsor, increase footfall and encourage people to 'shop local' and enjoy the huge range of offers. The investment by the council showed external investors that the council meant to support and take part in shaping the future of the inevitable change in town centres. The newly-formed Windsor Board was focussing on joint communications, strategy and resilience.

Councillor Bond paid tribute to the work of the community wardens. He explained that he had been on the Community Action Group for north Maidenhead for about ten years and had been impressed by the depth of local knowledge of the wardens and the neighbourhood police, so essential for dealing with crime and anti-social behaviour. The wardens and police each had their particular role and worked well together, they were always very helpful. He was worried about the effect of the proposals and hoped as much of their work as possible could be retained.

Councillor bond commented that it seemed only recently that the library at Boyn Grove had been opened, when it gave the Conservatives something of a populist headline along the lines of "Look, we're keeping Council Tax down and we're opening a new library". Libraries had a symbolic importance in the relationship between community and government, perhaps even reflected by Margaret Thatcher in a speech to the Royal Academy in the 1980s on her government's support for libraries and the arts. Boyn Grove was accessible on foot or bike from the whole of western Maidenhead. One resident had told him of visiting with a grandchild for the excellent collection of children's books. When it opened, someone had written, "Best thing to come to Maidenhead until Crossrail". Just six years after the official opening the council was proposing to cut its hours and consulting on closing it altogether, even before Crossrail had opened. Another resident had told Councillor Bond that he thought it was a wonderful idea to open the library, adjacent to the play area as a quiet and calm place and that it would be a great shame to close any local library, especially at a time when children would probably need calm places to borrow books for learning as the UK faced a gradual return to normal. The resident could not understand the proposed closure given the investment over the last six years. Councillor Bond stated that he remained open to working with anyone across the community to see if there was a way to keep it viable and open, and he appealed to members of the public who wanted to be actively involved to come forward and give something back to their community.

Councillor Del Campo commented that it may not be known exactly what the borough towns and communities were going to look like post pandemic, but for certain, they would be different. There would be less emphasis on retail and more emphasis on

places where people could meet, connect, eat, drink, learn and share ideas. Places where people could overcome loneliness, something that was particularly acute at the moment. The borough parks, cafés, libraries, arts centres and sports clubs offered residents a vital lifeline, and would help improve mental and physical wellbeing as the borough recovered from the crisis. Councillor Del Campo saw libraries as being central to that recovery. Boyn Grove library was less than seven years old. It was advertised as being dementia friendly on launch and having a sensory room for people with disabilities. It sounded fabulous then and indeed it was fabulous, but it was facing closure.

Councillor Del Campo referred to clause 9.13 of the new Libraries consultation, which said: "Whilst many residents use the library service extensively, few have knowledge of the wide range of services available. This must be improved." On page 1 of the transformation savings proposals, usage of Datchet Library dropped when car-parking charges were introduced and the library was not well used by people in the 'vulnerable' demographic. These pieces of information looked pretty poor when taken in isolation but taken together, they added up to a damning indictment of the attitude of this and previous administrations to the borough's libraries and its most vulnerable residents. Families and early education providers could help a child set out on a reading journey, but for some people, only a library could sustain it. The late, great Sir Terry Pratchett spoke of how he used to walk home from his library laden with books. He wanted to devour the whole library and claimed it taught him more than school ever did. Mary O'Hara, journalist and author had said "Having a library within walking distance of home was a way for a young girl from a poor background to access the same breadth of reading material as anyone else – at no expense. It stripped away at least some of the disadvantage that came with being from a low-income family."

Councillor Del Campo had recently heard a lead member describe the borough's finances as having been cut to the bone. She agreed. The council finances were a Christmas turkey that has been plucked, roasted, carved, and boiled for soup. Now, just as it was fit for the food bin, residents were told it could be 'transformed' into a swan. She did not buy that claim and nor did residents. The budget was a disaster for residents and the borough's communities.

Councillor Tisi commented that the pandemic lockdowns had had a devastating effect on many people with disabilities, older people with dementia and their families. Constant uncertainty over when day services would reopen and the disruption to routines had had a huge impact on mental health. The impact of caring for relatives during the pandemic without respite should not be underestimated. Many people had been shielding loved ones and caring round the clock with much reduced support. She paid tribute to them. They needed to be given a break, which was one reason why day services such as The Oakbridge Centre and Windsor Day Centre in her ward were so valued. She had received many emails from residents who has been in turmoil following the draft budget announcements to close these centres. One of her residents said that the centre had given their relative with dementia a real boost, the staff were so kind and caring. It had also been a huge help to their family, knowing that she was safe and cared for. Families like these were fearful that the services they enjoyed and relied on would be lost with no clear replacement currently set out.

The Lead Member repeated the phrase 'transformation is not a dirty word' so often, Councillor Tisi commented that she wondered if he was trying to convince himself as well as residents. The parents of a young adult in her ward with severe learning disabilities did not want trendy buzzwords. They feared a drastic reduction in the

quality and quantity of provision. Whatever dazzling language was used to present it in consultation questionnaires, the stark reality was that the day services budget would be halved. Councillor Carroll's reassurances that the transition to new services would be carefully managed may be received with scepticism by families who, just before finding out about the proposed closure, had been told in a leaflet 'the sky's the limit; just say it, we'll do it'.

Councillor Tisi did not disagree that there were wide scale improvements to be made to some adult services in RBWM that residents had described as rigid, restricted and outdated. It was important that people with learning disabilities were able to access personalised services that supported them with socialising and health, and for some, employment and building links within their community. However, for some people, the best option may be a day centre experience, delivered by specialist staff in purposely designed buildings like the Oakbridge centre which was only revamped in 2016.

The Equality Impact Assessment acknowledged this need but that it could be delivered in various locations. Councillor Tisi questioned at what further cost was this to the council? Would these smaller buildings have suitable facilities for personal hygiene and other technologies that might be needed to support people with severe learning disabilities. Families had also suggested to her that without suitable day services, they would be more likely to turn to residential care, at greater cost to the council in the long run.

Members had been assured that the voluntary sector would step in to offer a different kind of day service. She sincerely hoped that this would be possible but charities and other community organisations were also having their support removed. With traditional fundraising on hold for now, she questioned how many other community groups were at risk.

It was right that the council looked at the gaps in provision of supported living for young adults with disabilities in RBWM, but it was a huge blow to families that losing day centres seemed to be the price that must be paid to provide this accommodation. It was not a huge group of people but they were being asked to shoulder the biggest burden when according to the Equality and Human Rights Commission, adults with learning disabilities were already in the most disadvantaged group. The budget disproportionately affected the most vulnerable as children with special needs, people with disabilities and older people would bear 90% of the cuts. No meaningful amendment would change that reality and she commented that frankly it would be like putting lipstick on a pig. Therefore she was minded to vote against the budget.

Councillor Davies commented that the budget contained 80 pages of cuts, some of which may benefit the environment and some of which may lessen the borough's capacity to address the climate emergency, yet there was no sense that either of these outcomes was central to the planning. The council was rapidly approaching two years since it unanimously declared a Climate Emergency, and actions spoke louder than words. Whilst this vital area of activity was not explicitly included in the cuts, it was not included in the revenue budget allocations either. The council badly need a joined-up, forward-thinking approach so that short-term financial decisions did not prevent the council from achieving its medium and long term aims, or store up more problems for the whole community down the line.

Councillor Davies commented that as had been recently seen with the Low Traffic Neighbourhood proposals which were resoundingly rejected by residents in Clewer and Dedworth, one-off central government grants tended to come with very specific criteria and may not, as a community, be wanted. The council needed to offer more residents 'carrots' as well as 'sticks', for example the 'sticks' of increased parking charges had not been matched by the 'carrots' of frequent local bus services to encourage their use. Achieving carbon neutrality would not just be a lifestyle choice for the affluent. The council needed to invest to earn if it was to be able to increase the borough's renewable energy generation capacity tenfold by 2025. It needed to leverage the Royal Borough's name in offering group buying schemes for green energy, for solar panels and batteries and for rainwater harvesting. These schemes were being rolled out by other councils across the country. Becoming carbon neutral could be self-funding or could generate income in the long term, but the council needed to plan for that to happen.

Councillor Carole Da Costa commented that she understood that transformation was needed in an ever changing world. She embraced the plan to extend the return to home from hospital provision with the focus on enabling residents to choose the best physical rehabilitation by using intensive community based support services. This would in turn reduce the long term costs of residents who had failed to meet their full physical potential post hospital stay. However, there were concerns around other cuts in the budget. Having worked in maternity services for 20 years, Councillor C. Da Costa agreed that the proposed change in the health assisting service was the least harmful option. If money were not an issue the change to the antenatal visits by the health visitor may or may not have been subject to efficiency scrutiny. Sadly the luxury of analysis and an evidence based decision was not possible.

Councillor C. DaCosta was also concerned about the closure of the two day centres, partly about the provision of support for adults with learning disabilities. A key element should be the quality of life as people should be treated with dignity and respect, kept safe, and supported to take positive risks whilst protected from harm. People should have choice and control over their health and care services. Support and intervention should always be provided in the least restrictive manner. Equitable outcomes compared with the general population should be achieved by addressing health inequalities. With these key factors in mind, she agreed with seeking better life-enriching activities that were provided under than the 'one size fits all' care that day care services provided. However in some cases a day care centre was what was needed. She was concerned that although the proposed changes were in the adult social care transformation programme for March 2022, by moving it forward to April 2021, none of the strategies had been piloted or tested for the availability and quality of alternative services. Councillor C. Da Costa questioned who would provide the activities and the cost and longevity of such services. She also asked what would happen in the transferring period between day care closure and community based activities starting. Individuals using such services needed time to understand and adjust to changes. Short tester sessions with trusted carers walking them through pathways of change were needed which required time and investment in the human element of the transformation. She was concerned that the full time would not be available. A focus on finance could mean the full human cost and investment needed was not documented. Her fear was that the change would not be based on local pilots and therefore not evidence based and the borough could be accused of changes being finance driven rather than best practice based.

Councillor Reynolds commented that one of the main ways members of the public knew about changes that were being proposed in the budget was through the Maidenhead Advertiser. There had been two recent articles on the subject, one from the view of the Opposition and one from the view of the Leader of the Council. Councillor Johnson had commented that he was worried about the level of negativity of the opposition. Councillor Reynolds disagreed with this; as the opposition they were not being negative, rather they were being realistic and showing him what residents really thought. The opposition were being really positive about Windsor and Maidenhead because they loved the area. Twelve months previously when councillors had been asked to put in capital bids, he had put in a bid for capital funding for a new library in Furze Platt. The opposition were positive about their love of community wardens. The community warden in Furze Platt had had an amazing impact on the lives of so many residents who valued her work. The opposition had proposed an alternative way forward for Maidenhead town centre through an invest to earn programme. Councillor Reynolds stated that a difference in opinion was not being negative, or scaremongering. As councillors they had each been elected on a manifesto; the opposition was trying to put forward their vision for the borough.

Councillor W. Da Costa stated that there was a climate emergency. To tackle the climate emergency the council must change the way it thought and change the paradigm. There was a need to 'put money where our mouth is' and also empower people, just as other councils had done. In this new paradigm, the economy was the environment and the environment was the economy, offering the chance to save the planet whilst generating millions of pounds and thousands of jobs in RBWM. The headline summary in the report noted "the Council recognises its commitments with regard to climate resilience and its overall environmental impact." Climate change was listed amongst the key priorities. If the council's focus was truly on saving the planet, and playing its part, then from now on it must focus on achievement in every report. Every report, every investment decision, every budget must be framed in terms of climate change, climate change resilience and biodiversity restoration.

The budget papers showed £165,000 for capital schemes; nothing extra for day to day costs; nothing for River Thames Scheme. Wokingham had a capital budget of £71m over the next 3 years. They were striving to empower all residents. Councillor W. Da Costa highlighted that 100% of Carbon emissions were from the collective activity of all: councils, businesses, and residents. Wokingham were dealing with the key issues and the urgency needed by: investing £14m in alternative transport; £18m in clean energy generation and £19m in carbon reduction. There was also an extra revenue budget to support climate change staffing of £26,000. Cornwall had an annual spend of £2m to climate change, plus a capital budget of £52m over 3 years. They even had a Development Planning Document to guide who can build what, where and how, focusing on carbon reduction, climate change resilience and biodiversity restoration. The money was there if the council was serious from Public Works Loan Board funding, specialist funds, green bonds and funding from residents, businesses and government. The economy was the environment and the environment was the economy. The council had the chance to be in the vanguard and become entrepreneurs in the multi-billion pound green building industry, creating thousands of jobs, generating millions pounds of needed revenue for RBWM and restoring the environment.

This could be achieved by setting the highest standards possible in planning documents for building materials, building methods and always zero Carbon targets,

climate change resilience and biodiversity restoration. Cornwall had started with a Development Planning Document, a headline planning guide that ranked equal to a good Local Plan. The council would need to show ability, vision and guile to lead the way. The council must create schemes that empowered all citizens to quickly achieve zero carbon transport and zero carbon heat and energy sources, climate resilience and biodiversity restoration.

The council must create a development planning document to ensure that every building and development was carbon neutral, built with zero carbon methods based on a borough-wide Biodiversity Action Plan. Councillor W. Da Costa challenged the council to stop failing on the environment. This was what the public expected of the council because there was a climate emergency.

Councillor Price explained that Members were being asked to approve the budget, she did not believe that this would be done knowing how the eye-watering cuts would impact the lives of residents, particularly the vulnerable residents. Despite employing an outside agency to undertake the budget consultation the process only managed to generate responses from 800 or so residents, and yet this was deemed by Cabinet members to be really good. The 800 was far less than the numbers generated in various petitions objecting to the cuts, and yet despite this small response rate Members were told in a press release that this had shaped the budget. The budget was drawn up well before the results were known. She therefore questioned how had the budget changed in light of these results. At Cabinet there were two changes: an increase in funding for the arts and the removal of charges in rural car parking. Due to an error Councillor Price had pointed out, but not admitted publicly, residents were never asked about cuts to the arts funding, so she felt to claim the consultation influenced the change was just spin. The issue of cuts to rural car parks came fifth in the consultation. The first four areas of concern had just been ignored, which included bin collections, community wardens, children's and adult services. Councillor Price therefore commented that to claim the voice of residents was being listened to was just spin.

In relation to the voice of community groups, the paper said just three out of the hundreds and hundreds of voluntary groups had responded despite the Leader saying he was pleased at the number of residents and community groups that had responded. The Leader gave an assurance that the voluntary sector would be consulted, and yet they weren't approached until 15 January, after Councillor Price had alerted officers they were being ignored. The questionnaire was designed for residents not organisations, and whilst engagement sessions were held with staff and businesses none were held with the voluntary sector. They were told to fill in the questionnaire which had been designed for residents and households, not organisations. Members therefore just did not know the impact of the proposed cuts on the voluntary sector and the vulnerable communities they supported.

The impact of the cuts on residents could also be judged through the Equality Impact Assessments. Councillor Price questioned where was the evidence to make such judgements. Scant facts and figures had been provided, with predominantly stage 1 initial screenings. The public questions laid bare the gap in knowledge. In order to demonstrate the council had adhered to the Equality Duty there was clear guidance to public bodies to adhere to six principles. The council had to have 'real consideration'. The EQIAs should not be just a box ticking exercise. Councillor Price suggested that many of the EQIAs were bereft of evidence. The council also had to have 'sufficient evidence'. There was little evidence, facts and figures in the stage 1 screenings to

show the impact of the cuts on vulnerable residents. In her opinion, the council was laying itself open to the charge that it had not adhered to the Equality Duty.

Councillor Price highlighted that if the council did not know the scale of the impact on vulnerable residents, how could it eradicate or, at worst, mitigate the harm of these cuts. The funds were found to stop the charging at the rural car parks, which would have had a negligible negative impact, so she asked why this was prioritised over decisions which would have a high negative impact. Councillor Price concluded that to pretend that the budget would protect the vulnerable was spin.

Councillor Davey highlighted that 5% of Royal Borough residents had tested positive for COVID-19. Members had been told the administration's interim key priority was COVID-19 and top of the Medium Term Financial Strategy list was "Impact of COVID-19", yet one of the biggest budget cuts was to be the RBWM community wardens, potentially reducing the public facing team by over 50%. The decision did not make any logical sense as the community wardens had had a huge positive impact helping residents throughout COVID. Councillor Davey had submitted a budget proposal to the Lead Member but had heard nothing to date. At the very least, the council needed to find funding until a proper impact assessment on losing them had been done.

The Lead Member at the last Cabinet meeting stated that the police were comfortable with the budget plans to lose a significant number of the wardens. He felt it would help Members to see the letter to appreciate the context. Councillor Davey asked who did residents call when they need one to one help; who did the police call when they needed some local backup support and who did councillors call when they needed a resolution to a problem. The answer was the RBWM community warden. Rural parking suddenly got removed at the last Cabinet meeting with the Lead Member saying "our experts in finance will find a way". It turned out the funding was taken from the anticipated underspend when Members were being told money needed to go into reserves. Councillor Davey commented that whichever words were chosen, it was less than transparent.

Community wardens helped the most vulnerable residents, who tended not to be digitally savvy. Community wardens helped residents with neighbour disputes and with local COVID related issues. The community wardens were the council team on the frontline on day one of COVID.

Councillor Davey commented that libraries needed to be treated with much more respect. Budgets were reduced year on year when they could actually evidence they generated 700% added value from every £1 they were given. Telecom companies were putting up 5G masts all over the area which could have added over £200,000 to the budget but apparently they did not have to pay for putting up 20m masts, which did not feel right.

Councillor Davey highlighted that at any moment in time there was only one PC on duty for the whole of Windsor with 3 or 4 PCSOs. Community wardens helped the police with COVID tasks, with County Lines, with community relations. They were the main team on standby to deal with potential flood waters. He understood the £7m for Vicus Way Car Park could be moved to fund the River Thames Scheme Infrastructure Project if there was a willingness to do so. Braywick Leisure Centre, promised only months ago to come out cost neutral, was currently showing a £10m loss. He had

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asked for more information on the £4.5m for affordable housing at the start of February from the Lead Member but he was still waiting.

Councillor Davey commented that community wardens had helped him with intel and problem solving. He gave the example of drivers ignoring road closed signs on Dedworth Road. He had alerted highways, the police, lead members, lead officers and others, but it was the community wardens who had responded and found solutions. Councillor Davey felt the £3m parking loss was rather a round figure, laying the ground for the 22/23 budget PR machine to jump into action as tourists flocked to Windsor during the summer, lockdown or no lockdown.

Councillor Davey stated that he felt the council should save the libraries and the community wardens and add an extra £600,000 to the parking losses. In line with the World Economic Forum's strategy to encourage Global Leaders to make the most of the COVID opportunity for a global reset, he suggested announcing a referendum on the council tax. The council simply needed more income and there were only so many financial instruments that could be created before the administration would need to be honest and admit previous administrations had got it wrong and call a referendum. It was not possible to keep cutting services to balance the budget, there was a need to increase income.

Councillor Brar commented that withdrawal of the SMILE programme was another nail in the coffin for vulnerable residents. The scheme had been set up by her in conjunction with former Councillor Pam Proctor in 2004. It made a difference to the lives and wellbeing of residents especially those who were isolated. It was a popular programme that had grown all over the borough. Councillor Brar stated that she would not be able to support the budget as it was just all about cuts.

Councillor Knowles commented that it was the administration who had asked in the budget consultation to raise the council tax above the cap and said they were lobbying Government to have the cap raised; it was detailed in the MTFP.

Capital budgets were set for things as an easy descriptor and not for services, usually financed by borrowing and serviced from revenue budget, the interest payments. Capital profits could become revenue. It followed that the more you borrowed the more it cost to service the debt, not to repay it but to pay down the interest and charges. Repayment came when the project realized profit. The treasury management advisors set 0.6% as the interest rate for all calculations. As a guide an increase in interest rates of 1% added £2.5m to the cost of capital finance for the council's current level of debt. The portion of the reserve risk in the revenue budget was £517,000 which was an increase of just 0.4%. The margins were very small so it would not take much movement to become a problem.

The council's borrowing would reach £218m in the next year requiring repayment of £5,606m next year out of the revenue budget which was 7.05% of the total council tax income, or about £315,000 per tax household, for the scale. As the need to develop and invest in the borough was easily funded through this, if managed properly it should not be a problem, but within this year's capital program a large number of projects had slipped because of COVID, either directly or indirectly. Given the costs of short term borrowing via the Public Works Loan Board were currently being revised, the costs may change soon.

Slippage for the start of or project completion normally had a knock on effect on all the other projects either directly or indirectly connected however there was not a detailed per program risk matrix attached to the annex. There was a summary of the risks based around financial risk but nothing to identify which specific projects they affected or the many other factors affecting project completion or if they were interlinked with other schemes. This struck Councillor Knowles as an omission as knowing the higher risk items and how they worked together helped understand the whole picture and was normal in a publicly funded program management.

Paying down the debt was set out in the Treasury plan. Peak interest payments were £7.868m in 28/29 and the peak income coming in from 24/25 for a few years, if the slippage did not push it further to the right. This delay could adversely affect projected income from projects as well as other spending and increase the borrowing. Section 4.6 in the capital plan stated “disposals of council assets are used to repay short term debt”. He hoped it would not be a fire sale if it all slipped too much.

Councillor Knowles welcomed the move to look at other investment vehicles outlined in the treasury management plan as diversity and revisiting existing arrangements was always good practice. He suggested introducing an element of sustainable investment to complement the climate emergency and plan.

No one was saying borrowing to fund investment was bad, but that there was little deep dive information on the risk and assumptions. The world was changing very fast and risk needed to be on everyone's mind and published for transparency. That there was a commitment to only adding schemes that were essential and that the council did not make any further substantial investments which were not funded from future receipts, 106, CIL or LEP money. The problem with the latter was the need to borrow part of the funding. Comfort in the control of the process should be provided by the new Capital program board but this needed to be more transparent as they were the gatekeepers of the programme.

Councillor Stimson explained that the development of the budget had been a huge task. Cabinet had been really involved and had to make some difficult choices. The administration also treasured the areas the opposition had referred to but there was a need to balance the budget and be fiscally aware. In relation to her climate change and sustainability portfolio. There had been a concern about the budget for this work so the council had sought more funding. The creative team had secured grants of over £900,000 from central government. Two thirds would be spent on decarbonisation and retro-fitting. Communication of the successes would be undertaken soon. When Councillor Stimson had presented her area at Cabinet she had emphasised that the climate change and sustainability aspect would percolate through each area of the council and this had been the case. For example planning had produced an interim position statement on sustainability and energy efficiency design and would come before Cabinet later that week for approval. If approved, it would be published as guidance and afforded material weight in the planning process. Employee and Member training on carbon literacy would be provided. The library service was leading the way in terms of sustainability and best practice would be shared. A recycling awareness campaign was planned. Should the budget be approved the council would already be heading towards an improved rate of recycling. The fact that bi-weekly collection of residual waste drove up recycling rates was undisputed. The lead petitioner's rhetoric was damaging to sustainability. There were a number of

inaccuracies in the speech and Councillor Stimson highlighted that no waste in the borough went to landfill.

Councillor Baskerville echoed the comments of Councillor Brar in relation to the SMILE programme which had been set up to reduce the number of trips, falls and strokes that were putting a strain on social services. The scheme had had a significant impact given the small amount of funding therefore closing it was a false economy.

Councillor Cannon was pleased to speak in support of the proposed budget, which despite a uniquely challenging year, secured the council's finances in a much better position than could have possibly been expected earlier in the year and setting the foundations for further sound financial management for the years ahead. There had been a full public consultation on the proposed 21/22 budget and, far as he was aware, none of the opposition councillors or their party leaders, had presented a single funded alternative. Councillors had been given plenty of time to contribute this year, which was the excuse used in recent years for not doing so. However residents had an administration with a coherent vision and a clear plan to manage delivery competently.

The budget included a rationalisation of parking charges to maximise future revenue from tourists post COVID, whilst providing affordable parking for residents in borough car parks, benchmarked against private competition and comparable local shopping destinations. Through consultation with residents, the self-administered residents parking schemes had been converted through residents' choice, to either bring their charges in line with the existing RBWM administered residents parking schemes or returning to unrestricted parking. This would provide equity across all residents benefiting from residents parking schemes. Due to the current finances aggravated by the COVID impact, he had not yet been able to bring in a new residents discount parking scheme as planned but he remained committed to introducing one as soon as it was financially responsible to do so.

Councillor Cannon explained that the budget also included a proposal to reorganise the community warden team and community safety provision into a leaner model, to enable the council to deliver a community-focused, demand-led service, working with partners in supporting the residents. He had been surprised to hear from the opposition the suggestion to adjust Environmental Services Enforcement officers provision to prevent review of the community wardens. This had only been raised today, as an uncostered idea instead of providing a proper proposal in an amendment to the budget.

The borough had remained committed to the Environment Agency River Thames Scheme since the Council decision in 2017 and the administration had demonstrated its commitment to the flood alleviation by retaining the £10 million of funded borrowing in the budget for Thames Flood Alleviation between Black Potts and Bells Weir, to help protect the communities of Datchet, Horton, Wraysbury and Old Windsor. Last summer a responsible fiscal decision was made by the Director of Finance, that the council could not currently commit to be able to afford to borrow a further £43 million, due to the government not yet providing sufficient reassurance that the enabling legislation for a flood levy would be forthcoming, to allow for repayment of such borrowing. This lack of reassurance was despite lobbying of government ministers by the Leader of the Council and Councillor Cannon and considerable lobbying by the local MP Adam Afriyie. This resulted in the Director of Finance being unable to issue a

letter of confirmation to the RTS Sponsorship Group and their subsequent decision to exclude Channel 1 Datchet to Bells Weir from the project, despite the borough wishing to remain committed, whilst continuing to exploring funding.

The Cabinet and Council remained committed to flood alleviation to protect borough communities and this still could be through a future Environment Agency standalone equivalent to Channel 1 but in the interim, the council was working with the EA to identify other deliverable flood alleviation schemes

Councillor Bhangra commented that the budget was presented against a very severe global pandemic which had had a huge impact on council finances as many other councils across the whole country. It was a budget of necessary decisions, but was a budget which balanced the priorities and kept as much money in the pockets of residents as possible. The administration was taking responsibility and had the credibility and expertise under the steadfast leadership of Councillor Johnson to steer the council through the difficult and unprecedented times. It was a remarkable achievement that the council's financial position had been notably improved despite the challenging climate. The administration and officers should be wholeheartedly congratulated for bringing a balanced budget to Members for approval.

Councillor Bhangra commented that the leader of the opposition has said in the Maidenhead Advertiser the previous week that "Norden Farm and Old Court will be taken down to nothing". This was complete misinformation as the council had actually kept the funding for the current year, providing £64,000 as part of the current SLA and an additional £16,000 from an additional pot of £50,000. There was £80,000 for the current year as part of their share in the following year 2021/22 which they would also share and source additional funding with Old Court in Windsor. This was a significant support package that had been put in place in the context of a crippling pandemic and given all local authorities were being financially pummelled. It showed the council's commitment to the arts despite severe pressures. The total package included a minimum £80,000 which could increase with ongoing match funding and other options being actively pursued. In addition, the council would be providing increased support to Norden Farm in terms of marketing, advertising, assistance with financial and commercial offerings, and wider input into Norden Farm Board Meetings. This was a wider economic contribution in terms of time and resources to help Norden Farm.

The council had also supported Norden Farm in securing an arts grant fund of £351,000 by Arts Council England from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport's £1.57bn Culture Recovery Fund including through letters, advocacy and direct campaigning. NHS partnerships with Norden Farm and also the Big Lottery fund applications to assist their funding and ability to be self-sufficient were also being considered. Local businesses partnerships and sponsorship options would also be looked at.

Norden Farm was an important community asset and had a great team. The council would continue to work with the team to allow Norden Farm to become self-sufficient and sustainable. Residents wanted to see a strong and independent Norden Farm. Furthermore, the council would continue to lobby the local MPs and argue to government that a COVID contingency fund for the arts and culture, including libraries, should also be made available to help the arts and culture survive through the pandemic and beyond. The burden could not fall on beleaguered local authorities indefinitely and needed a central government funding solution.

Councillor Bhangra explained that he had jointly contributed £500 from personal allowances at Christmas towards Norden Farm's Ark Appeal. He thanked Councillor Rayner in continuing the funding for arts and culture in the borough by supporting Old Court in Windsor and Norden Farm in Boyn Hill. It was important to continue funding and provide wider support which he and Councillor Carroll would continue to do using areas of personal business and commercial expertise.

Councillor Larcombe stated that he wanted to clarify some facts on the River Thames Scheme. The borough had the Jubilee River built in 2002. The council did not put a penny into it although it cost about £100m. It protected Windsor, Eton and Maidenhead and dumped water further downstream in his ward. The River Thames Scheme had been on the cards since 2003. In 2010 it was proposed with partnership funding. At every stage the borough had spoken about support of the scheme. Councillor Larcombe referred to Appendix 3 section 246 which referred to the EA scheme. The scheme was first agreed by full Council in 2015 at a cost of £10m. A budget provision of £9.55m over the next three financial years was set. However this section did not reference that the cost of the whole scheme was now £640m and the borough's partnership was about £53m and that most of the scheme was going ahead. It was only Channel 1 that was not going ahead, which affected Old Windsor and Runnymede. The other channels, weir widening and other improvements were being funded by Surrey County Council which had borrowed £270m. He did not understand why the borough on one hand said it supported the project whilst on the other hand failing to fund it.

Councillor Singh commented that a 'Borough of Innovation and Opportunity' was a catchy slogan. It was plastered everywhere except within the budget where innovation was sorely lacking, and opportunity had been culled to the point of extinction. The opposition had tried to contribute with fresh ideas, new thinking, and a positive vision. To date the administration had been closed and selfish, determined to pursue its own course. Too proud and too conceited to rely on the experience and expertise within the opposition.

Councillor Werner had reminded him of a time when borough officers used their expertise to raise revenue with favourable cross-authority agreements. The government had recently expanded permitted development rights. In part the changes were aimed at increasing housing opportunities in existing developed areas to help meet the housing needs. If successful, it would ease the need for Green Belt developments which was a particularly thorny issue for the Royal Borough. Householders needed to be aware of the new possibilities. They needed a one stop shop that could tell them what was possible for their property, help them with plans, costings and to find reliable contractors. Someone was going to provide this service so Councillor Singh suggested it could be the council. The borough used to have a duty planning officer, offering a drop-in service to residents. Of course, it used to be free but that was not possible after fourteen years of neglect. However, a price point that made the council more attractive than private architects for small projects was surely possible. It might even be able to run it through the existing RBWM Property Company.

Climate emergency and carbon neutrality also offered an arena in which to raise revenues. An officer or two advising small businesses as they emerged from

lockdown restrictions on energy efficiency, noise pollution and water saving. The council was doing it anyway, for free, through the blunt instrument of enforcement.

Councillor Baldwin commented that for him the genesis of the tragic budget was the shocking revelation in September 2019 that the 19/20 budget overspend forecast had increased from £451,000 to £4.179m overnight. This was long before COVID-19. The policies of Conservative administrations from 2007 had left the council with an artificially low council tax, pathetic reserves and few revenue generating assets to fall back on. The council had a legal requirement to deliver a balanced budget. Cabinet had therefore out of dire necessity put before council a budget with life-altering outcomes for many and reduced services and opportunities for all. If his party had been leading the budget process it would have ensured that residents were given the clearest signal that the proposals represented the sum of the least bad options and that every possible mitigation had been applied. His party would have wanted to show that the pain was equitably shared geographically, socially, economically and culturally. To do this they would have involved all appropriate members of the opposition in every meeting during which alternatives were discussed so that no one could harbour any doubts about the transparency of the process or be in any doubt that this was the least worst option. Had this course been taken no one could have voted against the recommendations.

Councillor Baldwin commented that this resulted in the unedifying sight of lead members voting for the budget and then the following week trying to avoid the cuts falling in their wards. The Head of Finance had said the savings would only be achieved if library transformation was implemented in full.

Councillor Hill commented that in February 2018 he had called the budget insanely speculative, for which he had been mercilessly chastised. The proposed budget balanced but he questioned at what cost. The borough was about to lose libraries, day centres, valuable community support services, coupled with sneaky taxes like parking charges for parents dropping children off at the kiss & drop in Braywick park.

The debt pile was the size of Everest and growing. By the end of the financial year, the forecast debt pile was £211m with interest payments of £5.24m per annum. By 2023/24 this pile was forecast to reach £251m with interest payments of £7.8m per annum. The plan was to pay this down by 2035/36 to a mere £34m. Councillor Hill commented that a cynic might say this would be achieved either via a fire sale of public assets or the disposal of the publicly owned Maidenhead Golf Club or both. If it was the sale of Maidenhead Golf Club then the budget was potentially fatally flawed as the sale had been concluded with the Golf Club as yet nor had the Inspector delivered a verdict on the Borough Local Plan.

Councillor Hill commented that for him the budget demonstrated clearly the failings of the administration and their inability to change course, think creatively and build the borough for the future. It was still speculative as the capital receipts forecasted in the Treasury Management Report were by no means certain. He asked for more real collaboration, understanding and to take on board suggestions from the opposition groups.

Councillor Carroll highlighted that the budget was formulated on the back of a far reaching and wide ranging consultation. A number of bizarre metaphors had been

used by the opposition but in his view the elephant in the room was that no amendments or solution had been put forward by the opposition.

At the heart of the budget were plans to protect vulnerable people and furthering service excellence exemplified by the budget for adult social care and health and commissioning going up by £2m. The Children's Services budget would be going up by £1m. Councillor Carroll thanked all the officers who continued to provide excellent services even during the difficult times of the pandemic. He provided the example of the DASH charity. Domestic abuse had increased in the pandemic therefore the council had decided to put in additional funding to enable DASH to receive the same level of funding. In relation to opportunity and innovation the proposals would help to maximise life chances, health outcomes and independence. Transformation was a very positive word. There was a need to embrace technological change, best practice and evidence to further the vital services. In terms of day centres, the council was looking at the evidence for the need for a more blended approach. Councillor Carroll thanked Councillor C. Da Costa for her constructive comments. He reassured on the need to undertake consultation which was required by law under the Care Act but also underpinned the council's ethical principles. There was also a need to look at better commissioning. There was so much in the budget about young people including continued resourcing of youth services, schools, and an ambitious mental health strategy. Young people focussed on the issue of climate change. This was a mandate and a responsibility as young people mattered.

Councillor McWilliams commented that the budget intended to take sensible financial decisions, support vulnerable people and invest in the future and economic recovery of the borough.

He welcomed the £1.5m of support to people facing homelessness. The officers would continue to look for additional grant funding over the next year to build on the success of the current year. The last year had been one of the most challenging for any housing service. Councillor McWilliams highlighted the important work on transformation over the last three years. This had helped to set out a clear set of values, strong management and talented officers putting residents at the heart of everything the council did using modern technology. Last year 168 people had been helped to avoid homelessness, 92 people were prevented from becoming homeless and 76 received relief support. £1.4bn of inward investment to Maidenhead was an astonishing amount. He had grown up in Maidenhead and highlighted that the regeneration was now taking place.

In relation to communications, Councillor McWilliams stated that the council was on a transformative cultural journey. The Leader's approach was to open the council up and be more transparent. For the first time a public consultation on the budget had been held using all manner of technology available. Over 800 people had responded. This compared to just under 100 in other boroughs and just over 1000 in the much larger unitary Bucks Council. The consultation had been a success that would be built upon.

Councillor Bateson highlighted that the opposition did not like the budget and had used phrases such as 'eye-watering', 'not realistic', 'living in another world' and 'nail in the coffin'. However they had not given alternatives. Residents did not want a high council tax as after a mortgage council tax was the next biggest outgoing for a home owner.

Councillor Clark commented that he had hoped for a more positive debate. The opposition seemed to be divided into two camps – either ‘Private Frasers’ saying ‘we’re all doomed’ or fairy-tale tellers waiting for a good fairy to wave a magic wand. He suggested Councillor Werner’s budget could be called a fairy-tale budget. The budget had to by law be balanced and had to protect the vulnerable at a very difficult time. It also had to deliver the borough onto a path to recover from COVID.

Councillor Hilton responded to comments made earlier in the debate. He commented that he had inherited a budget in 2007 from the previous Liberal Democrat administration. Two weeks into the role officers had told him that there was a £1m hole in the budget and just £4.8m in reserves. Reserves were low then and had stayed lower than they should have been. He did not blame Councillor Werner as reserves were the responsibility of the Section 151 officer. Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 stated that the Section 151 Officer was required to assess the reserves and state they were adequate. This was a legacy issue that would be resolved. In reference to Councillor Jones’ comment that COVID was not the council’s problem Councillor Hilton commented that it was true that in the current year COVID costs had been mitigated by government funding but a £3m underspend had also been achieved. Councillor Jones also seemed to think that the implications of COVID would cease on 1 April but this was not the case. The Section 151 officer had highlighted in the report that there was a £9.25m impact in the following year. She had lauded the officers but not so in 2021/22, which could be considered an insult.

Councillor Hilton referred to Councillor Werner’s suggestion to raise CIL in Maidenhead when this was not possible. If it had have done it would not have led to the £1.3bn of investment in the town. He had said that the council should not sell off assets but invest in revenue generating assets. Councillor Hilton referred to three projects that would do just that: York House, Vicus Way car park and affordable housing. He commented that Councillor Werner was in attendance at a meeting when the issues of insourcing were discussed. The council had asked CIPFA to undertake an independent review of both Optalis and AfC. The recommendation was to retain both contracts.

The ability to spend more money on services relied on an administration with competence and capability to resolve the COVID problems. The administration had put the CIPFA issued behind it, recruited staff to help build a better financial future and demonstrated the leadership and competence to set the council on the path to sustainable finances.

Councillor Jones requested a personal explanation as she had been named and words were put in her mouth that she had not said. She stated that she would never insult an officer and her comments had been taken out of context.

Councillor Werner requested a personal explanation as everything he said had been misrepresented. He had put forward a series of proposals to enable the council to escape from its spiral of decline. Some of his suggestions had been called fantasies but many other councils had implemented them successfully. He had also proposed how his suggestions could be financed including insourcing, CIL and invest to save.

Councillor Hilton responded that he recognised that Councillor Jones would not have overtly set out to offend the Director of Resources and he therefore apologised. He

also commented that COVID would be an issue in the following year, an issue that Councillor Jones seemed to deny.

It was proposed by Councillor Hilton, seconded by Councillor Johnson, and:

**RESOLVED: That Council considers and:**

**Appendix 1 – Revenue Budget**

- i) Approves the 2021/22 Net Budget of £105.725m, consisting of:
  - a. The proposed new growth in service budgets of £3.124m as set out in Annex D to Appendix 1;
  - b. The proposed Covid-19 growth in service budgets of £9.251m as set out in Annex E to Appendix 1;
  - c. The proposed new savings opportunities of £5.630m as set out in Annex F to Appendix 1;
  - d. The associated contribution from Earmarked Reserves of £3.170m as set out in paragraph Error! Reference source not found., and the level of contingency as £2.812m as set out in paragraph Error! Reference source not found.;
- ii) Approves the calculations for determining the Council Tax Requirement for 2021/22, in accordance with the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as set out in Annex G1 to Appendix 1, consisting of:
  - a. A Council Tax Requirement of £79.470m.
  - b. A Band D charge of £1,131.17 for the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead in 2021/22, reflecting an overall increase of 4.99%, based on:
    - i. A 1.99% increase in base Council Tax taking the charge to £1,003.39 for 2021/22;
    - ii. An additional 3% to reflect an increase in the Adult Social Care Precept which is proposed as £127.78;
  - c. The Special Expenses Precept reducing to £33.90 for 2021/22 for the unparished areas of Windsor and Maidenhead in accordance with Section 35 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as set out in Annex G2 to Appendix 1;
- iii) Notes the following Precepts by partner organisations:
  - i. The Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley – £231.28, as set out in Annex G3 to Appendix 1
  - ii. The Royal Berkshire Fire Authority – £68.95 as set out in Annex G3 to Appendix 1;
  - iii. Parish Precepts as set out in Annex G3 to Appendix 1, as notified by the individual Parish Precepts;
- i) Approves the allocation of the £133.918m Dedicated Schools Grant as set out in Annex H to Appendix 1, and delegated authority be given to the Director of Children's Services and S151 officer in consultation with the Lead Members for Finance and Adult Social Care, Children's

and Health Services to amend the total schools' budget to reflect the actual Dedicated Schools Grant levels once received.

- ii) Approves delegated authority to the Grants Panel to award community grants for the 2021/22 annual round and publish the decisions following the Grants Panel.

#### **Appendix 2 – Fees and Charges**

That Council considers and approves:

- i) The Fees and Charges for 2021/22 as set out in Annex A to Appendix 2.
- ii) Delegated authority is extended to the Director for Adults, Health and Commissioning, in liaison with the Lead Member for Adult Social Care, Children's and Health Services, to set the Direct Payments Standard Rate (p20 of Annex A to Appendix 2).

#### **Appendix 3 – Capital**

That Council considers and approves:

- i) The Capital Strategy 2021/22 – 2023/24 as set out in Annex A to Appendix 3 of this report.
- iii) The consolidated Capital Programme for 2020/21 – 2022/23, including previously approved schemes, proposed new schemes and forecast slippage from 2020/21 into 2021/22 as set out in Annexes B1 – 6 to Appendix 3 of this report.
- ii) The capital variances and forecast slippage recommended by Cabinet at its meeting on 28 January 2021, as included within the Finance Update report.

#### **Appendix 4 – Treasury Management**

That Council considers and approves:

- i) The Council's Treasury Management Strategy for 2021/22 as set out in Appendix 4 of this report, including
  - a. The proposed Lending Counterparty Criteria;
  - b. The continuation of the current Minimum Revenue Provision Policy for 2021/22.
- iv) The Council's Treasury Management Policies as set out in Annex A to Appendix 4 of this report;
- v) The Council's Prudential Indicators as set out in Annex B to Appendix 4 of this report

#### **Appendix 5 – Pay Policy Statement**

That Council considers and approves:

- i) The Council's updated Pay Policy Statement Strategy for 2021/22 as set out in Appendix 5 of this report, noting that Sections 2.9, 3.3, 3.4, 4.2, 4.3 and 4.5 of that appendix will be updated following Council's decision regarding the 2021 staff pay award.

#### **Appendix 6 – Proposed Pay Award**

That Council considers and approves:

- i) The Council's proposed Pay Award for 2021/22 as set out in Appendix 6 of this report.
- vi) Approves a revision to the Council's pay structure, with a new minimum pay point of Grade 2, point 20 at a rate of £10 per hour at a cost of £18,382. This would equate to a minimum increase of 2.14% for those paid less than £10 per hour.
- vii) Approves a pay award of 2% to those not impacted by the £10 per hour increase, with effect from 1 April 2021 at an estimated cost of £431,426.
- viii) Approves the increase in the apprentice rates from April 2021, retaining the current differentials between employees who are under 18 and aged 20.
- ix) Approves an increase in Members' Allowances of 2% in line with the employee pay award, as required by Section 17 of the Members' Allowances Scheme and agreed by Council in October 2020.

#### **Appendix 7 – Feedback from Overview and Scrutiny Panels / Public Consultation**

- i) That Council considers, and has due regard to, the contents of Appendix 7.

<b>2021/22 budget (Motion)</b>	
Councillor John Baldwin	Against
Councillor Clive Baskerville	Against
Councillor Christine Bateson	For
Councillor Gurpreet Bhangra	For
Councillor Simon Bond	Against
Councillor John Bowden	For
Councillor Mandy Brar	Against
Councillor Catherine del Campo	Against
Councillor David Cannon	For
Councillor Stuart Carroll	For
Councillor Gerry Clark	For
Councillor David Coppinger	For
Councillor Carole Da Costa	Against
Councillor Wisdom Da Costa	Against
Councillor Jon Davey	Against
Councillor Karen Davies	Against

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Councillor Phil Haseler	For
Councillor Geoffrey Hill	Against
Councillor David Hilton	For
Councillor Andrew Johnson	For
Councillor Greg Jones	For
Councillor Lynne Jones	Against
Councillor Neil Knowles	Against
Councillor Ewan Larcombe	Against
Councillor Sayonara Luxton	For
Councillor Ross McWilliams	For
Councillor Gary Muir	For
Councillor Helen Price	Against
Councillor Samantha Rayner	For
Councillor Joshua Reynolds	Against
Councillor Julian Sharpe	For
Councillor Shamsul Shelim	For
Councillor Gurch Singh	Against
Councillor Donna Stimson	For
Councillor John Story	For
Councillor Chris Targowski	For
Councillor Helen Taylor	Against
Councillor Amy Tisi	Against
Councillor Leo Walters	For
Councillor Simon Werner	Against
<b>Carried</b>	